

The Terror of Blue John Gap by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Part 6

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. remember and retell the story so far;
2. listen to the sixth instalment and recount the main events;
3. listen in detail to a short extract and explore the relationship between stress and dramatic effect;
4. recall and review the whole story and discuss the main themes.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first paragraph), Track 2 (full audio for Part 6) and Track 3 (short extract) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of full transcript per student

Summary: The story is set in the Peak District (an upland area in the county of Derbyshire, England) in 1902. It tells the story of how a man uncovers the truth behind the legend of a mysterious monster. It is told in six parts. In Part 6 of the story, Hardcastle finds himself face-to-face with the monster in the underground caves of the Blue John Gap.

Activity 1

Aims: to recall the details of the previous instalment; to predict the end of the story

1. Ask students to recall how the last part of the story ended, what they learnt about the monster and what they think will happen next.
2. Ask them to look at Activity 1 on the worksheet and recall the significance of the expressions.
3. Ask them to check their answers against the transcript for Part 5.

Key: *Hardcastle **rushed** after the monster down the old Roman shaft; He **followed** the monster into the bowels of the earth; He **ran** after the monster at the top of his speed; He **raced** down a passage that opened into a great central cavern; The monster **turned** and then they were face to face.*

Activity 2

Aim: to practise extensive listening

1. Ask the students to listen to the first paragraph of Part 6 and answer these questions:
 - What animal does Hardcastle compare the monster to?
 - What parts of its body does he describe in detail?
 - What is so strange about the

monster's eyes?

- What happens at the end?

Key a: *1. a bear; 2. its forelegs, claws, skin, mouth, fangs and eyes; 3. They're huge but sightless; 4. The monster falls on Hardcastle and knocks him out.*

Play Track 1 (first paragraph). There is space on the worksheet for the students to write their answers.

2. Ask the students to compare their answers and discuss what they think will happen next and what they think the villagers will do after they hear Hardcastle's story.

3. Ask the students to listen to the rest of the instalment and answer these questions:

- Who rescued Hardcastle?
- How much time had passed since the rescue?
- What did the villagers do when they heard Hardcastle's story? Why?
- What two points of view are given in the newspaper story?
- What is Hardcastle's theory?
- What does he think saved his life?

Key b: *1. a search party of farmers; 2. two days; 3. They blocked up the tunnel to seal the monster in; 4. Hardcastle was hallucinating; Hardcastle's narrative corroborates the view held by the farmers that the monster exists; 5. a subterranean*

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world evolved apart from our own world; the monster may be an evolved form of a cave-bear; the opening allowed the monster to pass from its world into ours; 6. the lantern because the light was painful to the monster's eyes.

Play Track 2 (full audio for Part 6). There is space on the worksheet for the students to write their answers.

4. Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups and compare their answers. Give them a copy of the transcript to check their answers.
5. Ask the students to look through the transcript again and find extracts that describe the attitudes and theories of the following: a. the medical and scientific community; b. the local people; c. Hardcastle
6. Ask the the students who they believe. Do they think the monster really existed or was it just a figment of Hardcastle's imagination; a hallucination created by his illness? Ask them if they think the villagers did the right thing in closing the mouth of the cave.

Activity 3

Aim: to listen in detail; to raise awareness of the use of pauses and stress in story-telling

1. Ask the students to look at this short extract from the end of the story. The pauses and stresses have been marked. Ask them to work in pairs and read the extract out loud as they think the narrator would. If possible, ask them to record themselves on their mobile phones or on a computer.

Key: (// = pause; ___ = stress)

I leave these facts behind me, // and if you can explain them, // do so; // or if you choose to doubt them, // do so. // Neither your belief nor your incredulity can alter them, // nor affect one whose task is nearly over.

2. After they have all had a chance to read it out loud, play Track 3 (short extract) and let them compare their own version with the recording. Then ask them to shadow read the extract in time with the recording.

Activity 4

Aim: to role-play interviews with the medical community and with the local people

1. Ask the students to work in two groups: A and B. If the class is large, you can break the two groups down into smaller groups. Group A are journalists who work for the local newspaper, the *Castleton Courier*. They are going to interview the doctors who treated Hardcastle. Ask them to prepare four or five questions to ask the doctors about the story of Blue John Gap. Group B are also journalists for the *Castleton Courier*, but they are going to prepare questions to interview the local people.
2. When they have decided on their stories, ask the students to act out a scene between one of the rescue workers and his wife when he comes home after finding Hardcastle. Student A should play the part of the rescue worker and student B should play the part of the wife.
3. The first role-play. Ask students to work in pairs, with one student from group A and one student from group B. Student A is the journalist and interviews student B, one of the doctors.
4. The second role-play. Student B is now the journalist and interviews student A who is one of the local people.
5. Ask the students to discuss which role-play lasted the longest and why, and which was the most difficult role to play and why.
6. Finally, ask the students if they enjoyed the story and if they'd like to read more short stories by the same author.

Follow-up tasks

1. Ask the students to read back over their summaries so far and to write a short review of the complete story. They should include their opinion on the facts of the story and whether Hardcastle was hallucinating or telling the truth.
2. Ask the students to imagine that the reporter from the *Castleton Courier* found and read Hardcastle's diary and decided to write a new version of the story. Ask them to write the story. They can do this in groups in class (or online on a wiki page or similar), or as individual assignments at home.

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Part 6

Activity 1

Look at the phrases below. Can you remember them from Part 5 of the story? What movements do you associate with each one?

down the old Roman shaft
into the bowels of the earth
at the top of my speed
into a great central cavern
face to face

Activity 2

a. Listen to the opening paragraph and answer these questions:

1. What animal does Hardcastle compare the monster to?
2. What parts of its body does he describe in detail?
3. What is so strange about the monster's eyes?
4. What happens at the end?

b. Listen to the rest of the story and answer these questions:

1. Who rescued Hardcastle?
2. How much time had passed since the rescue?
3. What did the villagers do when they heard Hardcastle's story? Why?
4. What two points of view are given in the newspaper story?
5. What is Hardcastle's theory?
6. What does he think saved his life?

Activity 3

Look at the short extract. The pauses and stresses have been marked. Practise reading it as the narrator did.

I leave these facts behind me, // and if you can explain them, // do so; // or if you choose to doubt them, // do so. // Neither your belief nor your incredulity can alter them, // nor affect one whose task is nearly over.

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Part 6

That picture, seen in the brilliant white light of the lantern, is etched for ever upon my brain. He had reared up on his hind legs as a bear would do, and stood above me, enormous, menacing – such a creature as no nightmare had ever brought to my imagination. I have said that he reared like a bear, and there was something bear-like – if one could conceive a bear which was **ten-fold** the bulk of any bear seen upon earth – in his whole pose and attitude, in his great crooked forelegs with their ivory-white claws, in his rugged skin, and in his red, gaping mouth, fringed with monstrous fangs. Only in one point did he differ from the bear, or from any other creature which walks the earth, and even at that supreme moment a shudder of horror passed over me as I observed that the eyes which glistened in the glow of my lantern were huge, projecting bulbs, white and sightless. For a moment his great paws swung over my head. The next he fell forward upon me, I and my broken lantern crashed to the earth, and I remember no more.

When I came to myself I was back in the farm-house of the Allertons. Two days had passed since my terrible adventure in the Blue John Gap. It seems that I had lain all night in the cave insensible from concussion of the brain, with my left arm and two ribs badly fractured. In the morning my note had been found, a search party of a dozen farmers assembled, and I had been tracked down and carried back to my bedroom, where I had lain in high delirium ever since. There was, it seems, no sign of the creature, and no bloodstain which would show that my bullet had found him as he passed. Save for my own plight and the marks upon the mud, there was nothing to prove that what I said was true.

Six weeks have now elapsed, and I am able to sit out once more in the sunshine. Just opposite me is the steep hillside, grey with shaly rock, and **yonder** on its flank is the dark cleft which marks the opening of the Blue John Gap. But it is no longer a source of terror. Never again through that ill-omened tunnel shall any strange shape flit out into the world of men. The educated and the scientific, the Dr. Johnsons and the like, may smile at my narrative, but the poorer folk of the countryside had never a doubt as to its truth. On the day after my recovering consciousness they assembled in their hundreds round the Blue John Gap. As the Castleton Courier said:

‘It was useless for our correspondent, or for any of the adventurous gentlemen who had come from Matlock, Buxton, and other parts, to offer to descend, to explore the cave to the end, and to finally test the extraordinary narrative of Dr. James Hardcastle. The country people had taken the matter into their own hands, and from an early hour of the morning they had worked hard in stopping up the entrance of the tunnel. There is a sharp slope where the shaft begins, and great boulders, rolled along by many willing hands, were thrust down it until the Gap was absolutely sealed. So ends the episode which has caused such excitement throughout the country. Local opinion is fiercely divided upon the subject. On the one hand are those who point to Dr. Hardcastle’s impaired health, and to the possibility of cerebral lesions of tubercular origin giving rise to strange hallucinations. Some **idee fixe**, according to these gentlemen, caused the doctor to wander down the tunnel, and a fall among the rocks was sufficient to account for his injuries. On the other hand, a legend of a strange creature in the Gap has existed for some months back, and the farmers look upon Dr.

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Hardcastle's narrative and his personal injuries as a final corroboration. So the matter stands, and so the matter will continue to stand, for no definite solution seems to us to be now possible. It transcends human wit to give any scientific explanation which could cover the alleged facts.'

Perhaps before the Courier published these words they would have been wise to send their representative to me. I have thought the matter out, as no one else has occasion to do, and it is possible that I might have removed some of the more obvious difficulties of the narrative and brought it one degree nearer to scientific acceptance. Let me then write down the only explanation which seems to me to **elucidate** what I know to my cost to have been a series of facts. My theory may seem to be wildly improbable, but at least no one can venture to say that it is impossible.

My view is – and it was formed, as is shown by my diary, before my personal adventure – that in this part of England there is a vast subterranean lake or sea, which is fed by the great number of streams which pass down through the limestone. Where there is a large collection of water there must also be some evaporation, mists or rain, and a possibility of vegetation. This in turn suggests that there may be animal life, arising, as the vegetable life would also do, from those seeds and types which had been introduced at an early period of the world's history, when communication with the outer air was more easy. This place had then developed a fauna and flora of its own, including such monsters as the one which I had seen, which may well have been the old cave-bear, enormously enlarged and modified by its new environment. For countless **aeons** the internal and the external creation had kept apart, growing steadily away from each other. Then there had come some rift in the depths of the mountain which had enabled one creature to wander up and, by means of the Roman tunnel, to reach the open air. Like all subterranean life, it had lost the power of sight, but this had no doubt been compensated for by nature in other directions. Certainly it had some means of finding its way about, and of hunting down the sheep upon the hillside. As to its choice of dark nights, it is part of my theory that light was painful to those great white eyeballs, and that it was only a pitch-black world which it could tolerate. Perhaps, indeed, it was the glare of my lantern which saved my life at that awful moment when we were face to face. So I read the riddle. I leave these facts behind me, and if you can explain them, do so; or if you choose to doubt them, do so. Neither your belief nor your incredulity can alter them, nor affect one whose task is nearly over.

Track 3

So ended the strange narrative of Dr. James Hardcastle.

Glossary

- ten-fold** ten times
- yonder** over there in the distance
- idee fixe** (French) an obsession
- elucidate** explain
- aeons** very long periods of time