Discussion Questions for The Hound of the Baskervilles
Author: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

1. Sherlock Holmes is one of the few fictional characters so internationally famous that even before readers encounter the Holmes stories, they are already familiar with the great detective. After reading The Hound of the Baskervilles and/or watching the film, how would you answer the question, “Who is Holmes?”

2. What scenes or details in The Hound of the Baskervilles do you think illustrate his character especially well? To what extent do you think the character described in the story lives up to his myth?

3. The Hound of the Baskervilles is marked by the constant juxtaposition of the rational and scientific with the irrational and supernatural. How can you see this tension in the novel? Why might this tension have been especially riveting for a Victorian audience?

4. The moors in The Hound of the Baskervilles are so central to the plot that they almost function as another character in the story. If you were to describe them the way you would describe a human character, what would you say about them? Which person in the story do they most resemble and why?

5. Historians of the detective novel recognize the pairing of the brilliant Holmes with a very ordinary partner — Watson — as one of the Arthur Conan Doyle’s key contributions to the genre. Why do you think their pairing works so well? How would The Hound of the Baskervilles be different if Watson were taken out of the tale? Holmes remarks in another novel that Watson “sees but does not observe.” How does that make him a useful narrator for a detective story?
6. In a well-crafted detective story, nothing is wasted; each scene adds suspense and clues to the hunt for “whodunnit.” How tightly written is *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in this sense? What particular clues, details, descriptions, or lines of dialogue work particularly well to build suspense? What is the climactic scene and why?

7. A great detective needs a worthy nemesis. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Stapleton plays this role. When did you begin to suspect Stapleton? What clues gave him away? In what ways are Holmes and Stapleton similar? How does this heighten their conflict?

8. The essential premise of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is classic, a storyline that can be found in countless other works of fiction: Someone new comes to stay in an isolated place about which legends and mysteries are associated. This person’s life and/or sanity is threatened by increasingly frightening events until a perpetrator is caught. Why do you think it is such an enduring premise for a story?

9. Why are we so fascinated with crime — especially murder? Why are crime and detective novels, films, and television shows so popular? Do you think murder mysteries or detective fiction are different from “serious literature”? If so, why?