

**RADIO HOUR
EPISODE 17:**

Sherlock Holmes and
The Final Problem



A WEEK WITH A PLAY
Study Guide



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A WEEK WITH A PLAY

RADIO HOUR EPISODE 17: SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE FINAL PROBLEM

by Matthew Ivan Bennett

Featuring

Doug Fabrizio

Jay Perry

Isabella Reeder

Directed by Cheryl Ann Cluff

Adapted from a short story
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

*What if Dr. Watson was a woman
and Sherlock Holmes wasn't
always right?*

On the run from Moriarty,
the keenest criminal mind
they've ever faced,
Holmes is unsure of his powers,
and Watson is unsure of him.

THE PLAYWRIGHT



You will have the opportunity to meet [Matthew Ivan Bennett](#) and ask him about his experience writing RADIO HOUR EPISODE 17: SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE FINAL PROBLEM.

“I want people to experience the softer side of Sherlock Holmes. I’m trying open up the [cozy-mystery world](#) into something much more personal.”

RADIO HOUR



Discussion questions:

- Have you ever listened to a radio play before?
- What other kinds of media do you regularly listen to?

"The radio play, a new form of dramatic interest, is increasing rapidly in popularity. Of course, scenes and acts from current plays are often broadcast, but many eastern stations now have their own theatrical groups and give plays especially adapted for Radio use. Pretend you are blind and listen to these plays. The better your imagination, the better the play."

Radio Digest, October 27, 1923

The very first radio plays were broadcast in the 1920s. By the 1940s, radio had become one of the most popular forms of entertainment in America. In addition to plays, there were soap operas, serialized dramas, and variety shows. Eventually, radio was overtaken by TV, and many radio shows went off the air in the 1950s.

In 2004, as the internet became ubiquitous and the popularity of portable MP3 players grew, a new form of media appeared: podcasts. In the past twenty years, podcasting has grown to a huge world-wide industry reaching millions of listeners. This has led to a surge of interest in audio-only entertainment, including radio plays!

Since 2005, Plan-B Theatre has partnered with KUER's RadioWest to bring the art of live radio drama to modern audiences. Past episodes of RADIO HOUR have featured adaptations of well-known tales and original plays written by Utah playwrights. This is the thirteenth episode Matthew Ivan Bennett has written and his second Sherlock Holmes adaptation. Doug Fabrizio, host and executive producer of RadioWest, is reprising his role as Sherlock Holmes.

Read more about Doug Fabrizio
[Radio head: Doug Fabrizio finds a new voice as Sherlock Holmes](#),
The Salt Lake Tribune, 2012:



CREATE YOUR OWN RADIO PLAY

Download [our guide](#) for tips on writing, directing, sound design, mic technique, acting, and music composition for radio.

Comedian and journalist Jack L. Cooper became the first Black American radio announcer in 1929 with the debut of *The All-Negro Hour*, a variety show featuring live music, comedy skits, serial drama, and religious sermons. The program ran weekly for six years.



Jack L. Cooper, 1954



Manolita Arriola and Los Panchos perform for *Viva América* March 8, 1946

The U.S. State Department used radio to improve international relations during WWII and the Cold War. *Viva América* began as a cultural exchange program featuring music by artists from North and South America. It became enormously popular and is credited with introducing Latin music to a wider U.S. audience.

Learn More About Radio History

- Many radio stations experimented with scenes from plays, but the first station to successfully adapt plays for the radio was WGY in New York. [Read journalist Elizabeth McCleod's article about the birth of radio drama.](#)
- Watch the short film [Back of the Mike \(1937\)](#), to see how sound effects were created during a radio play broadcast.
- Learn more about the history of radio through a [virtual exhibit from the Digital Public Library of America.](#)



Teacher Tip: Use the resources above for a [jigsaw activity](#). Assign each student one topic to explore. Then group them with students who were assigned different resources. Have each student share three key concepts of what they learned with their group.

SHERLOCK HOLMES



Teacher Tip: Activate prior knowledge with a sticky note share. Ask your class to think of examples of stories, TV shows, or movies that center around detectives solving mysteries. Students write their examples on sticky notes and post them on the board.

Discussion Questions:

- **Do you enjoy detective stories? Why or why not?**
- **What Sherlock Holmes stories or adaptations are you familiar with?**

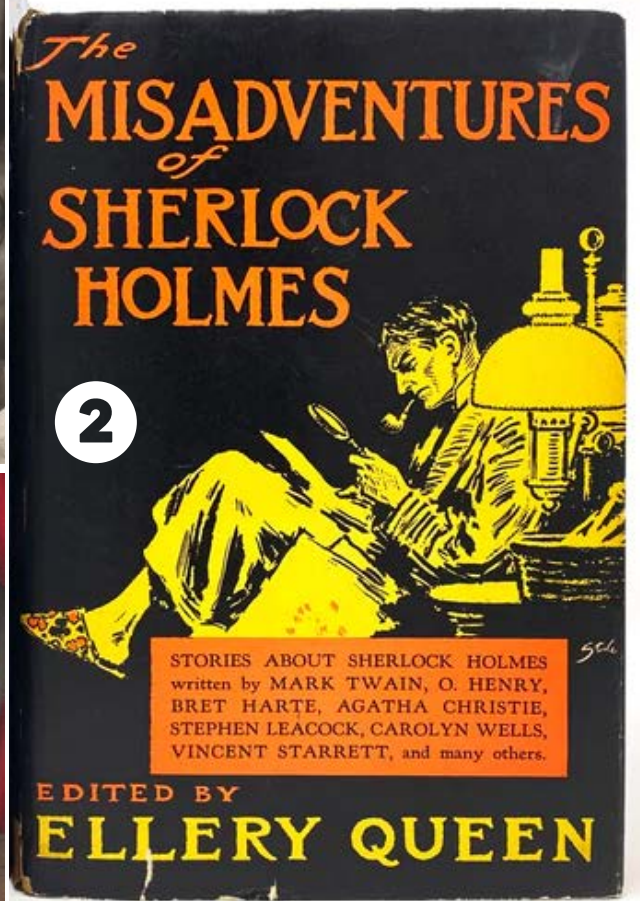
Edgar Allan Poe is credited with inventing the modern genre of detective fiction when he wrote "Murder in the Rue Morgue" in 1841. Mystery and crime stories were not new, but he was the first to introduce a recurring character, the eccentric and brilliant Auguste Dupin, who solved cases through keen observation and careful analysis of clues.

Forty-six years later, a young doctor published his first novel, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), about a murder solved by the ingenious Sherlock Holmes. A sequel, *The Sign of Four* was published in 1890, and by 1891 Conan Doyle had quit the medical field altogether to focus on his career as a writer.

Poe's Auguste Dupin may have been the first, but no fictional detective has ever been as well known as Sherlock Holmes. Arthur Conan Doyle's stories have been translated into more than 70 languages. The [Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia](#) lists 1,451 Sherlock Holmes stage adaptations and 117 radio plays. Sherlock Holmes is the main character of 60 silent films, more than 100 movies, at least two dozen TV series, and 76 video games. He has also appeared in newspaper comic strips, comic books, manga, and graphic novels. Not to mention the innumerable parodies, homages, stories written by other authors, or any of the looser adaptations where Sherlock is reimagined as a mouse or a doctor or is brought back to life in the 22nd century!



American silent film *A Black Sherlock Holmes* (1918)



1 British silent film
The Sign of Four (1923)

2 American anthology of
Sherlock Holmes parodies by
authors including Mark Twain
and Agatha Christie (1944)

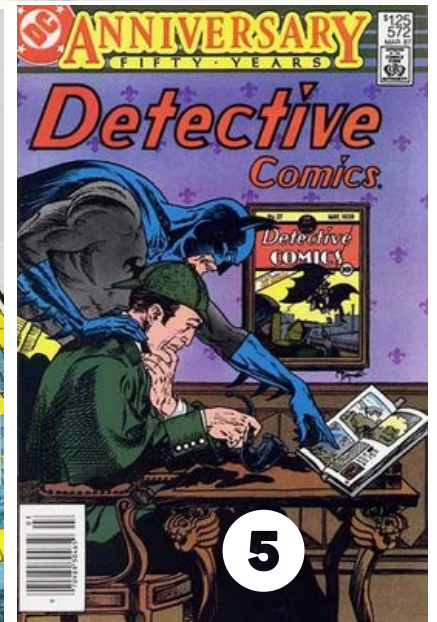
3 American movie
The Great Mouse Detective
(1986)

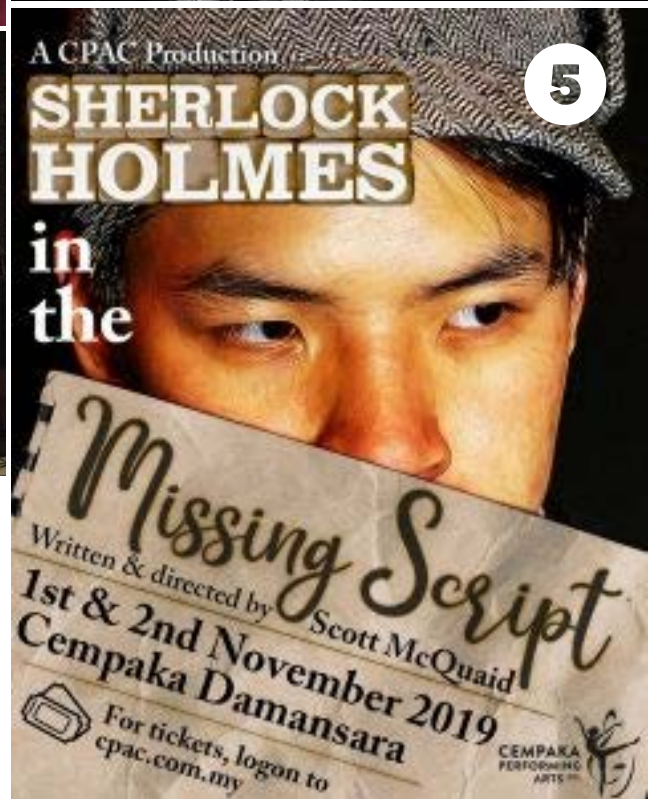
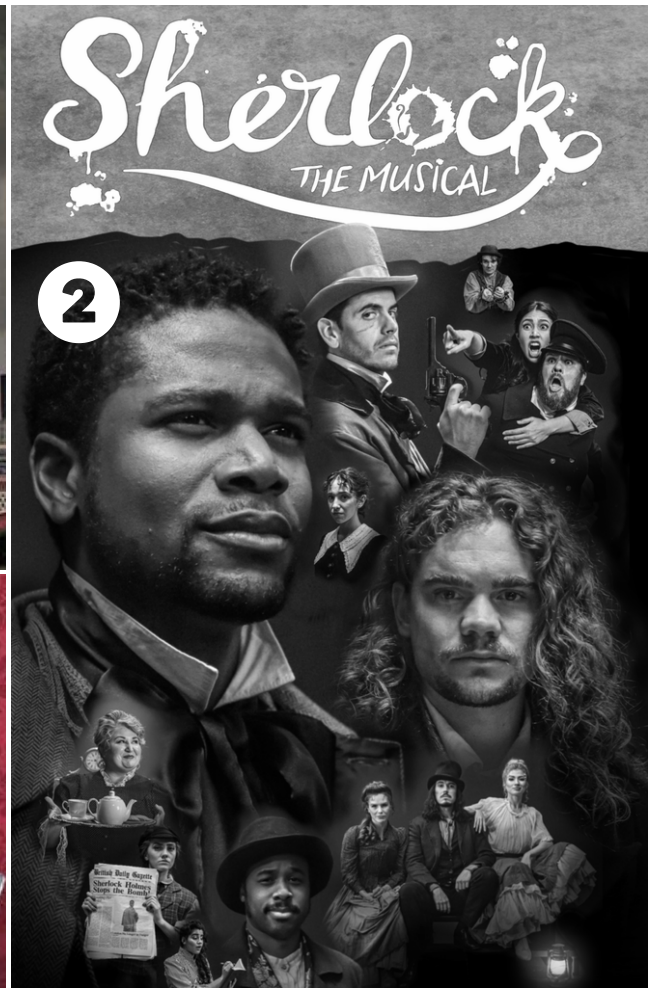
4 American board game
221B Baker Street (1977)

5 American comic book
Detective Comics (1987)

6 American TV show
House M.D. (2004)

7 American video
*Sheerluck Holmes and the
Golden Ruler* (2006)





- 1 British TV show *Sherlock* (2010)
- 2 American movie *Sherlock: The Musical* (2022)
- 3 Japanese TV show *Miss Holmes* (2018)
- 4 Russian TV show *Sherlock Holmes* (2013)
- 5 Malaysian play *Sherlock Holmes in the Missing Script* (2019)

There are two very distinct ways that Sherlock Holmes changed the world. The first is the way that readers interact with their favorite characters. Journalist

[Jennifer Keishin Armstrong](#) points

to "The Final Problem" as a foundational moment in the creation of modern fandom. Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories were published in *The Strand* magazine, with a new Sherlock Holmes adventure appearing almost every month between July 1891 and December 1893. The stories were so popular that crowds would form at newsstands when a new one came out. Conan Doyle decided he was done with Sherlock and wrote what he assumed (incorrectly, it turned out) would be his last ever Sherlock Holmes story: "The Final Problem." He recorded the event in his diary as, "Killed Holmes."

What was the public reaction to this? Absolute outrage. More than 20,000 readers canceled their subscription to *The Strand*, nearly ruining the magazine.

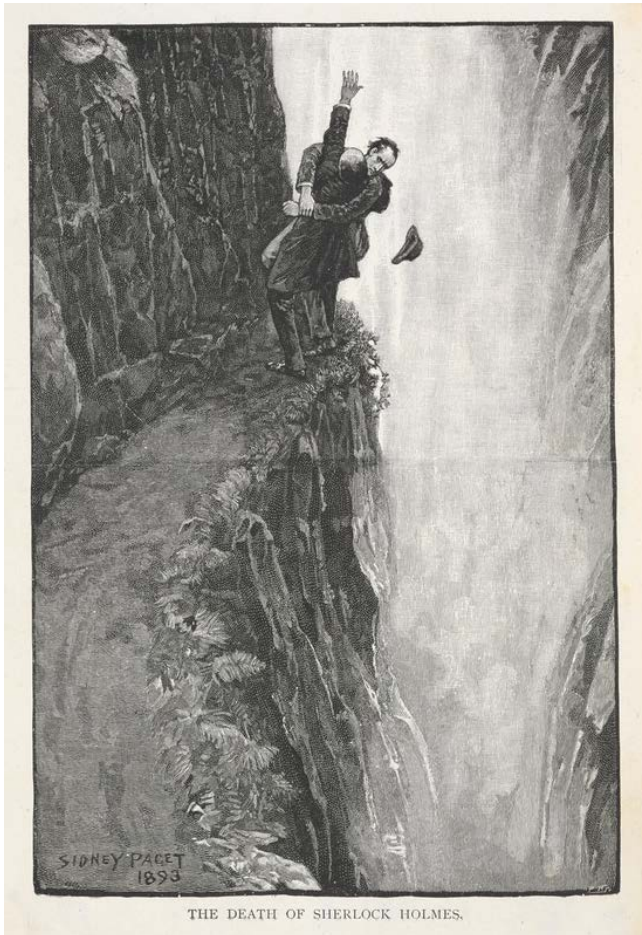


Illustration by Sidney Paget published with "The Final Problem" in British magazine *The Strand*

Armstrong explains:

Outraged readers wrote to the magazine in protest: "You brute!" one letter addressed to Conan Doyle began. Americans started "Let's Keep Holmes Alive" clubs. Conan Doyle stuck to his guns in the face of the protests, calling the death "justifiable homicide"—referring, presumably, to his own justifications, not Moriarty's.

This sounds, of course, like just another day on the internet in 2015. But at the time, Conan Doyle had every reason to be shocked by the torrent of vitriol. Fans simply did not do this before then. (In fact, they weren't even called "fans" yet. The

term, short for “fanatic,” had only recently begun use in reference to American baseball enthusiasts.) Readers typically accepted what went on in their favorite books, then moved on. Now they were beginning to take their popular culture personally, and to expect their favourite works to conform to certain expectations. They seemed to actually expect a reciprocal relationship with the works they loved.

Conan Doyle eventually caved to pressure and wrote another novel set before *The Final Problem*. He later resurrected Sherlock Holmes in *The Empty House*, where Holmes returns to Baker Street to explain how he faked his death.

Discussion Questions:

- **What do you think Armstrong means by people taking popular culture personally?**
- **What are some other examples of creators facing pressure from fans?**

The second way in which Sherlock Holmes changed the world is that he influenced the way that crimes are solved! [Suzanne Reller](#) writes,

"In a time where hearsay formed the basis for most guilty verdicts, Holmes analyzed blood splatters, bullet trajectory, fingerprints, and more. He was the first to emphasize the importance of an uncontaminated crime scene during police investigation. A full thirty eight years after the stories were written, the first forensics lab was built by Frenchman Edmond Locard, who came up with the exchange principle, which simply says that when two items come into contact, they each leave a trace on the other."

WOMEN IN MEDICINE

Discussion Questions:

- Why did the playwright choose to reimagine Watson as a woman?
- How does it change the story?

Were women doctors in the 1890s? Yes, they were!

In 1849, [Elizabeth Blackwell](#) became the first woman to graduate from medical school in the United States. Many assumed her application was a joke and laughingly voted to admit her. She later returned to her native Britain, becoming the first woman to have her name placed on the British medical register.

At a time when very few Black Americans had access to higher education, [Rebecca Lee Crumpler](#) had to face not just sexism, but racism. She graduated with a medical degree from New England Female Medical College in 1864, becoming the first Black female doctor in the United States.



An illustration of an anatomy lecture at a medical college for women. Sisters Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell opened the college in New York City in 1868.

Published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 1870.

England was slower than the U.S. to admit women to medical schools. In 1865, [Elizabeth Garrett Anderson](#) became the first woman to earn a medical license in England. Having passed their exam, the Society of Apothecaries begrudgingly granted her a license but quickly changed their rules to prevent other women from following in her footsteps. The following year she opened a hospital

specifically for women staffed completely by women. In 1874 she co-founded (along with Sophia Jex-Blake) the London School of Medicine for Women.

[Sophia Jex-Blake](#) was a student at the University of Edinburgh (the first British university to admit women) until a riot by a large mob of angry men in 1870 led to all women being kicked out of the university and the degrees of those who had already graduated being revoked. Sophia Jex-Blake eventually went to Switzerland and received her medical degree from the University of Berne in 1877.

By 1914, more than 1,000 women had followed these pioneers into medicine, including Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's daughter Louisa Garrett Anderson and Louisa's life partner Flora Murray. However, they were only allowed to treat women and children. When World War I broke out, Louisa and Flora jumped into action, raising money and gathering a medical team. They set up an emergency hospital in Paris, becoming some of the first women to treat men.

Photo of Flora Murray
and Louisa Garrett Anderson,
published in *The London Times*, 1921



Elizabeth Garrett Anderson



MISS FLORA MURRAY (left) AND DR. LOUISE GARRETT ANDERSON (right).
Leaving Buckingham Palace after receiving decorations.

Discussion Question:

- What obstacles did women in medicine need to overcome to accomplish their goals?

Learn more about challenges these doctors faced:

- Watch: [The UK's First Female Doctor](#), video essay by Youtuber Maddie Moate, 2020
- Read: [Women once faced bullies, blacklists and even angry mobs to practice medicine](#), article by Raquel Laneri, *New York Post*, 2021



Susan La Flesche Picotte

- In 1889 [Susan La Flesche Picotte](#) became the first Native American to earn a medical degree.



Antonia Novello

- In 1990, [Antonia Novello](#) became the first woman and first Hispanic to serve as Surgeon General of the United States.

TELLING AND RE-TELLING STORIES

Discussion Question:

- **Why do you think people retell or adapt existing stories instead of making up new ones?**

RADIO HOUR EPISODE 17: SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE FINAL PROBLEM is an adaptation of a short story by Arthur Conan Doyle that was first published in 1893. You might be familiar with the original meaning of adaptation from biology: the process of change by which a living thing becomes better suited to its environment. In literature and the arts, to *adapt* a work is to create something based on an earlier work, but fit to a new medium, in this case, radio. This is not a modern phenomenon. It is in human nature to tell and retell stories. Many of the oldest surviving folktales, songs, and poems were preserved through oral tradition—passed down through the generations through telling and retelling.

For as long as people have been writing, we have been re-writing stories. Aeschylus wrote plays based on the poems of Homer, Puccini adapted books into operas, and Tchaikovsky turned fairy tales into ballets. Charles Dickens grumbled about playwrights adapting his novels for the stage—not that stage adaptations existed, but that they beat him to it! He had his own playwriting ambitions and didn't appreciate the unauthorized adaptations. Sometimes a play would open before he had even finished the serialized story it was based on. Adaptations are everywhere you look in literature, on the stage, and on screen. Today many TV series find their origins in novels (see [The Rise of Must-Read TV](#) in *The Atlantic*).

You may know that the 2021 movie *West Side Story* was an adaptation of the 1957 Broadway musical (and the 1961 film), and you might have even known that the musical was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. But did you know that Shakespeare's version was itself an adaptation?

This simplified timeline on the next page doesn't even take into consideration the countless operas, paintings, books, movies that have been adapted from the same story over the centuries! What other adaptations can you think of?

“Tales evolve, and one generation adjusts the stories of the past to the present time and to its modern needs and ways of storytelling.”

John Dean, Professor of American Studies and Cultural History at the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines

“There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same old pieces of colored glass that have been in use through all the ages.”

Mark Twain, celebrated 19th century American writer

1475

Masuccio Saleritano writes the novella *Mariotto and Ganozza*



1524

Luigi da Porto writes his own version of Saleritano's story, but changes the lovers names to *Romeo and Giulietta*



1554

Matteo Bandello writes the novel *Romeo and Juliet*



1562

Arthur Brooke adapts Bandello's work into the narrative poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*



1597

Earliest known publication of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*



1957

West Side Story opens on Broadway. Book by Arthur Laurents. Music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.



1961

West Side Story movie released. Screenplay by Ernest Lehman.



2009

West Side Story Broadway revival adds Spanish dialogue and lyrics written by Lin-Manuel Miranda



2021

The movie *West Side Story* released. Screenplay by Tony Kushner. Music arranged by David Newman.



CHARACTER ORIGINS

Choose a character from the list below to look up. Where and when did the character first appear? Then see how many works they appear in across all kinds of media. Consider literature, art, comic books, tv, movies, theatre, radio, and video games.



Teacher Tip: Make this activity a competition. Give students a time limit for research and see who can come up with the longest list of examples for their chosen character.

Aladdin
Anansi
Cthulhu
Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde
Dracula
Frankenstein

King Arthur
Loki
Mary Poppins
Maui
Medusa
Mulan

Nancy Drew
Peter Pan
Robin Hood
Tarzan
Wednesday Addams
Zorro

FAN FICTION

Discussion Questions:

- **What do you see as the difference between adaptation and fan fiction? Is fan fiction a form of adaptation? Why or why not?**

Fan fiction is when a fan of a work or series (usually an amateur writing for their own amusement or to share with other fans) uses the work's characters and setting to write their own story.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Read or listen to the original short story of "[The Final Problem](#)" by [Arthur Conan Doyle](#). Then compare and contrast the original story with Matthew Ivan Bennett's script.

Use the Venn diagram on the next page to organize your thoughts before discussing these questions with your classmates:

1. **What did the playwright add to the story?**
2. **What did he choose to leave out?**
3. **How do these differences impact the story, and what do they reflect about the eras in which each version was written?**

Extend the activity by choosing another version of *The Final Problem* to add to your analysis. Options include:

- [The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Final Problem \(1954\)](#) Radio play by John Keir Cross. Run time 27 minutes.
- [The Rise and Fall of Sherlock Holmes \(1999\)](#) The first episode of the animated series Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century. Run time 21 minutes.
- **The Reichenbach Fall (2012)** Season two, episode three of BBC's Sherlock. Available on DVD from many local libraries or available to stream on Apple TV and Amazon Prime Video. Run time 1 hour and 30 minutes. Rated TV-14 for moderate violence and mild profanity.

Original Short Story by Arthur Conan Doyle

Radio play by Matthew Ivan Bennett