

***One Must Tell the Bees:***  
***Abraham Lincoln and the Final Education of Sherlock Holmes***

**Book Club Discussion Questions**

A Note from the Author:

If your book club would like to explore with me any aspects of the story, the characters and the themes at the heart of *One Must Tell the Bees*, don't be shy—request a Zoom video chat at [jlawrencematthews@gmail.com](mailto:jlawrencematthews@gmail.com).

I love discussing my favorite book!

—Cheers,  
Jeff Matthews

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## Part 1: The Basics

1. Upon learning you were going to read a book called *One Must Tell the Bees: Abraham Lincoln and the Final Education of Sherlock Holmes*, were you intrigued or put off by the idea of it being “a Sherlock Holmes book”?
2. What surprised you most about the book—positively or negatively—as you read it?
3. President Lincoln’s assassination and the 12-day manhunt for John Wilkes Booths were subject to conjecture, misinformation and wild speculation by the newspapers of the day, those being the only mass media available in 1865. How do you think the news of a president’s assassination would roll out in today’s 24/7 news cycle and the climate of a social-media-fueled political divide? How might it have been different (or similar) to what occurred in 1865 and in 1963?

Does the saying, “Nothing is new under the sun,” an Ecclesiastes reference, apply here?

4. This novel incorporates many themes, story lines, and characters. Which, if any, would you have expanded upon or eliminated from *One Must Tell the Bees*?
5. The Sherlock Holmes “origin story” in *One Must Tell the Bees* tells of an orphan raised by his older brother. Is it believable? Does it fit your preconceptions of Sherlock Holmes? Why or why not?
6. Does the portrayal of Abraham Lincoln in *One Must Tell the Bees* differ with how you have come to think of President Lincoln? Why or why not? And how did you react to Lincoln’s death scene? Was it appropriate?
7. The book goes back and forth in time and place, from the Civil War in America to the First World War in England. Which time and place piqued your interest more? Which setting called out to you to learn more about?
8. What are the dominant themes you discerned in *One Must Tell the Bees*? Which did you feel were most important? Which could you have done without?

9. Did the book alter your perception of American history in any way, positively or negatively? Does that history have a bearing on current events in America that you can relate to?
10. The author is white. One of the key characters—a freed slave named Abraham who is befriended by young Holmes—is black. Was Abraham well drawn or not? Was his relationship with young Holmes believable? Why or why not?
11. Johnnie Holmes and Abraham were outsiders viewing “America” through two different lenses based upon their life experiences involving race, heritage, family background, and social status. Which lens do you more easily connect with, and why?
12. *One Must Tell the Bees* tells a serious story, but there are moments of humor—do any come to mind?
13. There are four main female characters: Mrs. Watson; Ellen Stanton; Mary Lincoln; Holmes’s assistant, Miss Colvin. Which was your favorite, and why?
14. Margaret Watson plays an important role throughout *One Must Tell the Bees*. If you related to her as a woman, how did you view her role as wife/friend in the 1800’s? How would her character have changed, being a woman, in the 21st century?
15. Bonus Fun Question!  
  
“Sgt. Vincent Furnier” is an odd name for an Englishman in 1918 (or today, for that matter). Have you investigated where that name might have come from? Does it hint at the origin of the names of other fictional characters in *One Must Tell the Bees*? How many like Sgt. Furnier’s can you identify?

## Part 2: Deeper Dive

### Question 1: For Writers

*One Must Tell the Bees* started as two different book ideas: “Death of Sherlock Holmes” and “Sherlock Holmes Meets Abraham Lincoln.” Gradually the two stories came together in the form you have read. Would you have preferred one story versus the other?

Can you visualize how the book could be edited so that the two stories were separated?

### Question 2: For Historians

*One Must Tell the Bees* is told as history, not as “historical fiction.” Where does the American story detach from history? What did its depiction of Edwin Stanton, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson get wrong?

What does it get right?

### Question 3: For Holmesian Scholars

*One Must Tell the Bees* is intended to be entirely accurate to “the canon,” although it creates a portrait of Holmes’s origin quite different from what most Holmesians have derived from the canon. Where did it diverge in your mind? What personal traits of Sherlock Holmes are not at all supported by the canon?

Overall, does this “origin story” of Sherlock Holmes seem plausible or not?



East Dean Press

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