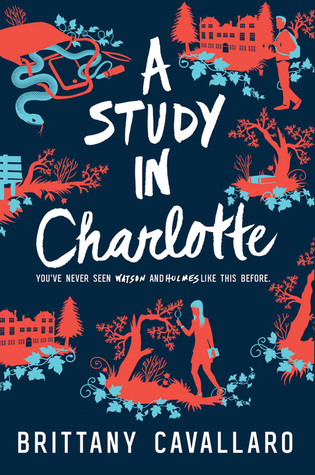


<http://www.brittanycavallaro.com/>

My name is Brittany Cavallaro, but I mostly go by Bri. I was born in 1986 in Springfield, Illinois and lived there until I went as a teenager to Interlochen Arts Academy to study creative writing. Then I pretty much kept studying creative writing. I still am. I’ve had the requisite odd jobs over the years (my favorite: working as a hat salesgirl), but I spent my twenties teaching literature, creative writing, and composition to undergraduates at the University of Wisconsin and gifted high school students through Northwestern University’s CTD program. I live with my husband and our two pets–a terrifying tortoiseshell cat and a very sweet golden retriever–in Michigan. I’m currently a [creative writing instructor](http://academy.interlochen.org/person/brittany-cavallaro) at the Interlochen Arts Academy (my alma mater!).



*A Study in Charlotte* is a modern, teenage take on the Sherlock Holmes experience. The story follows Charlotte Holmes and Jamie Watson, descendants of the famous duo, in a Connecticut prep school. At first, Jamie wanted nothing to do with Holmes; their families never saw eye to eye. But a murder at their school brings them closer together, especially since Charlotte Holmes and Jamie Watson are being framed for it; a murder copied directly from the pages of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.*

“Get up,” Holmes said. She didn’t offer me a hand.

There was a crowd around us. Of course there was. I swayed a little on my feet, flushed with adrenaline, feeling nothing. “Hi,” I said stupidly, wiping at my bleeding nose….

“...You think you’re defending my ‘honor,’ but you’re just as bad as he is.” She jerked a thumb at Dobson. “I don’t need someone to fight for me. I can fight for myself.”(17).

*This scene is one of the first times Charlotte speaks. It’s the first time her personality starts to take shape. Charlotte is a strong female protagonist with a lot of credibility, and her independence is clear. This interruption gives us a bit of insight to her past while also showing not only the readers, but to Watson and Dobson, what kind of person Charlotte is.*

He held up a hand before I could stand. “Except for the part where, when we found Dobson’s body, he was clutching your school library’s copy of *The Adventures of Sherlock and Holmes*. With one story in particular bookmarked. Or the part where you had sex with him. Dobson.” He was facing Holmes, but his eyes were fixed on me…

“Because I was using a rather large amount of oxy at the time,” she said cooly, “and had that come to light, I would have been expelled. Your real question should be whether or not the act was consensual. Which, according to me impaired state, wasn’t.” She paused. “Do you have any more questions?”

Her voice broke at the last word.

At that, I had to leave the room. (47-48).

*Cavallaro is not afraid to portray tough topics into her novel. Charlotte likes to keep a “robot” facade, as she calls herself. But here we see that not only is she young and reckless, but human. Her voice breaking at the end of her declaration is the crack to her hardened demeanor. We see a young teen who, under the influence of drugs, was taken advantage of and had only told the truth just now. She allowed herself to be a human once more before she has to carry on and solve the mystery herself.*

“The drugs.” She laughed. “No. I’d started with ‘the drugs’ at twelve. I was too soft on the inside, you see. No exoskeleton. I felt everything, and still everything bored me. I was like...like a radio playing five stations at once, all of them static. At first, the coke made me feel bigger. More together. Like I was one person, at last. And then it stopped working, and I began taking more, and more, and they sent me to rehab...I was sent away to think on what I’d done. It was never about keeping me from the drugs. It was about keeping me away from myself.” (251).

*This is the first time we see Charlotte under the influence of drugs in the present. She finally opens up to Watson, something she hasn’t done during the entirety of the book so far. We not only see what it can do to a person, but to a teenage girl with too much going on in her mind that she finds opiates as a means of escaping herself (and we also get a sense of what her family, Holmses, are like). Neither Watson nor Holmes trust each other, both secretly suspecting each other and not understanding one another until this moment.*

**The Craft**

Out of the chapters from *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, chapter seven seems to ideally capture the essence of this book: courage and survival. If you boil the plot down to a single idea, it’s a case of two teenagers, barely sixteen years of age, being framed for the murder of a fellow classmate while having to deal with the aftermath of a rape, an unhealthy dependency on drugs, and trying to escape death at the same time. This is an above beyond experience that requires immense courage to solve a crime (as teens, freshman in high school) while being so young and trying to survive plots for murder against them.

Cavallaro’s style is very addicting. She is able to deliver such simple, powerful lines at crucial moments that hook the reader in. While this book has a score that’s meant for teens at the high school grade, it still has the edge of secrecy and a reader’s desire to know *what happens next,* especially since this is a mystery, that it can hold the attention of adults as well. *A Study in Charlotte* is only the first book in the trilogy, and Cavallaro has more time and words to expand on the characters and give us more history on how our descendants of the famous Holmes and Watson came to be.

**Text Complexity**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **ATOS Book Level:** | 5.3 |
| **Interest Level:** | Upper Grades (UG 9-12) |
| **AR Points:** | 13.0 |

Lexile Score: HL750L

**Dale-Chall Formula worksheet**

Raw score 2.6727 [[ ? ]](http://www.readabilityformulas.com/dalechallformula/dale-chall-formula.php#)

Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.6727) [[ ? ]](http://www.readabilityformulas.com/dalechallformula/dale-chall-formula.php#)

Final Score: 6.3 [[ ? ]](http://www.readabilityformulas.com/dalechallformula/dale-chall-formula.php#)

**New Dale-Chall Readability Index:**

Grade level: Grades 7 - 8

This book is great for teens; it hits every Exeter quality. The one that most fits this novel is quality 2: “Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative hooks and a fast pace”. With a mystery to be solved, the excitement level will keep students wanting more and seeking out answers. It’s a wonderful take on *The Adventures of Sherlock and Holmes* with a teenage twists that will connect with readers.

Teens don’t need to have read the stories, but only know of them to understand. But this might make students want to trace back to the original stories to get a wider understanding of certain events within the novel. It also has concepts which might be considered controversial, like drug abuse, rape, and divorce; however, it is important to discuss these topics with teenagers. I believe that students will connect to the characters and the story.