



# English

## Key Stage 2 (lower)

# Telegrams



The following activities can form a unit on telegrams or be used separately. They address National Curriculum statutory requirements:

reading:

- retrieve and record information from non-fiction
- drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
- predicting what might happen from details stated and implied

writing:

- in narratives, creating settings, characters and plot



## Suggested Activities:

We first provide students with an explanation of what a telegram is.

The **first activity** encourages pupils to select essential information. After learning about what sending telegrams cost and why people would only use a few words, look together at the example where a lot of information has been shortened to 20 words. Discuss what has been included and what has been left out, including how it starts and ends. Discuss how you decide which information is essential and which can be excluded. Pupils then write their own 20 word telegram using the given information. They could work in pairs deciding what to leave out and what they need to say.

The **second activity** encourages pupils to infer and provide evidence. Pupils work in groups looking at different telegrams from Sherlock Holmes stories. Some of the vocabulary is quite challenging so a first activity might be to look up the meaning of the words the group doesn't understand - they could share out that task - and annotate the message with the definitions. They then answer the questions as a group making sure they have notes so they can feedback to the class. If there are at least two groups looking at each message then the whole class can compare their use of evidence.

In the **third activity** pupils work through the tasks in order to plan how to show character and show it through writing a conversation using what they inferred from one of the telegrams. It encourages them to give clues in their writing from which their reader can infer things about character.

**Extension Activity:** This activity lets pupils try using morse code and could also help pupils understand that British communications technology has changed over time and therefore this activity could help teachers address:

- a study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066



## What is a telegram?

A telegram was a way of sending short messages before text messaging and email. You would write your message on a form and it would be sent as a signal along telegraph wires in code by a telegrapher. The message would be recorded and then taken to the person it was for. You could send and receive messages all over the world. 150 years ago, in 1866 the transatlantic telegraph cable meant that messages could be sent from the UK to the USA for the first time.

(examples of telegrams can be found here: <http://atlantic-cable.com/CableCos/CandW/CW/index1.htm> )

(films by the U.S. Armed forces of sending a message can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC5RQNSSZH0> and here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQj74Y2H8xQ&list=PL12B2575993846F0A&index=1> )



## Activity One

A telegram form would have looked a bit like this:

**SCRAMBLED  
MESSAGES  
TELEGRAPH  
COMPANY**

Words. Sent  
At. M.  
Charge. To  
By

**NOTICE.**—This Telegram will be accepted for transmission subject to the Regulations made pursuant to the 2nd Section of the Telegraph Act, 1885, and to the Notice printed at the back hereof.

12 words, 6D.  
Every additional word, 1 1/2D.  
Every word telegraphed is charged for, whether in addresses or text.

TO {


FROM {

The Name and Address of the Sender, IF NOT TO BE TELEGRAPHED, should be written in the Space provided at the Back of the Form.

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## Send Essential Information

Telegrams were expensive to send. So you had to keep it short.

'in July 1865 [the telegraph companies'] **tariffs** [were] 6d for twenty words within London, 1s 0d within 100 miles, 1s 6d within 200 miles and 2s 0d beyond 200 miles, including **delivery.**' Steven Roberts, Distant Writing: A History of the Telegraph Companies in Britain between 1838 and 1868.

A **tariff** tells you the fixed price of something.



Image: by Jerry "Woody" [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a7/GREAT\\_BRITAIN%2C\\_VICTORIA\\_1894\\_-SHILLING a - Flickr - woody1778a.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a7/GREAT_BRITAIN%2C_VICTORIA_1894_-SHILLING_a_-_Flickr_-_woody1778a.jpg)



1 s (shilling) = 12 d (pence)



To help you think about how much this was: If you worked in an **office** you would earn about **25 shillings a week** in the 1880s, a **laundry washer** might earn **between 2 shillings 6d and 2 shillings 8d a day**, a **grocer's assistant** earned **12 shillings a week** in 1849. Mrs Beeton's book of Household Management from the 1860s suggests a **toasting fork, a dustpan, or a flour box** would cost a **shilling**. Charles Dickens's weekly magazine *All the Year Round* cost 2d per week in the 1860s.



**You only have 1 shilling to spare to send a message to the next town. Can you send messages in 20 words:**

Example:

You need to tell your Mum that you have arrived safely at your Aunt's house after a long journey because your train was delayed. You are sad to find that your Aunt's dog, Rover, is lost. Everyone is very upset about this.

Mum. Arrived safe at Aunty's. Journey long. Train delayed. Sadly Rover missing. All very upset. Joe.



You want to invite your friend, Sarah to come to your house for tea on Sunday at three o'clock in the afternoon. Ask her to bring biscuits, but you don't like chocolate, so you don't want her to bring chocolate biscuits. Tell her that your brother will be coming too.



Remember you only have one shilling so can only write 20 words on the telegram form - so put one word in each box and leave the last 5 boxes blank.



# SCRAMBLED MESSAGES TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Words.	Sent
	At _____ M.
Charge.	To _____
	By _____



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## Activity Two

### Inferences and Predictions

Telegrams were often used in Sherlock Holmes detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle. They first appeared in The Strand Magazine.



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/Holmes - Steele 1903 - The Empty House - The Return of Sherlock Holmes.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/Holmes_-_Steele_1903_-_The_Empty_House_-_The_Return_of_Sherlock_Holmes.jpg)



Here are some messages from Sherlock Holmes stories. It's your turn to be the detective.

- What questions does each telegram make you ask?
- What can you tell about the story and the character who has sent the telegram?
- What is your evidence?
- Can you predict what might happen next?





Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday tomorrow. Do come! I am at my wits' end. Hunter. (from 'The Copper Beeches')



Important fresh evidence to hand. McFarlane's guilt definitely established. Advise you to abandon case. Lestrade. (from 'The Norwood Builder')



Please await me. Terrible misfortune. Right wing three-quarter missing. Indispensable tomorrow. Overton. (from 'The Missing Three-Quarter')



### Activity Three

## **Imagine the meeting between Sherlock Holmes and Hunter at the Black Swan Hotel.**

1. First discuss with your partner what Hunter is worried about and why.
2. Draw him waiting: how can you show that he is worried?  
Now write a paragraph describing him waiting for Sherlock Holmes to arrive showing that he is worried. Use your drawing to help you.
3. With a partner make up a list of words to describe how a character might speak to show they are worried.
4. Include these ideas as you write a conversation between Hunter and Holmes.
5. Read the conversation your partner has written. Write a 20 word telegram explaining Hunter's problem.



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## Telegram Extra

- Turn your last message into morse code!
- Can you tap it out like the telegraphers in the youtube videos?
- Try making the first word clear for your partner. They should note down the dots and dashes then use the code to work out the word. Did they get it right?



## International Morse Code

1. The length of a dot is one unit.
2. A dash is three units.
3. The space between parts of the same letter is one unit.
4. The space between letters is three units.
5. The space between words is seven units.

A	• —	U	• • —
B	— • • •	V	• • • —
C	— • — •	W	• — —
D	— • •	X	— • • —
E	•	Y	— • — —
F	• • — •	Z	— — • •
G	— — •		
H	• • • •		
I	• •		
J	• — — —		
K	— • —		
L	• — • •		
M	— —		
N	— •		
O	— — —		
P	• — — •		
Q	— — • —		
R	• — •		
S	• • •		
T	—		

1	• — — — —
2	• • — — —
3	• • • — —
4	• • • • —
5	• • • • •
6	— • • • •
7	— — • • •
8	— — — • •
9	— — — — •
0	— — — — —