

## **THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

### **LESSON PLAN**

#### **BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE**

During the summer holidays students were asked to read THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY in abridged edition. A couple of lessons were dedicated to summarizing the storyline and discussing main characters and themes, asking students to discuss and express their opinion.

#### **GROUP WORK**

In groups of five ( Expert Groups), students were asked to find and summarize relevant information on topics connected to the historical background, artistic and literary movements contemporary to the novel, main themes and characters .

Students were given info sheets for the web quest, also containing suggestions and open questions.

#### **CLASS PRESENTATION**

After producing a two page info sheet, the expert groups were split up and new groups were formed containing one expert from each initial group who had to explain and share his/her knowledge with the rest of the students in his /her new group (Cooperative Learning).

#### **FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY**

The activity continued by reading and analyzing parts of the original text and discussing the main themes of the play in class.

#### **EVALUATION**

Both oral and written tests followed.

Web quest

Artistic Movements

The Victorian Age

Morality and Hypocrisy

Alter- ego

Vices and Crime

Original Text and exercises

Verifica

**Web Quest****Background info to The Picture of Dorian Gray**

Each expert group will be responsible for finding and summarizing interesting information helpful in understanding the historical period, artistic and literary movements contemporary to the novel, main themes and characters .

The expert groups will then split and new groups will be formed containing one expert from each initial group who will explain and share his/her knowledge with the rest of the students in his /her new group (Cooperative Learning)

Web quest: General Web sites which may be useful for

Start with wikipedia

Then <http://www.victorianweb.org>

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/doriangray/>

<http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides3/PictureOfDorian.html#Publication>

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian\\_britain/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/)

Aesthetic Movement in Europe (Literature and Art) Dandy

<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/ThePicture-of-Dorian-Gray-Critical-Essays-Oscar-Wilde-s-Aesthetics.id-144.pageNum-330.html>

Oscar Wilde's London /living and working in Victorian London

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/>

Class and Women (rights/ duties and value of women in Victorian Britain ) class distinctions

<http://www.channel4.com/history/microsites/H/history/guide19/part10.html>

[http://www.fashion-era.com/the\\_victorian\\_era.htm](http://www.fashion-era.com/the_victorian_era.htm)

Faust / doppelganger ( living a double life)

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/jekyll/>

<http://www.horror-wood.com/doriangray.htm>

<http://www.turksheadreview.com/library/notes-doriangray.html>

Vice and Virtue ( Sex –drugs –crime) Victorian Hypocrisy

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium\\_den](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium_den)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian\\_morality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_morality)

**Expert Group A**

Aesthetic Movement in Europe (Literature and Art)

How did the Aesthetic literary and artistic movement influence Oscar Wilde's life and Dorian's life,?

Are there points in common?

What is the PREFACE to The picture of Dorian Gray about? What does it tell us about art?

What's a Dandy? Who was a Dandy? Who's a Dandy today?

Differences between the Aesthetic Movement in France, GB, Italy?

What have Oscar Wilde and D'Annunzio in common? What's different?

**Expert Group B**         Oscar Wilde's London /living and working in Victorian London

What was the city like? (Environment, Housing, Pollution) City of contradictions- slums and suburbs

Where did people live and work? Which classes? Opportunities for lower classes and unemployed.  
Education workhouses

Exploitation of unskilled workers, women and children. Class structure- poor law : Victorian values- Self help

**Expert Group C.**         Class and Women (rights/ duties and value of women in Victorian Britain ) class distinctions

Rights duties and Value of women , even according to class

How did women live, dress , get an education and job ?

Morality and Hypocrisy and double standards .

Why are women absent from the story; what role do Dorian's mother/ Sybil / Lord Henry's wife have?

**Expert Group D.**         Faust / doppelganger ( living a double life)

Similarities between Faust and Dorian .Dorian as overreacher ( not content with human limits)

Differences (Knowledge vs eternal beauty/youth)

Evil Twin /Alter ego Similarity with Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Dorian's double life typical of Victorian society

Wilde's double life

**Expert Group E**         Vice and Virtue ( Sex –drugs –crime) Victorian Hypocrisy

Explain Dorian's fall into crime and perversion . Was it typical, Why was it so easy for him?

Double Standards / Victorian Hypocrisy

Wilde's vices and virtues- his fall to disgrace

## EXPERT GROUP A

Aesthetic Movement in Europe (Literature and Art)**HOW AESTHETIC LITERARY AND ARTISTIC MOVEMENT INFLUENCED OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE AND DORIAN'S LIFE**

Oscar Wilde preached aestheticism and wanted to construct his life like an art work, without obeying to any other criterions except pleasure and beauty instead Dorian breaks the common moral laws and doesn't hesitate in front of vice and crime, outside he was like an art work, but inside he had negative vices like drugs, sex and murder.

**PREFACE TO THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things. The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography. Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty. There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all. The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass. The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium. No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved. No artist has ethical sympathies.

An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style. No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything. Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art. From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type. All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital. When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself. We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct.

*The Preface is a series of epigrams, or concise, witty sayings, that express the major points of Oscar Wilde's aesthetic philosophy. In short, the epigrams praise beauty and repudiate the notion that art serves a moral purpose.*

**A 'DANDY'**

Oscar Wilde was considered a 'dandy', a very elegant man who gave great importance to his appearance, refined and eccentric lifestyle and brilliant conversation.

**Who could be considered a dandy today?**

Lapo Elkan. He's young, good-looking and extremely wealthy. He's fluent in six languages and the very definition of cosmopolitan, having been born in New York, raised in Brazil, educated in England and France, and now once again living in New York.

He's the scion of Italy's preeminent family (the Agnellis, not the Mafia), and is quintessentially Italian. He Style and fashion are in his blood, thanks to his aunt Diane von Furstenberg. He's linked with sleek cars and even sleeker women. Perennially named to the world's best-dressed lists, he's officially a *GQ* style icon. Lapo's luxury makes him a dandy deluxe and has earned him Dandyism net's acclaim as 2007 Dandy of the Year.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT IN FRANCE, GB, ITALY**

The **Aesthetic Movement** is a European 19<sup>th</sup> century movement that emphasized aesthetic values over moral or social themes in literature, fine art, the decorative arts, and interior design. Generally speaking, it represents the same tendencies that symbolism or decadence stood for in France, or *decadentismo* stood for in Italy, and may be considered the British branch of the same movement. It belongs to the anti-Victorian reaction and had post-Romantic roots, and as such anticipates modernism. It took place in the late Victorian period from around 1868 to 1901, and is generally considered to have ended with the trial of Oscar Wilde (which occurred in 1895).

**Aestheticism** was inspired by the principle of 'art for art's sake (art for the love for art) ...it had to simply create beauty. The Aesthete believed that Form was the essence of Beauty and Beauty was the highest perfection of human endeavours. The Aesthetic writers broke away from the confining conventions of their time and led very unconventional lives, pursuing pleasure and new sensations and devoting themselves to the cult of beauty and art.

**Symbolists** believed that art should aim to capture more absolute truths which could only be accessed by indirect methods. Thus, they wrote in a highly metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. Symbolism was hostile to "plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description", and that its goal instead was to "clothe (present) the Ideal in a perceptible form" whose "goal was not in itself, but whose sole purpose was to express the Ideal".

**Decadentismo** was an Italian artistic movement based loosely on the Decadent movement, found in France and England at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although differing in their approaches, they championed the idiosyncratic and the irrational against the advancing tide of scientific rationalism and mass culture at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN OSCAR WILDE AND GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO**

Between the novels of Oscar Wilde and Gabriele D'Annunzio there is a principal point in common: both were written in the Aesthetic Movement.

The protagonists of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and of "Il Piacere" are both looking for pleasure in all the aspects of the life even if, often, this pursuit takes Dorian and Andrea Sperelli to a bad kind of life made of drugs, sex and even murders. They try to find the pleasure of beauty, and they think that the beauty is the most important thing in a life even above the values of goodness and law. Even the writers, Wilde and D'Annunzio have these characteristics: they are intelligent and handsome, eccentric and nonconformist.

## THE VICTORIAN AGE

### Introduction

Victorian society is like a theatre. Outside, the streets smell of horse manure and the air is full of soot, while inside, the society is rigidly stratified: the queen and aristocracy sit in sumptuous comfort in the royal box, the upper classes next to them. In the dress circle and front stalls are the solid middle classes, while the lower middle classes of aspiring clerks and traders sit at the back of the stalls or second circle. To complete the segregation, the working class, who enter by a separate entrance, sit in the gallery and have the worst view of the show.

In the 1850, London was developing its business, by building new industries, new docks along the river tames, new railways, streets and buildings but, at the same time, it was destroying the same city. In fact, the new industries used to run with coal as combustible, and it upgraded the level of pollution. The smog blackened the houses and the lungs of the people causing a lot of disease.

Rich people did not have this problem. They used to solve it by taking holidays in the countryside, far away from the smog and the illness of industrial London, but the problem was unsolvable for poor people. They could not leave the city, because of their work, so they had to live in a city where the air was black, and as they had no money, they had to live in very small houses in cramped streets, in the suburbs of the city. These homes would share toilet facilities and there were always smell of manure. Disease as cholera and typhoid was spread through contaminated water supply, causing a large amount of deaths.

### Social classes

#### The aristocracy

In the 19th-century the aristocracy had an amazing power and was reinforced by the new aristocrats who owed their success to commerce, industry, and the professions.

The aristocrats also head Britain's social life. On their country estates, they go hunting, shooting and fishing.

#### The middle class

The middle class was a fairly small group of professionals, factory owners, businessmen, merchants and bankers.

In those years it expanded very rapidly and split into two different groups:

- The upper middle class which was divided between professionals (doctors, lawyers) and industrialists
- The lower middle class (professional managers). As government passed more and more laws, civil servants - working in both central and local government - multiplied.

London became a city full of clerks.

#### The working classes

This class was composed by men and women who performed physical labour, paid daily or weekly wages. These were the people who benefited most from the booming Victorian economy - their wages rose.

#### The lowest class

The 'lowest class' comprised about a quarter of urban populations. People were in deep poverty and living in squalid, even deadly slum conditions.

Some of these people were unemployed, some were criminals, all lived a precarious existence. Rural poverty was even worse. Child labour and poverty were common. Women were forced to give their children opium so they wouldn't make any noise while their mothers were in the fields. When times were bad and work ran out, these people had no choice. They had to leave the land and migrate to the booming cities or starve. By 1901, the number of men working on farms has dropped by a third.

Victorian society did not recognize that there was a lower class. The prevailing attitude was that the poor deserved the way they lived. If good moral choices had been made, the poor wouldn't be living the way they did. 'Their life was the life of savages.' Many ended up in the workhouse (institutions where homeless poor were lodged, but the living was horrendous and it was almost better to be back on the street).

### Poverty

19th century Britain saw a huge population increase stimulated by the Industrial revolution. The industries developed rapidly and demanded a lot of workers to produce even more goods to put into the growing world market. For this reason, lots of people that lived in the countryside and were dependent on agriculture, migrated to London. They thought that the city offered a possibility to work and change their life conditions. But when they arrived, they found a horrible background: they were obliged to live packed up in dirty slums and to work long hours in unhealthy places. They were even poorer than before. The lowest class was about a quarter of urban population. The unemployed people were criminals and others died of starvation. Lots of unskilled people died in factories, crushed by machineries. Many men got drunk in the pubs for desperation. The majority of the population was employed in mining and steel industry. The poorer classes had no rights. They had to work 60 hours per week on average, without any Sundays or holidays. They earned practically nothing, but if they stopped, they were dismissed. All the family had to work to survive, even women and children, who began to work at the age of 3 or 5. They were employed as chimney sweeps errand boys, crossing sweepers, shoe blacks, selling matches, flowers, and other cheap goods, or, if they were lucky, as domestic servants. In 1840 only about 20 percent of the children in London had no schooling. Charles Dickens, for example, worked at the age of 12 in a blacking factory. Instead, prostitution offered a "good earning", in fact many prostitutes were independent women, they were aged between 15 and 22. They visited pubs, which were off limits for respectable women. They were so numerous that in the 19th century there was 1 prostitute for 12 men. But with the rise in prostitution, there was an increase in sexual diseases, as gonorrhoea and syphilis. A typical Victorian double standard is that although there is no attempt to penalise men for having sex with prostitutes, women who sell sex are seen as sinful.

### Social and economic Victorian values

Help-self is the idea that everyone has to create his own success with his work and means and he is responsible of that. The attainment of success is all based on the good will.

Free trade stimulated economic growth. Economic growth created more jobs. More jobs meant more money for people to consume, which in turn meant new market opportunities for producers and traders. It is also demonstrated the fragility of this virtuous circle, in fact the situation became worse. Without state intervention it was clear that the whole Victorian economic miracle might be undermined. The solution adopted was central government intervention to mitigate the most damaging effects of unrestrained industrial capitalism. Parliament voted the first grant to support education for the poor. Parliament had passed the first Factory Act. Employment of very young children in textile factories was forbidden, and that of adolescents restricted. Children had two hours a day for studying. Factory legislation was progressively extended to other branches of industry. Compulsory elementary education and the opportunity for almost all children to receive free elementary education without payment of any fees.

## EXPERT GROUP C

### **MORALITY AND HYPOCRISY AND DOUBLE STANDARDS**

From our liberated point of view it is not easy to understand the women's role in the Victorian era. The women were looked as second class persons. They have fewer legal rights than men, and almost no political rights – in particular, they're not allowed to [vote](#). A married woman is the property of her husband, and her possessions – even her children – belong to him. The idea of respectable woman was woman as the “angel of the house” that had to stay at home looking after the children and taking care of the house. Only the job of a teacher was acceptable and the women from lower classes were able to work in textile factories. Moreover women were seen as the daughter of Eve, so the idea says that women are innately prone to corruption, and Victorian society makes a rigid separation between pure angels and immoral women.

The Victorian age introduces also a double sexual standard; repressive rules for women's [sexuality](#) with sexual freedom for men. This feature of "[moral](#) values" only served to increase prostitution, and to increase venereal disease. Indeed the church, in order to save the purity of the housewife - the Angel of the House - sponsored prostitution. Women, whose sexuality was disavowed, were considered ill and hysterical.

### **WHY ARE WOMEN ABSENT FROM THE STORY; WHAT ROLE DO SYBIL/ LORD HENRY'S WIFE HAVE?**

In the Oscar Wilde's famous novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” women are objects, a “decorative sex” as Lord Henry said, and haven't an important role in the story. Men have relationships with women in the novel—Dorian falls in love with Sibyl and Lord Henry is married—but in the novel, relationships with women are superficial and short. Lady Wotton, like most of the women in the novel, is depicted with no real importance: she is briefly introduced, and never heard again after the dialogue with Dorian. The most important female character in the novel is Sibyl. There is little substance to Sibyl's character: she is only very beautiful and very good in acting, and this features confirm what Lord Henry thinks: “women are a decorative sex”.

### **WOMEN'S LIFE IN THE VICTORIAN ERA**

Women in Victorian era were seen as temples of love and purity, innocent creatures who need protection and so, could not be used for physical exertion or pleasurable sex. The only role of women, who were named the “angels of the house” after a poem of Coventry Patmore, was to get married and look after the homely work. The young ladies were groomed thoroughly to get married and had to be innocent, virtuous, biddable and dutiful. They ran the house, made meals for their husbands and children, made clothes for everyone, and grew everything that the family ate. The women were also supposed to take care of someone who was sick (even mental illness and

alcoholism). The women were also responsible for sewing, knitting and painting the clothes. The gentlewomen made sure that the home was a place of solace and comfort for the husband and children, free from all the hassles or burdens of outside work. They wear bodices that completely cover their bosoms and arms, and their skirts reach down to their ankles. Accessories like hats, gloves, umbrellas and fans, were used when a mother and daughter wanted to impress society. Another myth of Victorian womanhood is that of the 'fallen woman'. Based on traditional Christian notions of woman as the daughter of Eve, the idea of the 'fallen woman' says that women are innately prone to corruption. But, in an age when contraception is still primitive, giving birth is hazardous – many women die in childbirth or soon after.

### **WOMEN'S CLASS : JOB AND EDUCATION**

The young women were mainly educated in accomplishments like French, drawing, painting, singing, dancing - everything which helped them to get a perfect impression (even if dancing was a pastime among most of the upper-class women and men). In the later part of Victoria's reign, many middle-class women seek activities and careers outside the home. But while it's easy enough to work in local charities, churches and the arts, especially music, it's harder for them to receive higher education and break into the professions. In the 19th century, London University is unique in allowing women to take degrees. At Oxford and Cambridge, new colleges for women are founded but they aren't allowed to receive degrees yet: in fact women who want to become doctors had to go abroad. But where great industries are located, there are more jobs for factory workers than for domestic servants. The largest sector is textiles. Other industries requiring female labour include the manufacture of metal, chemicals, stationery and books. Many women also work part-time, doing sewing and washing and hawking goods in the streets. Other women work in nursing and run hotels – the professions remain dominated by men.

### **WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

Victorian women are second-class citizens. They have fewer legal rights than men, and almost no political rights – in particular, they're not allowed to vote. By law, a married woman is the property of her husband, and her possessions – even her children – belong to him. Influenced by the Bible, many people believe that men and women are born to fulfill different roles: men to command and women to obey men and raise their children. Conceptions of women's passive sexual nature, added to ideas about possessive patriarchal individualism, equal male dominance. Any sexual transgression in polite society is severely policed. No matter how great the provocation, simply by leaving her husband a woman quits respectable society and becomes an outcast, especially because when they were considered 'fallen women', a prostitute, automatically they lost the respect of the other and of their family and they will not find a husband. This system gives middle-class men plenty of opportunity to indulge in hypocrisy and double-standards. It is seen as natural for gentlemen to use prostitutes but unnatural for women to have affairs.

**EXPERT GROUP D.**     Faust / doppelganger ( living a double life)**Summary of Goethe's Faust**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust is a tragic play and it should be defined a tragicomedy.

It was published in two parts: The First Part of the Tragedy and The Second Part of the Tragedy.

It is Goethe's most famous work and considered by many one of the greatest works of German literature.

In the first part Mephistopheles (devil) makes a bet with God: he can help Faust in this desire to learn everything that can be known.

The devil pursues Faust and they make an arrangement: the devil will serve Faust during his life and Faust will do everything the devil wants in hell after his life.

Faust signs a contract with the devil with his blood. After some travels Faust meets Gretchen and he falls in love with her. With the help of the devil Faust sleeps with Gretchen and she discovers to be pregnant. Gretchen's brother challenges Faust and he dies. Gretchen drowns her child and so she is convicted of the murder. Faust and the devil try to free her but they cannot do it.

In the second part Faust wakes in a fairies field and he starts a new cycle of adventure. At the end he goes in heaven and he loses half of his bet.

**Summary of Marlowe's Faust**

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, normally known simply as Doctor Faustus, is a play by Christopher Marlowe, based on the Faust story, in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge.

One theme in Doctor Faustus is sin. Throughout the play, Faustus is continuously making wrong choices when it come to his lifestyle. His first sin was greed.

Faustus began his downfall by making a pact with the devil.

Doctor Faustus is a German scholar who is well known for his accomplishments and he wants to know everything possible. Faustus gives his soul to the demon in return for 24 years of servitude. At the end of his 24 years of servitude he was worried about what he had done.

The next morning some people discover him torn limb from limb and his soul was with the devil.

The difference between Dorian Gray and Faust is that Faust wanted the knowledge in return for his soul and he has a medieval mentality, while Dorian wanted the beauty and the eternal youth. Dorian's mentality is a current one.

**Alter ego**

The Latin word "Alter ego" means "the other me", an other way to be of the man.

The famous story of Dr. Jekyll, a kind and nice doctor oppressed by his alter ego (Mr. Hyde), is an example of double personality. When he tells his story, he doesn't hide his double life: a respectable appearance, that hides his frenetic desires. From this double personality he wants to find out a scientific method that could divide the good part of him from the bad one. With this notion he will live his double life without limits.

The fight between Jekyll and Hyde is an example of the "Victorian compromise": people thought that the important thing was appearance.

Although the two stories (The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde-The Picture of Dorian Gray) don't belong to the same literary genre, there a lot of elements in common between them:

-Jekyll and Dorian sacrifice their soul to satisfy their own desire, but both of them won't get back.

-Dorian has the possibility to place his physical and moral decay on his picture, because he expressed a desire: he wanted the picture to get old for him, so he will remain handsome and young.

From that moment he started to commit crimes.

-Jekyll and Dorian have an alter ego and they relive their faults through it.

-Both of them want to eliminate their alter ego, but they understand that it could eliminate themselves.

The word alter ego is known also with the German term "Doppelganger": it means "the double that goes away.

### **Doppelganger**

The Doppelganger is a well known motif in myth, folklore and literature.

The word comes from doppel (double) and ganger (usually translated as goer), it refers to any double of a person; sometimes the doppelganger is a second self that haunts the first self.

The picture of Dorian, which serves as a metaphor for the state of his soul, or his conscience, is a variation of this motif of the doppelganger.

It's Dorian's second self that haunts him and which eventually he cannot bear to look at.

### **Double life in Victorian society**

In the Victorian society people thought that appearance was the most important thing in the life of the rich people.

Members of high society showed a respectable appearance but in reality they committed a lot of crimes.

They could be pedophiles, murderers, or drug dealers. They corrupted the police, they had a clean face and they lied about the reality of their life.

### **Double life of Oscar Wilde**

It is possible that Oscar Wilde had a double life like the characters on his books and the people of his society.

In the story of The Picture of Dorian Gray there could be a connection with the personality of Oscar Wilde, indeed Basil doesn't want to show his picture because it shows the secret of his heart and he could be convicted of homosexuality.

Oscar Wilde was put in prison for his homosexuality and he had a double life to preserve his respectability.

EXPERT GROUP A Vice and Virtue ( Sex –drugs –crime) Victorian Hypocrisy**OSCAR WILDE’S VICES AND VIRTUES**

After a long time passed writing, moving to different parts of the world and being successful he definitively established in London. From this moment he started mixing in high society, sparkling at parties and spending much of his time with friends and lovers, often stepping beyond the bounds of what was considered morally and socially proper for the time. In 1891 Wilde met an English poet called Lord Alfred Douglas, son of John Douglas, 9<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Queensberry. It was the beginning of a tumultuous relationship that would cause many problems to Oscar . Alfred had a tempestuous relationship with his father which did not help matters. He disapproved of his son's lifestyle and when he learned about his openly living with Wilde, he set out to defame Wilde. For the opening performance of “The Importance of Being Earnest” in 1895 at St. James' Theatre in London, the Marquess planned to publicly expose and humiliate Wilde. Oscar took legal steps to protect himself against the 'brute' but he ultimately won a case whereby Wilde was charged with "gross indecency" for homosexual acts. The outcome of the sensational trial was a sentence of two years hard labour. After Wilde was imprisoned Constance had her sons' last names changed to Holland.

**DORIAN’S PERVERSION AND CRIMES**

In a period as the Victorian age where crimes, prostitution, drugs and homosexuality were illegal, but very common and typical, the majority of high society’s member conducted a strange kind of life based on pleasure and evasion from the reality. This people lived every day in hypocrisy. This was one of the reason of why the character of Dorian fell into crime and perversion and why it was so easy for him to do such terrible things. The second reason could be that he never had a real childhood as everyone; his mother and his father died when he was very young and he grew up with his grandfather that had never accepted and loved him. We can say that Dorian’s character had never known what the love is. When he meets Lord Henry and he wishes that the portrait will grow older and that he will remain young forever he falls into another world characterized by a double identity and he begins to indulge in every kind of pleasure, moral and immoral. From the perversion and paedophilia with young boy and wives to the abuse of drugs and the murder of his best friend Basil.

***Double standards / Victorian Hypocrisy***

What does “morality” mean?

Morality means a group of principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad behaviours. In its descriptive use morals are principally created by society, philosophy, religion, and/or individual conscience.

And what did it mean in the Victorian Age?

It can describe any set of values that espouses sexual restraint, low tolerance of crime, and a strong social ethic. Due to the prominence of the British Empire, many of these values were spread across the world.

The morality and values of the Victorians can be classed under Religion, Morality, Elitism, Industrialism and Improvement.

But, nowadays, historians regard the Victorian era as a time of many contradictions. An excess of social movements concerned with morals co-existed with a class system that permitted hard living conditions for many.

The apparent contradiction between the custom of an outward appearance of dignity and restraint, and the prevalence of social phenomena that included prostitution and child labour, were two sides of the same coin: various social reform movements and high principles come forth to improve the harsh conditions. In that period morality was strictly connected with hypocrisy.

With the term *Hypocrisy*, we think about the act of pretending to have beliefs, opinions, virtues, feelings, qualities, or standards that one does not actually have. In fact, it is thus a kind of lie. Hypocrisy may come from a desire to hide from others actual motives or feelings.

In the Victorian age people had to always show the best part of their life. They must be perfect at the facade just to be accepted by the society, in this way they were stereotyped as perfect characters. Homosexuality, prostitution, drugs, blackmailing were considered immoral and scandalous in that period.

However, middle-high class people used to create two different personalities, one moral and for this reason accepted by the society, and the another one, immoral and disclaimed.

For example, even Dorian Gray had two different personalities. He was really handsome and fascinating aesthetically, he symbolized the perfect gentleman. But he was hypocritical; he used to take drugs, have homosexual relationships, go with prostitutes and commit murders.

# The Picture of Dorian Gray

## Reading Comprehension

### PART I

*Dorian Gray has just finished sitting for a portrait by his friend Basil Hallward, who was proud of having captured his beauty on canvas. He is walking in the garden with Lord Henry Wotton.*

"You have the most marvellous youth, Mr. Gray, and youth is the one thing worth having."

"I don't feel that, Lord Henry," he replied, snapping off a blossom by the stem.

"No, you don't feel it now. Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when thought has seared your forehead with its lines, and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it, you will feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it always be so?"

"... You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray. Don't frown. You have. And beauty is a form of genius – is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. It is one of the great facts of the world, like sunlight, or spring-time, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon... Yes, Mr. Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to really live, perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you... Ah! Realize your youth while you have it! Don't squander the gold of your days! [...] Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you! Be always searching for new sensations [...] afraid of nothing! [...] With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season. [...] Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!" [...]

"How sad it is!" murmured Dorian Gray with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!"

### PART II

*Dorian's wish came true. While he kept his youth and beauty, his portrait became progressively older, uglier and more wrinkled. Many years later, lonely and depressed after a life of corruption and debauchery during which he had brought misery and disgrace upon all his companions, Dorian regrets the loss of his soul.*

Ah! In what a monstrous moment of pride and passion he had prayed that the portrait should bear the burden of his days, and he keep the unsullied splendour of eternal youth! All his failure had been due to that. [...] It was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for. But for those two things, his life might have been free from stain. His beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery. What was youth at best? A green, an unripe time, a time of shallow moods, and sickly thoughts. Why had he worn its livery? Youth had spoiled him.

### PART III

*Finally, in desperation, Dorian stabs the picture. Awakened by a cry and a crash, his servants discover a strange scene...*

When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.

**Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)**

## Words

### 1. Find in the text words or expressions that mean:

- a) lined with old age
- b) burned the surface
- c) marked
- d) to support the weight
- e) unaffected, not damaged or spoiled
- f) strikes with a knife
- g) dry, small, old-looking
- h) horribly ugly.

### 2. Put the following words into pairs with opposite meanings:

- a) alive
- b) beautiful
- c) dead
- d) hard
- e) old
- f) overweight
- g) rough
- h) slim
- i) smooth
- j) soft
- k) ugly
- l) young.

Use each pair of words in a sentence about Dorian Gray, Lord Henry or the general process of ageing.

## Analysis

### 1. Are the following statements RIGHT or WRONG? Justify by quoting the text:

- a) Lord Henry must be old and he regrets it.
- b) Dorian agrees that it is wonderful to be young.
- c) Lord Henry advises Dorian to be as moral as he can in his youth.
- d) Dorian wishes that both he and his portrait could remain young.
- e) If Dorian had grown old normally, his life might not have been a disgrace.
- f) Dorian destroyed his portrait with his hands.
- g) The servants identified the dead man at once.

### 2. How does Dorian feel at the beginning of his conversation with Lord Henry? Which expression shows this? What are the effects of Lord Henry's speech on Dorian? What marks the turning point?

## Words

Ten of the following words from the text are nouns, ten are adjectives. If the word is a noun, say what adjective(s) can be formed from it and vice versa.

Ex.: *beauty*: noun → adjective: *beautiful*.

- (a) *beauty*; (b) *corruption*; (c) *courage*; (d) *dead*; (e) *depressed*; (f) *disgrace*; (g) *dreadful*; (h) *exquisite*; (i) *horrible*; (j) *lonely*; (k) *misery*; (l) *old*; (m) *passion*; (n) *proud*; (o) *sad*; (p) *splendour*; (q) *thought*; (r) *ugly*; (s) *wonder*; (t) *youth*.

## Writing

Essay (about 200 words): **How do some people try to stay young nowadays?**

The following words may help you: *exercise, diet, cosmetics, creams, wigs, plastic surgery, blood transfusions, pills...*

## ENGLISH TEST

Discuss the following statements/questions (Write a paragraph for each).

1. Use the following passage to explain what the portrait represents and how Dorian reacts to it.

Often, on returning home from one of those mysterious and prolonged absences that gave rise to such strange conjecture among those who were his friends, or thought that they were so, he himself would creep upstairs to the locked room, open the door with the key that never left him now, and stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and aging face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age.

(Chapter 11 The Picture of Dorian Gray)

2. What is Lord Henry's role in the novel, consider his influence and relationship with Dorian?

3. What does Oscar Wilde have in common with Dorian Gray, and what, instead, makes them different ?

4. How are the differences between social classes presented in the novel?

5. What was the role of women in the Victorian period? How is this reflected in THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY?

6. In your opinion, why and how do people today try to stay young and attractive?

(Consider the song by Annie Lennox "Keep Young and Beautiful " album "Diva"1992.)

*Keep young and beautiful*

*It's your duty to be beautiful*

*Keep young and beautiful*

*If you want to be loved*

**E' consentito l'uso del dizionario monolingue**