

# THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

OSCAR WILDE

## LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

### SYNOPSIS

Basil Hallward achieves a major success with his portrait of a strikingly beautiful young man, whom he met at Lady Brandon's. Basil's friend, Lord Henry Wotton, a notorious cynic, insists on meeting the model, Dorian Gray. Henry declares that the work is Basil's best and that he should exhibit it. Basil, demurring, fears that the work will reveal the secret of his soul.

Dorian, on his daily visit to Basil's house, meets Henry and is befuddled by Henry's glib words. In his early twenties with curling blond hair and classic features, Dorian becomes Henry's constant companion, even living for a time in Henry's home. The painter completes the portrait and gives it to Dorian, who fears that the work "will mock me some day."

A month later an infatuation between Dorian and an actress, Sibyl Vane, goes badly. Dorian, in love with Sibyl's performances in Shakespearean plays, stalks the theater for three weeks and proposes marriage to Sibyl, who is still in the breeches and vest of Rosalind. Overjoyed with her lover, whom she knows only as Prince Charming, Sibyl performs badly the night that Henry and Dorian attend a play together with Basil. Dorian renounces his love and labels her a third-rate actress. She kills herself by swallowing prussic acid.

At his residence, Dorian observes his portrait with alarm: the painting has altered to reveal cruelty in the subject's character. Too late, Dorian learns of Sibyl's death. Basil is surprised to discover that Dorian feels little remorse. Basil and Dorian quarrel. Basil accuses Dorian of being heartless. Dorian declares that he owes more to Henry than to the artist.

Immediately, Dorian hides the portrait behind a locked door in the schoolroom of his house. Restless and charged with emotion, Dorian requests something to read. Henry sends a servant with a soiled psychological novel about a young Parisian written in a "jewelled style, vivid and obscure." Dorian becomes obsessed with the character and emulates his lifestyle.

For years, Dorian indulges himself in narcissism and corruption in his quest for sensual pleasure and beauty. Damning rumors circulate. Scandals attach to his name. On November 9 at 11:00 P.M. on the eve of his 38th birthday, Dorian meets Basil outside his home. Basil attempts to warn Dorian of the innuendos that cling to his reputation. The accusations include particulars concerning Dorian's part in destroying a boy in the Guards, Sir Henry Ashton, Adrian Singleton, Lord Kent's only son, and the Duke of Perth. Basil blames Dorian's attachment to Henry and his sister, Lady Gwendolen, who is also sullied by her association with Dorian. Basil remarks that he would like to see Dorian's soul.

Dorian leads Basil upstairs to view the portrait, which epitomizes Dorian's decadence. As Basil gazes at the mildewed canvas, he sees the eyes of a devil. An uncontrollable urge leads Dorian to stab Basil in the neck with a knife. To cover his murderous trail, Dorian convinces his servant Francis that he arrived home at 2:10 A. M. without his key and had to be let in. Dorian blackmails Alan Campbell into disposing of the body. Dorian burns Basil's belongings in the fireplace and sets about his affairs as if nothing has happened. He exults in his duality.

At midnight the next evening, Dorian pays a driver to take him out of London toward the river. At an opium den, a sailor overhears a woman call Dorian "Prince Charming" and stalks him down the quay. He reveals himself as James Vane, Sibyl's brother. Because Dorian has maintained his youthful good looks, he convinces James that he could not have murdered Sibyl eighteen years earlier. The woman reveals that Dorian has made a pact with the devil to maintain his youthful appearance. A week later at Selby Royal, Dorian faints after seeing the face of James Vane watching him through the window of the conservatory.

The next day, James is shot by Sir Geoffrey Clouston during a bird hunt. Terror seizes Dorian after he views the body. He confesses to Harry: "I have done too many dreadful things in my life." He promises to change. Talk among his friends centers on the disappearance of Basil. About the same time, Henry is divorced by his wife, Victoria, and Alan Campbell commits suicide. Dorian tells Henry the truth about Basil's death. Henry tries to convince Dorian that Dorian has not changed. Dorian blames Henry's book for poisoning him.

Dorian, in love with Hetty Merton, a pure village girl, returns to the portrait for proof that he has redeemed himself. He finds more blood spotting the hand of the image. Distraught, Dorian stabs himself with the knife that killed Basil. When the servants and a policeman enter the room through the window to investigate a cry, they find the portrait of a handsome young man hanging over Dorian's aged, wrinkled corpse. Only the examination of his rings establish the dead man's identity.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Dublin in 1854, Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wilde was the son of Sir William Wilde, a famous surgeon, and the author Jane Francesca "Speranza" Elgee. He studied at Trinity College and won a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he earned a reputation as an aesthete and iconoclast. Under the influence of Ruskin,

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Arnold, and Pater, Wilde developed a sensual, hedonistic philosophy of art and literature. He won his first prize for literature in 1878 with the poem *Ravenna*.

After a tour of Greece, Wilde settled in London and shed all semblance of the outsider with his flair for wit and eccentricity. Widely lampooned, Wilde was a success on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1884, he married Constance Lloyd and fathered two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan. Famed for his verse, lectures, and critical essays, Wilde published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* three years later.

The following year Wilde changed the face of English comedy with *Lady Windermere's Fan*. He quickly followed with three major achievements: *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). His *Salome* (1893) was rejected in England but produced in Paris, with Sarah Bernhardt playing the lead. Later translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas, it appeared with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley.

At the peak of his career, as a result of a libel suit against the marquis of Queensberry, father of Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde was found guilty of homosexual practices and served two years at hard labor in Reading Gaol. In 1898 he composed *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Unfortunately, the experience broke his spirit. Bankrupt, he wandered the continent under the alias of Sebastian Melmoth and existed on charity until his death in Paris two years later.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Labeled a Gothic melodrama, Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, raised a storm of protest following its appearance in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890. Perhaps the most important line in the work is found in the preface, which states Wilde's belief in artistic freedom: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all."

The author himself was the butt of English humor, ridiculed in *Punch* and in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. Yet, his valiant assault against the musty uprightness of Victorianism led to a revitalization of British drama, particularly drawing room comedy. Wilde's works have been winnowed by aphorists for gems such as "A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing" and "I can resist everything except temptation."

Criticized for creating insincere, worthless characters against a backdrop of triviality and moral decay, Wilde presents the reader with the paradox of life in the Edwardian era, when moral choices were less obvious than the black-and-white verities of the preceding age. Beneath the bantering superficialities of Wilde's wit, his characters know a world that demands punishment for thoughtless choices.

Certainly Wilde's incarceration in Reading Gaol proves his point. As he stated in *The Critic as Artist* (1891): "It is through art, and through art only, that we can realize our perfection; through art and art only that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual experience."

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To compare the style of a psychological novel with that of the short story
2. To understand the meaning of hedonism and aestheticism
3. To illuminate the theme of self-destruction
4. To connect the setting with the theme
5. To analyze major symbols in the novel
6. To state Wilde's philosophy of the nature and purpose of art
7. To discuss the importance of sense impressions in the narrative
8. To research the milieu of the Edwardian era
9. To express the seriousness of decadence in moral terms

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To contrast Dorian's relationships with Henry and Basil
2. To explain how a book corrupts Dorian's soul
3. To discuss why the author sacrifices the artist as a victim of Dorian's corruption
4. To enumerate examples of Dorian's victims
5. To contrast the theme of corruption as it appears in the selected stories
6. To point out incidents in which the author deliberately masks the events with innuendo and rumor
7. To characterize Dorian's homelife
8. To discuss James's devotion to Sibyl

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. (Preface)  
(Oscar Wilde compares the nineteenth century reader to Caliban, the misshapen servant of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Caliban, son of Sycorax, the witch exiled from Algiers and left to bear her half-monster son alone on the island, lives his life in discontent, a foil to Ariel, the airy sprite who does Prospero's bidding without malice.)
2. Upon my word, Basil, I didn't know you were so vain; and I really can't see any resemblance between you, with your rugged strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. (1)  
(Henry contrasts the dark looks of the portrait artist

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

*with the blond beauty of Dorian, whom he calls a "young Adonis," the lover of Aphrodite in Greek mythology. In the final episode of his life, Adonis is killed by a boar. Aphrodite grieves so inconsolably that her tears fall to the ground and sprout a blood-red anemone in his memory.)*

3. "And yet," continued Lord Henry . . . "I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream—I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal—to something finer, richer than the Hellenic ideal, it may be." (2)

*(Henry espouses the ideals of Hellenism or the adoration of beauty characteristic of the Greeks of the fifth century B. C. In contrast to the medieval era, with its leanings toward decoration and overly romantic notions, the Greeks maintained a simplicity of thought and a purity of line in every art form.)*

4. That is one of your aphorisms. (4)

*(Dorian wearies of matching wits with Henry, who never seems to run dry of short, pithy statements of wisdom. Henry's last pronouncement illustrates aphoristic form: "Men marry because they are tired; women, because they are curious: both are disappointed.")*

5. Oh, Basil is the best of fellows, but he seems to me to be just a bit of a Philistine. (4)

*(Dorian suspects that Basil sacrifices art and beauty to profit. Henry, however, sees Basil in a different light: "Good artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are.")*

6. If he wedded Messalina, he would be none the less interesting. (6)

*(Harry reaches into Roman history for a hyperbole. Messalina, the third wife of the Emperor Claudius and mother of his son and daughter, cuckolded her husband with a host of street lotharios until Claudius discovered her excesses and in 48 A. D. had her executed.)*

7. There was a rather heavy bill for a chased silver Louis-Quinze toilet-set that he had not yet had the courage to send on to his guardians, who were extremely old-fashioned people and did not realize that we live in an age when unnecessary things are our only necessities . . . . (8)

*(Dorian sinks more and more deeply into the materialistic world. Symbolic of his absorption in objects is his purchase of a heavily ornamented silver dresser set from the Louis XV era for his guardians, who do not share his delight in extravagance.)*

8. Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a

new Hedonism that was to recreate life and to save it from the harsh uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. (11)

*(Dorian ponders the rise of pleasure worship, which is the antithesis of puritanism with its strict adherence to duty and its adulation of austerity or plainness.)*

9. Then he took down the *Blue Book* from one of the shelves and began to turn over the leaves. "Alan Campbell, 152 Hertford Street, Mayfair." Yes; that was the man he wanted. (13)

*(Dorian, in search of someone who can dispose of Basil's corpse, selects a name from the register of socially prominent Englishmen. Alan Campbell, who has a knowledge of science and the laboratory tools to complete the job, is in Dorian's power. By means of blackmail, Dorian secures Alan's services.)*

10. She can live, like Perdita, in her garden of mint and marigold. (19)

*(Dorian callously discusses Hetty Merton, the girl he intended to marry when he decided to change his ways. Obviously, he cares nothing for the person he compares to the heroine of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, who is set adrift in a boat, arrives at the coast of Bohemia, and falls in love with Florizel, the king's son.*

*Henry takes up the simile by noting, "And weep over a faithless Florizel," a direct reference to Dorian. He completes his comparison by pondering whether Hetty, like Sibyl Vane, has not already committed suicide. He envisions her floating in a mill pond like Ophelia, the girlfriend of Hamlet, another of Shakespeare's characters.)*

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the novel.

#### Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Describe Dorian on the day that Harry meets him.

*(Harry and Basil exit Basil's studio and find Dorian at the piano, his back to them. He is petulant at the idea of more sittings, but blushes faintly when he realizes that a stranger accompanies Basil. In Harry's eyes, the twenty-year-old golden boy is "wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity.")*

*Taking his place on the dais, Dorian resembles "a young Greek martyr." Contrasting Basil's pragmatism and honesty, the model has a melodic voice and teasing air. Harry compliments Dorian's "rose-red youth" and "rose-white boyhood." Harry's*

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

*intimate comments befuddle Dorian, who stands motionless to think over their import. Dorian begs off posing for Basil and walks into the garden with Harry, where Dorian plunges his face into "great cool lilac-blossoms.")*

2. Explain the situation that leads to Basil's murder.

*(On November 9 at 11:00 P. M., Basil awaits Dorian's return. In the library, despite Dorian's insistence on light topics, Basil reports the hideous rumors that sully Dorian's reputation in London society. Basil blames Dorian for filling at least eight victims "with a madness for pleasure." He concludes that he would like to see Dorian's soul.*

*With a bitter, mocking laugh, Dorian agrees to show him "his soul." Filled with pride and petulance, Dorian responds to a "terrible joy" at the idea of Basil sharing his secret. In the schoolroom, Basil is shocked by the mildewy dampness of the room and canvas and the satyrlike appearance of the portrait. He urges Dorian to pray for his sins and accepts part of the blame for ruining his former friend.*

*Hatred gains the upper hand in Dorian's mind. Like a hunted animal, he seethes with emotion and grasps wildly at the glimmer of a knife on top of a nearby chest. With no warning, he stabs the vein behind Basil's ear. After repeated plunges of the knife, the artist lies still, his blood dripping onto the ragged carpet.)*

3. Explain how James locates the man who caused his sister's death.

*(At midnight on the evening after Basil's death, Dorian, titillated by the notion of leading a double life, dresses in common attire and hires a driver in Bond Street to drive him to a distant address toward the river. At the opium den, Dorian gains entrance with a secret knock and spies habitués whom he knows. At an outburst of testiness from Dorian, a woman's eyes flash anger. She takes Dorian's money and sneers, "There goes the devil's bargain!" At Dorian's insistence, she alters her epithet to "Prince Charming."*

*A drowsy sailor responds immediately to the familiar nickname. James Vane, who never knew Dorian's real name, believes that he has located the man who jilted his sister, Sibyl, and rushes to follow Dorian along the quay in the drizzling rain. At first put off by the youthfulness of his quarry, he nevertheless continues to stalk his prey.)*

4. Describe how the unidentified sailor is accidentally shot.

*(For three days after seeing James Vane's face peering into the conservatory at Selby Royal, Dorian languishes over the shock. Then after breakfast, he joins a shooting party across the park. "At the corner of the pine-wood," Sir Geoffrey Clouston, the Duchess of Monmouth's brother, spies a hare "some*

*twenty yards in front of them." Dorian begs that Geoffrey let the animal live, but he shoots it as it leaps into a thicket.*

*The cry that results indicates that Sir Geoffrey has hit a human being rather than a hare. The head-keeper drags a body into the open. It is not until later that Dorian learns that the unidentified man was a sailor who carried a six-shooter. At the Home Farm, Dorian removes the handkerchief that covers James Vane's face. Even though his eyes fill with tears, Dorian thinks that he is now safe.)*

5. Describe Dorian's bizarre death.

*(Exultant that he had spared Hetty Merton, whose salvation was proof that his life was changed, Dorian needs a look at the portrait for reassurance that he has indeed abandoned evil. With lamp in hand, he unbars the schoolroom door and locks it behind him. After removing the purple hanging, Dorian realizes that the subject in the picture is more loathsome than ever because its hand exudes more drops of blood.*

*Questions seize Dorian's mind. Perplexed about the matter of confessing his crime, he breaks into laughter. Dorian's care in concealing the murder works against him. People would reject his confession, label him insane, and lock him away in an asylum. He contemplates his hypocrisy and decides that his only salvation is through destruction of the portrait.*

*As Dorian plunges the murder weapon into the canvas, he cries aloud. The servants and a policeman creep upstairs toward the source of the cry. Entering through a window off the balcony, they find the portrait in pristine condition and a withered corpse in evening dress lying on the floor with a knife through the heart. From an examination of the rings, they learn that the victim is Dorian.)*

### Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Why does Dorian propose to Sibyl?

*(A month after Harry befriends Dorian, Dorian justifies his infatuation with Sibyl. First, he explains that association with Harry filled him with "a wild desire to know everything about life." With veins athrob, Dorian wandered Picadilly and entered a theater, where Sibyl Vane was playing the lead in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.*

*The magic of Sibyl's musical voice led Harry to repeated visits to the theater to hear Sibyl playing other Shakespearean heroines. Dorian visited backstage the third night following Sibyl's performance as Rosalind. He was smitten by her childlike wonder, particularly when she named Dorian "Prince Charming."*

*Every day since then, Dorian returns to the theater. He makes a date with Harry to accompany him and Basil to the Bristol on Tuesday at 6:30. Harry ponders Dorian's infatuation. At 12:30 that same day,*

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

a telegram arrives from Dorian announcing his engagement. On Tuesday, Dorian explains how enthralled he was with Sibyl's portrayal of Rosalind. He went backstage after the Monday night performance. One kiss proved overpowering. Dorian and Sibyl became secretly engaged.)

7. Why is Dorian obsessed with the borrowed novel?  
(Following the broken engagement and Sibyl's suicide, Dorian suffers from the ugliness of the situation. His conscience gnaws at him, but he declares to himself, "Dorian Gray had not killed her." He turns to a yellow book that he borrowed from Harry. Immediately absorbed in it, he learns of things that he only vaguely dreamed of.)

The psychological account of a young Parisian "who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own" rivets Dorian to his seat. He reads by pale starlight until his servant reminds him of the hour. The next day, Dorian reports to Harry that the book fascinates him.

Harry, glad that Dorian liked the offering, strikes a significant chord in his friend. Dorian, differentiating between admiration and fascination, notes that he feels fascination, not liking, for the novel. Harry, murmuring to himself, acknowledges that Dorian has recognized the difference.)

8. How does life change for Dorian after he reads Harry's book?

(For the next eighteen years, Dorian falls under the spell of pleasure. He orders nine copies of the first edition of the novel and immerses himself in the hero, who is a "kind of prefiguring type of himself." Unlike the protagonist, who has a horror of mirrors and reflective surfaces, Dorian maintains his youth and appearance of innocence. Becoming gradually more conceited and egotistical, he surrounds himself with beauty and the worship of the senses.)

His disarmingly boyish exterior belies the corruption of his heart, which enjoys Roman Catholic communion because he likes kneeling on the cold pavement and watching the priest administer the host. Scandals and rumors plague Dorian's existence. He is nearly blackballed from the club. Dark insinuations about his character reach a peak just before Basil confronts him with his waywardness on November 9, the eve of Dorian's 38th birthday.)

### Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. What does this novel say about the corruption of the soul?

(Early in the novel, Oscar Wilde records Dorian's willingness to exchange his soul for the dewy youthfulness of the figure in the portrait. Wishing to remain young, he declares: "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!"

As Dorian's morality withers, he plunges into the self-deception of rationalization, withdrawing into his locked room and reminding himself that the decay of the portrait meant nothing so long as the real man maintained his youth. After he falls under the spell of the yellow novel, he grows "more and more enamored of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul." With perverse joy, he becomes an observer of self-destruction.

On the night that Basil states his desire to view Dorian's soul, Dorian laughs dementedly and draws Basil into his web. To Basil's urgings toward repentance, Dorian turns deaf ears as though he were no longer capable of redemption. After murdering his old friend, Dorian, like a hungry demon, turns his thoughts toward the corruption of another soul—Alan Campbell. Like Harry, Dorian spreads evil with little remorse for the next victim.

Ironically, the person who describes Dorian's decadence is the woman at the opium den, who calls Dorian "the devil's bargain." She reveals to James Vane that it was Dorian who corrupted her eighteen years earlier and who is reputed to have "sold himself to the devil for a pretty face." With a leer, she vanishes into the gloom.

On his last night, Dorian confronts Harry with the realization that Dorian has become a "face without a heart." Like Satan when he mocked Christ in the wilderness, Harry, the source of Dorian's corruption, quotes scripture. Leaning back indolently with half-closed eyes, Harry, like a venomous serpent recites Christ's words as recorded in Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Harry omits the next verse: "Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

10. How does Dorian's confrontation of his corrupter seal his doom?

(On the last evening of his life, Dorian pits his flagging resources against the facile and worldly wisdom of his friend, Harry. Dorian vows that "There is a soul in each one of us." Harry, cunningly turning the subject from theology to art, urges Dorian to play a nocturne. The 48-year-old Harry longs to extract the secret of Dorian's perpetual youth.)

The silken words lead Dorian into the world of Chopin at Majorca, Apollo and Marsyas, and the symbolic grapes that Dorian has crushed against his palate. Dorian tries to shake free, declaring that he is not the same. Harry, snakelike in his lure, charms Dorian with a flashback to the day they met, when Dorian plunged his face into lilacs. Harry says, "I wish I could change places with you, Dorian. The world has cried out against us both, but it has always worshipped you."

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

*With a gesture of frustration, Dorian remarks that "life has been exquisite," but that he must alter it from its past extravagance. Harry dangles another temptation—Lord Poole, who emulates Dorian in his idolatry of youth. Dorian accuses Harry of corrupting him with a book. Harry, aphoristic to the last, insists that art does not corrupt. Only the inborn evil of Dorian's heart is to blame.*

*Wearied with the effort of outwitting his tempter, Dorian turns away, bested in the worldliness that sets Harry apart from all his other friends. Harry's honeyed words draw Dorian back to the lilacs of their first encounter. Dorian, unable to fend off Harry's enticements, turns away, promising to join him the next day in the park. Hesitating a moment, as though he wants to continue the verbal battle, Dorian gives in and departs.)*

### Questions 11-13 Creative Level

11. Create an index of foreign words and phrases from the book, such as *mi bella Principessa*, *petit monstre*, *panis caelestis*, and *doigts de faune*. Label each with an abbreviation indicating the language, such as *It.* for Italian.
12. Sketch a map of London and mark areas which are pertinent to the story, such as Picadilly, the Thames, and Bond Street.
13. Add a chapter in which Harry learns of Dorian's death and speaks with Gwendolen about their eighteen-year relationship.

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Compare themes from Wilde's short stories to those of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Explain how less sophisticated works, such as "The Happy Prince," can possess similar ideas of corruption and retribution.
2. Make a list of allusions to mythology, history, literature, and the Bible. Explain how each illuminates the passage in which it appears.
3. Locate references to the five senses. Discuss how Oscar Wilde plunges his characters into a world of sensuality in order to estrange them from their morality.
4. Select a scene from the novel to serve as a cover illustration of Dorian's obsession with Basil's painting. Describe the scene in a paragraph.
5. Cite examples of poetic devices in the novel, such as sibilance, cacophony, euphony, parallel structure, allusion, metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration, and paradox.
6. Make a timeline of the major events in the story. Date each as carefully as you can, especially the night of Dorian's thirty-eighth birthday.

7. Outline a three-minute presentation in which you compare Dorian's treatment of Sibyl Vane with the Infanta's abuse of the dwarf.
8. Compose a lecture on greed, self-indulgence, narcissism, and other character flaws associated with vanity and selfishness. Use Dorian's corruption as an example of each fault.
9. Explain the symbolism of Dorian's first and last name. Note that the French adjective *d'or* means *golden*.
10. Read several versions of the Faust legend and listen to Gounod's opera based on the story. Write a theme about the enslavement of the human spirit to earthly pleasures. Connect this self-destruction to Dorian's love of youth and beauty.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Holland, Vyvyan B. *Son of Oscar Wilde*. New York, 1954.
- Hopkins, R. Thurston. *Oscar Wilde*. New York, 1989.
- Raby, Peter. *Oscar Wilde*. British and Irish Authors: Introductory Critical Studies. Cambridge, 1989.
- Roditi, Edouard. *Oscar Wilde*. Salem, Oregon, 1986.
- Sullivan, Kevin. *Oscar Wilde*. Columbia Essays on Modern Writers Series. New York, 1972.
- Worth, Katherine. *Oscar Wilde*. Modern Dramatists Series. New York, 1984.

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

### VOCABULARY TEST

Fill in the blanks in each of the following lines with pairs of words from the list that follows. Write the letter to your answer in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Lord Henry elevated his eyebrows and looked at him in amazement through the thin blue wreathes of smoke that curled up in such fanciful \_\_\_\_\_ from his heavy \_\_\_\_\_ cigarette.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Dorian stepped up on the \_\_\_\_\_ with the air of a young Greek martyr, and made a little \_\_\_\_\_ of discontent to Lord Henry, to whom he had rather taken a fancy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. "What a remarkable \_\_\_\_\_," said the professor of \_\_\_\_\_ as he was passing over the bridge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The light stole softly from above, through thin slabs of transparent \_\_\_\_\_, and the water in the marble tank glimmered like a \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. His father had been our ambassador at Madrid when Isabella was young and Prim unthought of, but had retired from the diplomatic service in a \_\_\_\_\_ moment of annoyance on not being offered the \_\_\_\_\_ at Paris . . .
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. He paid some attention to the management of his \_\_\_\_\_ in the Midland counties, excusing himself for this \_\_\_\_\_ of industry on the ground that the one advantage of having coal was that it enabled a gentleman to afford the decency of burning wood on his own hearth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The Renaissance knew of strange manners of poisoning—poisoning by a helmet and a lighted torch, by an embroidered glove and a jewelled fan, by a glided \_\_\_\_\_ and by an \_\_\_\_\_ chain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. You remind me of a story Harry told me about a certain \_\_\_\_\_ who spent twenty years of his life in trying to get some grievance \_\_\_\_\_, or some unjust law altered—I forget exactly what it was.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. He would examine with \_\_\_\_\_ care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that \_\_\_\_\_ 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.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The middle classes air their moral prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they call the \_\_\_\_\_ of their betters in order to try and pretend that they are in smart society and on intimate terms with the people they \_\_\_\_\_.

A. capricious, Embassy  
B. whorls, opium-tainted  
C. onyx, moonstone  
D. profligacies, slander  
E. dais, moue

F. philanthropist, redressed  
G. phenomenon, ornithology  
H. collieries, taint  
I. minute, seared  
J. pomander, amber

**THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

**Part I: Character Identification (30 points)**

Identify who or what is being described in each of the following quotations. Select your answers from the list that follows. Write your response in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. He seemed little more than a lad of twenty summers, hardly older . . .
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. And her voice—I never heard such a voice. It was very low at first, with deep mellow notes that seemed to fall singly upon one's ear.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. His name is Prince Paradox.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. At Cambridge he had spent a great deal of his time working in the laboratory, and had taken a good class in the Natural Science Tripos of his year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. She was simply a girl in a village.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Three times the outstretched arms shot up convulsively, waving grotesque, stiff-fingered hands in the air.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. [She] is very good at it . . . She never gets confused over her dates . . .
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The drowsy sailor leaped to his feet . . . He rushed out as if in pursuit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. It was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The elder woman grew pale beneath the coarse powder that daubed her cheeks, and her dry lips twitched with a spasm of pain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. She was an extraordinarily beautiful girl . . . and made all the men frantic by running away. . .
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. She was a curious woman, whose dresses always looked as if they had been designed in a rage and put on in a tempest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The sodden eyes had kept something of the loveliness of their blue, the noble curves had not yet completely passed away from chiselled nostrils and from plastic throat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. . . . a young man with smooth yellow hair, who was bending over a lamp lighting a long thin pipe, looked up . . . and nodded in a hesitating manner.

Adrian Singleton  
Hetty Merton  
Henry Wotton

Alan Campbell  
James Vane  
Sibyl Vane

Basil Hallward  
Margaret Devereux  
the portrait

Dorian Gray  
Mrs. Vane  
Victoria

**Part II: Fact/Opinion (30 points)**

Mark each statement either **F** for fact or **O** for opinion.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Dorian becomes obsessed with youth, beauty, and pleasure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The night of his birthday, Dorian kills Basil because Basil reminds him of where his enchanted life sprang from.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Henry takes pleasure in watching Dorian enjoy beautiful things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Because of Henry's interest in Dorian, Victoria grows bored with her husband and divorces him.



## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Francis realizes that he is being used as an alibi.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Lord Kelso becomes a painful memory to his grandson.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Dorian is drawn to Alan because of Alan's musical talent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Sibyl Vane is not the only person who knows Dorian by his nickname.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Rumors of Dorian's misconduct begin to circulate in London.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Henry believes that Basil's work had begun to lose something.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Dorian would never have been happy married to Sibyl Vane.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Henry's book fascinates Dorian to the point that he rereads it frequently.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. The death of the sailor could have been prevented if Dorian had warned his host.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Dorian's self-indulgence is the direct result of his dismal childhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Basil realizes that Dorian should never be introduced to so extravagant a man as Henry.

### Part III: Identification (10 points)

Explain the significance of the following details from the story.

1. schoolroom
  
2. opium den
  
3. sailor
  
4. the devil's bargain
  
5. Hetty Merton

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Contrast the deaths of Alan Campbell, Sylvia Vane, and James Vane.
  
2. Describe how the borrowed book affects Dorian Gray.
  
3. Describe the gradual change in the portrait.

**THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

**COMPREHENSION TEST B**

**Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)**

Identify who speaks the following quotations and to whom they are spoken. Place your answers in order on lines A and B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1A. My child, you are far too young to think of falling in love.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2A. I want you to explain to me why you won't exhibit Dorian Gray's picture.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3A. . . . as sure as there is a God in heaven, if he ever does you any wrong, I shall  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3B. kill him.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4A. It will mock me some day—mock me horribly!

\_\_\_\_\_ 4B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5A. I am going to alter. I think I have altered.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5B.

**Part II: Fill-in (30 points)**

Fill in the blanks with answers which complete each statement.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Besides, how do you know that \_\_\_\_\_ isn't floating at the present moment in some starlit mill-pond, with lovely water-lilies round her, like Ophelia?

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I met Lady Gwendolen, Harry's \_\_\_\_\_, for the first time.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Yet you poisoned me with a \_\_\_\_\_ once. I should not forgive that.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. The curiously carved \_\_\_\_\_ that Lord Henry had given to him, so many years ago now, was standing on the table, and the white-limbed Cupids laughed round it as of old.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. "What nonsense, Dorian!" laughed his companion, and as the \_\_\_\_\_ bounded into the thicket, he fired.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. The whole thing is most inconvenient, and really, when James is going away to \_\_\_\_\_, and I have so much to think of, I must say that you should have shown more consideration.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. "\_\_\_\_\_, 152 Hertford Street, Mayfair." Yes; that was the man he wanted.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. When you met \_\_\_\_\_, not a breath of scandal ever touched her.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Why is it, \_\_\_\_\_, that a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter it?

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. You look more like a prince. I must call you \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Forgive me, Mother. I know it pains you to talk about our \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Suddenly his eye fell on the \_\_\_\_\_ that he had placed in front of the portrait, and he started.

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. There is something fatal about a \_\_\_\_\_. It has a life of its own.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. He winced at the mention of his \_\_\_\_\_. He had hateful memories of him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. You had better confess your sin, for as sure as I am \_\_\_\_\_, you are going to die.

### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the answer that completes each of the following statements. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Dorian realizes that he cannot marry Sibyl after he hears (a) her brother threaten to kill him (b) Sibyl's poor performance on the stage (c) Mrs. Vane's opinion of the engagement (d) Harry's ridicule of marriage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Dorian's handsome blondness contrasts markedly with the dark features of (a) Basil (b) Henry (c) James (d) Alan.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Dorian is horrified to see (a) Hetty's death notice in the *Globe* (b) Hubbard's men carrying the portrait toward the schoolroom (c) the results of Alan's long hours in the laboratory (d) red dew on the hand of the figure in the portrait.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. It is ironic that one of the people who hears Dorian's cry is (a) the artist himself (b) Harry (c) Sir Henry Ashton's uncle (d) Henry's sister.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Dorian accuses Harry of cutting life to pieces with (a) epigrams (b) a sword (c) a palette knife (d) sarcasm.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Harry is unsure whether or not Sybil died from swallowing (a) prussic acid (b) opium (c) something sharp that cut her throat (d) Alan Campbell's chemicals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Basil waits for Dorian on the eve of (a) the exhibition of the portrait (b) Basil's departure to Paris (c) Dorian's 38th birthday (d) Harry's divorce from Victoria.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The woman at the opium den refers to Dorian as (a) Prince Paradox (b) the devil's bargain (c) the sailor (d) a rebel.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Dorian recalls a line from Hamlet about a (a) jealous lover (b) woman who dies from swallowing white lead (c) man who loses his soul (d) face without a heart.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. After Dorian confesses to the murder, Harry declares that he (a) doesn't believe the story (b) disliked Basil for his conceit (c) believes that Basil lost the portrait (d) wanted to buy the portrait.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Explain the significance of the following lines.

1. . . . what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose—how does the quotation run?—his own soul?
2. So I have murdered Sibyl Vane . . . murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife.
3. . . . every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter.

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

### VOCABULARY TEST ANSWER KEY

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. H  |
| 2. E | 7. J  |
| 3. G | 8. F  |
| 4. C | 9. I  |
| 5. A | 10. D |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A ANSWER KEY

#### Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Dorian Gray    | 9. Dorian Gray        |
| 2. Sibyl Vane     | 10. Mrs. Vane         |
| 3. Henry Wotton   | 11. Margaret Devereux |
| 4. Alan Campbell  | 12. Victoria          |
| 5. Hetty Merton   | 13. Dorian Gray       |
| 6. Basil Hallward | 14. the portrait      |
| 7. Victoria       | 15. Adrian Singleton  |
| 8. James Vane     |                       |

#### Part II: Fact/Opinion (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F  | 11. O |
| 2. O | 7. F  | 12. F |
| 3. F | 8. F  | 13. O |
| 4. O | 9. F  | 14. O |
| 5. O | 10. F | 15. O |

#### Part III: Identification (10 points)

1. A locked room in Dorian's house where he keeps the portrait behind a screen.
2. A disreputable location outside London near the river which Dorian frequents when he needs to escape.
3. James Vane, now 36 years old, hears "Prince Charming" and connects the name with his sister's former fiancé.
4. The epithet of a woman at the opium den. The words indicate that she knows something of Dorian's dark secret.
5. A village girl who meets Dorian in an orchard. Dorian, determined to improve himself, leaves her unsullied by his corruption.

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B ANSWER KEY

#### Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1A. Mrs. Vane  | 4A. Dorian Gray    |
| 1B. Sibyl Vane | 4B. Basil Hallward |
| 2A. Henry      | 5A. Dorian Gray    |
| 2B. Basil      | 5B. Henry          |
| 3A. James Vane |                    |
| 3B. Sibyl Vane |                    |

#### Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Hetty          | 9. Dorian.          |
| 2. sister         | 10. Prince Charming |
| 3. book           | 11. father          |
| 4. mirror         | 12. screen          |
| 5. hare           | 13. portrait        |
| 6. Australia      | 14. grandfather     |
| 7. Alan Campbell  | 15. James Vane      |
| 8. Lady Gwendolen |                     |

#### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A  |
| 2. A | 7. C  |
| 3. D | 8. B  |
| 4. C | 9. D  |
| 5. A | 10. D |

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.



**PERMA-BOUND • VANDALIA ROAD • JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS 62650**

**Call toll free 1-800-637-6581**