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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*The Picture of
Dorian Gray*
Oscar Wilde

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ISBN 978-1-60389-622-1

Item No. 205012

Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The Preface

1. Oscar Wilde wrote this preface to respond to critics who said that the novel lacked a moral message. How do you generally respond when someone criticizes you? Reflect on a time when you received criticism for something you did or said or wrote. Write a letter in response to your critic either defending yourself or explaining your perspective on the event in question.

2. The Preface is made up of a series of epigrams – short, witty statements that often seek to make their points through contrast – for example, “Crying is the refuge of plain women but the ruin of pretty ones.” Choose one of the epigrams from The Preface with which you strongly agree or disagree. Write a paragraph in which you explain why you agree or disagree with Wilde’s point of view in this epigram.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

6. Dorian Gray is merely a very handsome, wealthy young man – no one famous – but when Basil Hallward meets Gray for the first time, Basil explains that “a curious sensation of terror came over” him. He felt that Gray’s personality alone was so fascinating that it could completely “absorb” him.

Who is the most fascinating, non-famous person you have ever met? Write a one-page description of the person, the encounter and what was so fascinating to you. Or, write a one-page description of a non-famous person you would most like to meet and why.

7. Lord Henry asserts that “Genius lasts longer than Beauty.” Would you rather have extraordinary beauty or a kind of genius (intellectual, artistic, musical, athletic, etc.)? Write a response to Lord Henry in which you first, agree or disagree with him and second, explain which you would rather have (genius or beauty) and why.
8. Lord Henry says that “the thoroughly well-informed man” is his society’s “modern ideal.” Imagine that you are applying to be the “modern ideal” of a man or woman in our time. What personality traits, skills, life experiences, education, and employment history would you have to possess?

Write a resume in which you list the qualities you believe an ideal man or woman in our time must have. In the references section, list 2-4 real people whom you consider to be “ideal.”

Chapter IV

13. After Dorian leaves him, Lord Henry notices the sunset glowing gold through the upper windows, making the lower panes hot to the touch, and fading into a pale rose color high in the sky. The images make him think of Dorian's lifestyle. Write a paragraph explaining how you think Dorian's lifestyle seems to be "fiery colored" at this point in the story. Then, write another paragraph describing a person you know who has a "fiery colored" life.

14. Dorian is in love for the first time in his life, and he gushes to Lord Henry about Sibyl's voice, beauty, youth, innocence, talents, and all of their effects on him. Lord Henry has a different perspective. Where Dorian is reverent, Lord Henry is skeptical and dismissive.

What is your experience or feeling about new love or crushes? Write a "found" poem about love using only words or phrases from this chapter. Express your opinion through the choices of your words and the arrangement of them. Finally, choose words from the chapter to create a title that reflects the theme of your poem. Remember that poems do not have to rhyme. Here's an example of a "found poem" taken from this chapter:

A nervous laugh
Something seemed to throb in my veins
It became louder; I have seen her die
It depresses me, other people's tragedies.
A psychological phenomenon.
Our future would be the same as our past

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22. Lord Henry sends Dorian a letter early the morning after Sibyl's terrible performance to tell Dorian that Sibyl is dead. When it becomes apparent that Dorian hasn't read the letter, Lord Henry breaks the news to him in person. Reflect on a time when you received very bad or very painful news. How was it delivered? Did the method make it any harder or easier to hear?

Imagine that you are writing a chapter in a How-To manual for yourself. Entitle your chapter "How to Give (insert your name) Bad News." In one or two paragraphs, explain your preferences for receiving bad news: what would make it easier, or at the least, what would not make it harder for you to hear? Offer at least three specific suggestions you would like someone to follow, and warn the reader of the one or two things that he or she should definitely avoid, when giving you bad news.

23. The morning after his horrible treatment of Sibyl at the theater, Dorian is so disturbed by the change in the portrait that he decides to alter his course of increasing cruelty and carelessness and to renew his proposal of marriage to Sibyl. He regrets his actions, and though he doesn't love her as he thought he did, he wants to make up for his actions by keeping his promise to her.

The news of Sibyl's death stuns him. He cannot now take back or make up for what he has done. It is too late. Do you identify with Dorian at all? What advice would you give Dorian in coping with this situation? Write him a letter offering him some type of solution to the way he feels.

OR

Write a letter to him explaining how you feel about his behavior and treatment of Sybil.