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Literature Teaching Unit

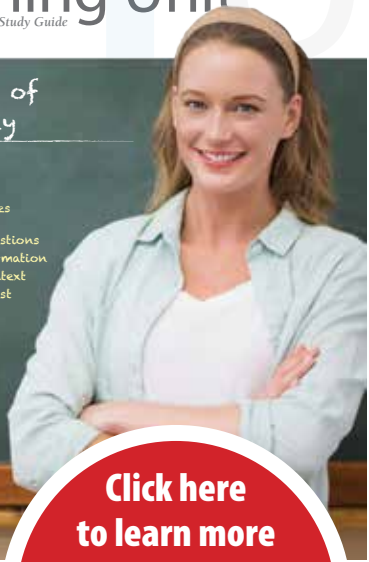
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Picture of Dorian Gray

by Oscar Wilde

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to

1. recognize how the mores of Victorian society are reflected in this novel.
2. compare the “horror” aspect of this novel with horror stories today.
3. see how the literary element of the *doppelganger* is utilized in this novel.
4. evaluate Dorian Gray’s values of beauty and youth.
5. relate Oscar Wilde’s theory of art to the artistic element in the novel.
6. understand the light and dark sides of man’s nature and relate these to the characters of Basil and Lord Henry.
7. trace the use of the mirror as an image.
8. examine Oscar Wilde’s repeated use of the soul as an image.
9. recognize the use of sentiment and melodrama.
10. understand the structure of English society as it is reflected in the novel.
11. recognize certain literary techniques Wilde uses, including: allusion, simile, metaphor, irony, personification, and foreshadowing.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Dorian Gray destroys three people before they die: Sibyl, Alan, and Basil. Write an essay in which you show how the relationship Dorian has with each one is responsible for their destruction.
2. The artist Basil Hallward says that he is overwhelmed by the power of absolute beauty. Choose four times that Basil encounters Dorian Gray; write an essay in which you characterize Basil based on these meetings.
3. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the values of Basil Hallward to those of Lord Henry Wotton.
4. Write an essay in which you support or refute the following statement: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel which makes use of the *doppelganger* motif.
5. Select scenes from Chapters 15, 17, and 18 that can be used to write an essay which reveals the upper classes as Oscar Wilde sees them. Include in your essay a comment concerning what Wilde is criticizing about this society.
6. Write an essay in which you examine how the portrait of Dorian Gray is used as a symbol in this novel.
7. Write an essay characterizing Lord Henry by choosing several cynical comments which he makes and analyzing whether he really means what he says or if these things are said for effect.
8. Select several ideas from the *Preface* to the novel; use these as the basis for an essay that either supports or refutes the ideas presented. Draw on your own personal experiences or reading experiences to develop this essay.
9. Point out ways in which women are depicted as being inferior to men.

The Preface

This introduction to the novel includes the philosophy of Aestheticism, which was generally shocking to people in the late Victorian period. It is based on the idea of “art for art’s sake.” This philosophy suggests that evil and decadence can be a source of art and beauty, not just morality. A book which was popular with aesthetes at this time was *A Reboours* (translated as “backwards”), whose hero tries to experience all the sensations of the past and thus lives backwards. This is the book referred to in the novel which Lord Henry has read and which he sends to Dorian Gray.

1. Caliban is the ugly, inhuman spirit of evil in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. There are two references to Caliban in the Preface. To what might these two statements refer?

2. An epigram in the Preface states “Even things that are true can be proved.” What does this mean?

3. Wilde maintains that books are neither moral nor immoral. At the time it was published, this novel was generally thought of as immoral. Why could it be considered immoral, and why could it be considered moral?

4. The mirror is an important symbol in the novel. Wilde refers to art as the mirror of the spectator. What does this mean?

2. What plan does Lord Henry have for Dorian?

3. Who is present for the lunch at the home of Lord Henry's aunt?

4. How does Lord Henry behave during lunch? Why does he act this way?

5. What effect does he have on Dorian?

6. What happens at the end of this chapter that shows the changing nature of the relationships among Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry?

Chapter Seven

VOCABULARY

anodyne – medicine to stop pain
ardent – strong; burning like fire
callousness – heartlessness, insensitivity
cynical – skeptical; inclined to finding and pointing out faults
discordant – not in harmony; jarring, clashing
disdain – hatred, contempt
divinity – religion
elocution – the way we express ourselves; speech
eon – age, period, time
ere – before
fiasco – a farce; complete failure
interminable – seemingly endless
listless – without movement
nacre – mother-of-pearl
piteous – pitiful, pathetic
portico – a porch
profanation – something unholy, ruined, or desecrated
sham – a trick, hoax

1. Describe the atmosphere at the theater that evening.

2. How does Lord Henry act?

3. How does Basil act? Why?

4. Describe Sibyl as she steps on stage.
