

A glimpse into *The Picture of Dorian Gray*¹

This teachers pack includes factual information as well as tasks and topics to be dealt with in the classroom. Cut and paste as you please, and please consult the official programme for additional information.

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Synopsis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

Basil Hallward is deeply fascinated with the aesthetically² and symmetrically beautiful, Dorian Gray. The more he sees him the more he is inspired to paint more exquisitely. Basil paints Dorian Gray a portrait. One day, Dorian meets Lord Henry in Basil's garden, they engage³ in conversation. Lord Henry insists that sensual satisfaction and beauty is all there is to life. Dorian worried about his inevitably

¹ Look out for footnotes that explain any challenging English words.

² Connected to Aesthetics – a set of ideas concerned with beauty.

³ Take part in, become involved with.

decaying beauty, hopes his symmetry will remain untouched like that of Basil's painting of him. Dorian's wish is granted and remains as young while the painting shifts with the passing of time. Dorian's obsession with worldly pleasures is the hedonist's⁴ nightmare; he succumbs to perversion and blind enjoyment. The debts of the body, the soul pays; every sin to be forever imprinted in his disfigured portrait. His life becomes a game of dark delight that blinds him of life's true joy — happiness. Cursed, drunk and numbed, he loses the love of his life and every hope of finding self— fulfilment. A soulless but beautiful walking corpse trapped in an endless life voided of true joy.

This novel lingers⁵ between the real and the imaginary, a fiction to be compared with Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" or "The Happy Prince". Portraying 19th century Victorian Britain, vanity, madness and annihilation⁶ become the disruptive leitmotifs of this renowned literary piece. Wilde's acute portrayal of a decadent aestheticism was a scandal in his time. The Narcissism portrayed in Wilde's novel has been expounded⁷ in various literary pieces in the past, from ancient Greek mythology to philosophical manuscripts of the 19th century. Philosopher, Gaston Bachelard pondered extensively about the polyphonies of this concept and its importance as a social reality. Wilde's novel can be regarded as a social critique of Victorian Britain, as it conveys the banal life of unstinting pleasures that diverted the wealthier and left them deaf to the "other's" loud pleas.

So, Who Was Oscar Wilde?

***TASK :** Look at the 4 pictures below and discuss with a partner, which one is Wilde

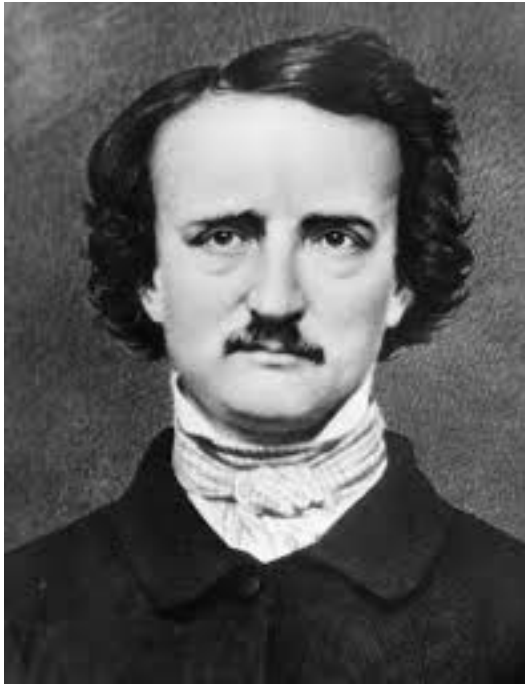


⁴ A person who wants to get as much pleasure out of life as possible.

⁵ To stay in a place longer than necessary, or to leave slowly. Stays, delays, remains, wait around.

⁶ To destroy. Kill, extinct, eradicate, exterminate, ruin, wipe out.

⁷ To present a story; in this case the same idea in Wilde's same is presented in other stories of the past. Illustrate, develop, expand, explain.



Answers:

(From left to right, starting top left to bottom right)

1. **Stephen Fry (British actor)** in the 1997 film *Wilde*
2. **Oscar Wilde**
3. **Edgar Allen Poe (American writer)** Whose work is often compared with Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for their Gothic style. Poe's story 'The Oval Portrait' inspired *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
4. **Charles Darwin (Naturalist/ Geologist)** Most famous for his book on evolution *on the Origin of Species*.

Fast Facts:

- Born: 16th October 1854, Dublin.
- Died: 30th November 1900, Paris.
- Died at age: 46.
- Famous for: Plays, his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and poetry.
- Education: Portora Royal School for Boys.
Trinity College in Dublin.
Magdalen College in Oxford.
- Father: Sir William Wade.
- Mother: Jane Francesca Elgee Wilde.

- Spouse⁸: Constance Lloyd.
- Children: Vyvyan Holland, Cyril Holland.
- Wilde's sister died, aged nine, from Meningitis.
- From 1887-1889 he edited *Woman's World*, a popular magazine.
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was serialized on 1st January 1890 in *Lippincott's Magazine*. This was a censored version.
- In 1891 Wilde revised and published *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a novel.
- The farcical⁹ comedy and Wilde's best-known play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*¹⁰, was first performed in 1895.
- In 1898 he published his best-known poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.
- Wilde was arrested for "gross indecency"¹¹ after a trial between him and the Marquess of Queensbury – father to Lord Alfred Douglas, with whom Wilde supposedly¹² had an affair with. He was sentenced 2 years' hard labour.
- Wilde is released and moves to Paris, France, where he lives the rest of his life in exile¹³.

Extended Biography:

Wilde's Life

The flamboyant¹⁴ and witty¹⁵ Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin 16th October 1854. He was studious¹⁶ as a child, and his love for books showed during his time as a young adult, during which he attended Trinity College in Dublin and then Magdalen College in Oxford. Later in life, Wilde had two sons called Cyril and Vyvyan, with an Englishwoman named Constance Lloyd. His greatest period of productivity¹⁷ was 1888 – 1895. During this seven-year period nearly all of his greatest works were written, including *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde lived a sort of double life in these years. He enjoyed the highest literary success of his life, while in his personal life he was not so fortunate. He had an affair with Lord Alfred Douglas, and the repercussions¹⁸ of this act lead to his downfall. Douglas's father left a visiting card for Wilde, calling him a "sodomite" (a misspelling of sodomite; a term Douglas used to suggest Wilde was homosexual). Wilde was so offended by this that he sued him for libel¹⁹. The trial didn't go in Wilde's favour²⁰ and he was sentenced two years in prison.

⁸ A person's partner; husband or wife.

⁹ Linked to farce, which is a comic dramatic work where characters are part of unlikely situation, often absurd or ridiculous. Funny, mockery, silly, laughable.

¹⁰ Being serious or heartfelt.

¹¹ A legal term. It was used to make sexual activity between men (and sometimes women) a criminal offense.

¹² What is generally believed. Evidently, apparently, so they say.

¹³ Banned from living in a country. It is usually for legal / political reasons.

¹⁴ Loud, flashy, colourful, confident, lively, extravagant.

¹⁵ Being funny and clever. Humorous, comic, sharp.

¹⁶ The feature of studying a lot. Enjoying books, reading and learning.

¹⁷ Being productive; producing a lot of something. In this case it means Wilde produced literature often and a lot.

¹⁸ The result of an action, often a bad result. Effect, result, consequence, outcome, aftermath.

¹⁹ A legal term. A false statement that damages someone's reputation.

²⁰ 'Didn't go in Wilde's favour': relates to "in favour" which means in agreement, supportive, having approval. If something *doesn't* go in your favour, it means the opposite. Not liked or supported.

When he was let out, Wilde was physically run-down²¹ and broke²². He moved to Paris and died November 30th, 1900 at the age of 46.

Below is a YouTube clip from *Wilde* – a film about Oscar Wilde. This scene shows Wilde receiving the letter from Douglas's father:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VjHwL8dXXM>

Family

Oscar Wilde was the second of three children of William Robert Wills Wilde (1815 – 1876) and Jane Francesca Angles Wilde (1821 – 1896). His father was an acclaimed²³ surgeon who was knighted for his work as the medical advisor for the Irish population. His mother a poet, nationalist and a linguist, translating European works like Wilhelm Meinhold's gothic novel "Sidonia the Sorceress". A translation Wilde would later draw upon for the darker elements of his works. Having Irish parents and holidays to Galway as a child meant Wilde was exposed to Gaelic story-telling. One prominent theme in these stories is the wish of human vanity which, when granted, brings ultimate damnation²⁴, something that influenced the idea behind *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In 1867, Wilde's little sister Isola Francesca died at the age of 10. Her death had a great effect on Wilde, so much so that he carried a lock of her hair with him until his death. The image of girls unknowing of their womanhood²⁵ haunted his works after the incident, including in *Dorian Gray*.

Literature

Wilde's Writing:

A playwright, author, and poet, Oscar Wilde is celebrated today for his witty, irreverent²⁶ and saucy²⁷ writing style and general outlook²⁸ on life. As one of the Victorian aesthetes²⁹, he believed in writing work that was beautiful – art for arts sake (the motto for the British aesthetic movement). For this reason, it can be said that Wilde valued style over sincerity or substance in his works and in his life. The most important thing to him was the form of the work and the nuances of word choices. He was so determined to have perfection in his works, that when he was asked to write a story of a hundred thousand beautiful words, he complained that "there are not one hundred thousand beautiful words in the English language."

²¹ Tired, weak, wasted, worn, ragged, beat-up.

²² Out of money.

²³ Publicly praised, celebrated, famous.

²⁴ Punishment in hell.

²⁵ 'Unknowing of their womanhood': Not yet matured / grown up from a girl into a woman.

²⁶ Lack of respect. Mocking, rude, cheeky, bold, disrespectful.

²⁷ Cheeky, sassy, sometimes sexually suggestive in a light hearted way.

²⁸ Your viewpoint/ point of view / attitude / perspective.

²⁹ An aesthete is someone who is part of the aestheticism movement. See the 'Aestheticism' section for an explanation on this.

***TASK:** Circle the words you feel best capture the characteristics and / or style of Wilde's writing in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Ornate Plain Simplistic Humorous Silly Thoughtful

Romantic Satiric Critical Emotional Bejeweled Playful

Unadorned Light hearted Serious Sensorv Trashy

Fragmented

Horror Snappy Descriptive Long Melodramatic

Futuristic Morbid

Further: See if you can find any passages, sentences, or words from the text to support your choices.

***TASK:** Pick a section from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that you find interesting and do an analysis of that passage. Pay close attention to Wilde's use of language and imagery.

Themes and Symbols:

1. Art / The relationship between art and reality

The distinction between reality and art is blurred in the novel. Actresses live as though they are constantly on stage, and a painter values his friendship because the relationship improves his ability to paint and make art. Dorian himself bases his life and actions on a work of art: the book given to him by Lord Henry. Throughout the novel, Dorian is obsessed with making his life into art, and it ultimately leads to his downfall as he tries to escape the morality within this decision. Acting seems to be more true than real life in the novel. Lord Henry says 'but I love acting' it's so much more than real life', Dorian loves Sibyl for her acting, and Sibyl calls Dorian her 'Prince Charming' making him into a character of her own. Dorian's story and the mixing of reality and art it creates makes a division between ethics and aesthetics in the novel. Wilde wanted to explore the link between an artist, his or her subject, and the resulting image on the canvas.

***TASK:** Read this extract. How does art and reality blur here?

LORD HENRY	Who are you in love with?
DORIAN	With an actress.
LORD HENRY	That's a rather common-place debut. Who is she?
DORIAN	Her name is Sibyl Vane.

LORD HENRY Never heard of her.

DORIAN No one has. They will someday, though. She is a genius.

LORD HENRY Tell me about your genius. How long have you known her?

DORIAN About three weeks. Night after night I go to see her play. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy. I have seen her in every age and every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination, they are quite obvious. But an actress! Harry, why didn't you tell me that the only thing worth loving is an actress?

LORD HENRY Because I have loved so many of them, Dorian.

DORIAN Oh, yes, horrid people with dyed hair and painted faces.

LORD HENRY There is an extraordinary charm in dyed hair and painted faces, sometimes. And now tell me, is Sibyl Vane your mistress?

DORIAN Harry! Sibyl Vane is sacred!

LORD HENRY It is only the sacred things that are worth touching, Dorian. When one is in love, one always begins by deceiving oneself, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. What do you know of her?

DORIAN She knows nothing of life and lives with her Mother, a faded tired woman who plays Lady Capulet in a sort of magenta dressing gown and looks as if she has seen better days.

LORD HENRY I know that look. It depresses me.

DORIAN Sibyl is the only thing I care about. Tonight she is Ophelia and tomorrow she will be Juliet.

LORD HENRY When is she Sibyl Vane?

DORIAN Never.

LORD HENRY I congratulate you.

DORIAN She is all the great heroines of the world in one.
My God, Harry, how I worship her.

LORD HENRY And what do you propose to do?

DORIAN I want you and Basil to come with me tomorrow night and see her act. I have not the slightest fear of the result. You are certain to acknowledge her genius.

LORD HENRY All right. Shall we say Cafe Royal at eight o'clock.

DORIAN Not eight, Harry, half-past six. We must be there before the curtain rises.

LORD HENRY Half-past six! What an hour! It will be like having a meat-tea, or reading an English novel. It must be seven. No gentleman dines before seven.

DORIAN Then I'll meet you at Basil's at six o'clock, no later. ... Now, I must go as Ophelia is waiting for me.
(Starts to go) Oh, Harry ...

LORD HENRY Yes.

DORIAN One more thing: Sybil Vane and I are engaged to be married. Good bye!

He goes, leaving LORD HENRY looking shocked and amused.

2. Mortality³⁰

Dorian Gray is afraid of getting old. A fear that is generated by Basil's painting, which reminds Gray that while the painting will always remain the same, he will age and eventually lose his looks. The fading of a person's beauty, then, becomes a sign of their mortality in the novel and so death and beauty become linked throughout. Dorian loves Sybil because he gets to watch her die onstage and then, miraculously³¹, be alive backstage. Her art makes her immortal³² every night. As well as this, Sybil's actual death by suicide gives her an eternal beauty because she is never allowed to age.

3. Good vs. Evil

Dorian is handed a "poisonous" yellow book by Lord Henry as a kind of social experiment, and it works. Dorian's world of goodness and purity is changed immediately and its seduction³³ blurs the line between good and evil. The power of greed and selfishness takes over Dorian and highlights his evil and ugly side, which is represented by the marks on the painting.

4. The Idea of a Double Life

Dorian Gray lives a double life as he outwardly plays a respectable gentleman while inwardly pursuing a wicked existence, crossing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Once Dorian realises that his portrait will bear the scars of his corrupt behaviour – leaving his actual appearance perfect – he feels free to ignore the pious principles that were a big part of the Victorian era. Wilde highlights a hypocritical element of Victorian society in Dorian Gray's double

³⁰ Death, the idea that people do not live forever and will die at some point.

³¹ So surprising as to suggest a miracle. Incredible, unexplainable.

³² An immortal is someone that cannot die. Living forever, undying.

³³ The act of seducing someone. To seduce is to tempt, persuade, draw them in, charm, often into having sex.

life - that because he looks respectable that means he is shielded³⁴ from any accusations about his bad behaviour. He is able to have the best of both worlds – a continued acceptance from his friends and the chance to fulfil his basest desires. Lord Henry makes the link between a negative appearance and the criminal when he says;

“Crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders. I don’t blame them in the smallest degree. I should fancy that crime is to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring³⁵ extraordinary sensations.”

***TASK:** Match the quotes with the themes.

“It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done,” said Lord Henry languidly. “You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor. The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place.” – Lord Henry.

Mortality

“Dorian felt keenly the terrible pleasure of a double life”

Art

"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!" – Dorian Gray.

Good and Evil

A Double Life

"You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of Sibyl Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don't know which to follow." – Dorian Gray

³⁴ Protected, guarded, sheltered, away from harm / danger.

³⁵ Getting, gaining, acquiring, securing, attaining.

Questions Based on Themes:

What evidence can you find in the text that suggests the worthlessness of living life in line with aesthetic values?

Can we divide all the characters into two groups of "good" and "evil"?

What is the role of art in the novel?

The Concepts Behind *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

Decadence and Aestheticism are two schools of thought that have come to define much of Wilde's work, including *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

1. Aestheticism

Aestheticism is an artistic and literary movement in Western Europe. It is about certain attitudes in the late 19th century. It was a literary and social movement that focused on the idea that art existed for art's sake. To Aesthetes, the pursuit of beauty was seen as the highest good and they sought to overthrow the notion³⁶ that art had to have some higher moral purpose. In Aestheticism, life is viewed as an art. Oscar Wilde is a writer who is strongly associated with the aesthetic movement.

2. Decadence

The Decadent movement was the later generation of the Aesthetic movement. Oscar Wilde and others associated with the movement labelled themselves "decadents". These artists sought inspiration, both in their lives and in their writing, in aestheticism (art for art's sake, free from moral and social concerns). The difference between the decadent and the aesthete lies in the moral and social concerns of each movement. For the aesthete, the social world is not important compared to the pursuit of beauty. Morality is irrelevant. The decadent, however, is very much against the dominant culture. They expressed their dislike for prevailing³⁷ values in society through their sense of superiority and amorality³⁸ of art. For example, if society considers sex between husband and wife a private matter, the Decadent might write a poem that describes his night with a prostitute in graphic detail.

Dorian Gray is the definition of decadence in his combination of the criminal (in his visits to opium dens³⁹) and the aesthete (in the high culture that he is part of).

A person who captures the meaning of decadence is Harald Glöckler, a German fashion designer from Maulbronn.

³⁶ The idea, view, concept, belief, opinion, thought.

³⁷ If a value is "prevailing", it means a standard or principle that remains, continues, succeeds, is dominant over others, or is current, custom, existing today.

³⁸ Lacking / doesn't have a moral – a principle of right or wrong.

³⁹ Opium den: a room where opium (a drug) is smoked.



***TASK:** Look at his website: <http://www.haraldgloeoekler.de> and think about how his style might represent decadence.

Victorian Britain:

Wilde's dramatic portrayals of the human condition came at an important period of Victorian Britain. All citizens of Britain were finally able to embrace literature, which was once a luxury only the wealthy and educated could afford. People often think of the Victorian period as a grey, colourless time, with strict moral conducts that governed people to act like prudes. However, the Victorian era was a time when sensationalism blossomed⁴⁰ in cheap newspapers, there were celebrities, and Jack the Ripper was active. These were the conflicting realities that indicate to us today a society of hypocrisy. There were dark sides and disturbing private desires behind the public faces of this society, and Wilde explores this side of Victorian life with his character Dorian Gray.

Victorian Sexuality

Nowadays, nobody would blink⁴¹ if you said the word "leg" in public, but, back in the Victorian era, it was actually found offensive. They preferred the word "limb". However, under the surface, it wasn't all so highbrow⁴². Men had a lot of access to sex and sexually explicit entertainment, just like Dorian's scandalous⁴³ love affairs. But, for women, it was quite the opposite. They were expected to represent purity and innocence. In this sense, there was a double standard in the view of sexuality of men and women.

***TASK:**

How are these double standards reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?
How does Oscar Wilde portray Sibyl's purity?

Within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde consciously or unconsciously (a fact that is still debated to this day) inserted the theme of homoeroticism. The novel is partly about the artist Basil Hallward's obsession with his muse, a young and beautiful, Dorian Gray. Gray's beauty is admired by both Basil and Lord Henry. Beauty is often seen as a feminine attribute, not often are

⁴⁰ Developed, grew, multiplied, increased, succeeded.

⁴¹ Shut and open the eyes quickly.

⁴² Refers to an intellectual, a thinker, someone well read. But, in this case, it also means sophisticated, serious, snobby (characteristics sometimes given to intellectuals)

⁴³ Shocking, outrageous, disgraceful, wicked, shameful.

men referred to as beautiful. Therefore, when men like Dorian are the objects being seen as beautiful by other men, like Basil, we can read homoerotic undertones to this story.

Although the word "homosexual" didn't enter the English language until 1892, in late Victorian society, same-sex encounters were frowned upon⁴⁴ and considered "unclean". Wilde had to edit out many references of the desire Basil Hallward felt for Dorian. He removed and replaced a total of 500 words from the serialised version published in the *Lippincott's Magazine* prior to the actual novel in an attempt to tone down Basil's same-sex desire. However, enough of the theme remained in the first edition to elicit⁴⁵ strong criticism of homoeroticism that would be later used as evidence against Wilde in his criminal trials.

***TASK:**

Discuss: What does the treatment of women in the novel suggest about relationships between men and women?

Does it perhaps suggest that only men are fit and worthy companions for each other?

Did you Know?

- Oscar Wilde's full name is Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde.
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Wilde's only novel.
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was one of the most controversial literary works of the 19th century. It caused public outcry because it was too "prurient" - meaning paying too much close attention to sex.
- The book also played a considerable part in his later legal trials that sentenced him 2 years in prison for homosexuality.
- Victorians believed that sin was written on the body. In the study of criminology, scientists like Cesare Lombroso (a big name in Victorian criminology) thought criminal behaviour could be detected in the shape of a person's skull. The notion that criminal behaviour showed itself visibly in an individual's features can be read in *Dorian Gray*.

***TASK:** Below is a picture from Lombroso's studies. Pick out who you think would be labelled a criminal by Lombroso and explain why:

⁴⁴ Frowned upon: made people frown, disliked, disgusted, hated, disapproved.

⁴⁵ Cause, provoke, produce, bring about, bring out, draw out.



- Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray was based on John Gray, a handsome blond poet that Wilde met in 1889. Biographers believe that The Picture of Dorian Gray was "a form of courtship."
- Oscar Wilde's mother wanted a girl and often dressed the young Oscar in girls' clothing. This wasn't that unusual in the 19th Century, though, as many young boys dressed in girls clothing.



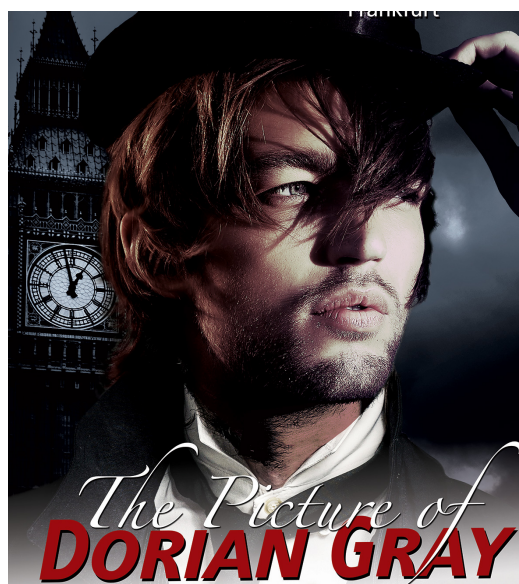
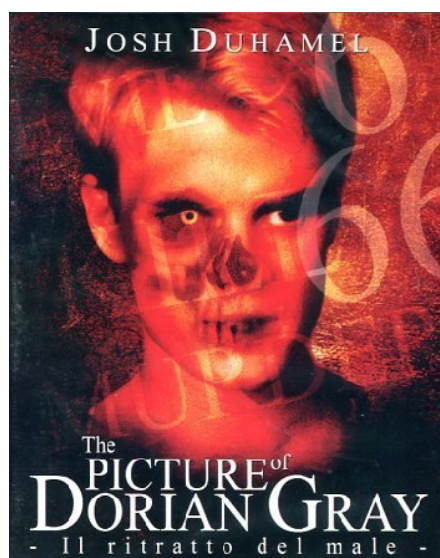
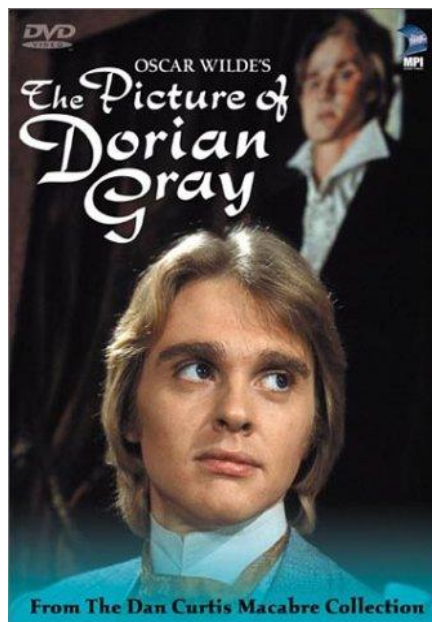
Oscar Wilde



John Gray

A Trip to the Movies:

*Task: Date the production:



(From left to right, starting top left to bottom right)

1. 2009
2. 1973
3. 2004
4. 1945
5. 2016 (The English Theatre production)

- Which image do you feel best captures Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and why?
- What do these images have in common?
- Or have they changed over time?
- Does the period in which these films were made affect these posters?

***TASK:** Design your own poster for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Which actor would you cast as Dorian Gray?

Film clips:

Attic scene with Dorian and Harry (Harry's death):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jkw3yV00qIU>

Dorian's death:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMWuFGc9ML0>

***TASK:** How else might you choose to present *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? Can it be presented on stage? In a painting or poster?

Here is a short clip of Matthew Bourne's *Dorian Gray* – a ballet influenced by Oscar Wilde's novel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oDDeRSmL04>

Here is an interview with Director Matthew Bourne and the dancers:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oDDeRSmL04>

How have they attempted to give *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a modern twist?

Do you think this adaptation works well?

Can you see any similarities between the ballet and the novel?

Let's get Theatrical, Darling

***TASK:** Act out these scenes in groups of 3. When you read this scene, think about:

How much is Lord Henry to blame for what Dorian becomes? People often read Harry as the devil who tempts Dorian to sin – how accurate is that here? How would you show an audience this?

Is there a distinct point when the portrait becomes part of Dorian? How would you show this on stage?

Scene 1:

DORIAN Is it really finished?

BASIL Quite finished. Don't you like it?

LORD HENRY Of course he likes it. Who wouldn't? It is one of the greatest things in modern art. I will give you anything you like to ask for it.

BASIL It's not my property, Harry.

LORD HENRY Not your property? Whose is it?

BASIL It's Dorian's, of course.

LORD HENRY Well, he's a very lucky fellow.

DORIAN *(thoughtfully after a short pause)* How sad it is! 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 thatfor that - I would give everything. I would give my soul for that!

LORD HENRY It would be rather hard on your work, Basil. BASIL I should object very strongly, Harry.

DORIAN *(peevishly)* I do believe you would, Basil. You like your art better than your friends. How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. When one loses one's good looks one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. Lord Henry is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself.

BASIL Dorian! Don't talk like that.

DORIAN Why did you paint it? It will mock me some day - mock me horribly!

BASIL This is your doing, Harry.

LORD HENRY It is the real Dorian Gray - that is all.

BASIL You should have gone away when I asked you.

LORD HENRY I stayed when you asked me.

BASIL Between you both you have made me hate the finest piece of work I have ever done, and I shall destroy it. What is it but canvas and colour?

BASIL walks over to a table on which is a litter of tubes, brushes, and pots. He picks up a long palette-knife and goes purposefully towards the painting.

DORIAN *(jumping up)* Don't, Basil, don't! It would be murder!

DORIAN *tears the knife out of* BASIL *'s hand.*

BASIL I am glad you appreciate my work at last, Dorian.

DORIAN Appreciate it? I am in love with it, Basil. It is part of myself.

BASIL Well, as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished and sent home. Then you can do what you like with yourself. *(A slight pause)* Now, you will have tea, won't you Dorian? And you, Harry? Or do you object to such simple pleasures?

LORD HENRY I adore simple pleasures, they are the last refuge of the complex. But I don't like scenes, except on the stage. So now that the ownership of the portrait is no longer in question, let us all go and dine at Willis's.

BASIL It is such a bore putting on one's dress-clothes, and, when one has them on, they are so horrid.

LORD HENRY Yes, the costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour element left in modern life.

BASIL You really mustn't say things like that in front of Dorian, Harry.

LORD HENRY Before which Dorian?

BASIL Before either.

DORIAN I should like to dine with you, Lord Henry.

LORD HENRY Then you shall; and you'll come too, Basil won't you?

BASIL I would sooner not. I have a lot of work to do.

LORD HENRY Well, then you and I will go alone, Mr. Gray.

DORIAN I should like that awfully.

BASIL And I shall stay with the real Dorian.

DORIAN *(going over to the painting)* Is this the real Dorian?

Am I really like that?

BASIL Yes; you are just like that.

DORIAN How wonderful, Basil.

BASIL But it will never alter. *(He sighs)* That is something. *(He pauses)* Don't go to Willis's tonight, Dorian. Stop here and dine with me.

DORIAN I can't, Basil.

BASIL Why not?

DORIAN Because I have promised Lord Henry to go with him.

BASIL He won't like you any the better for keeping your promises. He always breaks his own. I beg you not to go.

DORIAN *laughs, shakes his head and looks at LORD HENRY, who in turn has been watching them with an amused smile.*

DORIAN I must go, Basil.

BASIL Very well. Good-bye, Dorian. Come and see me tomorrow. You won't forget?

DORIAN No, of course not.

BASIL And ... Harry ...

LORD HENRY Yes, Basil?

BASIL Remember what I told you, earlier.

LORD HENRY I have forgotten it already.

BASIL I trust you.

LORD HENRY I wish I could trust myself. Come, Mr. Gray, my hansom is outside, and I can drop you at your own place. Good-bye, Basil. It has been a most interesting afternoon.

Important Questions:

- Do you think Wilde intended his book as a celebration of decadence⁴⁶ or as a fable about the perils⁴⁷ of its excesses?
- Wilde states in the preface to the novel 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all'. - Can you read a moral dimension to this story?
- What can we take about ideas of conscience from this novel?
- Is today's society free from the hypocrisy of Dorian's?

Wilde Restyled:

Oscar Wilde's English is quite different to the kind of English we speak today. We've explained some of the trickiest words from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to help you understand what exactly he's talking about.

1. **Laburnum**: A small tree that has yellow flowers.
2. **tremulous**: shaking as from weakness or fear
3. **sullen**: being bad tempered or sulky
4. **conjecture**: to believe, especially on uncertain / unsure grounds
5. **comely**: suitable behavior
6. **languidly**: a tired / weary manner
7. **wreath**: a circular band of flowers for decoration
8. **whorl**: a pattern of circles or spirals
9. **faltering**: the act of pausing uncertainly
10. **gape**: look with amazement
11. **cynicism**: a feeling of distrust
12. **ensconce**: fix firmly
13. **chirrup**: make high-pitched sounds
14. **savage**: without civilizing influences
15. **dowager**: a widow holding property from her dead husband
16. **lionize**: to attach a lot of social importance
17. **listless**: limp or lacking energy
18. **unjust**: not fair; marked by injustice or partiality or deception
19. **scrupulous**: characterized by extreme care and great effort
20. **tedious**: so lacking in interest as to cause mental weariness
21. **petulant**: easily irritated or annoyed
22. **whim**: a sudden idea or change of mind; odd or fanciful idea
23. **brood**: hang over, as of something threatening, dark, or menacing. Also to think about something a lot
24. **languorous**: lacking liveliness
25. **gilded**: made from or covered with gold
26. **chiseled**: having a clean and distinct outline as if precisely cut along the edges
27. **quiver**: shake with fast, tremulous movements
28. **opium**: den a place, generally located in a slum, where opium is brought and smoked. Usually, other banned / criminal activities, such as prostitution and gambling happen here.

⁴⁶ See the 'Decadence' section to understand this better. Decadence often means corruption, excess, self-indulgence, sin, wickedness.

⁴⁷ Threat, danger, hazard, risk.

Word Search:

MAPMOHSLEPIBHNQ
DOZQEPOEYHFIPAL
WZRNZTIAGTOKBIK
WKERTOQBUIATRMRL
XYBEAUTYMETMUOH
LISABLRREFDOSPDF
DAXLHEIZGRAYATN
HNNTDBBTTTSUXILJ
YNURJROAYIGBNEH
HOUGEULONBLZTOY
YMTFTGLKYYSIHL
VXZCCNEWKLNLNRG
FXDPEJJCZOVXIGIE
CFERUTLUCUBFXRP
CORRUPTIONBFOUZ

1. BASIL
2. BEAUTY
3. BOOK
4. CORRUPTION
5. CULTURE
6. DEATH
7. DORIAN
8. ETERNAL
9. GRAY
10. HENRY
11. IMMORTAL
12. MORTALITY
13. MURDER
14. OPIUM
15. PAINTING
16. SIBYL
17. STAGE
18. UGLY
19. YOUTH

Advanced Section: Oscar Wilde and Shakespeare

Wilde's novel has many allusions⁴⁸ to William Shakespeare. The most obvious link is between Sibyl and the character of Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia is a young noblewoman who is driven mad after her lover Hamlet murders her father. She later drowns in a river. Ophelia's death was represented a lot in the Victorian period, especially in art.



Like Ophelia, Sibyl is an innocent beauty that is selflessly in love with Dorian (Hamlet). Out of a misunderstanding regarding love both women commit dramatic suicides. After Sybil's suicide, Lord Henry even advises Dorian: 'Mourn for Ophelia, if you like'. Sibyl plays a lot of Shakespeare characters, including Ophelia.

Other character links between *Hamlet* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:
Hamlet / Dorian Gray
Dorian's Portrait / The Ghost (Hamlet's father)

Dorian Gray and Faust

Oscar Wilde himself comments that this novel is based on the Faustian themes which would have been very well known to all of the educated men of his time, and it is very easy to see parallels between the legend and this story.

Dorian himself would represent the character of Faust, who gives up his soul in order to have beauty forever, as he cries 'Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!' The difference between Dorian and Faust is that Dorian is a truly innocent character, shown through his beauty which is described as 'pure' and has religious connotations. The actions that Dorian carries out are also reminiscent of Faust's, for example he travels the world, although as Wilde must have wanted to make the work his own, the travels are not physical travels around the world, but instead collections of small parts of the world in order that Dorian can experience them, 'he would now study perfumes.... he devoted himself entirely to

⁴⁸ Mention, hint, suggestion, reference.

music... he took up the study of jewels...he turned his attention to embroideries...he had a special passion, also, for ecclesiastical vestments..'. Furthermore, Dorian's knowledge of the world and indeed desire to gain knowledge, doesn't begin until after his soul has been sacrificed as he tells Lord Henry 'you filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life'. Of course, this quote itself leads directly to Lord Henry as the perpetrator behind this evil bargain, very much like the Faustian Mephistopheles.

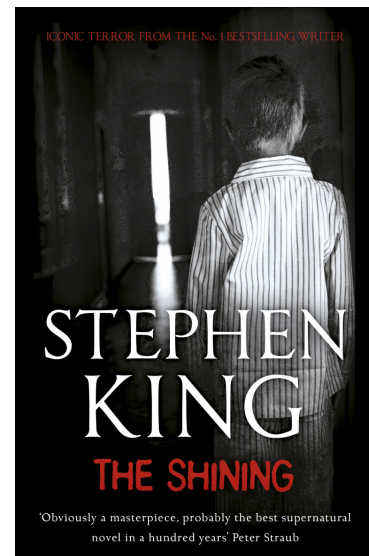
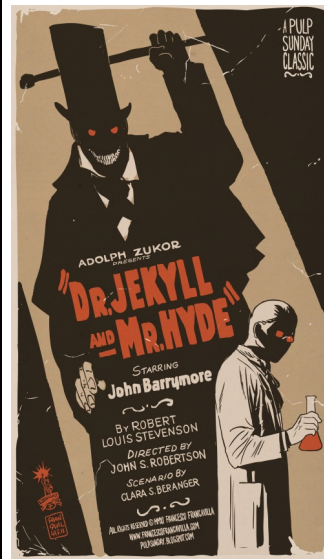
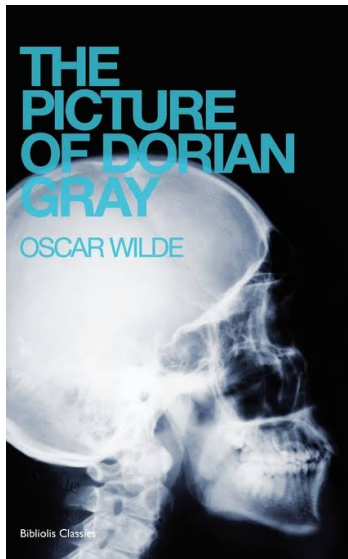
The themes and ideas that The Picture of Dorian Gray present emulate the ideas that the Faust myth present. For example, there is a key idea that it is not only Dorian whose soul can be so easily tainted but every man alive, 'here was an ever-present sign of the ruin men brought upon their souls and yet every man has the choice to save himself, 'each of us has heaven and hell in him' (Dorian), and by the end of the novel when the idea of a soul is challenged by Lord Henry, it is made clear that knowledge of the human soul and the human condition are truly the only lessons that Dorian has gained, 'The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought and sold and bartered away... There is a soul in each one of us. I know it' (Dorian)

Other potential relevant comparative quotes

'It is the face of my soul' Dorian

'There goes the devil's bargain!' Old Woman

The Gothic:



What do these book covers / film advertisements have in common?
How many of these texts do you recognize?

Gothic is the name of a literary genre. The books in this genre often have similar characteristics, styles, motifs⁴⁹, themes, etc. Common traits of a Gothic novel are psychological and physical terror, the supernatural, ghosts, haunted houses and Gothic architecture, castles, darkness, death, decay, doubles, the devil, angels, madness, secrets, and hereditary curses. What examples of these can you find in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?

Gothic novels were often placed in dark and shadowy realms which echoes the malevolence⁵⁰ they hide. Dorian's attic where he hides his secret is suggestive of his own evil. With its 'damp odour of mildew... covered in dust' the empty space normally void of life in the sudden necessity of its use confirms the shame of the sins he must hide. The atmosphere of menacing evil is

⁴⁹ An image / idea that is repeated in a text

⁵⁰ Evil, wickedness, nastiness, bad, meanness.

heightened as Dorian 'creeps' up the stair, in need of 'unlocking the door' to enter the room where his portrait, the mirror of his own evil that held the 'curious secret of his life' would be hidden 'from the eyes of men.'

**The following exercises are based on the novel:*

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.

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 TASK

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...*

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?

Further Reading and Resources:

For more on Oscar Wilde:

The British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/people/oscar-wilde> - Profile on Oscar Wilde, including a link to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography which provides a very detailed description of Wilde's life.

The Official Site of Oscar Wilde - <http://www.cmgwww.com/historic/wilde/>

The Poetry Foundation, Biography of Oscar Wilde, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/oscar-wilde>

Martin Chilton, Oscar Wilde: 20 great quotes about America, Nov 30th 2015.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/authors/Oscar-wilde-quotes-about-america/>

For more on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

Greg Buzwell, *The Picture of Dorian Gray: art, ethics and the artist*, The British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-picture-of-dorian-gray-art-ethics-and-the-artist>

Roger Luckhurst, 'Perversion and degeneracy in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', The British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/perversion-and-degeneracy-in-the-picture-of-dorian-gray>

The British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-yellow-book> - More about the "Yellow Book", a book thought to influence *Dorian Gray* in the novel.

Gillespie, Michael Patrick. "Picturing *Dorian Gray*." *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie. New York: Norton & Co., 2007. 393-409.

Sarah Huener, 'Quite Useless, Truth, Art and Life in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray', PIT Journal 2001, <http://pitjournal.unc.edu/article/quite-useless-truth-art-and-life-oscar-wilde's-picture-dorian-gray>

For more on Aestheticism and Decadence:

Carolyn Burdett, Aestheticism and decadence, The British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/aestheticism-and-decadence>

For more on Victorian Britain:

Professor Eric Evans, Overview: Victorian Britain, 1837 – 1901, Last Updated: March 29th 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/overview_victorians_01.shtml

BBC History, Victorian Britain, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/timeline/victorianbritain_timeline_noflash.shtml
Emma Mason, The Victorian's Surprisingly Liberal Attitude Towards Gay Men, History Extra, 7th April 2015. <http://www.historyextra.com/article/sex-and-love/victorians'-surprisingly-liberal-attitude-towards-gay-men>

<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/the-gothic>

For Dorian Gray's facebook page:

<http://thewallmachine.com/fStfM8.html>

For the novel in full:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>