

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Picture of Dorian Gray

by Oscar Wilde

written by Nicole Guertin

Copyright © 2005 by Prestwick House, Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938.
1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for
classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. *This material,
in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.*

ISBN: 978-1-58049-893-7

Item No. 204965

The Picture of Dorian Gray

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.

Chapter I

3. Lord Henry Wotton's speech is characterized by epigrams. Consider his assertion that "...there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about." Based on your personal experiences, would you tend to agree or to disagree with Lord Henry? Write an opinion column for your school newspaper in which you explain your perspective. Try to come up with a catchy title for your article.
4. Lord Henry asserts that "it is better not to be different from one's fellows," saying that those who have extraordinary qualities of any kind (good looks, athletic abilities, fame, wealth, intelligence, creativity or artistic expression) will "suffer terribly." Make a list of people you know or know of who fit one of those categories. Then, try to imagine what kind of suffering they might experience as a result of being different – even in a positive way.

People with Extraordinary Characteristics

Possible Suffering

5. "You know we poor artists have to show ourselves in society from time to time, just to remind the public that we are not savages. With an evening coat and a white tie, as you told me once, anybody, even a stock-broker, can gain a reputation for being civilized," Basil explains to Lord Henry. Consider your own life. Write a paragraph about something you have to do – perhaps on a regular basis, even – that you don't want to do or that just isn't "you" in order to please someone else or to appear to be respectable or presentable.

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 II

9. Lord Henry Wotton delights in expressing unconventional, even scandalous viewpoints and in seeing their effect on others around him. His speech is peppered with epigrams: for example, “The bravest man among us is afraid of himself.” Keep a list of the epigrammatic statements Lord Henry makes in this chapter. Then, explain in a few sentences what you think he means by each one.

Lord Henry’s Epigrams

Meanings

10. Dorian is so moved by the beauty of the portrait Basil has painted of him that he cannot stand the reality that he will grow older while the portrait will remain as youthful looking as when it was first painted. It will mock him, he claims, in his old age.

Look at a photo of yourself, your family, or a friend taken several months or years ago. Do you understand at all Dorian’s reaction to his portrait? Do you share any of the same feelings of regret or loss when you look at pictures from the past? Write a paragraph in which you describe your own emotions when you look at your picture.

Chapter III

11. From his Uncle George, Lord Henry discovers the tragic history of Dorian's life. Dorian's extraordinarily beautiful mother could easily have had the most wealthy, prominent, and desirable of suitors, but she chose instead to run away with a penniless soldier. Her father hired a man to kill his new son-in-law just months after the elopement and took his daughter back to live with him. She had a child, Dorian, from this marriage, but died within a year. Dorian was raised by his harsh, distant grandfather and never mentions his mother.

Imagine that she wrote Dorian a letter when she knew she was not going to live to raise him and hid it in the schoolroom where she hoped one day he would find it. What do you think she would want her son to know about her? His father? His grandfather? About her choices? Her desires for him? Do you think she would have had a resentful or forgiving attitude toward his grandfather (her father)? Assume The mother's persona, and write the letter to Dorian.

12. In this chapter, we see Lord Henry relating to several different people. Fill in the chart below with details of what you learn about Lord Henry through each of the conversations listed. In one conversation Mr. Erskine refers to Lord Henry as "extremely dangerous." Based on your observations in the chart, do you agree or disagree with him? Write a paragraph in which you explain your perspective.

Conversation with...	What you learn about Lord Henry
Uncle George	
Himself	
His aunt	
The Duchess	
Mr. Erskine	
Dorian	