

The picture of Dorian Gray

David Marler - Rotterdam UAS - Literature 3.2
Advanced English Literature



Picture of Dorian Gray

David Marler - Rotterdam UAS

Course goals

The student demonstrates knowledge of and insight into the defining characteristics of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and can use literary terms (see below) to analyze it.

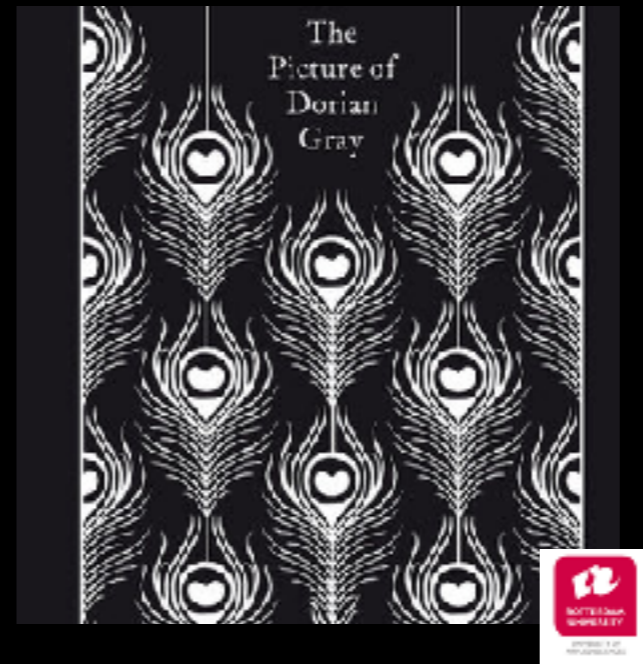
The student has a knowledge of the characteristics of the gothic genre and can discuss Victorian morals. The student can deduce the themes of the work and link these to the work's genre, time period, and style.



Workshop

The Picture of Dorian Gray

- Part 1- Knowledge of the text
 - Activity 1- Choosing a character
 - Activity 2- Group discussion
- Part 2- Knowledge of Genre, theme, and symbol
 - Activity 3- Lecture
 - Activity 4- Mini-presentations



Part I - Knowledge of the text



Quiz over novel



Activity 1. casting the roles

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Activity

You will be placed into groups. Each group will get a character. Your group will answer the following questions about your character.-

What should the actor look like?

-How should the actor behave when in character?

-Which characteristics are most important for this actor?

You will get 5 minutes to discuss your character, when you are finished one student will present.



Activity 1: Warming up (15-20 minutes) – finding the right actor.

For this portion of the class, the students will focus on their knowledge of the text. This is a quick warming up activity. The students will be placed into groups of three students. They will each get a character and a task. They will have to answer the following statements:

-What should the actor look like?

-How should the actor behave when in character?

-Which characteristics are most important for this actor?

The characters they will analyze are:

- 1) Dorian Gray
- 2) Lord Henry Wotton
- 3) Basil Hallward
- 4) Sybil Vane
- 5) James Vane
- 6) Allan Campbell

Steps: 1) Give students the instructions: Your group will get a character and you must decide on the characteristics of the actor. You will have 5 minutes to prepare a 1-minute elevator pitch where you will propose an actor. You must discuss -What should the actor look like?

-How should the actor behave when in character? -Which characteristics are most important for this actor?

2) Break them up into groups and allow them 5 minutes to discuss and prepare. One student must keep time and is in charge; one will take notes; one will present later

to the group.

3) After 5 minutes the students will give a short 1-2-minute presentation to the entire group.

Activity 1. casting the roles

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Activity

- What should the actor look like?
- How should the actor behave when in character?
- Which characteristics are most important for this actor?

Groups

1. Dorian Gray
2. Lord Henry Wotton
3. Basil Hallword
4. Sybil Vane
5. James Vane
6. Allan Campbell



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Activity 2. Group discussion



The novel is based around three male characters: Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Haliward. How are these characters similar and different from one another?



What kind of love does Lord Henry have for Dorian...
does Dorian have for Sybil Vane... does Basil have for
Dorian? What does this say about each character?



Lord Henry gives Dorian a book after Sybil's death titled *Le Secret de Raoul* (a.k.a. "the yellow book"), what is in the book? Why is this book significant?



Why does Dorian kill Basil Haliward?



A black and white portrait of Oscar Wilde, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera.

Oscar Wilde's tumultuous life and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Part 2- Activity 3- Lecture



Oscar Wilde

Biographical information

- 1854-1900
- Anglo-Irish
- Major works: "The Importance of Being Earnest" (play), *The Picture of Dorian Gray*





The Picture of Dorian Gray and “The Sign of Four” (Sherlock Holmes) both got their start at the Langham hotel in London on 30 August 1889. On this night, J.M. Stoddart dined with Wilde and Sir Doyle. They made an agreement to have both works written in serial form, and to be published monthly in his magazine.

It is probably one of the most consequential literary dinners in history.



The Picture of Dorian Gray was scandalous from its very beginning. The magazine that published it had issues with many of the topics and themes of the novel. There was open insinuation of homosexuality, and other amoral acts. Characters' lives were fictitiously ruined, many committed suicide, and one of the main characters – Basil Hallward (the painter) – was even murdered. Morality in the Victorian era was something that Wilde almost appears to mock – he comes revisits topics of morality and beauty throughout the novel.

Beauty is viewed as the highest ideal in the novel. It is more important than being a good person, being virtuous, or even being moral. Youth is directly linked to this view on beauty. Dorian stays forever young and beautiful, but he becomes morally corrupt. We can see that Wilde's work is a commentary on this worshipping of beauty and youth – both aspects of the dandy culture (or dandyism), where certain men of the time would spend hours on their looks and appearance in order to show refinement.



Problematic then, problematic now

Problematic then, problematic now.

Male sexuality and homosexuality as a theme

When the novel was published in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, the editor, J.M. Stoddart, removed many scandalous passages from the work. Many of these passages were re-added in 1891, when the work was published in novel form. Most of these edits dealt with sex and homosexuality. One famous example was the removal of Basil's near "coming out" when he says to Dorian:

"It is quite true that I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend. Somehow, I had never loved a woman. I suppose I never had time. Perhaps, as Harry says, a really grande passion is the privilege of those who have nothing to do, and that is the use of the idle classes in a country."

Nearly all of the edits dealt with Basil, who Wilde originally described as "Rugged and straightforward as he was, there was something in his nature that was purely feminine in its tenderness." While the sexuality of all of the characters remains ambiguous, Basil seems to be completely obsessed with Dorian, who he views as his muse.



Victorian Morality

Most of the “moral issues” with the novel come from complex Victorian ideals about morality. British morality had changed significantly in the Victorian era. Victoria herself was seen as a moral example that the rest of the nation should follow. Victoria’s family was seen as the idealized version of what all British people should strive for. Victorian morality was a strict set of code (mainly for the emerging middle class) that praised personal restraint, hard work, and religion. So, when Wilde’s novel eluded to homosexuality, ruined women, suicide, murder, etc., many were shocked. The novel glorified the exact morals and ideals that Victorians found repugnant and unacceptable. Still, the novel is Victorian in that there is some poetic justice at the end: Dorian commits suicide for his crimes and the portrait returns to its original state.



On 18 February 1895, the Marquess left his calling card at Wilde's club, the Albemarle, inscribed: "For Oscar Wilde, posing sodomite" [sic].[143][note 5] Wilde, encouraged by Douglas and against the advice of his friends, initiated a private prosecution against Queensberry for libel, since the note amounted to a public accusation that Wilde had committed the crime of sodomy.

Queensberry was arrested for criminal libel; a charge carrying a possible sentence of up to two years in prison. Under the 1843 Libel Act, Queensberry could avoid conviction for libel only by demonstrating that his accusation was in fact true, and furthermore that there was some "public benefit" to having made the accusation openly.[144] Queensberry's lawyers thus hired private detectives to find evidence of Wilde's homosexual liaisons.[145]

In the trials, one of the main pieces of evidence was Wilde's own writings - the picture of Dorian Gray.

After the imprisonment, Wilde left the UK and moved to France where homosexuality had been decriminalized.

Misogyny in The Picture of Dorian Gray



Aspects of the novel that shocked Victorian readers (like homosexuality) are no longer shocking to most readers. But *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is problematic for different reasons. First and foremost, the novel is quite misogynistic. Women are treated as unimportant, silly, and often incapable of original thought. The female characters in the novel are almost entirely underdeveloped and flat. The male characters are misogynists that say horrible things to and also about the female characters in the book. While there is a form of reckoning for the characters who partake in immoral acts (most of them commit suicide), there is no reckoning for the misogyny.

Activity 4- Minipresentations



Instructions

Minipresentations

You will be given 20 minutes to create a short 3-minute presentation on one of the terms below in groups. You will answer a question about theme or genre and you must use specific examples from the novel. After 20 minutes, your group will present.



Do not put them into groups until after you have shown all of the topics (to ensure they listen). There is a word document you can share that has all of the instructions on (so the students do not need to write this down). This can also be shared on Moodle/Teams.

Group 1

Dandyism

The title of your mini-presentation: **Dandyism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

Look at the term Dandyism on the handout. What role does Dandyism play in the novel? Which characters are Dandies?



Group 2

The Aesthetic or Decadent Movement

The title of your mini-presentation: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as part of the Aesthetic or Decadent Movement

Many academics have called *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a quintessential text from the Decadent or Aesthetic movement.

Read the term on the handout and present specific examples from the text that prove that this novel is an important part of the Aesthetic movement.



Group 3

Libertines and Sadists

The title of your mini-presentation: Libertines and Sadistic characters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Many of the characters in the novel can be described as libertines or even sadists. Describe what those terms mean and present which characters are libertines or sadists using specific examples from the book.



Group 4

The Gothic Genre

The title of your mini-presentation: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a Gothic novel

The Picture of Dorian Gray is often seen as part of the gothic genre. Read the term on the handout and prepare a mini-presentation where you explain how this book is part of the Gothic genre. Use as many specific examples from the book.



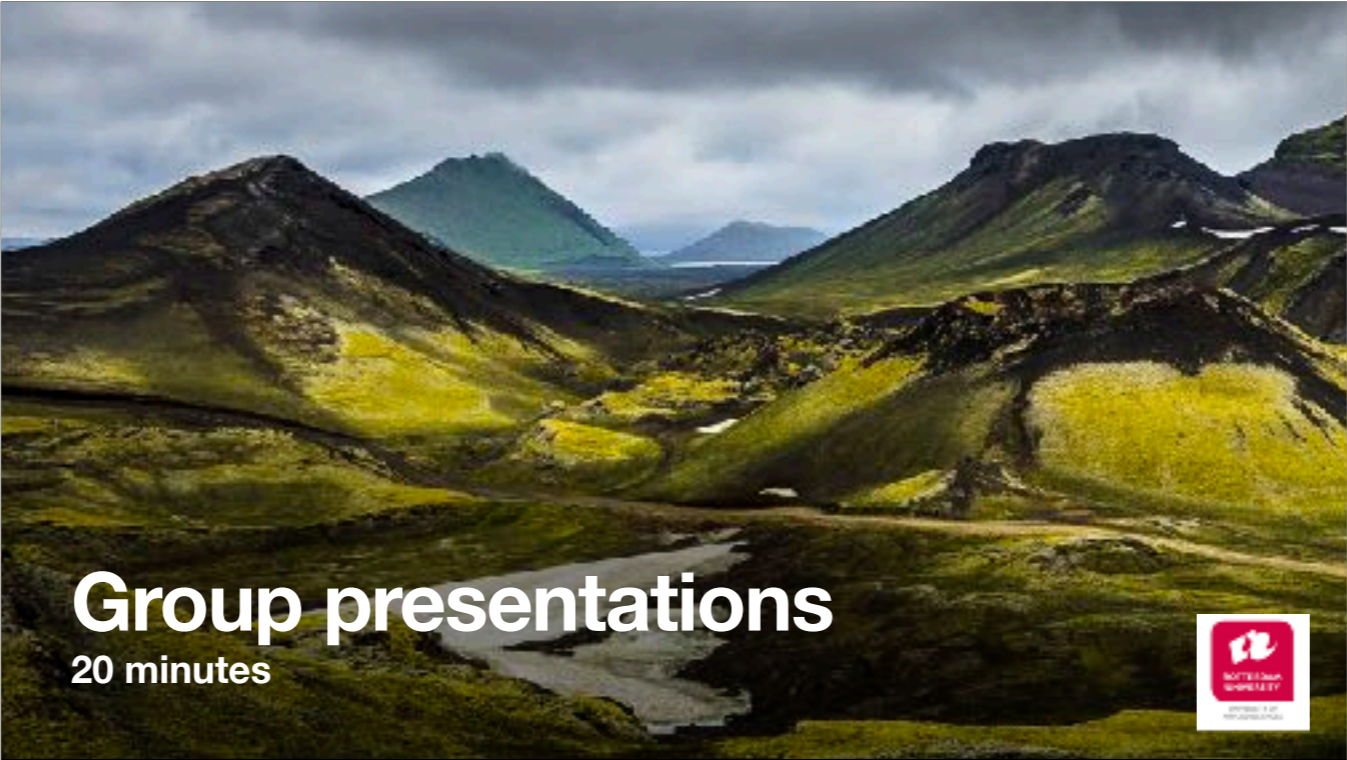
Group 5

Bourgeois Morality

The title of your mini-presentation: The roll of bourgeois morality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Many academics argue that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a rebuke of bourgeois morality. Read the term on the handout and create a mini-presentation where you explain the role of bourgeois morality in the novel. Use as many specific examples from the text as possible.





Group presentations

20 minutes

