

Focus on Reading 4

The Picture of Dorian Gray

You are going to read the abridged version of “The Picture of Dorian Gray” a novel written by Oscar Wilde. Have you heard of the story? Do you know what it is about? Read the information about the author first.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was born in Dublin in Ireland. He came from a highly educated family. His father was a distinguished surgeon and his mother was a poet. He went to University at Trinity college Dublin and Oxford and then moved to London. As a young man, Wilde was brilliant and eccentric with his long hair and extravagant clothes. He began writing poetry but his most famous works are his plays, especially comedies like Lady Windermere’s Fan (1892) and The Importance of Being Earnest (1895). Like his conversation, his plays were full of quick humour such as: “Nowadays, people know the price of everything and the value of nothing”

Wilde’s career was stopped by scandal. He was sent to prison for homosexuality. When he came out of prison, he moved to Paris and died a broken man.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is Oscar Wilde’s only novel and is a brilliant story about moral decadence.



Now, read the first two paragraphs of the story and find out about:



Characters:

Setting:

Situation:



Read now paragraphs three and four till “.... in love with his own picture.” Why is Dorian worried? What do you think he will do?

Now read the rest of the story.

Basil Hayward was a successful artist. He had nearly finished a portrait of a very handsome young man called Dorian Gray. One day, a friend of his, Lord Henry Wotton, saw the picture Basil was painting and wanted to meet this young man. A few days later, Lord Henry and Dorian Gray met at Basil’s house and went for a walk in the garden.

“Ah, how lucky you are to be so young. There’s nothing in the world as important as youth!” said Lord Henry to Dorian. “But time is your enemy”. They went inside to see the portrait and Dorian looked at his own picture intensely.

“I wish I could always stay young and the picture could grow old. Oh, why did you paint this picture, Basil? Why should it stay young while I grow old? I wish the picture could change, and I could stay as I am.”

Dorian was beginning to fall in love with his own picture.

A few weeks later, Dorian told Lord Henry that he was in love with an actress, called Sybil Vane. She was seventeen and very beautiful. Dorian didn’t tell Sybil his name but she called him Prince Charming. He told her that he was in love with her and he wanted to marry her. Sybil’s brother was worried about her and this mysterious young man.

“If that man harms my sister, I’ll kill him”, he said to a friend.

But Sybil’s brother was a sailor and had to go off to Australia.

One night, Dorian took his friends to see Sybil acting as Juliet in Romeo and Juliet. She acted badly and after the

performance Dorian spoke to Sybil. He was very angry with her. “But how can I pretend to be Juliet now that I know what real love is?” she said to him. Dorian said that he didn’t love her any more and so he left her.

When he got back home Dorian looked at his portrait again. Somehow it was different. The face in the picture now had a cruel smile.

Then Dorian remembered his wish. He realized that he had been cruel to Sybil. Tomorrow he would see her and be good to her and make up for what he had done. But the next day Lord Henry brought Dorian some terrible news. Sybil had killed herself! Lord Henry told him not to worry, that it would have been impossible to marry her anyway-she was just an actress. When Lord Henry left, Dorian looked at the picture of himself again. He realized that he would stay young and handsome for ever and that the face in the picture would become ugly, old and cruel.

The years went by, but Dorian Gray stayed young and handsome. He enjoyed all the pleasures there were in life. However, his portrait changed and showed all the terrible secrets of his life. Dorian became more and more obsessed with the picture as the face in it became old and ugly. On Dorian’s thirty-eighth birthday, Basil Hayward, the painter, came to see Dorian and told him he was going away to Paris. Basil told him that people were saying terrible things about Dorian’s life. Dorian decided to show Basil the portrait and to tell him his secret. Basil was horrified when he saw the face and told Dorian to change his life. Suddenly, Dorian became very angry with Basil. He took a knife And stabbed Basil several times. The next day, Dorian got rid of the body. Nobody would ever miss Basil Hayward. They would think that he had gone to France.



Later that night Dorian was in a bar talking to two women. One of the women said to him, “Ah, I remember you. You’re Prince Charming, aren’t you?”

A sailor heard this. It was Sybil’s brother. He realized that this was the man who had been cruel to his sister eighteen years ago. Dorian was very afraid and said that it couldn’t have been him. He showed the sailor his face, the face of a young man of twenty. Then, he went away.

“I nearly killed that boy,” said the sailor. “Boy?” said the woman. “I first met him eighteen years ago, but his face hasn’t changed in all that time.”

A week later, Dorian was in the country staying with some friends, when he realized that the sailor was following him. He became very afraid. The next day he went out walking with some of his friends who were

shooting. His friend shot at an animal and there was the cry of a man. He had killed the sailor who had been following Dorian. Dorian decided to change his life.

“Maybe if I have a better life, the face in the picture will not be so ugly and horrible.”

But when he looked at the portrait it was even more terrible than before. He decided to destroy the picture. He picked up a knife and stabbed the painting.

There was a loud cry and a crash. The servants were very afraid. They went into the room. On the wall they saw the portrait of Dorian Gray as a young, handsome man. On the floor was a dead man, with a knife in his heart. It was the other Dorian Gray, his face old, ugly and horrible.



After Reading: Work in groups and discuss the following questions

1. Who was Basil? What is Basil and Dorian relationship?
2. Why did Dorian make his wish about the portrait?
3. Who was Sybil?
4. What happened to his portrait after he left Sybil? How did his face in the portrait change? What happened to Sybil finally?
5. How did Dorian change physically over the years? What about his portrait?
6. Why did Dorian kill Basil?
7. Who was the sailor? Why did he follow Dorian? How did Dorian escape from him? What happened to the sailor later?
8. Why did Dorian decide to destroy the portrait?
9. What happened to the portrait in the end?

Follow Up: Discuss

What is the moral of this story?
What are the pleasures of being young compared to those of being old?
Do you think there are only advantages in staying young and beautiful for ever? Can you think of any disadvantages?