



**IDX G9 English H+**  
**Study Guide S1 Monthly 2**  
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**The Picture of Dorian Gray Plot Summary**

**Chapter One:**

Painter Basil Hallward spoke of Dorian Gray, a young man he deemed his muse, as he was completing a portrait of him. Lord Henry Wotton was intrigued by Basil's description of Dorian and subsequently requested to be introduced to him. He presents his Hedonistic and immoral worldview for the first time.

**Chapter Two:**

Lord Henry expands with his philosophy of youth, beauty, and hedonism. Dorian, shaken and very changed by the idea that his youth and beauty will fade, wildly wishes the portrait would age in his place.

**Chapter Three:**

Dorian visits Henry's home and meets Henry's wife, Victoria. Henry continues lecturing on pleasure and personal freedom. Dorian seems to become increasingly in tune with Henry's worldview.

**Chapter Four:**

Dorian tells Henry he has fallen in love with Sibyl Vane, a young, poor, actress.

**Chapter Five:**

The narrative shifts to Sibyl's theatric family (her mother and brother), who worry about the mysterious "Prince Charming". Sibyl is portrayed as very naïve.

**Chapter Six:**

Basil expresses concern over Dorian's rapid lifestyle shift. Dorian, however, is thrilled about Sibyl, and Henry minimizes Basil's doubts.

**Chapter Seven:**

Dorian brings Basil and Henry to see Sibyl perform, but she delivers a wooden, lifeless performance of Juliet. She explains to Dorian later that real love makes acting feel false. Dorian, disgusted, rejects her cruelly, showing how he had probably only fallen in love with the characters she portrayed onstage.

**Chapter Eight:**

Dorian discovers the portrait has changed—its lips appear crueler, and he is horrified. Lord Henry then tells him that Sibyl has died.

**Chapter Nine:**

Basil begs Dorian to see Sibyl's death as a tragedy. However, Dorian, already very influenced by Henry's philosophy, treats it as an aesthetic event. He refuses to let Basil see the changed portrait.

**Chapter Ten:**

Dorian hides the portrait in a locked room. He becomes increasingly paranoid about its condition and the possibility that others may accidentally see it.

### **Chapter Eleven:**

Many years have passed. Dorian indulges in a life of pleasure, art collection, and scandal. Rumors circulate, but his beautiful appearance protects him.

### **Chapter Twelve:**

Basil confronts Dorian about the rumors. Dorian attempts to evade his moral lectures; in the end, he decides to reveal the portrait's corruption to Basil.

### **Chapter Thirteen**

Basil, appalled by the portrait, urges Dorian to repent. Dorian murders Basil in a sudden fit of rage.

### **Chapter Fourteen**

Dorian forces an old friend, Alan Campbell, to destroy Basil's body by using blackmail. Campbell eventually complies.

### **Chapter Fifteen**

At a dinner party, Dorian tries to appear composed, but anxiety about Basil's disappearance gnaws at him. Lord Henry, not knowing anything about Basil's death, remains his old self.

### **Chapter Sixteen**

Dorian goes into the dark opium dens of London seeking escape. He encounters James Vane, Sibyl's brother, who has vowed to avenge her. Dorian narrowly escapes death by fooling James with his youthful looks that he was not Sibyl's Prince Charming.

### **Chapter Seventeen**

Dorian and Lord Henry exchange lively and light remarks with the Duchess of Monmouth at a party. To his horror, Dorian spots James Vane stalking him.

### **Chapter Eighteen**

Dorian attends a shooting party, during which a peasant was accidentally shot to death. Dorian feels extreme relief as he discovers the identity of the slain man to be James Vane.

### **Chapter Nineteen**

Lord Henry dismisses the possibility of true moral transformation. Dorian realizes that Henry will never understand the weight of what he has done.

## **Chapter Twenty**

Dorian tries to convince himself he can reform, but his motivations are shallow. The portrait shows that his attempts at goodness are not sincere. Hoping to free himself, Dorian attempts to destroy the portrait. In doing so, he kills himself. The portrait returns to its original beauty; Dorian's body shows the age and total corruption of his life.

## **Character Development**

### **Dorian Gray**

- Starts off as very innocent and impressionable;
  - Kind of polite, gentle, and unsure of himself.
  - Henry starts to change him by telling him about his youth and beauty and how those would eventually fade away with time, which was inevitable. (This is a turning point, as Dorian is starting his descent into corruption).
- Gradually accepts and embraces Lord Henry's hedonistic ideals throughout the book.
  - Dorian starts listening to Henry more than to Basil.
  - Begins to see people as sources of entertainment rather than human beings (leaving Sibyl when she performs badly and eventually treats her death as beautiful and artistic rather than tragic).
  - Hides the portrait to avoid the truth and live a double life.
- Becomes manipulative, cruel, and morally numb.
  - Actions shift from accidentally causing someone's death → very intentional (directly murdering Basil, his old friend)
  - Takes advantage of people who trust him
  - Begins ruining friendships and reputations without any human emotion.
  - When he declares that he wanted to be "good" again, he realizes he's already in too deep. (One way of interpreting this is that he only wants to feel better about himself, not actually change.)

### **Lord Henry**

- Virtually unchanged; brilliant, cynical, hedonistic, irresponsible
- The catalyst for Dorian's corruption yet doesn't have any consequences.

## **Basil Hallward**

- Gentle, intellectual painter; was genuinely affectionate of Dorian Gray
- Tried to guide Dorian Gray but he was ignored next to Lord Henry's fancy, appealing ideas.

## **Reflections on Society**

- People judge others by how they look, not who they are.
- Dorian is trusted and admired only because he is handsome and young.
- His beauty protects him from blame, even when rumors spread.
- Gossip is seen as amusing and can be discussed for 2 whole months in the upper classes
- Wealthy characters live comfortably without facing consequences.
- There's a lot of talk of "living in the land of hypocrites", critiquing how wealthy people are buried in gold and riches while talking about the plights of the poor.
- People enjoy hearing sharp, witty ideas without thinking about the harm they might cause. (The relationship between Dorian and Henry).
- Dorian's world values pleasure as the highest value.

## **Background Information on *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

- There are 3 versions of the text: the original typeset, the 1890s edited, and the 1891 expanded and edited version that we read now.
- Written by Irish author Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in 1890 in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine as a shorter novella; Wilde later expanded it into a full-length novel in 1891 (Brittanica)
- Upon its release, the book caused significant controversy due to its homoerotic undertones and hedonistic thinking (well, you can't help but think Lord Henry is actually Oscar), leading to harsh criticism and even being used as evidence against Wilde during his 1895 trial for gross indecency.
- Plot is covered above.

## **Aestheticism**

- Literary and cultural movement, prominent at 19th century
- Emphasize aesthetic values more than social or political themes for lit, art, and music
- Related to lit of decadence
- Considered by some to be immoral
- Linked to decaying morality
- Features: evocative use of lan of senses; excessive attention to self; absense of instructive aim; perversity in subject matter; hedonistic attitude

How can we explore the question Morality versus Corruption?

At what point does someone become too obsessed with themselves?

### **How does the novel display aesthetics during the Victorian age?**

- The novel promotes the idea that beauty and art should be valued for their own sake, not for moral or practical purposes, which is the main focus of the aesthetics movement
- Characters like Lord Henry argue that living beautifully is more important than being morally good, which is the ultimate key in corrupting Dorian
- Dorian surrounds himself with fine clothes, music, perfumes, and art, a living style devoted to the sensory pleasure
- One who concentrates too much on his appearance is called a FOP (e.g. Dorian)
- The novel puts together public respectability with private indulgence, revealing how the Victorians tend to hind their souls, displaying only their outermost shell
- The decaying portrait also represents the conflict between outward beauty and inner corruption, highlighting once again the era's obsession with the outer appearances.

### **Epigram**

- Witty sayings. God! Oscar Wilde fills his novel with this. Lord Henry uses sharp, clever epigrams that challenge conventional morals
- "To get back one's youth... there is nothing else in the world worth having"
- Epigrams often glorify beauty, pleasure, and art over morality, therefore it is commonly used in Victorian England works and daily life
- The author's frequent use reflects the aesthetic ideal of valuing surface elegance
- Lord Henry's epigrams seduce Dorian into a hedonistic worldview, showing how lan and style can shape belief
- Additional: Dramatic foil: when 2 characters have opposite characteristics.

- e.g Basil and Henry

### **The Mask**

- The poem examines the tension between the true self of a person and the persona they present to the world.
- Written in the form of a short dialogue, it describes the moment of questioning about sincerity and appearance
- The mask also represents some parts of aesthetic ideals, that beauty and performance can be more powerful than raw truth
- The speaker suggests that wearing a mask not to deceive love, but to protect it is reasonable as it shields love away from the harshness of reality
- The poem's perspective also reflects Yeats's own love for Maud Gonne (yes! research) who often performed on stage, leading him to wonder whether her public passion masked private indifference