

## Julian—English 4 Regular Summer Reading Questions

### *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The following questions are to help you understand the novel more fully. As you read, answer these questions. We suggest that you spend time developing your answers either in a handwritten journal or a typed journal that you can bring to class in the fall. Since we will be studying *Dorian Gray* during the school year, we will assume basic comprehension of the novel (characters, setting, plot, and major symbols/themes) prior to our studying the novel. These questions will aid you in gaining that basic comprehension as well as developing a deeper understanding of the work. Make certain that you complete this journal activity: You will be required to bring these questions and your written responses during the summer reading exams / activities check and during the quarter when we study *Dorian Gray* as a class.

FYI—Reading *Spark Notes* and other such works might help you to a certain extent; however, they do not replace reading the novel. Furthermore, the following questions were generated by your NDP instructors and do not rely on these works; reading *Spark Notes* et al. may actually complicate this exercise. Also, movies on *Dorian Gray* are interesting but are not faithful to the work. By all means view them, if you like, but do not ignore the novel—all assignments and tests are based on the novel not the movies. At times students become confused between the movie and the story, so make certain to focus on understanding the novel.

A good source to help you learn about Oscar Wilde and this work is the Victorian Web. Please feel free to use it: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/index.html>. It will be of greater use to you than Wikipedia.

#### Preface

1. What is the topic of the Preface?
2. What does it mean to say, "No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style"?

#### Chapter 1-Chapter 2

3. Describe the artistic setting of the opening scene. Who is there? Where are they? What are they doing? What words are used to describe the house and the garden?
4. Describe Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry.
5. Oscar Wilde is known for his humor. Describe the humor—give an example of it.
6. From what social class do the characters of this novel come? How does this affect our view of them and their problems?
7. What is notable about the account of Basil's first encounter with Dorian? How does Basil describe their relationship and Dorian's effect on his art?
8. How does Dorian regard himself? Is he a narcissist? (Look up this term and the story of Narcissus—what does the term mean. What is basic plot of Narcissus?)
9. How is flower imagery used throughout the scene (e. g., Lord Henry pulls "the daisy to bits with his long, nervous fingers")? What symbolism is associated with a scene of temptation in a garden?

10. How is Lord Henry portrayed? What is his relationship to his family? What principles does he profess?
11. What does Lord Henry suggest may be the end of Basil and Dorian's relationship? Do you think his prophecy come true?
12. What themes are suggested when Lord Henry meets Dorian Gray? (Think of Genesis)
13. What do you think of the claim that Dorian is a naturally innocent, lovely person? What seem to be his initial impulses? Is he a thoughtful young man?
14. What are some of the claims made by Lord Henry to Dorian? How do they affect Dorian?
15. What does Lord Henry believe is the relationship between the soul and the senses?
16. What do we know of Lord Henry's appearance? Could any of these descriptors be symbolic?
17. In what context does Lord Henry speak to Dorian of the decay of beauty and of his own decay? What does he advocate doing with the time one has? ("a new Hedonism--that is what our century wants" ).

18. How is the natural imagery of the garden used to reinforce the scene's meaning? Does Dorian have a sense of foreboding in his new choices?

19. What do you make of the fact that Basil signs his name to the picture in vermilion? (Look up vermilion. What might this foreshadow?)

20. What effect does the picture have on Dorian? What does he wish? Do you think the wish is granted?

21. Is there symbolism in the departure of Dorian with Lord Henry to the theatre, leaving Basil behind? Explain what that might be.

#### Chapter 3-Chapter 4

22. What does Lord Henry learn about Basil's background from his visit with his uncle? Does Lord Henry feel pleasure in the exercise of his influence?

23. In Lord Henry's conversations with his uncle and at lunch with his Aunt Agatha, what views are exchanged on Americans, Chicago, marriage to heiresses, etc.,?

24. What is the tone of conversation at lunch? What remarks does Lord Henry make on philanthropy and pleasure?

25. Describe Lord Henry's social position and his tastes by examining the furniture and other objects in his house? What seems his relationship to his wife?

26. What are Lord Henry's views on marriage? On women? To what extent would his audience have accepted or resisted these views? (Look at when the work was first published.)

27. Under what circumstances does Dorian encounter Sibyl Vane? When he recounts his emotions to Lord Henry, what are your thoughts and feelings about Dorian and Lord Henry?

28. What is the nature of Dorian's attraction to her? What are connotations of her name? (Look both up. Also think about what her last name sounds like—look that up.)

29. Describe the theater and the theater manager. What are your thoughts about where Sibyl works? What are your thoughts about how Wilde describes the theater manager?

#### Chapter 5-Chapter 7

30. What is Sibyl's attitude toward her romance with Dorian? How does the mother interpret their relationship?

31. What do we learn further about the Vane family--patron, mother and Jim? What is the significance of their names?

32. What is ominous about the scenes which occur before Jim leaves for Australia? (What do you think might this scene be foreshadowing?)

33. Is James' behavior melodramatic? How does it affect the novel that most of the Vane plot is presented in melodramatic terms? (Look up term melodrama and melodramatic)
34. What question does Jim ask their mother, and what is significant about her response? Is James correct that she is not a fit guardian?
35. What seems the nature and basis of Sibyl's love?
36. How does this family conflate art and life?
37. How does Lord Henry react to Dorian's engagement? (Note that it was Sibyl who first mentioned marriage) What form does Dorian's romantic attraction to Sibyl take?
38. What reason is given for the fact that Sibyl acts poorly after meeting Dorian? What grounds do his friends offer for consolation?
39. What happens in the final scene between Dorian and Sibyl? What do we learn about his character?
40. How does this episode use/reflect on the conventions of melodrama? Does this alter our sympathies for the protagonists?
41. How is the portrait altered by this event? What motivates Dorian's reaction to the changed portrait? Is he sincere?

#### Chapter 8-Chapter 9

42. What do you think is symbolic in Dorian's action of placing a screen in front of the picture? Of his writing a letter to Sibyl?

43. Do you think it is appropriate that Wilde has Dorian learn the news of Sibyl's death from Lord Henry? What is his Dorian's response? Why cannot he feel her death deeply?
44. On what grounds does Lord Henry console him? What are your thoughts and feelings about Lord Henry's methods of consoling Dorian and Dorian's response? By the time he speaks to Basil, what attitude toward the event has Dorian taken?
45. How does Dorian respond to changes in his portrait? What do these responses reveal about this character?
46. In your opinion, what function does Basil seem to serve in the novel? With whom is Basil repeatedly juxtaposed?
47. What is Basil's response to the thought of death? Over what issue do he and Dorian dispute? How have the respective positions of model and painter come to be reversed?
48. What is shown by the fact that Dorian falls into a rage of possessiveness and fear at the thought of anyone beside himself viewing the picture? Is this consistent with the narcissism he has heretofore shown?
49. What is less than reciprocal about the "confessions" made by the two men (Basil and Dorian) to each other? To what does Basil confess, and what does Dorian conceal?

#### Chapter 10-Chapter 11

50. What steps does Dorian take to distance himself from the portrait? What symbolism is associated with the cloth which covers it and with the cobwebbed attic?
51. What is Dorian's reaction to the notion that he will become degenerate?
52. What is revealed by Dorian's fear of his own servants? Who carries the picture upstairs for him? Why wasn't he willing to carry it himself? What seems odd about the picture?
53. What memories does Dorian have of his grandfather and the attic room? What symbolism might there be in placing the painting in this room with such memories?
54. What does Dorian fear in addition to sin? What is symbolized by the fact that he locks the attic door? What is significant about the fact that he reads a yellow-covered book?
55. What are Dorian's concerns when he reads of the inquest in Sibyl's death?
56. Wilde discusses how Dorian imbibes evil from a book, a book which is more influential than any human being in Dorian's life. What is Wilde's point about the power of literature or art?
57. What change occurs in Dorian's lifestyle? What kinds of debaucheries and scandals seem to be hinted at? What do you make of the fact that he is given to mysterious absences?
58. What characterizes his behavior in polite society? What ideas does he allegedly wish to promote?

59. What has changed in his relationship with the portrait?
60. To distract himself from his debauched inclinations, Dorian attempts to cultivate certain tastes. What are these tastes? Are these distractions successful? What emotion haunts Dorian?
61. What do we learn of his continuing relationship with Lord Henry?
62. What gradually alters in Dorian's lifestyle and reputation?
63. What views does Dorian express about the nature of society? What is his view of human personality? How may his views be affected by his desires?

#### Chapter 12-Chapter 16

64. Why does Basil pay a visit to Dorian?
65. How does Dorian show Basil his soul? Why is it appropriate that only Basil should see Dorian's soul?
66. When Basil realizes that he is seeing Dorian's soul—what does he realize he's been worshipping all these years? Does Basil take responsibility for his own actions?
67. What does he ask Dorian to do with him? Why does Dorian feel as much hatred towards Basil as he does towards the painting?
68. How is the murder described? How does Dorian act immediately after Basil is murdered? How does this make you feel about Dorian?
69. Who was Alan Campbell, and what has been the relationship between Dorian and Campbell? What is their relationship like now? What is noticeable in Dorian's attitude toward his commission of blackmail?

70. How is Campbell's removal of the body both scientific and magical? Can you think of other nineteenth-century texts with a similar mix of science and magic (or the super-scientific)?

71. Where does Dorian go after Alan has removed the evidence? What is the atmosphere and mood at this dinner like? How does knowing what Dorian has done impact how you respond to the witty and light-hearted dinner?

72. What is revealed about Dorian's life in the scene in which Dorian visits the opium den? Who does he meet there? What has happened to Dorian's friends and lovers? What does this tell you about Dorian?

73. By what piece of information does James Vane come to recognize Dorian Gray is the man he wants to kill for the death of Sybil?

74. How does Dorian escape James' attempt on his life?

75. After allowing Dorian to go, what does James learn about Dorian? Who gives him this information? Do you think her current situation may be due to Dorian Gray?

#### Chapter 17-20

76. At Selby Royal, with whom does Dorian? What does Lord Henry tell this young woman? How are his comments ironic?

77. Why does Dorian faint?

78. James Vane is accidentally shot while during the hunting of hare. What was he doing out in the fields?

79. Why is it ironic in Dorian's request that the men not shoot the hare? Why would Dorian suddenly care about the death of an animal when he's been involved in so many evil things?

80. When does he discover that he is safe from James Vane? Do you think that it may be impossible for Dorian to be killed? (We see how he has not aged or gotten ill since he made his wish. Could James' "accident" be something more?)

81. Consider Dorian's life up to the point, and including, the discovery of James' death. Is Dorian a happy man? Why or why not? Give specific examples.

82. Upon returning from the country, Dorian meets with Lord Henry and tells him he has decided to lead a good life. What does Dorian claim is his first "good deed"?

83. Why does Lord Henry laugh at Dorian's good deed? How does Lord Henry show it to be a selfish act? And how does he prove to Dorian that it did not help the other individual? Do you think Dorian did a good thing and that Lord Henry is cynical, or do you agree with Lord Henry? Explain your answer.

84. As Lord Henry and Dorian discuss Basil's disappearance and the rumors of Basil having been murdered, Dorian asks Lord Henry, "What would you say if I told you that I murdered Basil?" What is Lord Henry's response? Remember how much he desires to corrupt Dorian in the first chapters—why can't he recognize the depth of Dorian's corruption?

85. When Dorian returns home, he wants to see if his good deed shows on his soul, so he goes to check the painting. How has the portrait altered? Why is this significant—what does it say about Dorian's self-awareness.

86. The final scene is full of symbolic and ironic elements. Name as many as you can.

87. How does the ending of the novel form an effective closure to the themes raised in the book?

Novel Questions:

88. By focusing on the narcissism of Dorian, does the novel *Dorian Gray* address the virtue of "character" (as in integrity / moral fiber)? Is anyone in the novel of good character?

89. Re-read the Preface regarding art and aesthetic value? Is *Dorian Gray* "just useless art" or does it have the potential to corrupt the reader or does it have a moral? Explain your answer in light of what Wilde asserts in the Preface.

90. Discuss the general representation of women in the novel, (What type of characters are they? Are they central characters? Are they individuals of power? (Who is / who isn't?) Are they concerned with important and significant things?

91. Would you say this book is a novel? A romance? A fable or allegory? What helps reinforce or compensate for the relative lack of dramatic action in the plot?