

Dorian Gray kills Dorian Gray

WARM UP

1. Answer the following questions.

- Does your inner self correspond to your outer self?
- Are you what people see of you?
- What relationship is there between your inner self and your outer self?
- Choose one of the questions above and express your opinion about it. Think also of a character (real or fictional) that can embody your opinion about the issue.

The passage you are going to read is taken from the last chapter of the book and contains its unexpected and shocking conclusion.

He took the lamp from the table and crept upstairs. As he unbarred¹ the door, a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face and lingered² for a moment about his lips. Yes, he would be good, and the hideous³ thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already.

- 5 He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged⁴ the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning⁵ and in the mouth the curved wrinkle⁶ of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome⁷ — more loathsome, if possible, than before — and the scarlet dew⁸ that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and
- 10 more like blood newly spilled. Then he trembled. Had it been merely vanity that had made him do his one good deed? Or the desire for a new sensation, as Lord Henry had hinted, with his mocking laugh? Or that passion to act a part that sometimes makes us do things finer than we are ourselves? Or, perhaps, all these? And why was the red stain larger than it had been? It seemed to have crept⁹ like a horrible disease over the wrinkled fingers. There was blood on the
- 15 painted feet, as though the thing had dripped — blood even on the hand that had not held the knife. Confess? Did it mean that he was to confess? To give himself up¹⁰ and be put to death? He laughed. He felt that the idea was monstrous. Besides, even if he did confess, who would believe him? There was no trace of the murdered man anywhere. Everything belonging to him

- unbarred: aprì
- lingered: rimase
- hideous: terribile
- dragged: tirò via
- cunning: astuzia
- wrinkle: smorfia
- loathsome: terribile
- dew: rugiada
- crept: estesa
- to give himself up: costituirsi alla polizia



► A frame from Oliver Parker's film *Dorian Gray* (2009), starring Ben Barnes.

had been destroyed. He himself had burned what had been below-stairs. The world would simply say that he was mad. They would shut him up if he persisted in his story... Yet it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement¹¹. There was a God who called upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin. His sin? He shrugged his shoulders. The death of Basil Hallward seemed very little to him. He was thinking of Hetty Merton. For it was an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at. Vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that? There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could tell?... No. There had been nothing more. Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognized that now.

But this murder — was it to dog¹² him all his life? Was he always to be burdened by his past? Was he really to confess? Never. There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself — that was evidence. He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest¹³ other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred¹⁴ many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it.

He looked round and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright, and glistened¹⁵. As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead, he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it.

There was a cry heard, and a crash. The cry was so horrible in its agony that the frightened servants woke and crept out of their rooms. Two gentlemen, who were passing in the square below, stopped and looked up at the great house. They walked on till they met a policeman and brought him back. The man rang the bell several times, but there was no answer. Except for a light in one of the top windows, the house was all dark. After a time, he went away and stood in an adjoining portico and watched.

'Whose house is that, Constable?' asked the elder of the two gentlemen.

'Mr Dorian Gray's, sir,' answered the policeman.

They looked at each other, as they walked away, and sneered¹⁶. One of them was Sir Henry Ashton's uncle.

Inside, in the servants' part of the house, the half-clad¹⁷ domestics were talking in low whispers to each other. Old Mrs Leaf was crying and wringing her hands. Francis was as pale as death.

After about a quarter of an hour, he got the coachman and one of the footmen and crept upstairs. They knocked, but there was no reply. They called out. Everything was still. Finally, after vainly trying to force the door, they got on the roof and dropped down on to the balcony. The windows yielded easily — their bolts were old.

When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.

11 atonement: ammenda, espiazione

12 to dog: perseguitare

13 lest: per timore che (arcaico)

14 marred: rovinato

15 glistened: luccicava

16 sneered: fecero una smorfia di scherno

17 half-clad: mezzi vestiti

COMPREHENSION

2. Read the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who is the protagonist of the passage?
- 2 What does he see?
- 3 What does it look like?
- 4 What does he decide to do?
- 5 How does the story end?