

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oscar Wilde was born in 1854, in Dublin, Ireland. He was a famous playwright¹, novelist, poet and wit². His most famous play is *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He wrote nine plays, but he only wrote one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He also wrote some children's stories, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, but he said that they were not written for children, but for all "childlike people".

Wilde's father, Sir William Wilde, was a famous eye doctor. His mother, Jane Francesca Elgee, was a writer. At school, Wilde was very good at Greek and Latin. He won scholarships³ to study Classics first at Dublin College, Ireland and then later at Oxford University, England. After his graduation Wilde moved to London to live with his



friend Frank Miles, a popular portrait painter. In 1881, he published his first collection of poetry.

In 1882, Wilde sailed to New York for a lecture⁴ tour of America. On his arrival, he famously said to a New York customs official⁵, "I have nothing to declare but my genius." He lectured on the importance of beauty in the decoration of your house, in the choice of your furniture and in the clothes you wear.

In 1884, Wilde married Constance Lloyd. They had two sons. In 1887, he became the editor of a new monthly fashion magazine, *The Lady's World*. Wilde continued to write and, although many of his works shocked the Victorian society of the time, they were very popular. Wilde's success, however, suffered because of scandal⁶ in the 1890s. In 1895 he was arrested and spent two years in prison. Oscar Wilde died a poor man in 1900.

- 1 **playwright**: person who writes plays for the theater
- 2 **wit**: clever and funny person
- 3 **scholarships**: money given to good students to help them study
- 4 **lecture**: type of talk or lesson
- 5 **customs official**: person who checks nothing illegal comes into a country
- 6 **scandal**: shocking event that makes people angry

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a gothic horror story (see Exercise 8, page 12), and it is the only published novel written by Oscar Wilde. When it first appeared in a monthly magazine in 1890, it was criticized. Wilde then made a lot of changes to the story. The new story was published as a novel in 1891. Again, it was criticized, and it caused scandal at the time. Wilde's wife, Constance said, "Since Oscar wrote *Dorian Gray* no one will speak to us." W.H. Smiths, the famous bookseller, refused to sell the book, but despite the controversy, it was still very popular.

Oscar Wilde was a successful playwright and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is written more in the style of a play than a

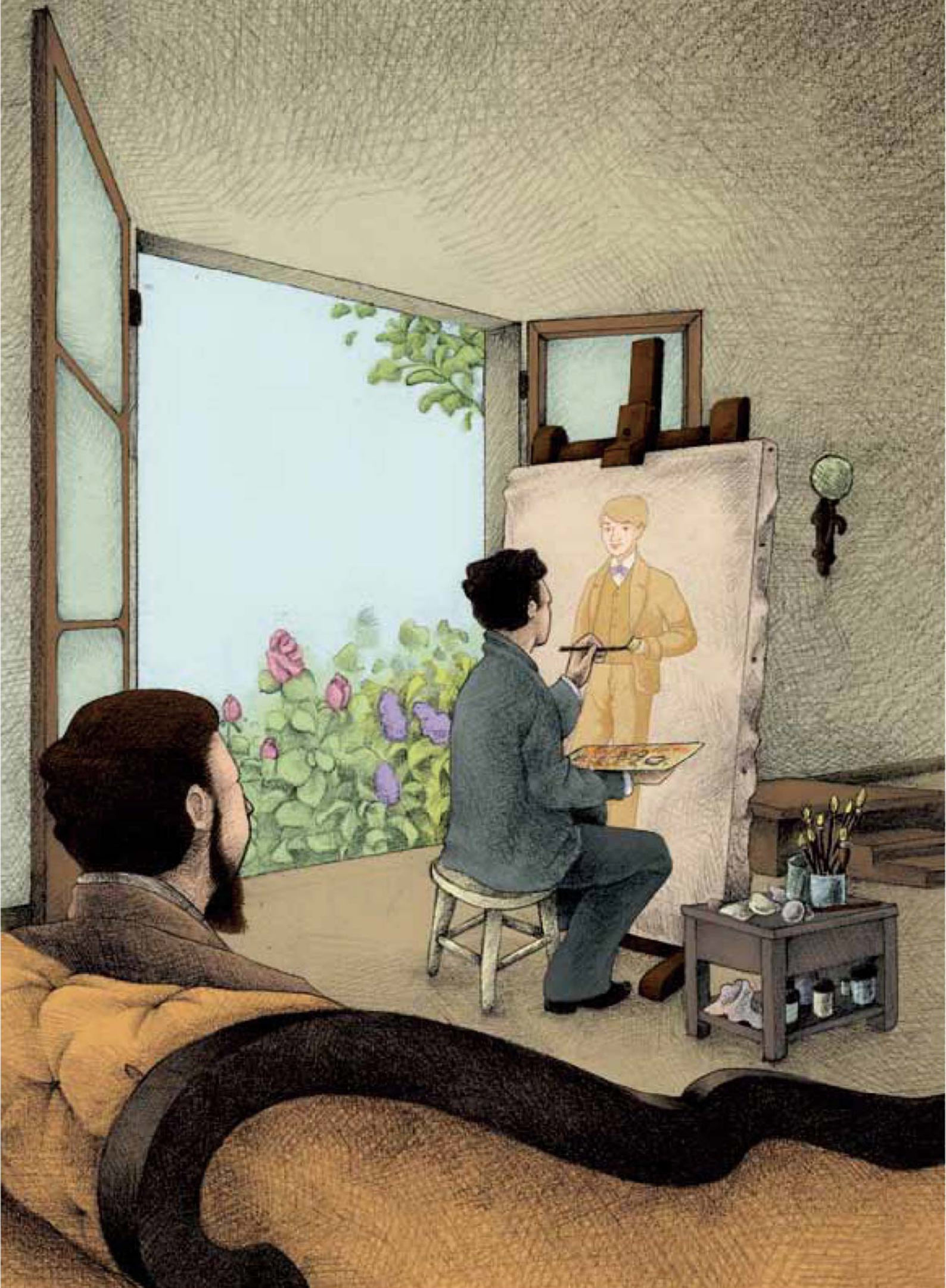


novel. There is more dialogue than description and the novel focuses on the witty¹ conversations between its three main characters: Basil Hallward, the artist, Lord Henry Wotton, his wealthy² friend, and Dorian Gray, a handsome young man.

One of the main themes of the novel is the emptiness of worshipping³ beauty and pleasure. Life, Lord Henry Wotton says in the novel, should be lived for beauty and pleasure and not for duty⁴. He encourages Dorian Gray to enjoy himself. He tells Dorian he should make the most of his youth and beauty before they fade⁵. Dorian Gray takes his advice and leads a selfish, hedonistic⁶ life. In the end, he realizes his mistake but it is too late. He has destroyed his soul⁷.

The novel has always been very popular and thirteen film versions of it have been made to date⁸. Marvel Comics made an illustrated adaptation of the novel in 2007.

- 1 **witty**: cleverly funny
- 2 **wealthy**: rich
- 3 **worshipping**: adoring
- 4 **duty**: things one must do
- 5 **fade**: decrease
- 6 **hedonistic**: where you think only of pleasure
- 7 **soul**: mind, character, thoughts and feelings
- 8 **to date**: up until the time of printing



Chapter 1



A lovely scent of flowers filled the studio¹. The light summer wind blew through the trees in the garden, and in through the open door. Lord Henry Wotton was lying on a divan².

In the center of the room, there was a portrait of a very beautiful young man. In front of it, sat the artist, Basil Hallward.

"It's your best work, Basil," said Lord Henry. "You must send it to a gallery."

"I won't send it anywhere," Basil answered.

Lord Henry looked at him in surprise. "Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow³, why?"

"I know you'll laugh at me," Basil replied, "but I can't exhibit⁴ it. There is too much of *me* in it."

Lord Henry laughed. "Too much of *you* in it! The portrait doesn't look like you at all. You have a strong face and coal-black⁵ hair. This young man is made out of ivory and rose petals. He never thinks. I'm sure of that. He's some brainless⁶ beautiful boy. You aren't like him at all."

"You don't understand me, Henry," answered Basil. "Of course, I don't look like Dorian Gray."

1 **studio**: place where an artist works

2 **divan**:



3 **fellow**: man

4 **exhibit**: show to the public

5 **coal-black**: very black, like coal

6 **brainless**: stupid



"Dorian Gray? Is that his name?" asked Lord Henry.

"Yes, that's his name. I didn't want to tell you."

"But why not?"

"Oh, I can't explain. When I like people, I never tell their names to anyone. I love secrecy. It's the one thing that can make modern life mysterious. I suppose you think I'm foolish¹."

Lord Henry laughed and pulled out his watch. "I must go, Basil," he said. "But before I go, you must answer my question."

"What is that?" asked Basil.

"Why won't you exhibit Dorian Gray's picture? I want the real reason."

1 foolish: not sensible; stupid

2 sitter: somebody who sits for an artist to paint his/her portrait



"Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter². I don't want to exhibit this picture because it shows the secret of my soul³."

Lord Henry laughed. "And what is that?" he asked.

"Two months ago, I went to a party at Lady Brandon's. After about ten minutes, while I was talking to overdressed⁴ ladies and boring academics, I suddenly felt that someone was looking at me. I turned, and I saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I went pale. I felt that there was about to be a terrible crisis in my life.

³ soul: mind, character, thoughts and feelings

⁴ overdressed: wearing clothes that are too smart or too formal



"I was afraid, and I turned to leave the room. I walked quickly to the door. But, I bumped into¹ Lady Brandon, who pulled me back into the party and I found myself face to face with the young man. I asked Lady Brandon to introduce me to him."

"And how did Lady Brandon describe this wonderful young man?" asked Lord Henry.

"Oh, something like this. 'Charming² boy—I forget what he does—maybe he doesn't do anything—oh, yes, he plays the piano—or is it the violin, dear Mr Gray?' We both laughed, and we became friends at once."

"Laughter is a good beginning for a friendship, and it's the best ending for one," said Lord Henry.

"Tell me more about Mr Dorian Gray, Basil. How often do you see him?" continued Lord Henry.

"Every day. I need to see him every day."

"But I thought you only cared about your art."

"He is my art to me now," said Basil. "The work I've done, since I met Dorian Gray, is the best work of my life."

"Basil, this is extraordinary! I must see Dorian Gray."

Basil got up from the chair he was sitting on, and he walked up and down the room. He thought for a while and then he said, "Henry, Dorian Gray gives me inspiration. But you might see nothing in him."

"Then why won't you exhibit his portrait?" asked Lord Henry.

"I don't want to show my soul to the world."



“Poets are not like you. Poets know a broken heart sells many books.”

“I hate them for it,” cried Basil. “An artist should create beautiful things, but he shouldn’t put anything of his own life into them. Nowadays men use art as a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty. That’s why the world will never see my portrait of Dorian Gray.”

Art

- What do YOU think? Should art be autobiographical or just beautiful?
- Can you think of or find any examples of autobiographical art? Discuss in groups.

“I think you’re wrong, Basil,” said Lord Henry. Then he added, “My dear fellow, I’ve just remembered.”

“Remembered what, Henry?”

“Where I heard the name, Dorian Gray.”

“Where was it?” asked Basil, with a frown³.

¹ **bumped into**: met by chance

² **charming**: likeable; very attractive

³ **frown**: angry facial expression



"Don't look so angry, Basil. It was at my aunt, Lady Agatha's house. She told me about a wonderful young man. He's helping her in the East End¹, and his name's Dorian Gray. She said that he was very serious and kind."

"I don't want you to meet him, Henry."

Just then, the butler² came in.

"Mr Dorian Gray is in the hall, Sir," he said.

"You must introduce me now," cried Lord Henry, laughing.

Basil looked at Lord Henry. "Dorian Gray is my dearest friend," he said. "Your aunt was right about him. Don't spoil³ him. Don't try to influence him. Your influence will be bad."

"Nonsense⁴!" said Lord Henry, smiling. "Show him in," he added to the butler.

Bad influence

- Do you think people or friends can have a good or bad influence on each other? How? Discuss with a partner.

1 **East End:** poor area of London in Oscar Wilde's time

2 **butler:** most important male servant in a big house

3 **spoil:** (here) change somebody's good character

4 **nonsense:** that's not true; that's silly