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MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Student's Worksheet

Some Outstanding British Authors

—

Oscar Wilde, William Styron

Oscar Wilde (1856 – 1900)

A _____ is a man who places enormous importance upon physical appearance, sophisticated language, elegant clothes and manners.

Read the citation of Wilde's words. Does it tell you anything else about his personality?

I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best.

Task Two:

Life

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin into a family of an outstanding doctor and studied in Dublin and Oxford. After leaving the university he settled in London, where he married Constance Lloyd in 1884. Influenced by the French theory of "l'art-pour-l'art", connected with decadence and elegant dandyism, he became a founder of the aesthetic cult and lectured on aesthetics in London. He proclaimed that art cannot be judged by any moral attitudes but only by its purely aesthetic values. So he refused using art for depicting social and political problems. Following the success of his comedies, Wilde was greatly admired by London society. Known for his biting wit, spectacular dress, and glittering conversation, Wilde became one of the best-known personalities of his day. However, in 1895 he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment of hard labour for homosexuality. He came out of prison as a broken man, and afterwards was living in poverty in France where he soon died on November 30, 1900.

Writing

Under the influence of French literature, Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), a decadent but stylistically perfect novel. When published, Wilde's only novel was criticized as scandalous and immoral. In his sophisticated fairy-tales, e.g. *The Happy Prince*, *The Selfish Giant* and *The Nightingale and the Rose* from *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888),



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Wilde shows his deep sympathy for the poor and unhappy. His essay *De Profundis* (published 1905) consists of autobiographical notes from prison, with growing interest in serious problems of human existence.

In his conversational comedies he made witty but sharp criticism of English high society and proved to be a master of the paradox (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, 1892, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895, *An Ideal Husband*, 1895). Although these plays relied upon relatively simple and familiar plots, they rose well above convention with their brilliant dialogue and biting satire. Therefore their genre is called conversational comedies.

Some Interesting Facts about Wilde's Tomb

In 1909 his remains were moved to Père Lachaise Cemetery, inside Paris. His tomb was designed by Sir Jacob Epstein. The modernist angel depicted as a relief on the tomb was originally complete with male genitalia which have since been vandalised; their current whereabouts are unknown. In 2000, Leon Johnson, a multimedia artist, installed a silver prosthesis to replace them.

In 2011, the tomb was cleaned of the many lipstick marks left there by admirers, and a glass barrier was installed to prevent further marks or damage.

(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde)

Task Four:

Read the text about Wilde's most famous work and the only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Then answer the questions below the text.

A painter, Basil Hallward, paints a most beautiful portrait of his muse, the handsome young man named Dorian Gray. During the last session of painting, completely innocent Dorian meets Basil's friend Lord Henry Wotton, who opens his eyes to the fact that his beauty will pass one day and tells him that he should enjoy life to the fullest. Upon the finishing of the portrait, Dorian wishes out loud that the painting would grow old, and not he. Because of Lord Henry's influence, Dorian starts looking for passion and falls in love with a young actress, Sibyl Vane. When she falls in love with him, however, she realizes the falseness of her stage life and performs very poorly in front of Basil and Lord Henry when they come to meet her; Dorian is completely disappointed, loses all love for her, and breaks the engagement. He goes home to find that the painting has become slightly more cruel-looking, and the next morning, just after making a decision to go back and marry her anyway, finds out that Sibyl has killed herself. The painting fills him with fear and he locks it up in a room in his house.

Dorian finds a certain joy, over the next years, in committing sinful deeds and watching the painting change; he loses neither his beauty nor youth, but the painting grows old and ugly. When Dorian is thirty-eight, he runs into Basil, having not seen him for a long time, and finally shows him what has happened to his portrait. Basil is horrified and Dorian kills him, and has an old friend of his burn the body and get rid of the evidence.

Dorian becomes increasingly anxious and fearful that someone might discover his secret, and goes to an opium den to try to erase his bad feelings. Sibyl's brother, James, who

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has been searching for him for eighteen years, knowing only that his sister called him Prince Charming, finds Dorian and threatens his life. He lets him go when Dorian tells him to look closely at his face; he could not have been more than twenty years old. While at a hunting party a few days later, a man is accidentally shot and killed, and Dorian finds out that this man was James. He decides that from this time on, he will be good; and to do this, he must get rid of the constant anxiety and fear he has been feeling - he must destroy the portrait. He stabs it, with the same knife he used to kill Basil, and when the servants enter they see the portrait as it was when it was new, and a horrible, old, ugly man lying dead on the floor.

John Fowles

(1926 – 2005)

Task Five:

Read the text.

John Fowles was an English novelist and essayist, much influenced by both Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and critically positioned in postmodernism.

In his novels, he often reflects tension between reality and fiction and he speculates about the nature of fiction.

His first novel, *The Collector* (1960), can be read as a thriller in which a young clerk, Frederick Clegg, a sexually repressed sociopath, uses his inherited money to kidnap and imprison (“to collect”) a beautiful girl of higher class, a student of art Miranda, whom he loved. The novel can be also interpreted as the parallel, or parody, to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, to which it often alludes. However, the novel has much more interpretations as it is typical for postmodern prose.

The greater part of *The Collector* deals with the psychological conflict between Miranda and her captor as they are two opposite types of people. Actually, this is the main theme of the novel. Miranda is a free spirit, educated, artistic and open minded while Clegg represents all small envious people who choose to live just for themselves. Through this conflict, the author expresses his ideas about society, sexuality and the sense of life. The experienced reader will also appreciate a unique structure of the story, which is presented from both Clegg’s and Miranda’s points of view. The first part of the novel gives us the story (what happened), which is retold from Clegg’s point of view: the story of choosing Miranda as the best “exhibit” of his collection of butterflies, which is his hobby; buying of an old isolated house, making preparations by renovating the cellar into a prison then finally the act of kidnapping Miranda. However, Miranda is not the submissive, passive person during her imprisonment; in every aspect she exceeds Clegg’s narrow-minded personality.

Miranda’s diary she keeps in the cellar forms the second part of the novel. We learn her thoughts, her values (beauty and freedom) she appreciates above all else, and her complicated relationship with Clegg, whom she pities on one hand and hates on the other



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hand. Although Miranda unsuccessfully attempts to escape several times, she never gives up. Finally, she becomes seriously ill and dies. We leave Clegg looking for another “exhibit”.

After leaving Oxford, Fowles taught at a school on the Greek island of Spetsai, which inspired *The Magus*, an instant bestseller that agreed with 1960s "hippie" anarchism and experimental philosophy. This was followed by *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, set in Victorian England in 1867. Its basic plot deals with the love affair between Charles Smithson, a modern Victorian gentleman, and a mysterious Sarah Woodruff, who is supposed to be the mistress of a French Lieutenant. Fowles expresses doubt about the Victorian morals and manners and compares them to the present ones, some parts of the novel resemble sociological essay. At the end of the novel, he even offers three alternative endings to his readers.

Later fictional works include *The Ebony Tower*, *Daniel Martin*, *Mantissa*, and *A Maggot*.

Fowles was named by the *Times* newspaper as one of the 50 greatest British writers since 1945.

Vocabulary:

position - zařadit

allude – narážet

envious – závistivý

submissive – poslušný

exceed – převyšovat

values – hodnoty

pity – litovat

attempts – pokusy

exhibit – exponát

instant – okamžitý

resemble - připomínat

Now make notes under these headings:

Author:

life data

influence

literary period

most popular books

The Collector:

1st published

genre

main theme



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main characters

brief characteristics of the main characters

plot

structure
