

English 11 HONORS

Summer Reading 2010

READ THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BOOKS AND THE GUIDING QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING EACH BOOK.

Keep the questions at hand as you read and take notes, in the books, if they are yours, or on paper (a reading journal).

Assessment – first full day of classes:

You will be asked to respond to a choice of short essay questions dealing with *all three* novels. Think about how all three novels are related; what are their similarities? What are their major differences? The guiding questions below will help you formulate your thoughts about each novel.

THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE by Robert Louis Stevenson

ABSTRACT: Stevenson’s 1886 novel focuses on the dichotomy present in Victorian society and in human nature—the duality of life and death, good and evil, demons and angels. He presents the monstrous for the reader to consider on many levels, including the personal. His characters initially lack self-knowledge; they fail to understand the duality of human existence. It is up to the reader to “solve the mystery” of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Scottish poet, essayist, and author Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) studied to be a lawyer but soon turned to writing travel stories, essays, and short stories for popular magazines. He had suffered from tuberculosis since childhood, so he moved often, searching for a healthful climate and writing continually as he traveled. He is perhaps best known for his adventure stories *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*; his reputation as a writer declined shortly after his death, but today he is held in high regard for his originality, moral vision, and the power of his writing.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHILE READING

1. Many characters are used symbolically; look for and consider the symbolism.
 2. Signification, or naming, is one indication of Stevenson’s theme or message. Based on names, what are the issues and the related themes in this novel?
 3. What is the message here about self-knowledge or about hypocrisy?
 4. Think about the plot and characters and any possible relationship to the Victorian understanding of Darwin’s theory of evolution (contrary to Creationism).
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PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY by Oscar Wilde

ABSTRACT: This 1891 work reflects Wilde’s view of repressive Victorian society and its hypocrisy. While similar in some ways to *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Wilde’s only novel is more disturbing, presenting a bourgeois society moving toward self-destruction as represented by Dorian himself. Wilde addresses the creative power of art, the duality of human nature, and the dichotomy of good and evil. Murder and monstrosity dominate, but unlike Stevenson’s work, there is no glimmer of hope.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wilde (1854-1900), an excellent student, was educated at Trinity College in Dublin and then, on scholarship, at Magdalen College in Oxford. In 1884, he married, soon had two children, and embarked on the most creative phase of his life. He wrote children's stories, his only novel (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* - 1891), and then his first play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*. With this work, he found his niche and from then on wrote for the theatre. He was known for his flamboyance and wit, both of which are very evident in his plays. In 1895, Wilde was accused of homosexuality and sued his accuser. This proved to be the beginning of the end of his career and his life. He dropped the case but was then convicted of gross indecency and spent two years in prison; his wife and children moved to Switzerland and changed their last name. His career was over. He wandered through Europe and died of meningitis from an ear infection.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHILE READING

1. Note any symbolism.
 2. What is Wilde saying about Victorian society?
 3. In what way might the word "monstrous" describe the characters, the plot, or this novel as a whole?
 4. Who are the real victims? Why?
 5. What is most disturbing about this story?
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***TURN OF THE SCREW* by Henry James**

ABSTRACT: This 1897 work reflects James' fascination with ghost stories, but not the harem scarem BOO kind of ghost. James's ghosts are terrifyingly close to reality, so close that the reader might question, and doubt, his or her perception. The story concerns a governess and her young charges at Bly, an English country home. A major question debated by critics is: Are there really ghosts at Bly, or are they the product of the governess's insanity? What, exactly, is the "corruption" that she fears threatens the children? This novella addresses not only the issue of corruption of the innocent (forbidden subjects) but also isolation, responsibility, misdirected heroism, and sanity. Good and evil are again in the forefront, and, like Wilde's novel, subtle references to sexual impropriety are veiled in the ubiquitous Victorian shroud of ambiguity. This psychological novella is a masterpiece of narrative technique.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Henry James (1843-1916) was born in the US but is considered by most to be a British author, essayist, and critic—he became a British citizen in 1915. His father (Henry James, Sr.) was an eminent theologian and intellectual, his brother (William James) the distinguished American philosopher. His family put great emphasis on education, so he and his brother were educated by private tutors as the family toured the major cities of Europe. He moved to London in 1876, where he wrote prolifically. He retired to East Sussex in 1897 but lectured across the US in 1904. His dissatisfaction with the America's lack of response to WW I prompted him to become a British citizen.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHILE READING

1. Note any symbolism.
2. What specific techniques does James use in this narrative? How does he create suspense and mystery?
3. Look up the definition of Gothic Novel. In what ways is *Turn of the Screw* a Gothic Novel? In what ways not?
4. What might be the reason for Miles' dismissal from school?
5. How might be the nature of the children's corruption?

- 6. Is the governess sane?**
- 7. What is most disturbing about this story?**