

To: Students taking *Literature 12 Honors*

The summer reading for *Literature 12 Honors* is **The Picture of Dorian Gray** by Oscar Wilde. More famous for The Importance of Being Earnest, Wilde penned The Picture of Dorian Gray as an exploration of morality—a concept that he struggled with himself. Looking at this text (and its title), many of you may be inclined to mistakenly dismiss this book as a dreary, boring text best left moldering on the shelves of your local library. However, I think that many of you will become interested in the text once you read the first few pages, explore the setting, and meet the characters of the novel. Something lies beneath the surface of the text, and Wilde hints at it even as the story begins.

Although many of you are accustomed to “marking a text” using the traditional or formalist approach, we will be exploring many of the “new modes of criticism” and applying them to the literature that we read in class. To get you ready, I am asking that you mark certain elements that will help to facilitate our initial conversations about the new modes of criticism. You *do not* have to mark formalist elements (symbolism, foreshadowing, etc.).

This text was selected because it takes place during a time period (The Victorian Era) which saw a great deal of upheaval in the areas of social and political reform, so it should be easy to locate and highlight:

- Passages from the text that relate directly to the Victorian (and specifically Wilde’s) view of women. Note both the third person commentary and the dialogue spoken to, by, or about women in *Dorian Gray*.
- Passages from the text that denote economic class, or one’s social and/or financial standing in society. Consider to what degree class affects respectability, responsibility, exposure to corruption, etc. Additionally, consider what opportunities are available based solely upon financial status.
- Passages from the text that reveal the inner workings of the title character’s mind, and his own internal struggle with trying to balance his or her wants and desires against the concepts of morality and decency.
- Passages from the text that demonstrate the value that Wilde’s England (and its citizens) seemed to place upon the arts (art, music, literature, etc), education, government, and law. In other words, highlight passages that seem to be a window to the Victorian view of everyday life.

While I do not plan to collect the books to check your marking, the assessments for this unit (the subsequent essay and test) will focus on **both** the plot and the aforementioned elements. Above all else, enjoy both the book and your summer vacation. I’ll see you in September!

Sincerely,

*Mr. Shimon*