

Bishop Challoner School



English Literature Pre-Course Tasks

Task 1: Research the context

Using The British Library's website is a fantastic way to explore the history of literature and language in Britain. Choose one (or more) of the following areas:

- Medieval Literature - <https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature>
- Shakespeare and Renaissance - <https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare>
- Restoration and the 18th Century - <https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18thcentury-literature>
- Romantics and Victorian - <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians>
- 20th Century - <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature>

Task 2: Analysing texts

The Picture of Dorian Gray is one of the texts you study during your two year English Literature A-Level. The text was first published in 1890 and later revised and re-published in 1891; it was considered to be a scandalous text and was used as evidence against Oscar Wilde in court. Below are two extracts from the text which show very different aspects of London.

Annotate each extract in detail considering what it presents about the setting but also the characters mentioned.

Consider the following questions to help you annotate both extracts:

- What type of studio do you think it is? What type of person might own the studio? (Ch1)
- What type of environment is the character in? What does it tell us about the wealth/class of the character?
- What senses are used? What effect do they have?
- What is the general mood/ atmosphere created?
- What do you notice about the structure of the text?
- What vocabulary or references do you not know? Look up and write the definitions around the extract.

Chapter 1

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear

the burden of a beauty so flamelike as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid, jaded faces of painters of Tokyo who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion.

The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.

- **Write a paragraph outlining your initial thoughts on this chapter.**

Chapter 4

I will tell you, Harry, but you mustn't be unsympathetic about it. After all, it never would have happened if I had not met you. You filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life. For days after I met you, something seemed to throb in my veins. As I lounged in the park, or strolled down Piccadilly, I used to look at every one who passed me and wonder, with a mad curiosity, what sort of lives they led. Some of them fascinated me. Others filled me with terror. There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations. . . . Well, one evening about seven o'clock, I determined to go out in search of some adventure. I felt that this grey monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins, as you once phrased it, must have something in store for me. I fancied a thousand things. The mere danger gave me a sense of delight. I remembered what you had said to me on that wonderful evening when we first dined together, about the search for beauty being the real secret of life. I don't know what I expected, but I went out and wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black grassless squares. About half-past eight I passed by an absurd little theatre, with great flaring gas-jets and gaudy play-bills. A hideous Jew, in the most amazing waistcoat I ever beheld in my life, was standing at the entrance, smoking a vile cigar. He had greasy ringlets, and an enormous diamond blazed in the centre of a soiled shirt. 'Have a box, my Lord?' he said, when he saw me, and he took off his hat with an air of gorgeous servility. There was something about him, Harry, that amused me. He was such a monster. You will laugh at me, I know, but I really went in and paid a whole guinea for the stage-box. To the present day I can't make out why I did so; and yet if I hadn't-- my dear Harry, if I hadn't--I should have missed the greatest romance of my life. I see you are laughing. It is horrid of you!"

- **Write a paragraph outlining your ideas on this chapter.**
- **Try and answer the following question:** Compare how Wilde presents the world of the aristocracy and the world of the working class, in these two extracts. Pay close attention to Wilde's language choices, used for effect.