

The Picture of Dorian Gray NEA Knowledge Organiser (A Level English Literature A – AQA)					
Characters	Dorian: the eponymous protagonist whose Faustian pact unravels. Initially his youthful good looks are linked with purity, but he is corrupted by vanity and Lord Henry’s teachings Basil: Dorian’s conscience, literally speaking as the creator of the picture that records his sins and metaphorically as the friend who tries to encourage him to repent his sins. Likely in love with him Lord Henry: the devil on Dorian’s shoulder, a beguiling socialite full of poisonous theories about living a life of pleasure. Lord Henry’s name is an aptronym: “old Harry” is a synonym for the devil. Lady Victoria Wotton: Henry’s long-suffering wife receives a divorce eventually but the details remain unknown. Adrian Singleton: another example of the damaging effects Dorian can have on mind and body.		Sybil Vane: a radiant young actress who briefly offers Dorian a different path but is discarded as collateral damage in “Prince Charming’s” grand quest for the greatest sensations life has to offer. James Vane: Sibyl’s younger brother who vows to hurt anyone who hurts her. Eighteen years later, Dorian’s youthfulness allows him to temporarily escape James’ revenge before a hunting party accidentally kills him. Lord Kelso: Dorian’s cruel maternal grandfather Alan Campbell: seduced by and then ruined by Dorian, he is blackmailed into using his brilliant scientific skill to dispose of Basil’s body.		
	Aspects of Gothic Literature		Characteristic of Victorian Literature		
Mystery, suspense and fear Dorian’s paranoia at being discovered Ominous Atmosphere and Setting Soho Supernatural The end, when Dorian dies and his dead body is old and wrinkled, and the picture recovers its old state magically Villain Dorian? Lord Henry? Emotional Distress Sybil’s heartbreak and suicide Anti-hero Dorian Faustian Pact/ bargain with the devil Dorian says “I would give my soul” for the privilege of being young for the rest of his life. Secret room The schoolroom used to be a study and a play-room for Dorian when he was a child, and was locked to secure bad memories. Description features typical gothic elements: Old books, mice, faded tapestries, windows rattling in the wind and a smell of mildew. Motif of locks appears frequently in Gothic novels, in this instance, the room is used to lock away the painting. Doppelganger-motif the portrait Sudden break-out of violence Dorian murders Basil ‘Bad’ science Dorian blackmails Alan Campbell to get rid of Basil’s dead body by dissolving it and also Lord Henry seems to treat Dorian as the subject of an experiment Magical objects and the total dedication to things the Yellow Book and the portrait		Serialization -a work of fiction that is published in sequential pieces called instalments Extended the temporal experience of reading novels. Spreading the cost made it more affordable to the masses Industrialization - the industrial revolution spurred massive social, political, and economic change. Attracted and repelled by this transformation, writers produced an explosion of work Class -pre-set social categories into which one is born: a process of collective identity formation and consciousness: something determined by how one makes a living: a state of mind shaped by intimate experience: a rhetorical construct and set of social representations: or a matter of extreme material differences between poverty and wealth Science vs. Religion -New scientific theories such as Darwin’s Origin of the Species (1859) challenged Genesis in particular. Some scientists worked these new discoveries into their existing belief systems. Others used them as an opportunity to challenge a number of societal orthodoxies Nostaleia - from the 1840s through 1870s, authors increasingly turned to nostalgic representations of the past as a means of coping with the abundance of cultural and social changes during this revolutionary period The Woman Question - While many women would increasingly demand more political and legal rights and greater economic and social opportunities, the period also saw the increasing identification of women with the domestic sphere. Patmore’s poem “The Angel in the House” (1854), consolidated this ideal of the domestic angel, the idea of the perfect woman as submissive to her husband, meek, powerless, and deeply spiritual. Utilitarianism - a well ordered society should seek to secure ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number		Vocabulary	
		• aesthetics: principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty. • aphorism: a pithy observation which contains a general truth • Brevity: shortness in time • Candour: honesty or directness, whether refreshing or distasteful • Capricious: tending to make sudden unexpected changes • Conjecture: the formation of judgments or opinions on the basis of incomplete or inconclusive information • Connoisseur: an expert in fine or domestic arts, or somebody with discriminating taste in such a specialty • Debauch: to persuade somebody to behave in an immoral way • decadence: moral or cultural decline as characterized by excessive indulgence in pleasure or luxury • degradation: process by which something is made worse • egotistical: excessively conceited or absorbed in oneself • Ennui: weariness and dissatisfaction with life that results from a loss of interest or sense of excitement • etiquette: the customary code of polite behaviour in society • Faustian pact: a pact whereby a person trades something of supreme moral or spiritual importance, such as personal values or the soul, for some worldly or material benefit, such as knowledge, power, or riches. The term refers to the legend of Faust a character in German folklore and literature, who agrees to surrender his soul to an evil spirit after a certain period of time in exchange for otherwise unattainable knowledge and magical powers that give him access to all the world’s pleasures • Feign: to make a show or pretence of something • Hedonism: a devotion to pleasure and happiness as a way of life • Ignoble: dishonourable and contrary to the high standards of conduct expected of somebody • Induce: to persuade or influence somebody to do or think something • iniquity: immoral or grossly unfair behaviour • materialistic: excessively concerned with material possessions; money-oriented • melodramatic: behave or show emotion in ways that are more extreme than usual as in a melodrama - a sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions • muse: a person or personified force who is the source of inspiration for a creative artist – relates to Greek and Roman mythology, each of nine goddesses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, who preside over the arts and sciences • Panegyric: extravagant praise delivered in formal speech or writing • paradox: a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true • Petulant: ill-tempered or sulky in a peevish manner Profligate: extremely extravagant or wasteful • redemption: the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil • Sordid: demonstrating the worst aspects of human nature such as immorality, selfishness, and greed • Tremulous: shaking, trembling, or quavering, e.g. from fear or nervousness • vengeance: the act of or desire for revenge •			
Historical Context					
In July 1890 <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> was first published in <i>Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine</i> . It was published as a book, in an expanded version, in 1891. Many regard the former to be superior and consider the latter to be the result of padding and artistic compromises that had to be made to meet the demands of Wilde’s publishers. Original publication was branded ‘immoral’. A revised publication included the author’s claim in the preface that ‘There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.’ Wilde was a famous aesthete: someone who values the superficial beauty of art above all else. Wilde railed against restrictive Victorian codes and conventions whilst enjoying the privileged life of an upper class, white male. His witty plays were widely celebrated. This was his first and only novel. He was jailed for indecency at a time when homosexuality was illegal.					
Preface	Plot	Quotations	Brief Analysis	Compares Well to...	
	0 Epigrams on the function of the critic, the nature of art and the role of the artist in c19	There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.	First substantial addition to the story as it appeared in Lippincott’s magazine. It was inserted partly to anticipate and rebut accusations of ‘immortality’. Manifesto-like, Satirical . Provocative	Candide by Voltaire American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis The Secret History by Donna Tartt	
1	0 Sensuous, descriptive opening that is Eden-like in its imagery	‘white daisies were tremulous’ ‘Lord Henry, pulling the daisy to bits with his long, nervous fingers’	Natural imagery: Innocent, natural and simple flower destroyed carelessly by Lord Henry foreshadows his impact on Dorian	Lord of the Flies by William Golding On The Road by Jack Kerouac	
	0 Lord Henry, visiting Basil Hallward’s studio, sees the artist’s painting of Dorian Gray	‘young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus’	Literary allusions link Dorian both to beauty and arrogance and its fall. Both died through rejecting others and living for themselves alone	Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis	
	0 Basil refuses to sell a work that contains so much of himself	‘Harry! if you only knew what Dorian Gray is to me!’	Influence. Exclamations underlining the strength of emotion	Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman	
	0 He is reluctant to let Lord Henry meet Dorian, but Dorian arrives at the studio	‘You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose.’	Lord Henry is associated with artifice and hypocrisy here. He will arguably engineer Dorian’s denigration while protecting himself. Basil tuns Lord Henry’s own epigrammatic style of speech on him here	The Graduate by Charles Webb The Secret History by Donna Tartt	
	0 Each of the key themes of the novel are introduced: dangerous beauty, tragedy, innocence, influence, class, secrecy, vanity, appearance v. reality, opulence	‘I quite sympathize with the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders. The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property, and that if any one of us makes an ass of himself, he is poaching on their preserves.’ ‘Dorian Gray is my dearest friend,” he said. “He has a simple and a beautiful nature...Don’t spoil him. Don’t try to influence him. Your influence would be bad.’	Wilde presents Lord Henry as a detached and refreshingly witty contrast to the earnest Basil. In his use of satire here he manages to condescend both the working classes and his own social peers. His discrimination of the lower classes is evident in the triplet here	Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Lord of the Flies by William Golding The Secret History by Donna Tartt	
2	0 Lord Henry talks to Dorian about the pursuit of pleasure and tells him that his youth and beauty are precious	‘there is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral’ ‘a look had come into the lad’s face that he had never seen there before’ ‘life suddenly became fiery coloured to him’	Influence is once again repeated here – foregrounded by Wilde suggesting it is central to the novel. The impact of the influence is then centred. The change on Dorian’s face and dangerous imagery	Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe On The Road by Jack Kerouac The Secret History by Donna Tartt	
	0 Looking at the finished painting, Dorian wishes it could grow old in his place, saying he ‘would give [his] soul for that!’	‘his finely chiselled nostrils quivered, and some hidden nerve shook the scarlet of his lips and left them trembling’ ‘the sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation’ ‘a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a knife’	Semantic field of dangerous beauty. Trace the descriptions of Dorian’s lips, frightened here, throughout the remainder of the novel Biblical imagery. Continues Wilde’s worshipful language to describe Basil’s feelings towards Dorian. Cyclical structure and violent simile	On Beauty by Zadie Smith Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh	
	0 We learn Dorian’s family history	‘Grace was his, and the white purity of boyhood, and beauty such as old Greek marbles kept for us. There was nothing that one could not do with him. He could be made a Titan or a toy. What a pity it was that such beauty was destined to fade’	Wilde presents Dorian as a romantic orphan . He was raised by his cruel Grandfather in lonely conditions, which might be why he expresses so few opinions and is a ‘blank slate’ Traditionally, his beauty and innocence should secure him a happy ending. Unusually, he is already wealthy	The Secret History by Donna Tartt Shame by Salman Rushdie American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis On The Road by Jack Kerouac	
3	0 Dorian chooses Lord Henry over Basil				
	0 We meet Lord Henry’s wife	“I don’t think I am likely to marry Harry. I am too much in love. That is one of your aphorisms. I am putting it into practice, as I do everything that you say” ‘He thought of his friend’s young, fiery-coloured life and wondered how it was all going to end’	Wilde demonstrates Lord Henry’s influence of Dorian here by having him parrot Lord Henry’s language and explicitly state his mirroring . Repetition of the phrase that relates to dangerous beauty – the image is at once bright, striking, fleeting and deadly. Lord Henry’s detached consideration of Dorian’s end is presented as callous.	The Secret History by Donna Tartt On The Road by Jack Kerouac Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Shame by Salman Rushdie	
4	0 Dorian is in love with Sibyl Vane.				
	0 Lord Henry considers this turn of events in his ‘Dorian’ experiment				
5-6	0 Sibyl’s family discuss Dorian.	‘Prince Charming rules life for us now’ ‘I know what pleasure is...it is to adore someone’	Dorian is idealised and romanticised and the class difference between the two characters is underlined. Dorian retreats from Lord Henry’s teachings and finds meaning instead in Sibyl. However, his love for her is grounded in her ability to inhibit multiple people, suggesting a confused identity	The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh Shame by Salman Rushdie	
	0 Dorian discusses her with Basil and Lord Henry				
7	0 Sibyl’s acts poorly and Dorian leaves her. The painting changes	‘a touch of cruelty in the mouth’ ‘touch of cruelty in the mouth’	Repeated phrase within two pages. The physical manifestation of Dorian’s changing personality. Supernatural/ Magical realism. Track the mouth	Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis	
8	0 Dorian looks at the painting again. He feels guilty and decides to re-propose to Sibyl	‘Was it all true? Had the portrait really changed? Or had it been simply his own imagination that had made him see a look of evil where there had been a look of joy? Surely a painted canvas could not alter? The thing was absurd. It would serve as a tale to tell Basil some day. It would make him smile.’	Wilde’s use of a series of interrogatives show Dorian to be questioning the mystery of the seemingly magical/ supernatural painting. The collocations used to describe his doppelganger here seek to underline the change in Dorian’s characterisation. The reference to telling Basil to make him smile is foreboding.	American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter Shame by Salman Rushdie Enduring Love by Ian McEwan	
	0 Sibyl has died by suicide	‘you must not be mixed up in it. Things like that make a man fashionable in Paris. But in London people are so prejudiced, Here, one should never make one’s debut after a scandal’	Satire at work here, with the reputation of the upper classes being given greater importance than the lives of the working classes. Reputation was also mentioned at the opening of the novel in relation to Basil	Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman Shame by Salman Rushdie Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman	
	0 Lord Henry persuades Dorian not to reproach himself, and Dorian sees Sibyl’s death as a beautiful romance	‘real pleasure in watching it’ ‘most magical of mirrors’	Intensifier and verb make the painting seem like a play. Superlative and alliteration of m create a pleasurable mm sound emphasising Dorian’s joy	Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis	
	0 Dorian decides to take advantage of the painting’s power and live as he pleases	‘I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry’	Basil once again uses biblical language to describe his love for Dorian	Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman	
	0 Basil confesses his love to Dorian	‘Even those who had heard the most evil things against him - and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs - could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world’	Wilde’s use of the superlative here shows the power of Dorian’s beauty. It protects him and his reputation. Though gossip surrounds him, it is not believed. Themes of truth v. reality and secrecy as well as reputation apply here. Victorian atti.	The Secret History by Donna Tartt Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh Shame by Salman Rushdie Enduring Love by Ian McEwan	
9-12	0 Dorian hides the portrait and reads the Yellow Book				
	0 Dorian lives a hedonistic life for 18 years, money and beauty offering him some protection				
13	0 Dorian shows Basil the painting	‘I made a wish, perhaps you would call it a prayer’ ‘This is the face of s satyr’ ‘It is the face of my soul’	Biblical imagery – is Dorian taunting Basil? Connection to the worshipful imagery of the portrait’s introduction	The Secret History by Donna Tartt Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe	
	0 Basil urges Dorian to repent	‘suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas whispered into his ear by those grinning lips’	Sudden bursts of violence and intense emotions as is typical of Gothic texts. Influence but this time of the painting, has it become more than simply a ‘magical mirror’ of what is? Does it now have an agency of its own, or is it reflecting Dorian’s true desire? ‘Whispered into his ear’ is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s poison imagery. Violent verbs portray urgency and intensity	The Secret History by Donna Tartt Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Enduring Love by Ian McEwan	
	0 Dorian murders Basil and hides the evidence	‘he rushed at him, and dug the knife onto the great vein...crushing the man’s head down on the table and stabbing again and again’			
	0 Dorian finds the address of a scientist who can dispose of the body	‘took out the key and returned... locking himself in as he did so’	Secrecy – locking himself in – trying to hide who he truly is.	The Secret History by Donna Tartt	
		‘a faint smile passed across his lips, as though he had been lost in some delightful dream’	Dorian’s peacefulness echoes his reaction after Sibyl’s death. His lips portray happiness and this is reinforced through alliteration	The Secret History by Donna Tartt	
14-17	0 Dorian blackmails Alan into helping him	‘You have gone from corruption to corruption, and now you have culminated in crime’	Consonance and repetition emphasise Dorian’s degradation. His immortality arguably peaks at this point	American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Lord of the Flies by William Golding	
	0 Dorian goes to an opium den	‘bitten lips of Dorian Gray’	Lip image here is corrupted, broken. Connotations of sensuality and worry	Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman	
	0 Dorian is called ‘Prince Charming’ and is attacked by James Vane, but his ‘youth’ saves him				
	0 Dorian is called ‘Prince Charming’ and is attacked by James Vane, but his ‘youth’ saves him				
	0 James follows Dorian to the country	‘Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason’	Echoes of the preface here and connections to ideas of aestheticism . Here we get an insight into how ugly Dorian has become. Using the name ‘Prince Charming’ to conduct his second life is cruel. This chapter has many reminders of the characters he has destroyed on his journey to hell	Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh The Secret History by Donna Tartt	

18 19	O Dorian is scared and paranoid O James Vane is accidentally killed	'When he closed his eyes, he saw again the sailor's face peering through the mist-stained glass, and horror seemed more to lay its hand upon his heart'	Dorian is no longer at peace now that it seems his past actions may have caught up with him. Typical gothic images are created through semantic fields of fear and secrecy are highlighted here	American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Enduring Love by Ian McEwan Lord of the Flies by William Golding
	O Dorian declares he has changed O Dorian accuses Lord Henry of 'poisoning' him with a book	'You are quite perfect. Pray, don't change' 'I determined to leave her as flower-like as I found her'	Contrasts with Basil's prayers for Dorian to repent. Plosive alliteration Simile echoes early descriptions of Dorian prior to Lord Henry's influence	American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis Candide by Voltaire
	O Dorian destroys a mirror, blaming beauty for corruption Portrait reveals his hypocrisy O Dorian stabs the painting O His old and ugly body is discovered. Painting restored	'The curves of your lips rewrite history' 'his beauty had ruined him. His beauty and the youth that he had prayed for' 'his beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery'' in hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness' 'monstrous soul-life' 'he seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it'	Darkly ironic . Written by a lover, Dorian's sensuality is dangerous Challenging shallow Victorian beliefs that beauty is an indication of goodness. Dorian realises he has used his beauty as a disguise. Repetition emphasises themes of beauty and appearance v reality Painting has become both conscience and evidence of his crimes Cyclical structure of simile when he first sees portrait. Accidental suicide	Call Me By Your Name by Andre Aciman American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis The Secret History by Donna Tartt Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe American Psycho by Bret Easton-Ellis
Big Ideas				
A Marxist reading of the text draws our attention to whose story is being told; it centres on the experience of the upper class. The ideology of the class is expressed quite clearly throughout, and both Lord Henry and Dorian produce nothing that might be considered useful to wider society – Lord Henry producing only his protégé and Dorian curating his own life as a piece of art. Instead, they both benefit from the work of others (Basil, Lord Henry's brother). Sibyl is Dorian's working-class counterpart. Working class characters disappear without a trace			A psychoanalytical reading of the text might unpeel the layers of narcissism evident within the text. The portrait is a reflection of Basil's own love for Dorian. It invites Dorian to view that love. Instead Dorian emulates Narcissus's' desire to possess the person he sees reflected in the water, and sees only love for himself. Lord Henry also 'projects one's soul' into Dorian, moulding his 'intellectual views' and 'temperament' to mirror his own. In the early Victorian period it was felt that people had an inherent character, but later science and art explored the idea of personality, and in particular multiple personalities	
Future Learning		Prior Knowledge	Cross Curricular Links	
Victorian literature and Gothic literature modules appear on most English university courses. May of Wilde's plays are also studied. Analytical skills will be useful for an Arts subject and careers such as Law.		Gothic traits Y7 & Y8 Knowledge of Shakespeare Y7- Dickens, Y8 –; Fear and Fascination Y9 – The Woman in Black, Y10 – Jekyll and Hyde Knowledge of the tragic genre Y9 – Romeo and Juliet, Y10 - Macbeth		
Links				