UNTERRICHTS MATERIALIEN

Englisch Sek. II



Unlocking Oscar Wilde – A teaching unit on his life and work

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RAABE,
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Survey of topics and methods

Main focus	pre-reading activities	language	working with the text	comment / discussion	creative writing	listening comprehension	further activities	Material
■ The development of Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ■ Parallels between Wilde's life and work	•	•	•	•			•	Topic 1 ■ Extract from Richard Ellmann's biography of Oscar Wilde
■ Language and style of the extract ■ Characterisation of Dorian Gray ■ The relationship between Dorian and Sybil		•	•	•	•		•	Topic 2 ■ Extract from Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
■ The Aesthetic movement ■ The relationship between Algernon and Lane ■ The use of symbols in the play ■ Social class divide in Britain	•	•	•	•			•	Topic 3 ■ Extract from Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* ■ Photograph: "Toffs and Toughs" by Jimmy Sime
■ Language and style of the story ■ The moral of the story		•	•	•			•	Topic 4 ■ Wilde's short story "The Selfish Giant"
■ The context of the poem and the reasons why Wilde wrote it ■ The pros and cons of death penalty	•	•	•	•			•	Topic 5 ■ Extract from Wilde's poem "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"

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Unlocking Oscar Wilde: A teaching unit on the life and work of Oscar Wilde



Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on October 16, 1854, to parents who were well-known, distinguished Anglo-Irish intellectuals. His mother Jane was, in the words of Wilde's biographer, Richard Ellmann "no ordinary person". A poet, an orator and a nationalist, much of her son's wit, talent and conviction came from her. His father was a prominent doctor and was knighted for his efforts. He, too, was a writer of some achievement. At first, Oscar was educated at home and by the age of ten he was fluent in German and French. He then went to Portora Royal School for boys, followed by some years at Trinity College, where he was the outstanding student in his year and won the Berkeley Gold medal in Greek. This all-round talent in the Classics, languages and literature would accompany Wilde for the rest of his life and help make him one of Ireland's most famous literary voices. He was also destined to become a leading light in the aesthetic movement of the 1880s and 1890s as well as London's most famous wit and the most celebrated writer of the day.

Tragically, Oscar Wilde also went on to become the man whose fall from grace dominated news headlines and court reports over a series of sensational court cases in the closing decade of the 19th century. These cases centred on his love for a young man, Alfred Douglas, and Wilde's high-profile fight with Alfred's father, the Marquis of Queensbury. It was a fight he never stood a chance of winning and one which cost him his health, fame and wealth. His friends advised him to flee to the safety of his beloved France, a country that would become his final resting place, before he could be prosecuted. This he declined to do. His rejection of the offer of freedom in Paris was partly due to his determination to save Alfred Douglas from disgrace and imprisonment but it also came from his conviction that he could talk himself out of any situation.

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make sure Alfred stopped seeing Wilde. Wilde found himself caught in the bitter fight between father and son and, egged on by Alfred, eventually took the Marquis to court for libel. After Wilde's release from prison, the two men met again and spent some time living together in Naples but Alfred Douglas gave the penniless Wilde limited help. Eventually Douglas returned to England and Wilde died in Paris.

The Marquis of Queensbury (1844–1900) is famous as the man who introduced rules to the sport of boxing but also for his role in the downfall of the Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde. Single-handedly, he brought Oscar Wilde to his knees and paid detectives, famous lawyers and criminal figures to make sure Wilde was sent to prison. Queensbury died in 1900 some months before Wilde passed away in Paris. Just like his adversary, he converted to Catholicism shortly before he died.

Oscar Wilde's religious conversion: Shortly after birth, Oscar Wilde was baptised at the local Church of Ireland (Anglican) church and he converted to Catholicism shortly before his death in Paris. Throughout Oscar Wilde's life, sin, suffering, love, redemption and conscience were matters to which he gave great thought. His novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the short stories for children, contain elements of all of these themes. Considering that *The Selfish Giant* was published in 1888 and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* in 1898, we can see that religious topics dominated his work at many stages of his career. In the last years of his life, the issues of sin and suffering came to the fore. At a physical, emotional and spiritual level, Wilde was suffering greatly, particularly during his court cases and his two year stay in Reading Gaol. On his release, he met Alfred Douglas again but their relationship was under a great strain and they went separate ways. While in Italy with Robbie Ross in 1900, Wilde attended Mass and made papal visits until eventually he was baptised by a French priest in the hours before his death in Paris.

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