



SOME WILDE'S WORKS

Match the names of Oscar Wilde's major works with their summaries.

(1) *The Importance of Being Earnest*

(2) *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

(4) *LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN*

(3) *An Ideal Husband*

(5) *Salome*

A) As the subtitle reads, it is "*A Play About a Good Woman*". Like many of Oscar Wilde's dark comedies, it is a biting satire on the morals of Victorian society, particularly marriage. An upper-class lady discovers that her husband may be having an affair with another woman. She confronts her husband but he instead invites the other woman, Mrs Erylne, to her birthday ball. Angered by her husband's unfaithfulness, the lady leaves her husband for another man. In the end, Mrs Erylne follows Lady Windermere and attempts to persuade her to return to her husband as she does not want to be responsible for the break-up of her marriage. She sacrifices herself and her reputation in order to save the marriage.

(adapted from www.wikipedia.com)

B) This comedy is an attack against late Victorian social values. The plot revolves around blackmail and political corruption. Its main character, Sir Robert Chiltern is a rising political star and well-off. He has a beautiful and loving wife Gerturde. His life seems perfect, but all this is threatened when Mrs Cheveley appears in London with evidence of his inglorious past. As a young man, he sold cabinet secrets to a stock-exchange speculator. As the comedy unfolds, we find out that the man thought to be a perfect man and husband is flawed.

(adapted from www.guardian.co.uk and other sources)



C) This *comedy of manners* by Oscar Wilde tells the story of two young gentlemen who lead double lives to add some excitement to their otherwise respectable but dull lives in Victorian England. Jack Worthing has a country estate where he has to take care of a young beautiful ward Cecily. He pretends to have a brother Ernest who causes a lot of problems, and who he therefore needs to visit in London. Jack also wants to propose to Gwendolen, his friend's, Algernon Montcrieff's cousin. Algernon, himself, pretends he has an invalid friend named Bunburry, whom he needs to visit from time to time (which is what he calls "bunburying"). Hearing about the beautiful ward, Algernon decides to go Jack's house as Ernest! Things go really bad when both friends end up in a country house and their deceptions are discovered.

(adapted from www.sparknotes.com and www.cinema.com)

D) This tragedy by Oscar Wilde was originally written in French, and was translated and published in English three years later. The play tells in one act the Biblical story of the stepdaughter of Herod Antipas. She dances at the birthday party of her stepfather so beautifully that Herod offers to give her whatever she desires. She requests the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter. This story has been taken up by many writers, but Oscar Wilde's version remains the most popular to this day.

(adapted from www.enotes.com)

E) It is the only novel by Oscar Wilde. It tells the story of a young man of great beauty. When he meets Lord Henry Wotton, Lord Henry inspires him with a vision of life of beauty and sensual pleasures and free from ethical or moral concerns. Another of his friends, the artist Basil Hallward, awakens his vanity. After admiring a portrait of himself painted by Basil, he declares that he would give his own soul if he could remain eternally young while the portrait grows old. He gets his wish, and the picture shows the gradual disfigurement of his soul as he sinks into a life of degradation and crime. After many years, he decides that from this time on, he will be good, but to do this he must get rid of the anxiety and fear he feels when he sees the portrait. He stabs it with a knife and falls dead. When the servants enter they see the portrait as it was when it was new, and a horrible, old, ugly man lying dead on the floor.

(adapted from www.enotes.com)



Teacher's Notes and Answer Key

Depending on the level of your students, you may need to pre-teach some vocabulary, eg. ward, deception, vanity, disfigurement, inglorious, stock-exchange, to sink into, to stab with a knife.

Then, ask your students to read the titles and descriptions and match them. Check answers.

Answers:

1C, 2E, 3B, 4A, 5D,

Follow-up:

Oscar Wilde has written 9 plays. Ask your students to find out some other plays and what they were about. They can find works by Oscar Wilde on www.oscarwildecollection.com.