

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

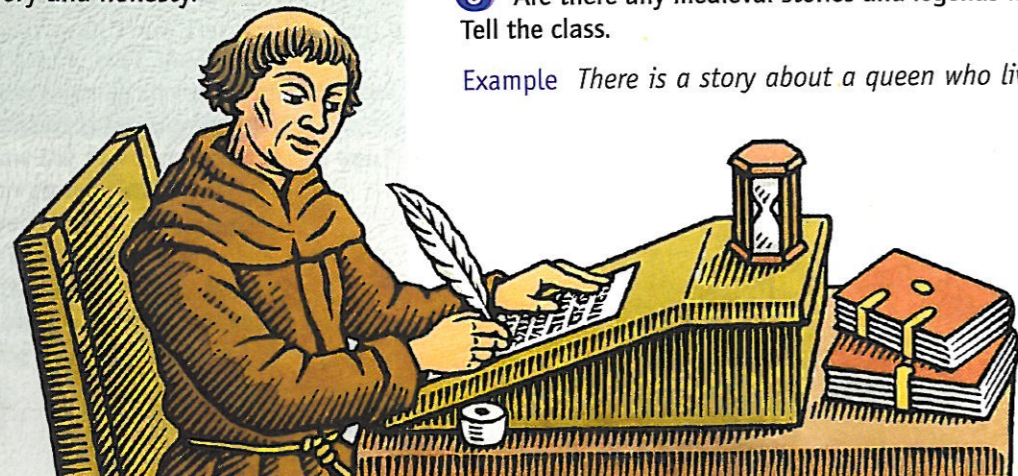
BACKGROUND

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was written by an unknown English poet towards the end of the fourteenth century. This was a very important time for the English language. After the Norman conquest in 1066, French was the main language for the aristocracy and for government.

However, English gradually became dominant and the late fourteenth century saw a remarkable flowering of English literature, with great writers like Geoffrey Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*) and William Langland (*Piers Plowman*).

During this period, as all Europe was going through the horrors of the Black Death, England was involved in the Hundred Years' War with France (1337–1453) which helped to develop a feeling of English national identity.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a classic example of Arthurian literature, popular in Europe in the later middle ages. The story is about the knightly values of bravery and honesty.



Literature Spot 1

Before you start

- 1 Read the historical background to the story. What was happening in *your* country during this period?

Reading and Listening

- 2 Read and listen to the story. Order the sentences below.

Example 1 f

- a) The Green Knight didn't cut off Sir Gawain's head.
- b) Gawain went back to Camelot, but he was unhappy.
- c) Sir Gawain and the lord agreed to exchange everything they received.
- d) Sir Gawain cut off the Green Knight's head.
- e) Ten months later, Gawain went to look for the Green Knight.
- f) When King Arthur was celebrating Christmas, a strange knight arrived.
- g) The Green Knight picked up his head and got on his horse.
- h) Sir Gawain stayed with the lord of a castle.
- i) A lady visited Sir Gawain and kissed him.
- j) The last day she gave him a belt but Gawain said nothing to the lord.

- 3 Read the story again and answer these questions:

- 1 Why did the Green Knight want to play this 'game' at King Arthur's court?
- 2 What were the conditions of the 'game'?
- 3 Who was the lord of the castle?
- 4 Why did Gawain not give the lord the belt?
- 5 Why did the Green Knight use his axe three times?
- 6 Why was Sir Gawain unhappy at the end?

- 4 What was the real purpose of the game? What does the story show us about medieval attitudes to violence and honour?

- 5 Look through the story and choose five words that are new for you. Check the meaning in the Mini-dictionary and write them in your vocabulary books.

Speaking

- 6 Are there any medieval stories and legends in your country? Tell the class.

Example *There is a story about a queen who lived in ...*



It

was New Year at the court of King Arthur. The King, Queen and all the knights of the Round Table were celebrating. Suddenly the door opened and everybody turned round. A knight rode into the room on a magnificent horse. The knight and his horse were completely green!

The strange green knight got off his horse and spoke. 'I know that King Arthur and his knights are famous for their bravery. I have come to test their bravery with a little game. Here is my axe. One of you brave knights must try to cut off my head. But, next year, on the same day, I will try to do the same to that knight.'

A brave and honest knight, Sir Gawain, stood up and said: 'I will do it.' With no hesitation, he took the axe and cut off the Green Knight's head. Then the strangest thing happened. The Green Knight picked up his head, got on his horse and left the room!

Ten months later, Sir Gawain went off to find the Green Knight. He came to a magnificent castle. The lord of the castle invited him to stay for the New Year. Sir Gawain and the lord made an agreement. They agreed to give each other anything they received.

The next day, the lord of the castle went out hunting. Sir Gawain stayed in bed. Suddenly, the lady of the castle, the lord's wife, came into his room. She was beautiful. She kissed Sir Gawain and then left. When the lord of the castle

returned, he gave Sir Gawain a deer he had caught. Sir Gawain gave the lord a kiss.

The next day the same thing happened. On the third day, the lady of the castle kissed Sir Gawain and then gave him a special belt. She said it would save his life. Sir Gawain did not give the belt to the lord of the castle because he thought it might be useful when he went to see the Green Knight.

On New Year's day, Sir Gawain went to meet the Green Knight. As they had agreed, the Green Knight took the axe. He was going to cut off Sir Gawain's head, when suddenly he stopped. He tried a second time, but again stopped. The third time, he cut Sir Gawain's neck a little, but didn't hurt him.

Sir Gawain was angry. He said: 'Why did you try three times? We agreed only once!' The Green Knight told him that he was, in fact, the lord of the castle. 'I didn't cut you the first two times because you were honest for two days! But on the third day, you didn't tell me about the belt. So I had to cut you!'

Sir Gawain returned to King Arthur's court. He was sad because he had not been honest. He decided to wear the belt around his neck for the rest of his life. He told King Arthur: 'When I become arrogant, I can look at the belt and remember that I am not a perfect knight.'



Literature Spot 2

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BACKGROUND

Charles Dickens (1812–70) was one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century. His father was put in prison for debt, so Dickens had to start work when he was very young.

He began writing for popular magazines and became famous with *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), a collection of amusing stories about the eccentric Mr Pickwick and his friends. Dickens' most famous novels include *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861). These books have very good stories which criticise Victorian society.

A Christmas Carol (1843) only took a month for Dickens to write. The short story contains a very strong moral about the importance of generosity and compassion and symbolises all the good things of Christmas.



Before you start

1 Read about Charles Dickens. Have you read any of the books mentioned or seen films of them?

Reading and Listening

2 Look at the pictures in the story. What do you think happens to the main character?

- a) He has some bad dreams on Christmas Eve but when he wakes up he feels the same as before.
- b) He meets some eccentric people, but in the end he has a good Christmas.
- c) He is visited by four ghosts on Christmas Eve, who make him change his attitudes to life.

3 Read the story very quickly and check your answer.

4 Read and listen to the story. Match the characters with the actions.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 Scrooge | a) appeared and told Scrooge about the three ghosts |
| 2 Scrooge's nephew | b) showed Scrooge what was going to happen to him |
| 3 Scrooge's ex-partner, Jacob Marley | c) showed Scrooge the Cratchit family Christmas dinner |
| 4 The Ghost of Christmas Past | d) arrived late on the day after Christmas |
| 5 The Ghost of Christmas Present | e) invited Scrooge for Christmas dinner |
| 6 The Ghost of Christmas Future | f) showed Scrooge his life when he was young |
| 7 Bob Cratchit | g) enjoyed Christmas day and started to be generous |

5 Now order the actions in Exercise 4.

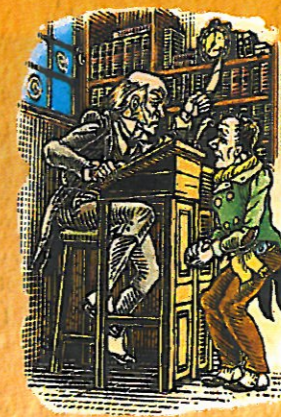
Example 1 *Scrooge's nephew invited him for Christmas dinner.*

6 Read the story again and answer these questions.

- 1 How did Scrooge change in the story?
- 2 Why did Marley want to help Scrooge?
- 3 Why was Scrooge unhappy when he saw his past?
- 4 Why was he sad when they visited the Cratchit family Christmas?
- 5 What did the Ghost of Christmas Future show Scrooge?
- 6 What did Scrooge do on Christmas Day and the day after?
- 7 What is the moral of this story? Do you agree with it?

7 Look through the story and choose five important words that are new for you. Check the meaning in the Mini-dictionary and write them in your vocabulary books.

It was Christmas Eve. Ebenezer Scrooge was in his office, the office of Scrooge and Marley. His clerk, poor Bob Cratchit, was working. Suddenly, Scrooge's young nephew came into the office.



'Hello uncle. Merry Christmas!' he said happily. 'Do you want to come and have Christmas dinner with us tomorrow?'

'Christmas?' Scrooge replied. 'Bah! Humbug!' Scrooge hated Christmas and he refused his nephew's invitation for dinner on Christmas Day.

His nephew went away. Later two men came to the office, asking for money for the poor.

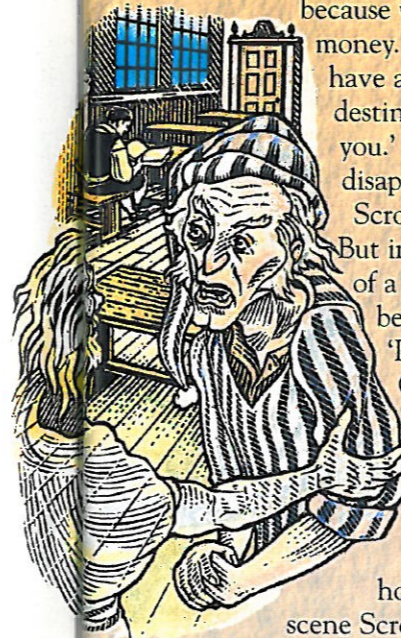
'Bah! Are there no prisons for these people?' Scrooge refused to give even a penny.

Then, when it was time to close the office, Bob Cratchit asked for the day off, because it was Christmas.

'All right,' Scrooge said, 'but be here early the next morning!'

That evening Scrooge was sitting in front of his fire at home when, suddenly, he saw a ghost in front of him. 'Who are you?' Scrooge asked nervously.

'In life, I was Jacob Marley, your partner. I am wearing these chains and I can never be in peace, because when I lived, I only thought about money. But I am here to help you. You have a chance to escape my terrible destiny. Tonight three ghosts will visit you.' Then the ghost of Marley disappeared.



Scrooge went to bed and fell asleep. But in the night he woke up. The figure of a strange old man appeared near his bed.

'I am the Ghost of Christmas Past. Of your past,' it told Scrooge. The ghost took Scrooge to scenes of Christmases from the past. In one scene Scrooge saw himself as a boy at school. He was reading a book. All the other boys had gone home for Christmas. In another scene Scrooge saw himself as a young man.

He was talking to his girlfriend, who he didn't marry because she didn't have any money. Scrooge began to feel sadder and sadder.

'Stop! Show me no more!' he cried. Finally the ghost brought him home and Scrooge fell asleep again. Later that night, Scrooge woke up again.

'I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look at me!' said the second ghost, laughing. He was a large man with a beard, wearing a green robe. He took Scrooge to the house of Bob Cratchit and his family. It was cold in the house and Bob and his family were sitting around a very small Christmas pudding.

'What a wonderful pudding. Merry Christmas everyone!' cried Bob.

Scrooge felt sad, because he could see how poor the Cratchits were. Bob's smallest child, Tiny Tim, was weak and ill. The ghost finally took Scrooge to a very poor area of London. There were two poor children out in the street.

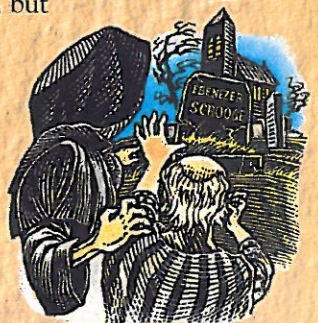
'Can't we do something to help these children?' he asked the ghost, who repeated what Scrooge had said before.

'Are there no prisons?' The ghost laughed and disappeared.

Then, the third ghost appeared. He was dressed in black and looked ...

'Are you the Ghost of Christmas Future?' Scrooge asked nervously.

The ghost did not answer. It took Scrooge and showed him scenes of the future. In one, people were talking about Scrooge's death, but not one person was unhappy about it. The ghost also took him to the Cratchit family. The family was very sad. The little boy, Tiny Tim, had died.



The next morning, Scrooge opened his window and asked, 'What day is it today?'

'Why sir, it's Christmas Day,' replied a young boy in the street.

Scrooge was very happy. He gave money to the boy to buy an enormous turkey for the Cratchit family. Then he went out into the street.

'Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!' He wished everybody he saw Merry Christmas. He met the man who had asked for money for the poor and gave him a large sum of money. Scrooge then went and visited his nephew and had the best Christmas dinner in his life. The next day he went to his office early. He waited for Bob Cratchit.

'You are late!' said Scrooge in an angry voice.

'Yes, I'm very sorry ...' replied poor Bob.

'In that case, I'm afraid I'm going to ... increase your salary! Merry Christmas, Bob!'

From that day, Scrooge was the happiest man in the world. He gave money to the poor. He helped Bob Cratchit's family.

And people always said of him: 'He knew how to celebrate Christmas.'





Literature Spot 3

The Pearl

BACKGROUND

John Steinbeck (1902-68) was born in California. After university, he had several different jobs. He worked on farms looking after cattle or picking fruit. Many of Steinbeck's novels and stories were about the hard lives of farming families in California, like *Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937). His most famous book, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), was about a poor, migrant family in the terrible period of economic depression of the 1930s. Other famous works include *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *Cannery Row* (1945) and *East of Eden* (1952). Many of Steinbeck's novels were later made into Hollywood films. Steinbeck was given the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962.

The Pearl is an old Mexican folk story which Steinbeck tells with his characteristic understanding and love of humanity.

Before you start

1 Read about John Steinbeck and answer these questions.


- 1 What kind of people did Steinbeck write about?
- 2 What experience did he have of their lives?
- 3 In what period did Steinbeck write a lot of his most famous novels?

2 The three animals below are important in the story. Match them with the definitions.

oyster, scorpion, coyote

- 1 a kind of wild dog
- 2 a small sea animal that lives in a shell and produces pearls
- 3 a creature like a large insect that has a poisonous sting

Reading and Listening

3  Read and listen to the story. Order the sentences below.

Example 1 h

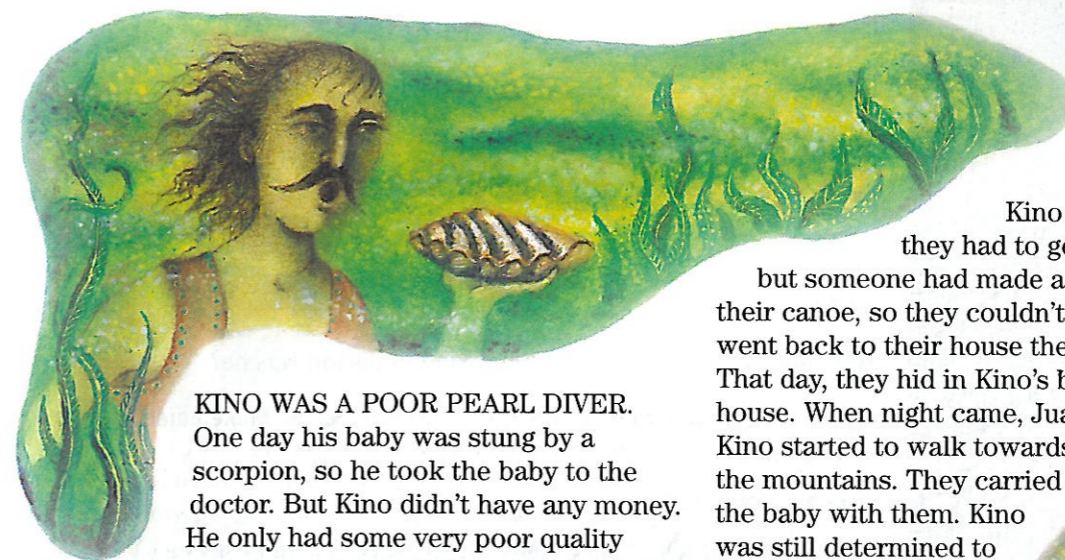
- a) The hunters thought there was a coyote. One of the hunters shot and killed the baby.
- b) The following day, Kino tried to sell the pearl in the main square of the town.
- c) Somebody burnt down their house and they had to hide.
- d) They left the town and started to walk to the capital.
- e) That day, when he was diving, Kino found an enormous pearl.
- f) Someone tried to get into their house in the middle of the night.
- g) Some men attacked Kino and he killed one of them with a knife.
- h) One day Kino's baby was stung by a scorpion, so he took the baby to the doctor.
- i) In the end, Kino threw the pearl back into the sea.
- j) Some hunters followed Kino and Juana into the mountains.

4 Read the story again and answer these questions:

- 1 Why did the doctor refuse to treat their baby?
- 2 Why did he visit them later that day?
- 3 Why did people try to get into Kino and Juana's house?
- 4 Why was Kino unhappy with the price the dealers offered him?
- 5 Why did he decide to go to the capital?
- 6 Why did the hunters follow them?
- 7 Why did Kino and Juana throw the pearl back into the sea?

5 Read the story again. Which of these do you think is the best moral to the story?

- a) money only brings unhappiness
- b) poor people can never win
- c) society is very unfair
- d) we should not exploit the sea



KINO WAS A POOR PEARL DIVER. One day his baby was stung by a scorpion, so he took the baby to the doctor. But Kino didn't have any money. He only had some very poor quality pearls. The doctor didn't want to treat the baby, so the doctor's servant lied to Kino: 'The doctor has gone out.'

That day, Kino went diving for pearls. When he was diving he saw a very large oyster. He swam down and down and picked up the oyster. Then he came to the surface. He took his knife and opened the shell of the oyster. Inside, there was an enormous and beautiful pearl – the greatest pearl in the world!

Kino and his wife Juana were very happy. Now they would have enough money to educate their son and maybe buy new clothes and even a rifle. The news of the pearl spread through the town very quickly. That evening, lots of neighbours came to their house and they talked about what Kino and Juana could do with the money.

The doctor and his servant also came to the house, because they had also heard about the pearl. The doctor made Kino and Juana afraid about the scorpion sting. He gave the baby medicine, which he said would save him. The doctor looked around the house, because he knew that the pearl would be hidden somewhere there.

In the middle of the night, while Kino and his family were sleeping, Kino suddenly heard a noise. Someone was trying to get the pearl! In the darkness, Kino jumped up with his knife but someone hit him on the head and ran away. The next morning he took the pearl to the pearl dealers in the main square of the town. There were many dealers but they all worked for one man and they always gave the divers the lowest possible price for their pearls. Kino went to different dealers but they all said that the pearl was too big and ugly and that it wasn't worth more than 1,500 pesos.

Kino was very angry. He decided to go to the capital city because he knew that the pearl was very valuable. But that night someone attacked him outside his house. Juana said that the pearl was evil and that it was going to destroy them. She tried to throw the pearl into the sea, but Kino stopped her. Soon afterwards, he was attacked in the darkness by a group of men. He defended himself with his knife and killed one of the men.

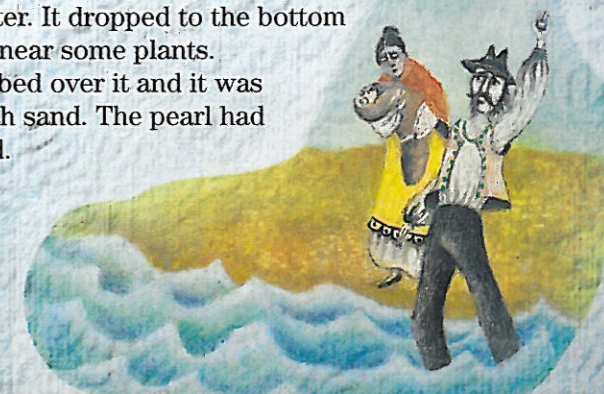
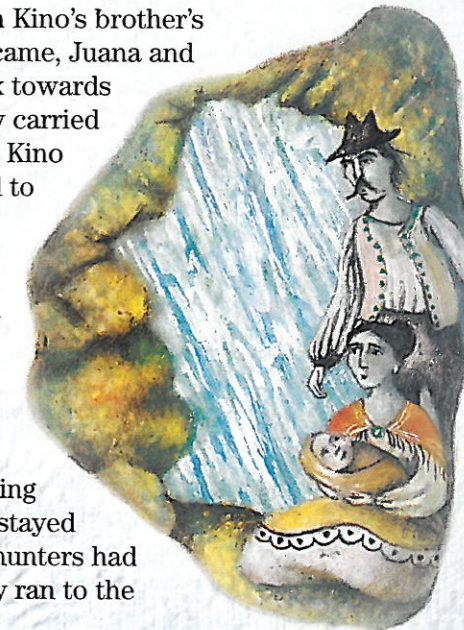
Kino and Juana knew that they had to get away from the town but someone had made a hole in the bottom of their canoe, so they couldn't go by sea. When they went back to their house they found it in flames.

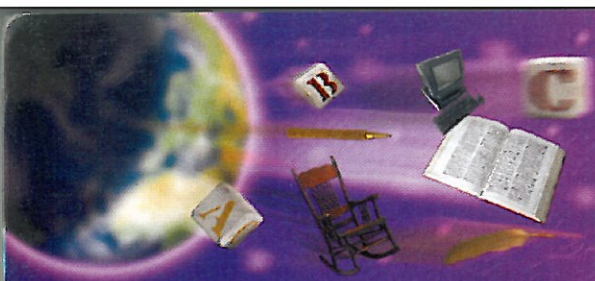
That day, they hid in Kino's brother's house. When night came, Juana and Kino started to walk towards the mountains. They carried the baby with them. Kino was still determined to sell the pearl and kept making plans about the future. During the day, they found a place to hide. They were resting when they saw that three hunters were following them. They hid and stayed very quiet until the hunters had gone past. Then they ran to the mountains.

High in the mountains, they found a stream and a waterfall. They drank water and then decided to hide in one of the caves under the waterfall. That evening, the hunters arrived and camped next to the waterfall. Juana had difficulty keeping the baby quiet, so Kino decided to go down and try to kill the men. He was just about to attack them, when the hunters heard the baby. They thought that it was a coyote.

A man fired his rifle just as Kino attacked. Kino then took the man's rifle and killed the other men. But suddenly everything went very quiet and Kino knew that something was wrong. He went back to the cave. The baby was dead! He had been hit by the first rifle shot. Kino and Juana walked back to the town carrying the body of their dead baby. They walked slowly. The people came out to meet them but Kino and Juana ignored everybody. They walked towards the sea. Kino took out the pearl. It was grey and ugly, and in the pearl he could see evil faces. He offered the pearl to Juana but she said softly: 'No, you.'

Kino took the pearl and threw it into the water. It dropped to the bottom and settled near some plants. A crab climbed over it and it was covered with sand. The pearl had disappeared.





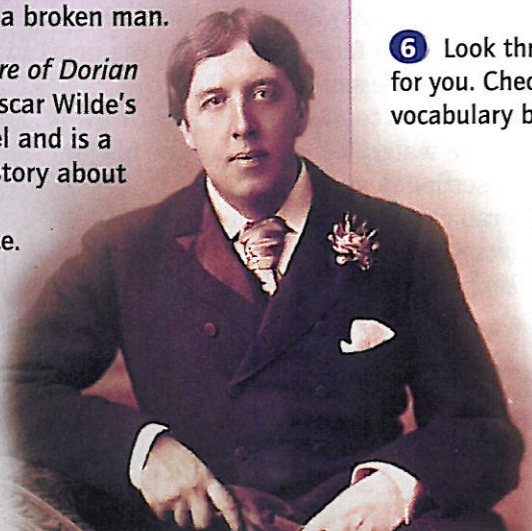
The Picture of Dorian Gray

BACKGROUND

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was born in Dublin in Ireland. He went to university at Trinity College Dublin and Oxford and then moved to London. As a young man, Wilde was brilliant and eccentric, with his long hair and extravagant clothes. He began writing poetry but his most famous works are his plays, especially comedies like *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) or the more serious *Salome* (1894). Like his conversation, his plays were full of quick humour, such as: 'Nowadays, people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.'

Wilde's career was stopped by scandal. He was sent to prison for homosexuality. When he came out of prison, he moved to Paris and died a broken man.

The *Picture of Dorian Gray* is Oscar Wilde's only novel and is a brilliant story about moral decadence.



Literature Spot 4

Before you start

- 1 Read about Oscar Wilde. What kind of person was he?
- 2 The story mentions some of the subjects below. Make adjectives from the nouns.


Example *fear* – *afraid*

fear, youth, anger, cruelty, horror, beauty, death, success

Reading and Listening

- 3 Look at the title and the pictures. What do you think the story is about? a valuable painting, a robbery from an art gallery, obsession with a painting

Read the story quickly and find out.

- 4  Read the story again and listen at the same time. Are these statements about the story true or false?

- 1 Basil Hayward painted a portrait of his friend Dorian Gray.
- 2 Dorian made a wish to stay young and for his portrait to become old.
- 3 Dorian met a beautiful young painter called Sybil Vane and fell in love with her.
- 4 Sybil killed herself after Dorian left her.
- 5 On his thirty-eighth birthday, Dorian killed his friend Basil.
- 6 Sybil's brother followed Dorian and shot Dorian's friend.
- 7 Dorian finally decided to destroy the portrait with an axe.
- 8 When the servants found Dorian his face was old and horrible.

- 5 Read the story again and answer these questions.

- 1 Why did Dorian make his wish about the portrait?
- 2 What happened to his portrait after he left Sybil?
- 3 How did his face in the portrait change?
- 4 How did Dorian change physically over the years?
- 5 Why did Dorian kill Basil?
- 6 Why did the sailor follow Dorian?
- 7 Why did Dorian decide to destroy the portrait?
- 8 What happened to the portrait in the end?
- 9 What is the moral to this story? Do you agree with it?

- 6 Look through the story and choose five important words that are new for you. Check the meaning in the Mini-dictionary and write them in your vocabulary books.

Speaking

- 7 Think of ideas for a story about a very beautiful woman or a very handsome man. Tell the class your ideas.



Basil Hayward was a successful artist. He had nearly finished a portrait of a very handsome young man called Dorian Gray. One day a friend of his, Lord Henry Wotton, saw the picture Basil was painting and wanted to meet this young man. A few days later, Lord Henry and Dorian Gray met at Basil's house and went for a walk in the garden.

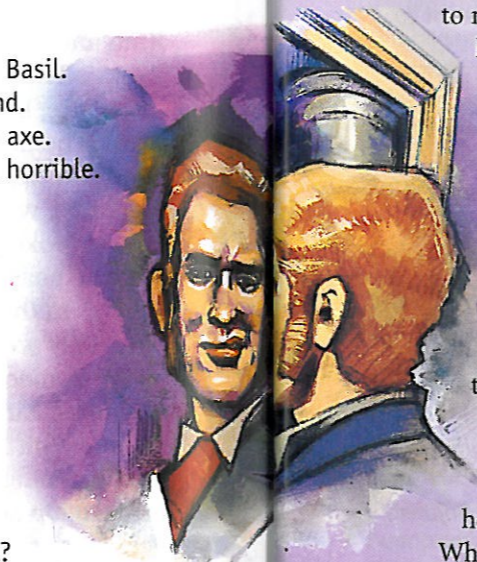
'Ah, how lucky you are to be so young. There is nothing in the world as important as youth!' said Lord Henry to Dorian. 'But time is your enemy.'

They went inside to see the portrait and Dorian looked at his own picture intensely. 'I wish I could always stay young and the picture could grow old. Oh, why did you paint this picture, Basil? Why should it stay young while I grow old? I wish the picture could change, and I could stay as I am.'

Dorian was beginning to fall in love with his own picture. A few weeks later, Dorian told Lord Henry that he was in love with an actress, called Sybil Vane. She was seventeen and very beautiful. Dorian didn't tell Sybil his name but she called him Prince Charming. He told her that he was in love with her and he wanted to marry her. Sybil's brother was worried about her and this mysterious young man.

'If that man harms my sister, I'll kill him,' he said to a friend. But Sybil's brother was a sailor and had to go off to Australia. One night, Dorian took his friends to see Sybil acting as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. She acted badly and after the performance Dorian spoke to Sybil. He was very angry with her. 'But how can I pretend to be Juliet now that I know what real love is?' she said to him. Dorian said that he had loved her because she was a good actress.

Now he didn't love her any more and so he left her. When he got back home Dorian looked at his portrait again. Somehow it was different. The face in the picture now had a cruel smile. Then Dorian remembered his wish. He realised that he had been cruel to Sybil. Tomorrow he would see her and be good to her and make up for what he had done. But the next day Lord Henry brought Dorian some terrible news. Sybil had killed herself! Lord Henry told him not to worry, that it would have been impossible to marry her anyway – she was just an actress. When Lord Henry left, Dorian looked at the picture of himself again. He realised that he would stay young and handsome forever and that the face in the picture would become ugly, old and cruel.



The years went by, but Dorian Gray stayed young and handsome. He enjoyed all the pleasures there were in life. However, his portrait changed and showed all the terrible secrets of his life. Dorian became more and more obsessed with the picture as the face in it became old and ugly. On Dorian's thirty-eighth birthday, Basil Hayward, the painter, came to see Dorian and told him that he was going away to Paris. Basil told him that people were saying terrible things about Dorian's life. Dorian decided to show Basil the portrait and to tell him his secret. Basil was horrified when he saw the face and told Dorian to change his life. Suddenly, Dorian became very angry with Basil. He took a knife ... and stabbed Basil several times. The next day, Dorian got rid of the body. Nobody would ever miss Basil Hayward. They would think that he had gone to France.

Later that night Dorian was in a bar talking to two women. One of the women said to him, 'Ah, I remember you. You're Prince Charming aren't you?'

A sailor heard this. It was Sybil's brother. He realised that this was the man who had been cruel to his sister eighteen years ago. Dorian was very afraid, but said that it couldn't have been him. He showed the sailor his face, the face of a young man of twenty. Then Dorian went away.

'I nearly killed that boy,' said the sailor. 'Boy?' said the woman. 'I first met him eighteen years ago, but his face hasn't changed in all that time.'

A week later Dorian was in the country staying with some friends, when he realised that the sailor was following him. He became very afraid. The next day he went out walking with some of his friends who were shooting. His friend shot at an animal and there was the cry of a man. He had killed the sailor who had been following Dorian. Dorian decided to change his life.

'Maybe if I have a better life, the face in the picture will not be so ugly and horrible.'

But when he looked at the portrait it was even more terrible than before. He decided to destroy the picture. He picked up a knife and stabbed the painting. There was a loud cry and a crash.

The servants were very afraid. They went into the room. On the wall they saw the portrait of Dorian Gray as a young, handsome man. On the floor was a dead man, with a knife in his heart. It was the other Dorian Gray, his face old, ugly and horrible.

