

# *The Happy Prince Teacher's Notes*

B2

Irish poet, playwright, novelist, editor, dandy and wit Oscar Wilde was a major figure of the nineteenth century literary scene, and his work is still widely read and performed today. A new biopic has been released with a wonderful cast (Rupert Everett, Colin Firth, Colin Morgan, Emily Watson.)

His life, and his work, were divided into two distinct categories. The (relatively) conventional: marriage, fatherhood and his immensely popular comic plays like *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and modern fairytales like “The Happy Prince”. And the scandalous, at least in Victorian times: his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas and imprisonment, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*.

The biopic by and starring Rupert Everett focuses on the last years of his life which can help students understand Wilde's art and life.

This article will give pupils an overview of Wilde's life after being jailed. We recommend it with older classes because of the subject matter.

## **Vocabulary and structures**

- literature
- biography
- narrative present
- simple past
- passive
- adjectives

## **Cultural element**

- Oscar Wilde
- Victorian Britain

## **Reading and writing**

- The article is designed for videoprojection, but pupils will probably need printouts to do the activities, unless your class is equipped with tablets. We suggest starting with the images before tackling the text. Then pupils can do the comprehension activity.

- The second activity works on vocabulary,

asking pupils to associate adjectives and nouns, and then on adjectives from the text to match with antonyms.

- The third activity consists of reading and presenting tweets about the biopic and then write a tweet about Wilde.

## **Listening**

- The fourth activity enables the pupils to work on biopics and literary genres, definitions have to be associated to the corresponding genre. It is a training for oral comprehension. The trailer can be watched individually if you have tablets or allow your pupils to use their smartphones, or for the whole class with a videoprojection: listening, taking notes and finally produce a short text about the trailer.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTLYj837YaM>)

## Transcript

■ **Oscar Wilde:** Your appreciation has been most intelligent, which persuades me that you think almost as highly of the play as I do myself.

**Onscreen text:** He was a celebrity.

**Father Dunne:** What's the name of this friend of yours?

**Bosie:** Oscar. Oscar Wilde.

**Father Dunne:** Oh Jesus Christ

**Onscreen text:** A poet.

**Reggie Turner:** I hear you're writing a new play?

**Wilde:** Superb.... *A vous tous.*

**Onscreen text:** And a father.

**Wilde:** Constance, my dear, beautiful wife. You and my sons are the things that tie me to life.

**Onscreen text:** But he carried a secret.

**Bosie:** Oscar, let's run away somewhere no one could find us.

**Wilde:** You don't know what you're saying.

**Onscreen text:** That would destroy him.

**Man:** Not wearing your silk stockings today, Oscar?

**Wilde:** You go too far, sir!

**Man:** No, you go too far, madam.

**Wilde:** I am a ruined man.

**Judge:** Oscar Wilde, the crime of which you have been convicted is so bad you must be dead to all sense of shame.

**Man 2:** Sir Oscar bleedin' Wilde!

**Judge:** I shall under such circumstances pass the severest sentence that the law allows. The sentence of the court is that you'll be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for two years.

**Wilde:** For two years I have lain on hard boards, knelt on cold stone, dined on shame. I'm ready to return to life.

**Constance Wilde:** I feel sure that if I was to see him once, I would forgive him everything.

**Bosie:** I can make you happy.

**Wilde:** Yes, you can.  
I dare say what I have done is fatal.

**Turner:** Be careful, Oscar.

**Wilde:** I love him as I always did, with a sense of tragedy and ruin. There's no mystery so great as suffering, but suffering is nothing when there is love. Love is everything. I'm in mortal combat with this wallpaper, Robbie. One of us has to go.

## Solutions:

■ **Step 1. A.** American --> Irish, unknown --> famous, Edinburgh --> Dublin, poems --> children's stories, met Wilde --> encountered/discovered Wilde, childhood --> final years, wise decision --> fatal mistake, London --> Paris, praised...friends --> in poverty, wife was proud --> fled/ashamed

**B.1.** happiness-unhappy, success-successful, fame-famous, aristocrat-aristocratic, tragedy-tragic, brilliance-brilliant

**2.** happy-unhappy, successful-unsuccessful, unpopular-popular, legal-illegal, unappealing-appealing, careful-carefree

## Step 3

a horror story-f, a fiction-c, novel-g, fairy-tale-h, a short story-i, memoir-e, a biography-a, an autobiography-d, a biopic-b, a gothic story-j.

## Step 4

**1.** in a theatre, 19th Century, an elegant man, audience laughing and enthusiastic

**2.** celebrity, friend, poet, Jesus Christ,

**3.** *à vous tous*

**4.** run away, you don't know

**5.** silk stockings, going too far, 'madam'

**6.** Ruined, crime, convict, bad

**7.** OW laughing and mocking him

**8.** imprisoned for 2 years, hard labour (laid on hard boards, knelt on cold stone, dined on shame)

**9.** Ready to return to life, wife: forgive him, Bosie: make you happy

**10.** Suffering is nothing when there is love. Love is everything.