

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Oscar Wilde

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Aestheticism was an art movement that valued the experience of beauty and form above strict moral or social messaging. It arose in the latter half of the 19th century, in conflict with conservative Victorian standards. Within Aestheticism, artists focused on the idea of creating “art for art’s sake,” prioritizing the sensual experience of a painting or written work. Aesthetic writers, like Oscar Wilde, peppered their work with language that evokes feeling, tone, and mood. Wilde once stated, “There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.” The wider aesthetic movement included painters, sculptors, architects, and more craftsmanlike arts such as ceramics, fashion, and furniture. Many people criticized Aesthetic works for alleged morality. Nevertheless, Aestheticism had a profound impact on future art movements, such as abstract expressionism.

Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of the Aesthetic movement?

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| A. Emphasis on beauty and sensuality in artwork   | B. Rejection of strict social or moral messaging |
| C. Preference for art that upholds societal norms | D. The idea of creating art for art’s sake       |
2. In 1895, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and hard labor. His official crime was “gross indecency,” a conviction for having a relationship with another man, Alfred Douglas. At the time, homosexuality was a crime in Britain. Wilde spent much of his sentence in solitary confinement, rarely seeing anyone besides the prison guards. He did receive occasional visits from his wife, Constance. In prison, he wrote “De Profundis,” a letter to Douglas, which denounced the conditions of his imprisonment. After leaving prison, Wilde moved to France, where he spent his remaining years. His final poem, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” portrays the grief and isolation that Wilde experienced while imprisoned. In 2017, the British government officially pardoned Wilde, along with 50,000 other men who had been convicted of homosexuality.

Based on this passage, which of these most likely describes the mood of Wilde's poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”?

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|------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. Joyful        | B. Introspective, or thoughtful |
| C. Philosophical | D. Pained                       |

3. \*The Picture of Dorian Gray\* was Wilde's only novel. Originally published in magazine installments in 1890, it portrays a young bachelor's descent into a creature of moral vileness. After posing for a portrait, Gray wishes to exchange his soul for eternal youth and handsomeness. He commits to a life of pleasure-seeking, often manipulating and abusing others in pursuit of his own fulfillment. All the while, he stays physically youthful while the painting of him ages and decays in the attic. The painting is a visual representation for the way Dorian's soul degrades as he mistreats people in pursuit of his own excess. In addition to his one novel, Wilde wrote nine plays, including \*The Importance of Being Earnest.\* This satirical comedy of manners is filled with witty dialogue. For example, the young lady Gwendolen Fairfax remarks, "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing," and "I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train."

What is the meaning of the painting in Dorian Gray's attic?

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| A. It shows Gray's rising social status.   | B. It portrays how Gray abandons his artistic principles.        |
| C. It mirrors Gray's true moral character. | D. It reminds Gray of the beauty he will lose as he grows older. |