

The Picture of Dorian Gray: The Preface

Oscar Wilde

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What standards are appropriate for evaluating a work of art, according to Wilde? What standards are not appropriate?
2. What is the relevance of the artist's intention to Wilde? Is there other knowledge, external to our knowledge of the work itself, which is relevant to evaluating and appreciating a work, according to Wilde?
3. Do we need to know biographical data about the artist to appreciate a work of art, according to Wilde? Could we fully appreciate his work without background knowledge?
4. What does the critic bring to a work being evaluated?
5. What does the reader bring to a work being studied and appreciated?
6. What is the role of morality in art? Is it an appropriate subject matter of a work of fiction? Is morality an appropriate standard in evaluating a work of art?
7. Wilde says that we "go beneath the surface" of a work of art at our "peril." What does he seem to mean by that? What things are "beneath the surface" in a work of art?
8. When Wilde says that "art is quite useless," what does he mean? Is he rejecting utility as a standard for evaluation of art? What else might he be rejecting as appropriate in our appreciation of art?