This classic relates the strange and eerie tale of the change of Jekyll into Hyde.

Award: NCTE Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Horror/Thriller, Monsters; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Science Fiction, Misc./Other

Main Characters

Dr. Hastie Lanyon    Jekyll's estranged friend and colleague, who sickens and dies after witnessing the transformation between Hyde and Jekyll
Dr. Henry Jekyll    a medical doctor whose experimentation with transcendental medicine leads to shattering consequences
Mr. Edward Hyde    the embodiment of the evil component of Jekyll's personality, who gradually gains strength and power over Jekyll
Mr. Utterson    Jekyll's friend and lawyer, who tries to protect Jekyll and eventually learns the bizarre truth about his life
Mr. Richard Enfield    a relative of Mr. Utterson, whose story of a trampled child gives Utterson his first inkling of a link between Hyde and Jekyll
Poole    Jekyll's long-time butler, who finally sends for Utterson to help him destroy whatever is occupying his master's home
Sir Danvers Carew    a prominent London official who is murdered by Edward Hyde

Vocabulary

cabinet    a small, private room or office
cheval-glass    a swiveling, full-length mirror
hansom    a carriage for two passengers drawn by a single horse
pedant    one who focuses on unimportant or trivial points or clings to arbitrary rules
press    an upright cabinet in which chemicals are stored
Soho    a neighborhood in London

Synopsis

As the story opens, Mr. Utterson is listening to Mr. Enfield's tale of a bizarre incident on the streets of London. In the middle of the night, Enfield observed a man trample a young girl on a street corner. The angry crowd demands restitution, and the man, Edward Hyde, entered a mysterious back door with a check drawn on another man’s account.

Hyde's name strikes a chord with Utterson, because he remembers it mentioned in the will of his client, Dr. Henry Jekyll. That evening, he reviews the strange provisions of the will whereby Hyde would step into Jekyll's shoes in the case of any prolonged "absence." Utterson begins having troubling dreams about Hyde and sets out to encounter him on the street. After he sees Hyde's face in the lamplight, Utterson declares it bears "Satan's signature."

Utterson becomes quite concerned about his old friend, Dr. Jekyll, as he learns that Hyde has full privileges in Jekyll's house, as well as a key. He fears that Hyde's position as Jekyll's heir may precipitate his friend's murder.

After the sensational murder of Sir Danvers Carew, all of London knows that Hyde is the killer, but the man suddenly disappears. Utterson, deeply troubled, visits Jekyll, who assures him that he is done with Hyde forever. Then, he hands the lawyer a mysterious letter. Utterson visits Dr. Lanyon, only to find him deathly sick and unwilling to discuss their mutual friend, Henry Jekyll.

The story approaches a climax when Utterson is summoned to the Jekyll home by an unnerved Poole. Together, they decide to break into the room where Jekyll has isolated himself, but they are too
late—they see only the death throes of Edward Hyde.

In the end, the story is explained by two narratives. The first, written by Dr. Lanyon, describes how he witnessed the terrible transformation from Hyde to Jekyll and how his "soul sickened" at what Jekyll then revealed. In the final narrative, Jekyll reveals himself by way of the lengthy letter he gave to Utterson. He discusses how he used himself as a test subject in attempting to separate his two essential natures, the good and the evil, thereby transforming himself from the restrained Jekyll into the uninhibited Hyde through use of carefully crafted potions. In the end, the experiment gets out of hand as the transformations occur spontaneously and Hyde gains dominance. Jekyll spends his last days attempting to set down his confession and waiting to be completely overtaken by his evil counterpart.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What is Jekyll's explanation for why Hyde is so much younger and smaller in stature than himself?

In his "Full Statement of the Case," Jekyll speculates that, because the dark side of his nature had been suppressed for most of his life, it was "less exercised and much less exhausted," and thus fresher, lighter, and newer.

Inferential Comprehension

As Hyde stands clutching his potion and taunting Dr. Lanyon to observe his transformation, what clue does Hyde give to his true identity?

After Lanyon agrees that he will observe and have his curiosity satisfied, Hyde warns him "...remember your vows: what follows is under the seal of our profession." This is an allusion to Jekyll's profession and a clue to what will transpire in the next terrifying minutes.

Constructing Meaning

After Poole and Utterson find the dead body of Hyde on the cabinet floor, Utterson says, "We have come too late, whether to save or punish. Hyde is gone to his account...." What is the meaning of Utterson's statements?

Poole and Utterson do not know who or what to expect behind the door as they chop it open. Poole earlier refers to the caged being as "it," and the two believe that the voice they hear is not their friend and master's, but that of Edward Hyde. Utterson is saying that they are too late to save their friend or kill his enemy. Jekyll and Hyde are dead.

Teachable Skills
**Understanding Literary Features**  Initiate a class discussion on the subject of Dr. Jekyll's contention that the simultaneous presence of good and ill within each person is "the curse of mankind."

**Understanding Characterization**  In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the character of Edward Hyde is usually described from the point of view of others, most pointedly from that of Henry Jekyll. We read little of Hyde's actual dialogue, but when Hyde is quoted, his speech is grandiose, intense, and emotional. Review Hyde's dialogue from the end of the chapter entitled "Dr. Lanyon's Narrative." Lead a class discussion on how Hyde's dialogue reveals his character.

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning**  Jekyll's friend and classmate, Dr. Lanyon, objects to his colleague's research into "metaphysical medicine." In explaining why he has become estranged from his colleague, he tells Utterson, "Such unscientific balderdash would have estranged Damon and Pythias." As an exercise in understanding literary allusion, assign students to research Greek mythology to discover the story of the great friends, Damon and Pythias. Using what they learn, assign the students to write one paragraph on the meaning of Lanyon's remark.

**Responding to Literature**  The idea of transforming oneself by drinking a potion, entering a telephone booth, or putting on a magical piece of clothing, has long captured the imagination of the public. Jekyll sought to transform himself in order to relieve the distress he felt as a man of conscience with certain "base" tendencies. Think about your own life. If you could drink a "tincture" to transform yourself at will, what would be your motivation? What would your double look like? What special powers would he or she possess that you do not? Ask each student to write a page in which these questions are addressed.