

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Unabridged) by Robert Louis Stevenson

Book Information

Robert Louis Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
(Unabridged)

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Book Level: 9.5

Interest Level: UG

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

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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.

Literary Analysis

The author uses Jekyll's first-hand account in the final chapter of the book to resolve many questions and tie up loose ends from earlier in the story. Review "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case." What are some of the questions that are addressed in this chapter?

Answers may include the following ideas: Jekyll's motivation for conducting the experiments, why Lanyon was requested to retrieve the phial of salts, how Jekyll arranged for Hyde's living and finances, the explanation for Jekyll's written blasphemies, the reason for Jekyll's strangely worded will, the reason Jekyll scoured London looking for a particular salt, Jekyll's attitude toward Hyde and vice versa, and the reason Jekyll could not return to his own form.

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

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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.