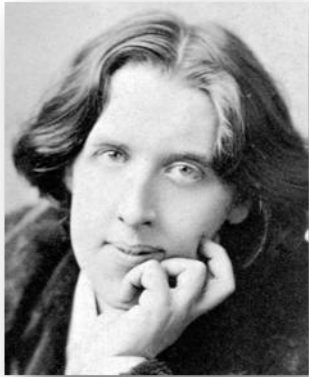


# OSCAR WILDE

British Dramatist, Poet and Critic  
(1854-1900)



By the age of 40 Oscar Wilde was famous in Europe and the U.S. for penning *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his influential political tract *'The Soul of a Man Under Socialism'* and his theater masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest*. At the height of his fame he was publicly accused of being a 'sodomite' by John Douglas, the Marquis of Queensberry, with whose son, Lord Alfred, Wilde had been involved. His place in society threatened, Wilde sued Queensberry for libel. Losing the suit, he was indicted on charges of "gross indecency between males." His first trial, remembered for its defense of "the love that dare not speak its name," ended without a verdict; but he was tried again, lost, and was sentenced to two years of hard labor. When he was released from prison in 1897 he was a broken man. Bankrupt, bereft of friends, and his place in society, he went into exile. The dissipation that followed took a final toll on what remained of his health. He died on November 30, 1900 and was buried in France. Wilde's persecution, which brought to light details about gay life among the upper class, ushered homosexuality into public view in a way it had not been – underscoring the decisive role the closet played in keeping it hidden from society even though it was not uncommon. The publicity surrounding Wilde's trials had a chilling effect on the daily lives of countless terrified people who were driven only deeper into the closet; but it also led to the development of a nascent gay and lesbian consciousness that became central to the success of the GLBT Civil Rights Movement that was to follow.

## Lesson Plan

### Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate prior experience: What do you know about the author and poet, Oscar Wilde? Read the biographical information.
2. Group Discussion: Describe how Oscar Wilde portrayed the Victorian Era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
3. Explore the fast facts or biography to reveal your impressions of Oscar Wilde to society (as found in the following:  
<http://www.cmgww.com/historic/wilde/bio1.htm>

### Level 2: Additive Approach

1. View 'Oscar Wilde Part I' at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqRwZz7n8o8> and describe in what ways Wilde offered "fresh air" into the Victorian Period.
2. Website Investigation: Analyze another contributor in the field of literature from <http://legacyprojectchicago.org/Literature.html>
3. Discuss a common approach that sheds light on a historical period.

### Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Interpret the effects that his homosexuality had on his career and gay identity.
2. Gather important background on Wilde's influence in the following <http://suite101.com/article/oscar-wildes-influence-on-gay-identity-a78821>
3. Cite the changes that Wilde had in his development and consequences that he suffered in his life.

### Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. How did Oscar Wilde's life exemplify "being true" to your life and values?
2. Who today would identify with Wilde's publicity and consciousness-raising?
3. Describe steps of advocacy that you would use to support an individual's GLBT lifestyle in the political or social arena.