

# WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

## THE LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE

Coach John recounts the life of one of his literary heroes, Oscar Wilde.



Oscar Wilde (born October 16, 1854, Dublin, Ireland—died November 30, 1900, Paris, France) Irish **wit**, poet, and dramatist whose reputation rests on his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and on his comic masterpieces *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

He was a spokesman for the late 19th-century **Aesthetic** movement in England, which advocated art for art's sake, and he was the object of celebrated civil and criminal suits involving homosexuality and ending in his imprisonment (1895–97).

Wilde was born of professional and literary parents. His father, Sir William Wilde, was Ireland's leading ear and eye **surgeon**, who also published books on archaeology, folklore, and the satirist Jonathan Swift. His mother, who wrote under the name Speranza, was a revolutionary poet and an authority on Celtic myth and **folklore**.

Like many in his generation, Wilde was determined "to burn always with [a] hard, **gemlike flame**."

Wilde agreed to lecture in the United States and Canada in 1882, announcing on his arrival at customs in New York City that he had "nothing to declare but his genius." Despite **widespread** hostility in the press to his languid poses and aesthetic costume of velvet jacket, knee **breeches**, and black silk stockings, Wilde for 12 months exhorted the Americans to love beauty and art; then he returned to Great Britain to lecture on his impressions of America.

In 1884 Wilde married Constance Lloyd, daughter of a prominent Irish **barrister**; two children, Cyril and Vyvyan, were born, in 1885 and 1886.

In the final decade of his life, Wilde wrote and published nearly all of his major work.

But Wilde's greatest successes were his society comedies.

His close friendship with Lord Alfred Douglas, whom he had met in 1891, infuriated the marquess of Queensberry, Douglas's father. Accused, finally, by the marquess of being a sodomite, Wilde, urged by Douglas, sued for criminal libel. Wilde's case collapsed, however, when the evidence went against him, and he dropped the suit. Urged to flee to France by his friends, Wilde refused, unable to believe that his world was at an end. He was arrested and ordered to stand trial and later sentenced to two years hard-labour in prison.

Adapted from Britannica

by **ECP coach**



**John Hird**

## Word list

- wit: (n)** keen and amusing intelligence; astuteness
- aesthetic: (adj)** of or relating to a sense of beauty or an appreciation of the arts
- surgeon: (n)** a physician who specialises in surgery / operations
- folklore:** the traditional beliefs, legends, customs, etc., of a people
- gemlike: (adj)** like a mineral, pearl, or other natural substance valued for its rarity and beauty
- flame: (n)** a portion of burning gas or vapour
- widespread:** (adj) spread over a wide area
- breeches: (n)** old fashioned, knee-length trousers
- barrister: (n)** (in England) a lawyer who may speak in the higher courts

## Let's chat about that!

1. Give a summary of the text to your coach and/or classmates.
2. Oscar Wilde was English - True or False?
3. Where did Oscar study?
4. At US customs Oscar declared: "I have nothing to declare but my genius." What did he mean?
5. Have you read any of his works? Talk about them.
6. What did Lord Queensberry accuse Oscar of? What happened to him?
7. Read the quotes from Oscar on page 2? Which ones do you like?
8. Who are your favourite writers? Talk about their works.

## OSCAR WILDE'S QUOTES AND EPIGRAMS

### Monty Python's 'Oscar' sketch

*"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken."*

*"To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all."*

*"Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much."*

*"If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over again, there is no use in reading it at all."*

*"With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating*

*things, and the symbols of things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all."*

*"The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality we can predicate of it. The systems that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and not on its growth and development."*

*"The best amongst the poor are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so."*

*"Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future."*

*"Hearts are made to be broken."*

*"You don't love someone for their looks, or their clothes, or for their fancy car, but because they sing a song only you can hear."*

*"I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train."*

*"Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."*