

A man in a dark top hat and suit, looking down, with a cane. The background is dark and moody.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Study Guide

by Michael Poteet

For the novel by
Robert Louis Stevenson

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Synopsis

Mr. Utterson the lawyer is perplexed and disturbed. His close friend of many years, the well-respected Dr. Henry Jekyll, has fallen into the company of one Edward Hyde—a man who, by all accounts, is cruel, unfeeling, and seemingly pure evil. Fearing for his friend's life, Utterson tries to persuade Jekyll to rid himself of his new companion. Although Jekyll swears he can and will, Utterson continues to hear reports of the doctor's closeness to Hyde. When Hyde murders a Member of Parliament, Utterson decides the situation is critical. Jekyll's relationship with Hyde must be stopped. Utterson, however, does not realize the full extent of that relationship, and the desperate lengths to which Jekyll must go to sever it.

Variouslly described as mystery, science fiction, fantasy, horror, and social critique, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* remains as relevant an examination of the human heart as when it was first published over a century ago.

“Story of the Door” through “Dr. Jekyll Was Quite at Ease”

Vocabulary

From the choices given, underline the best definition for each underlined word. Classify each word according to its part of speech. Rely on context clues for help.

1. He was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages. . . .

austere:

part of speech: _____

inconsiderate

indulgent

stern

displeased

mortify:

part of speech: _____

subdue

ignore

harden

cultivate

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11. . . . Utterson himself was wont to speak of it as the pleasantest room in London.
part of speech: _____
reluctant
eager
bored
accustomed
12. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say?
part of speech: _____
primitive
supernatural
mythical
exotic

Extra Vocabulary Questions

Understanding Latin:

1. Using a Latin dictionary or other resources, give the sense of the underlined phrase in the following sentence. What image might Stevenson be trying to create with this phrase?

“Ay, it must be that; the ghost of some old sin, the cancer of some concealed disgrace: punishment coming, pede claudo, years after memory has forgotten and self-love condoned the fault.”

Idiom:

Playwright George Bernard Shaw once quipped, “England and America are two countries separated by the same language.” Some of Stevenson’s British, 19th century *idioms* (uses of words) may strike you as strange, but by paying attention to context

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4. Why does Utterson fear for Jekyll's life?
5. What do Lanyon and Jekyll think of each other?
6. What common reaction do people have to Mr. Hyde?

Thinking About the Story

7. *Point of view* is the vantage point from which a story is narrated. *First-person* point of view is when the narrator is a character in the story. *Second-person* point of view is when the narrator is a person but is not in the story itself. *Third-person* point of view is when the story is told by someone outside the story. Third-person point of view can be *omniscient* (where the narrator reveals the thoughts and emotions of all the characters), *limited omniscient* (where the narrator reveals the thoughts and emotions of a few of the characters), and *objective* (where the narrator doesn't reveal characters' thoughts or emotions). From what point of view is Stevenson telling the story? Why would Stevenson choose this point of view?
8. While Henry Jekyll and Edward Hyde appear only once each in this section of the book, readers already know them by reputation. How would you describe both Jekyll and Hyde based on what other characters—and the narrator—say, think, or feel about them?

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John 15:12–15

How do these biblical lessons in friendship apply to the characters in the novel?
How do your own friendships measure up to these biblical standards?

13. Enfield prefers not to ask too many questions of others because such behavior “partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment.” Read Matthew 12:36, 37; Revelation 20:12–15. What do you think Enfield means by his statement?
14. The two friends, Utterson and Enfield, have expressed similar sentiments about involving themselves in the lives of others. Of Utterson, Stevenson writes:

But he had an approved tolerance for other; . . . and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove. “I incline to Cain’s heresy,” he used to say quaintly: “I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.”

Enfield puts it this way:

“I had a delicacy. . . . I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. You start a question, and it’s like starting a stone. . . . No, sir, I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask.”

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brother go to the devil in his own way.” Rather, he wishes to be more involved in Jekyll’s dilemma. On the other hand, Utterson and Enfield continue their walk even after they see the “expression of . . . abject terror and despair” on the doctor’s face. They revert to “Cain’s heresy” and the code of silence established in “Story of the Door.” Expect disagreement as to whether or not Utterson is a good friend to Jekyll, since Stevenson offers readers conflicting data. Answers to the personal application questions will vary.

7. Answers will vary. In this writer’s opinion, Utterson may feel he needs forgiveness for failing Jekyll as a friend. When presented with an opportunity to be—as “Story of the Door” states—“the last good influence” on a “downgoing” man—Utterson withdraws. Accept other reasonable interpretations.

8. Poole begins referring to the person in the cabinet as “it” after he takes Utterson to hear the voice of the person within. He also calls him “that thing” and “the creature” and refers to him as a rat and a monkey. Poole clearly does not view this person as a person—he feels he is subhuman, soulless, an animal. Answers may vary. Referring to this unseen (by the reader) person as “it” and describing his movements as ratlike and monkeylike is disquieting and disturbing. We don’t doubt Poole’s assessment, and so we don’t really know what to believe, but the reader probably experiences dread.

Dig Deeper

9. Stevenson returns our attention to the story of Cain’s murdering Abel. God tells Cain, “Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10), presumably for vengeance. We first saw an allusion to Genesis 4 in Utterson’s invocation of “Cain’s heresy” as the book began. Accept reasonable answers to the interpretation question. In this writer’s opinion, Stevenson may be returning our attention to the Cain and Abel motif to suggest that Utterson, in adopting his largely “hands-off” approach to Jekyll (exemplified in “Incident of the Window”), has become not much better than Cain: through his failure to intervene, Utterson has contributed to his “brother” Jekyll’s death. Another interpretation may link Jekyll and Hyde as the Abel and Cain figures. It appears that Abel cries out to God for justice or vengeance as do the souls of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9–11. In both texts, the right of revenge is reserved to God, implicitly in Genesis and explicitly in Revelation. Yet in both texts that revenge is delayed: God marks Cain with a protective seal (Gen. 4:15), and the martyrs under the heavenly altar, specially clothed in robes of white, are “told to wait a little longer” (Rev. 6:11) because more martyrs are to follow. Although God has every right to exercise vengeance, the fact that vengeance is delayed may witness to the truth expressed in Psalm 103:8: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” Accept other reasonable interpretations.

“Dr. Lanyon’s Narrative”

Vocabulary

1. ~~routes~~, enigmas; 2. ~~emitted~~, whetted; 3. ~~bulwark~~, impediment; 4. ~~mythical~~, incredulous; 5. ~~dictations~~, metamorphoses; 6. ~~orthodoxy~~, turpitude; 7. ~~convention~~, parley; 8. ~~predicted~~, constrained; 9. ~~obscure~~, idiosyncratic; 10. ~~obliviousness~~, debility

Questions

1. Jekyll asks Lanyon to bring a drawer with its contents from Jekyll’s home to Lanyon’s, where an anonymous man will, with Jekyll’s authority, take it from Lanyon.
2. Lanyon is sure Jekyll is insane.
3. The drawer contains various medicinal and chemical ingredients, a phial [vial], and a book filled