

GCSE English Literature

Jekyll and Hyde - Grade 9 Analysis · AQA Set Text

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27 entries

Stevenson's 1886 novella is a Gothic anatomy of the respectable Victorian self. Its detective-story surface conceals a fable about repression: the more rigidly Jekyll polices his reputation, the more violently Hyde erupts. Stevenson withholds the truth through fractured narration - lawyers, letters and second-hand accounts - so that the reader, like the city, only glimpses the monster at the edges. This sheet treats duality as a structural and formal principle, not just a theme: study how the form itself splits, how fog and architecture externalise the divided mind, and how Stevenson indicts an entire culture of concealment. Argue method; never retell.

THEMES - the divided self and its discontents

Duality of human nature	Stevenson dramatises the self as a battleground of ' <i>polar twins</i> '. Jekyll's confession that ' <i>man is not truly one, but truly two</i> ' frames identity as inherently fractured, and the novella's structure enacts this through doubling - two doors, two narratives, two names. Grade 9 move: argue that Hyde is not an external evil but the compartmentalised remainder of Jekyll himself, making duality a psychological inevitability rather than a horror imported from outside.
Repression and its violent return	Hyde is the product of suppression, not indulgence. Jekyll admits he concealed his pleasures 'with an almost morbid sense of shame', and the potion merely gives that buried self a body. The more Jekyll represses, the stronger Hyde grows, so the novella reads as a parable of Victorian self-policing curdling into monstrosity. Repression is the cause, not the cure.
Science versus religion and the limits of knowledge	Stevenson stages a collision between transgressive science and moral order. Jekyll's chemistry trespasses on creation, while Lanyon's ' <i>unscientific balderdash</i> ' marks the conservative limit of acceptable enquiry. The transformation is described in quasi-religious terms of damnation, suggesting that knowledge pursued without conscience becomes a kind of blasphemy. Science here is a Faustian overreach.
Reputation and the tyranny of appearances	The novella's gentlemen are obsessed with surface respectability. Utterson's instinct to bury scandal - he would 'let my brother go to the devil in his own way' - shows how reputation suppresses truth. Jekyll creates Hyde precisely to protect his good name. Argue that Stevenson indicts a society where the appearance of virtue matters more than its substance, breeding the very duplicity it fears.
The Gothic city and the geography of the mind	London becomes a psychological map. Soho's fog, 'like a district of some city in a nightmare', and Jekyll's house with its respectable front and sinister rear door externalise the split self in brick and weather. Stevenson uses setting as character, so that the labyrinthine, fog-bound city embodies repression, secrecy and the unknowable interior of the Victorian gentleman.

CHARACTERS - arc, key moment, interpretation

Henry Jekyll - the respectable transgressor	Arc: from controlled hypocrite to disintegrating self, undone by his own experiment. Key moment: his final 'Full Statement', where first-person narration finally grants access to the interior he spent the novel hiding. Interpretation: Jekyll is the true subject of the horror - not a victim of Hyde but his author. Stevenson makes him a study of how respectability and desire cannot coexist without producing a monster.
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Edward Hyde - the embodied id	Arc: from shadowy figure to dominant self, swelling as Jekyll weakens. Key moment: the murder of Sir Danvers Carew, where Hyde's violence becomes public 'with ape-like fury'. Interpretation: Hyde's indescribability - characters sense 'deformity' without locating it - makes him a projection of repressed instinct, the atavistic residue Darwin's theory implied lurked beneath the civilised man.
Gabriel Utterson - the reluctant detective	Arc: from incurious observer to horrified knower. Key moment: breaking down the cabinet door, the act that finally forces concealed truth into the open. Interpretation: Utterson's lawyerly discretion makes him the ideal Victorian narrator - he embodies the very repression the novel critiques, his reluctance to look mirroring a society that prefers not to know its own darkness.
Hastie Lanyon - the cost of certainty	Arc: from confident rationalist to a man killed by what he witnesses. Key moment: seeing Hyde transform into Jekyll, after which he declares ' <i>my life is shaken to its roots</i> '. Interpretation: Lanyon represents orthodox science destroyed by the unthinkable; his death before Jekyll's confession lets Stevenson stage the trauma of forbidden knowledge before its explanation, heightening Gothic dread.

KEY QUOTATIONS DECODED - language, form, structure, deployment

'Man is not truly one, but truly two'	The antithesis and the paradox of 'truly two' make division the deep truth of identity rather than a flaw. Placed in Jekyll's confession, it retrospectively reframes the whole narrative. Deploy as the thesis of the text: every doubling - doors, names, narrators - is engineered to prove this single claim.
'Something displeasing, something downright detestable'	The vague abstractions and anaphora of 'something' enact Hyde's indescribability, locating his horror in feeling rather than feature. Deploy to argue Stevenson makes evil unrepresentable on purpose - Hyde resists language because he is the part of the self that civilisation refuses to name.
'Trampled calmly over the child's body'	The oxymoronic 'trampled calmly' fuses brutality with indifference, making Hyde's evil chilling for its lack of passion. The trampling motif recurs, structuring our sense of him. Deploy as the reader's first proof that Hyde violates the most basic moral instinct - protecting a child.
'The animal within me licking the chops of memory'	The bestial metaphor and Darwinian register reduce the gentleman to an appetite, while 'memory' shows Jekyll savouring the freedom Hyde grants. Deploy to link repression and pleasure: Hyde is desirable to Jekyll, which is precisely the scandal Stevenson exposes beneath respectability.
'With ape-like fury'	The simile invokes evolutionary regression, casting Hyde as the atavistic ancestor lurking inside the modern man. Positioned at the Carew murder, it makes private vice publicly monstrous. Deploy to weave Darwin: Hyde embodies Victorian terror that civilisation is a thin veneer over the primitive.
'A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven'	Pathetic fallacy and the funereal 'pall' make the fog a shroud over the city's conscience, blurring moral vision. Deploy to show setting as method: the fog literalises concealment, so that London itself cannot see clearly, mirroring the gentlemen who refuse to look.
'If he be Mr Hyde ... I shall be Mr Seek'	Utterson's grim pun names the novella's detective engine while exposing his own complicity in pursuit. The wordplay turns identity into a game of hiding. Deploy to show how Stevenson laces the form with concealment even at the level of a single joke.
'The most racking pangs succeeded ... a grinding in the bones'	Visceral, polysyndetic physical detail makes transformation an experience of agony, not liberation, undercutting any glamour in Jekyll's experiment. Deploy to argue Stevenson frames the divided self as torment - the body itself rebels against the splitting of the soul.
'I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man'	The clinical verb 'learned' and the noun 'duality' present Jekyll's discovery as scientific finding, lending the supernatural a rationalist frame. Deploy to show Stevenson dressing Gothic horror as case study, exploiting the era's faith in science to make the monstrous credible.

'This too was myself'

The blunt monosyllables collapse the comforting distance between Jekyll and Hyde, forcing ownership of the monster. Deploy as the novella's moral climax: the horror is not that Hyde exists but that he was Jekyll all along, dissolving the alibi of the separate self.

CONTEXT (AO3) - woven, never bolted on**Victorian duality and the double life**

Respectable Victorians were expected to maintain immaculate public surfaces while desires were driven underground, producing a culture of secret double lives. Weave: Jekyll's literal splitting literalises this social condition, so the novella reads as a diagnosis of an entire class trained to conceal rather than reform itself.

Darwin and the fear of regression

Darwin's 1859 theory of evolution implied humans were descended from animals, raising the spectre that civilisation might devolve. Weave: Hyde's 'ape-like' violence and 'troglodytic' appearance embody this anxiety, making him the evolutionary throwback the respectable gentleman fears he still contains.

The Gothic tradition and the unspeakable

Stevenson inherits the Gothic's doubles, doppelgangers and forbidden knowledge, but relocates terror from the haunted castle to the modern city. Weave: the fractured, document-based narration revives the Gothic device of partial testimony, keeping the monster always at one remove and the truth perpetually deferred.

Victorian London and the fog of secrecy

1880s London was a city of stark contrasts, where wealthy and criminal districts sat streets apart, and gas-lit fog became a byword for moral murk. Weave: Stevenson's nightmarish Soho and respectable Jekyll's sinister back door map the era's geography of hidden vice onto a single architecture, making the city a portrait of the divided self.

GRADE 9 THESIS LINES - conceptualised openers**On duality**

Stevenson's novella locates horror not in the existence of Hyde but in his inseparability from Jekyll, using a fractured Gothic form to argue that the monstrous is not an invader of the respectable self but its suppressed and inevitable other half.

On repression

Far from a tale of indulgence, 'Jekyll and Hyde' is a study of repression's recoil: Stevenson shows that the rigid concealment demanded by Victorian respectability does not extinguish desire but compresses it into something deformed, so that Hyde is the price of Jekyll's hypocrisy.

On narrative form

By withholding Jekyll's voice until the final pages and filtering events through lawyers and letters, Stevenson makes the novella's very structure perform its theme, conscripting the reader into the same culture of partial sight and deferred truth that allows the monster to flourish.

On context and class

Stevenson weaponises the Gothic to indict a specific social class, using the dignified gentlemen who shield Jekyll's name to expose how Victorian respectability institutionalises the concealment that breeds Hyde in the first place.