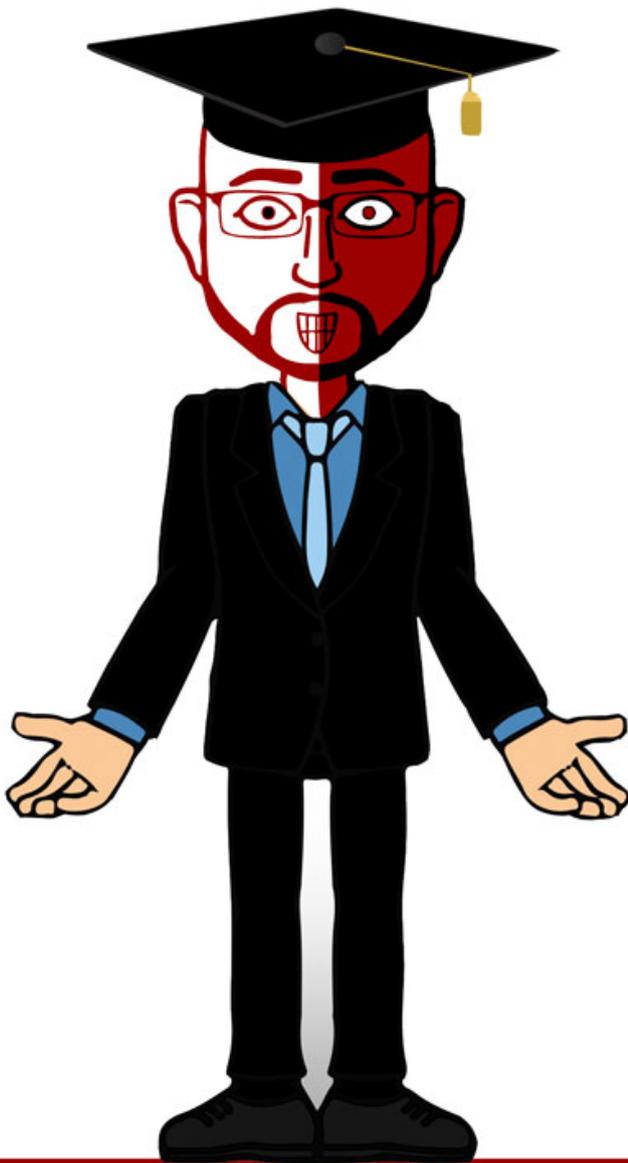


Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION

# MR Bruff's Guide To JEKYLL & HYDE



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SAMPLE

## Part 7: Character analysis – Dr. Henry Jekyll

Dr Henry Jekyll is a well-respected scientist who is famous for his intellect, his gentlemanly qualities and his dinner parties. At these parties, we learn, there are usually men “all intelligent and reputable” and also, all “judges of good wine”. Jekyll, then, is a member of the upper classes who is liked by his peers and used to the finer things in life.

Jekyll is a man of fifty who is “large, well-made, smooth-faced...[with] every mark of capacity and kindness”. Stevenson, in his first presentation of Jekyll is sure to present him as a character for whom we have positive feelings. He is shown to be the kind, generous Victorian gentleman. He has recently made out a will that is being kept by the lawyer, Mr Utterson. Utterson, however, is disturbed by the will because Jekyll has decided that, should he die, he wants to leave his considerable fortune to a man by the name of Mr Hyde.

In his “statement of the case” (chapter 10) we learn that Henry Jekyll was born “to a large fortune” and had a thoroughly good upbringing. He was “inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellow-men, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future”. In short, Jekyll is the perfect Victorian gentleman. He’s from a good family and, to anyone looking at him from outside, he would have been almost guaranteed a good future.

Here, however, Stevenson introduces this idea of the double life. He tells us that “the worst of [his] faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition” which attempted to trivialise his indiscretions in his younger years. He goes on to give a closer idea of what he got up to as a young man when he says that he hid these “irregularities” with an almost “morbid sense of shame”. The suggestion here is that his activities as a younger man were sexual in nature and, although not specified directly (remember, Stevenson’s wife objected to the first draft being too explicit) it’s interesting to remember that homosexuality was still a crime in Victorian society.

Jekyll hides and represses these youthful indiscretions and says that he “concealed his pleasures” for the sake of his career and standing in society. It is these indiscretions that Utterson thinks Hyde is using to blackmail Jekyll into leaving him all his possessions. In covering up his youthful activities, Jekyll says that he came to realise the “profound duplicity of life”. He begins

to develop a theory or idea of how one might separate these two personalities - the good side and the bad side. In his experiments, he develops a potion that, when drunk, transforms Henry Jekyll into Edward Hyde.

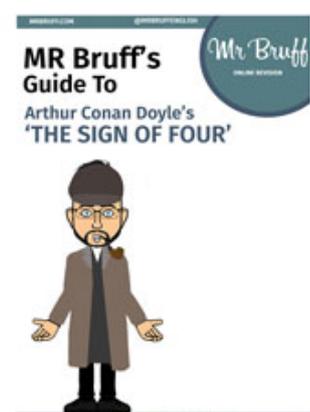
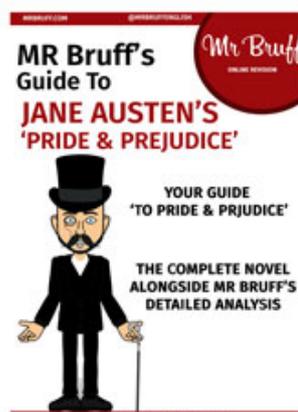
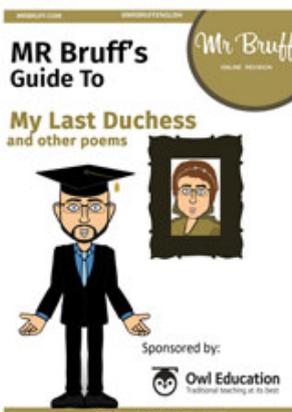
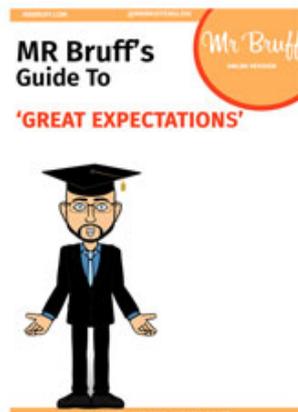
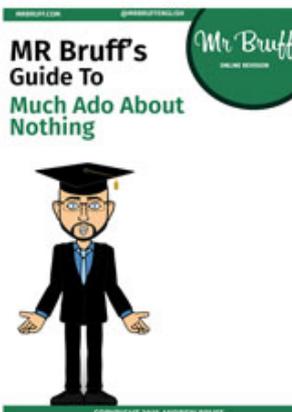
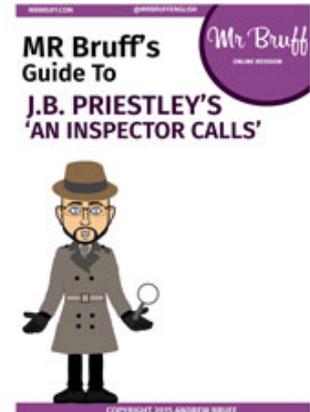
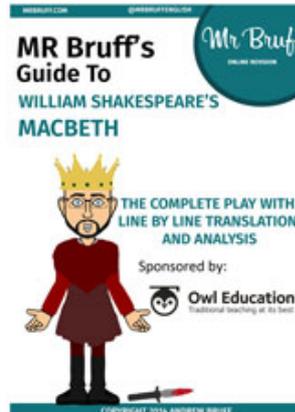
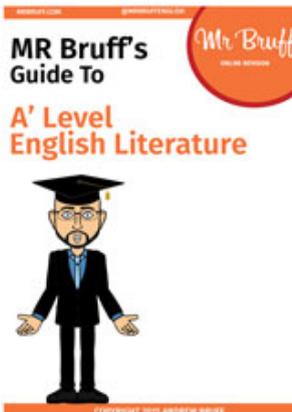
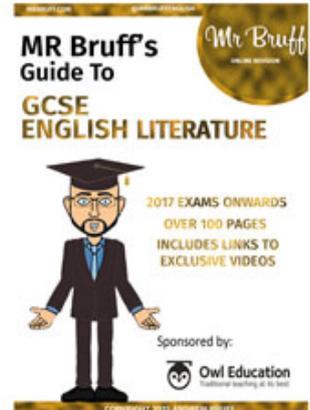
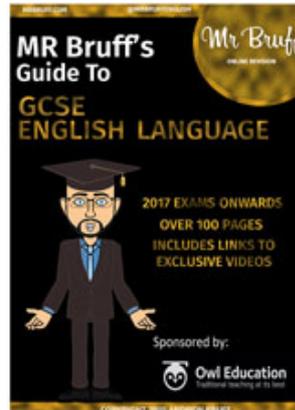
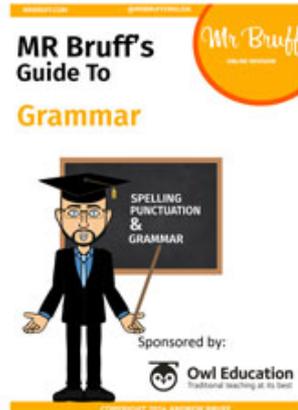
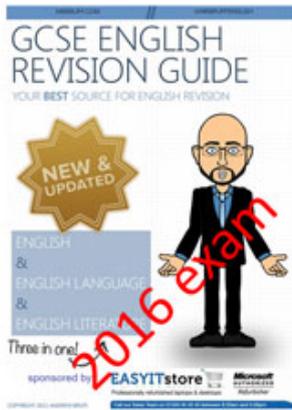
An interesting point to make here is that this novel is not simply a story about good versus evil as it's often made out to be. While Edward Hyde is a distillation of pure evil, Henry Jekyll isn't all good. He admits that within himself he often fights his desires and compulsions in order to conform to Victorian society. He is a mixed character and when he takes the potion, he must have had some element of evil in him to create Hyde. He says himself that "had [he] approached [his] discovery in a more noble spirit, had [he] risked the experiment while under the empire of generous or pious aspirations, all must have been otherwise, and from [the experiment] ... come forth an angel instead of a fiend".

What Jekyll is saying here is that he was looking for an excuse or a way to carry out these "concealed pleasures" of his when he took the potion and, from that beginning, was spawned Hyde. If he had been good in his intentions, the creature that he transformed into would have been good. So, rather than the potion separating good from evil, it can be viewed as distilling and separating true desires. Again, when read in Victorian times, this idea would have been very unsettling, especially given the added sexual undertones.

Ultimately, Jekyll is too weak to contain Hyde. At first, he intends to use Hyde to fulfil his pleasures. He tells the servants of his own house that the man, Edward Hyde, is to be allowed full access to the house and not to be spoken to. He also sets up an apartment for Hyde in Soho, one of the seedier areas of London at the time, and continues to take the potion to transform into Hyde and then, in the morning, change back into the respectable Dr Henry Jekyll.

Over time, Hyde begins to appear when *he* wants to. Jekyll loses control. This is one of the most troubling allegories of the story. Is Stevenson saying here that if we give in to our darker sides that they will ultimately end up winning out over our good? Or, is he saying that to repress and conceal these sides to ourselves is to hide who we are and damage ourselves psychologically? It's clear that Jekyll is in many ways horrified by his own actions when he's transformed into Hyde but he continues to go back to his rooms and take the potion. At one point in the novel, Dr Jekyll assures Mr

Uttersen that there is nothing to worry about and, if he wished, Hyde would disappear never to return. We come to realise that this isn't true and, in fact, echoes the words of many addicts before and since.



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