

Every Exquisite Thing

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Violence, Sexual References, Drug and Alcohol References)

SYNOPSIS

When Penny's new mentor offers her an opportunity she cannot refuse, to have a portrait painted by a mysterious artist who can grant immortal beauty to all his subjects, Penny happily follows in the footsteps of Dorian's most glittering alumni, knowing that stardom is sure to soon be hers.

But when her trusted mentor is found murdered, Penny realises she's made a terrible mistake—a sinister someone is using the uncanny portraits to kill off the subjects one by one. As more perfectly beautiful students start to fall, Penny knows her time is running out . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Steven is an award-winning author from the northernmost town in England. She has published several books for children and young adults; her debut novel *The Exact Opposite Of Okay* won the inaugural Comedy Women In Print Prize, while *The Love Hypothesis* was optioned for TV by an Emmy-winning team. Her books have been widely translated, and her work has appeared in *The i Paper*, *The Guardian* and *Buzzfeed*.

STUDY NOTES

The Faustian Bargain

- The novel engages with the Faustian bargain—making a deal with the devil. This is when a person makes a deal with the devil or some other spiritual form for perpetual beauty, wealth, magic, power, knowledge or immortality in turn for their soul. The most famous literary adaptations of the Faust legend are:
 - *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* a play by Christopher Marlowe
 - *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's
 - *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

Can you think of any other stories, either in literature or on screen, that engage with the Faustian bargain?

- To show students how popular the Faustian bargain is, broadcast the clip from *The Little Mermaid* where Ursula, grants Princess Ariel's wish to become human if Ariel agrees to surrender her beautiful voice. Like Dr Faustus, Ariel is made to sign a deed. Ask students why this idea of making a deal with an evil force is so popular?
- In both *The Little Mermaid* (particularly the fairytale as opposed to the Disney movie) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there is a 'price' to be paid in order for Ariel and Dorian to get what they want. What message are we ultimately left with about the true cost of a Faustian bargain?

Portraiture

- The novel examines the idea of a double life—that people are not what they seem on the outside. Outwardly a person may seem respectable but inside they pursue an existence that crosses the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Invite students to think about their own double life, or the double life of someone they know or that of an animal. Paint a portrait of how their subject presents to the world and then create a distorted portrait or magazine layout of how the subject truly is.
- Research artists including Jimmy Turrell, Andy Warhol, Julian Opie, Josh Bryan, Hattie Stewart, and David Hockney for inspiration of different approaches to portraiture and injecting points of view. Consider tracing shapes, flattening tones, size, rule of thirds and balance.
- Select a character from the novel and create a distorted/dual-perspective portrait.

Intertextuality

- Intertextuality is part of the complex meaning-making process and builds students' fields of learning. There are layers of intertextuality in this text. Provide the class with a summary of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Why do students think the author wrote an adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? What do young people want? What are they prepared to do to get it? Is it worth it?
- Further, the play within a play in the text—a nice nod to Shakespeare – is *Macbeth* which is another intertextual conversation about how one can acquire power through stealth, ambition and appearance. *Macbeth* must make a choice, 'two truths are told'—a choice between being a good subject or taking the kingship. Taking the kingship requires him to kill but it aggravates his conscience, and he suffers. Penny also makes a deal with the Painter in return for perpetual beauty and she too suffers as a consequence. What are the tough decisions that Penny and other characters have to make? How do they deal with their moral dilemmas?
- Invite students to write and perform a monologue depicting a character facing a tough decision which they will benefit but their best friend will miss out as a consequence. Illustrate their conflicting thoughts through words and actions.