

THE STORY

“The Canterville Ghost” begins with the sale of an old English mansion called Canterville Chase to Horace Otis, an American minister. The old owner, Lord Canterville, warns Mr. Otis that the house is haunted by a ghost, but Mr. Otis is not worried and replies that he doesn’t believe in ghosts.

Soon after, Mr. Otis moves into the Chase with the rest of his family: his wife, Lucretia, his eldest son, Washington, his fifteen-year-old daughter, Virginia, and his young twin boys. They are received by Mrs. Umney, the housekeeper. Upon moving in, Mrs. Otis notices a dull red stain on the floor and asks her to clean it. The housekeeper explains that it’s a bloodstain of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered there by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. The servants tried many times to clean the bloodstain away but without any result. Mrs. Umney warns the family that Sir Simon’s guilty ghost still haunts the house. Dismissing the housekeeper’s story as a fairy-tale, Washington, cleans the stain with the American Pinkerton’s Stain Cleaner.

The next morning the stain has returned, and although the Otis family clean it away every morning, it returns every night. Intrigued, they decide that the house is actually haunted. Then, one night, Mr. Otis meets the ghost of Sir Simon. He is awoken in the middle of the night by a clanking noise. Venturing into the corridor, he meets the ghost of Sir Simon. But rather than being frightened by this strange meeting, Mr. Otis politely offers the ghost a bottle of Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator to make its chains quieter. Utterly humiliated, Sir Simon retreats down the corridor until he encounters the twins, who throw pillows at his head. The ghost runs away in his room, shocked at the family’s reaction. It begins to reminisce on his past victories of scaring the mansion’s inhabitants, causing them to go mad or to commit suicide. Determined to scare these “modern Americans”, Sir Simon plots his revenge.

The family laughs at the ghost as well as the bloodstain, which is changing color every day. The only member of the family who does not laugh is Virginia. Then, one night the ghost puts on a suit amour (thinking it will be frightening) but it is too heavy for him and he falls over with a loud crash. Another night, the twins make a fake ghost with some materials found around the house and leave it in the corridor.

When Sir Simon sees it, he is terrified and runs away. The ghost finally gives up on trying to scare the family.

After a few days, Virginia finds the ghosts hiding place and talks to him. She implores him to behave himself more, and also tells him off for killing his wife and stealing her paints to make the bloodstain. Sir Simon explains that he died because his wife's brothers punished him for her murder by locking him up without food and water until he died. His only desire is to finally rest in the Garden of Death, but to realise his dream a pure girl has to cry and pray for his soul. Unlike the rest of her family, Virginia pities the ghost. She takes his hand and goes with him into another dimension.

That night Virginia does not join her family for tea and they are worried about her disappearance. But at midnight she finally returns carrying a small casket. She reveals to the family where the ghost's secret chamber is, and they finally find Sir Simon's skeleton chained to the wall. Virginia explains that he is now at peace because she prayed for him. She says that Sir Simon gave her a box of jewels to thank his friend for her help. The family decide to have a funeral for him and bury his remains; in this way the ghost will never return to Canterville Chase.

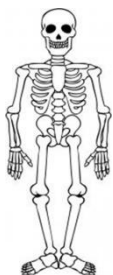
A grand funeral is arranged and Lord and Lady Canterville attend too. Mr. Otis attempts to give the jewels that were in the casket to Lord Canterville, but he will not accept them, so they go to Virginia.

Virginia wears the beautiful jewels that the ghost gave her on the day she marries the young Duke of Cheshire. After the wedding they walk in the churchyard, and Virginia admits that the ghost, who is now at peace resting in the Garden of Death, showed her how important life and death are, and how love is stronger than both.

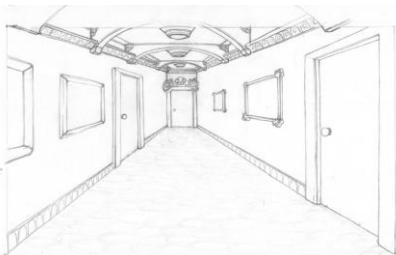
THE CANTERVILLE GHOST

How do you imagine the Canterville Ghost? Draw it!

WORD PICTURES – Can you find the right words?



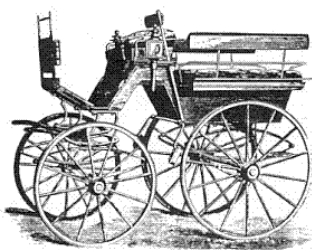
1) _____



2) _____



3) _____



4) _____



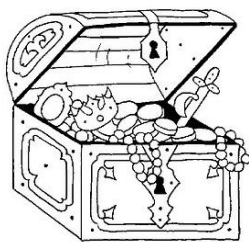
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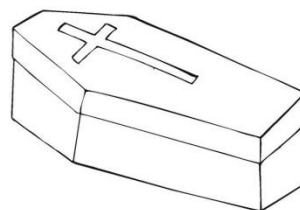
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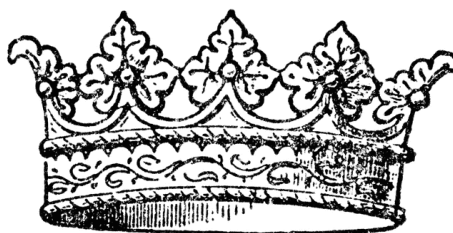
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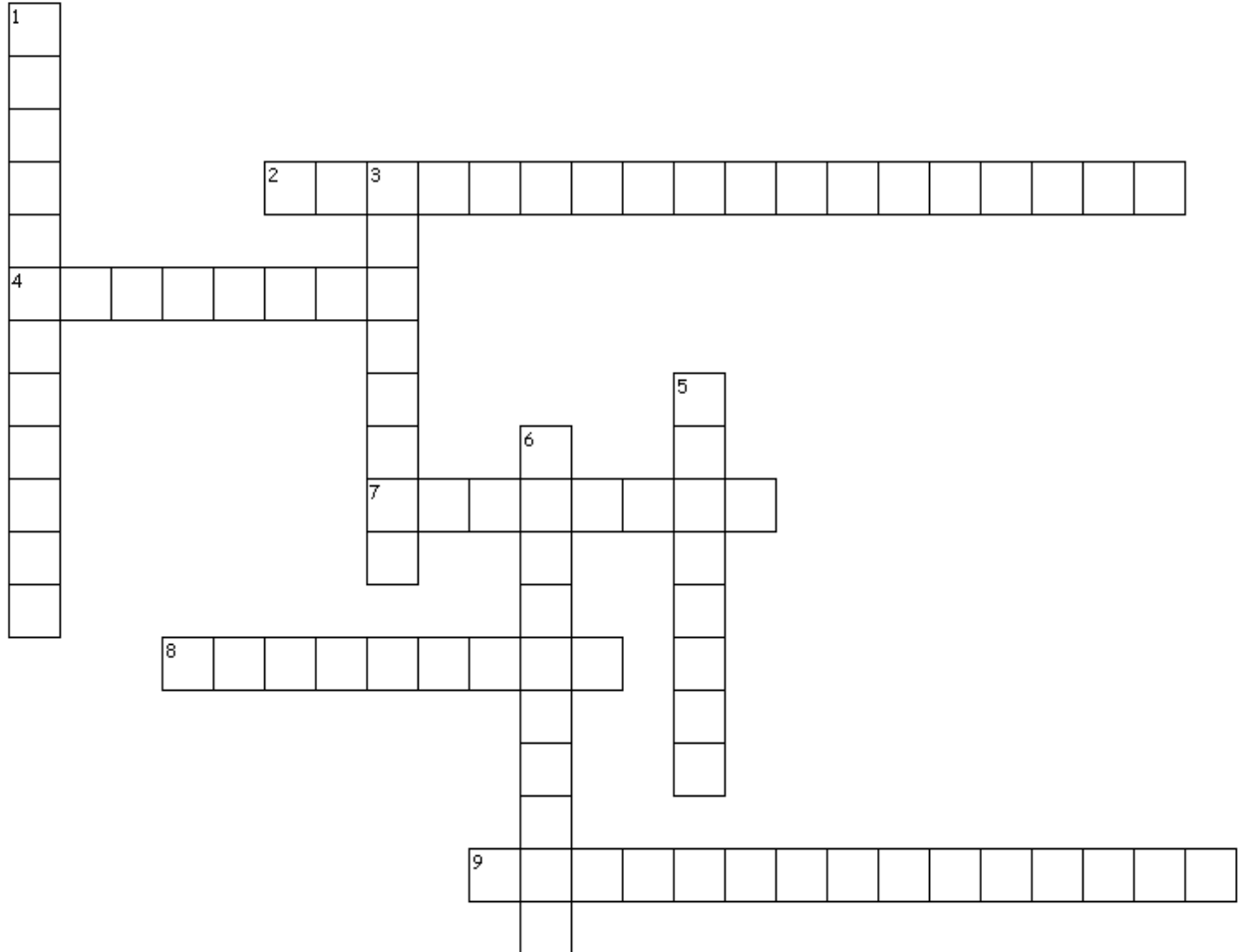


10) _____



11) _____

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS:

2. The real name of the Canterville ghost.
4. The boys who play tricks to the ghost.
7. The lady murdered in Canterville Chase by her husband.
8. The American minister who buys Canterville Chase.
9. The first owner of Canterville Chase.

DOWN:

1. A woman from the American upper-middle class and the wife of the American minister.
3. The old housekeeper of Canterville Chase.
5. The lovely young girl who helps the ghost to rest in peace.
6. The Otis' eldest son.

WORD DEFINITION

Can you match each word with its definition?

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Haunted | A. To disappear gradually |
| 2. Heirloom | B. To lose control over one's emotions |
| 3. To warn | C. A condition of the weather with strong winds, rain, thunder and lighting |
| 4. Purchase | D. Wearing tattered |
| 5. To scour | E. Bad or adverse fate |
| 6. To fade away | F. An object that has been in a family for generations |
| 7. To catch sight of | G. To conduct oneself in a proper manner |
| 8. Murder | H. Compassion or kindness. |
| 9. Storm | I. The sound produced by two pieces of metal striking |
| 10. To lock up | J. Being deceived |
| 11. Clank | K. The act of buying |
| 12. Soiled | L. To cry because of strong emotion |
| 13. Ragged | M. To glimpse or to notice something |
| 14. To flee | N. Act of revenge |
| 15. To whiz | O. Inhabited by ghosts |
| 16. Mercy | P. Dirty |
| 17. Vengeance | Q. To run away |
| 18. Polite | R. A loud noise. |

..... 19. Crash	S. To search all over an area
..... 20. To break down	T. The unlawful and deliberate killing of a person
..... 21. To weep	U. Impolite
..... 22. To stab	V. To rush or to move swiftly
..... 23. To behave yourself	W. To give advance advice to somebody in danger
..... 24. Doom	X. To pierce with a pointed weapon
..... 25. Tricked	Y. To close a door with the key
..... 26. Rude	Z. Showing good manners

WORD SEARCH

N T N T O F E A R W T O B E A T P E
 A I D O C E U W O F O Z F D Y R X Z
 S J G E I S X R A J P L I O O T E M
 Y A Y H A T H S F T R U P P S U N O
 Z M V X T T A W A H A G A Z C V M O
 K A V L O M H N S A Y I R Z I D H E
 I Z T T V V A W G T R O F M O C O T
 D E O S X V L R N I B N A E L C O T
 N M A A E U J E E C D P E S I O N P
 A E W X O O L U M G P N S M I E I N
 P N A S E D X T I E A Y I R T T T C
 P T K T S O H G A K D A J U Y S K Y
 E A E S I N H R X A K N R L V Z H V
 D B M K F E A R F U L I V J V Z R F
 I L P Z U N D S F F K A I J I V B J
 X O S Z C P D B X B J T A N Z M A P
 W U Q E L O E M G K C S K O N X U E
 G D I I X G T T W U B N V G W T H T

Can you find in the grid the right English equivalent of the Italian words written below?

FANTASMA
 TEMERE
 APPARIZIONE
 MORTE
 MACCHIA
 PULIRE
 SVEGLIARSI
 CONSOLARE
 PREGARE
 RAPITO

RUMORE
 OLIARE
 INDIGNAZIONE
 LANCIARE
 SPAVENTOSO
 INCUBO
 PIETÀ
 PECCATO
 ANIMA
 STUPORE

Solving the puzzle, a hidden message will be revealed.

What is the deepest desire of the Canterville ghost?

VERB TENSE

Replace the gaps with the correct tense of the verbs in brackets.

"I _____ (to not sleep) for three hundred years," he _____ (to say) sadly, and Virginia's beautiful blue eyes opened in wonder; "for three hundred years I _____ (to not sleep), and I am so tired."

Virginia _____ (to grow) quite grave, and her little lips trembled like rose-leaves. She _____ (to come) towards him, and kneeling down at his side, _____ (to look up) into his old withered face.

"Poor, poor Ghost," she _____ (to murmur); "have you no place where you can sleep?"

"Far away beyond the pine-woods," he _____ (to answer), in a low, dreamy voice, "there _____ (to be) a little garden. There the grass _____ (to grow) long and deep, there _____ (to be) the great white stars of the hemlock flower, there the nightingale _____ (to sing) all night long. All night long he sings, and the cold crystal moon _____ (to look) down, and the yew-tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers."

Virginia's eyes grew dim with tears, and she _____ (to hide) her face in her hands.

"You mean the Garden of Death," she whispered.

"Yes, death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses _____ (to wave) above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no to-morrow. To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace. You can help me. You can open for me the portals of death's house, for love is always with you, and love is stronger than death is."

Virginia _____ (to tremble), a cold shudder ran through her, and for a few moments there _____ (to be) silence. She _____ (to feel) as if she was in a terrible dream.

Then the ghost spoke again, and his voice sounded like the sighing of the wind.

"Have you ever read the old prophecy on the library window?"

"Oh, often," _____ (to cry) *the little girl*, _____ (to look) *up*; "I know it quite well. It _____ (to paint) *in curious black letters*, and is difficult to read. There are only six lines: "

*'When a golden girl can win
Prayer from out the lips of sin,
When the barren almond bears,
And a little child gives away its tears,
Then shall all the house be still
And peace come to Canterville.'*

But I _____ (to not know) *what they mean*."

"They mean," he said, sadly, "that you must weep with me for my sins, because I have no tears, and pray with me for my soul, because I have no faith, and then, if you _____ (to be always) *sweet, and good, and gentle, the angel of death* _____ (to have) *mercy on me*. You will see fearful shapes in darkness, and wicked voices will whisper in your ear, but they _____ (to not harm) you, for against the purity of a little child the powers of Hell cannot prevail."

Virginia _____ (to make) *no answer*, and the ghost wrung his hands in wild despair as he looked down at her bowed golden head. Suddenly she _____ (to stand) *up, very pale, and with a strange light in her eyes*. "I am not afraid," she said firmly, "and I _____ (to ask) *the angel to have mercy on you*."

He _____ (to rise) *from his seat with a faint cry of joy*, and taking her hand bent over it with old-fashioned grace and kissed it. His fingers _____ (to be) *as cold as ice, and his lips burned like fire*, but Virginia did not falter, as he led her across the dusky room.

QUIZ GAME

Can you answer these questions about “The Canterville Ghost”?

1. “The Canterville Ghost” is set in Great Britain, but where do Mr. Otis and family come from?

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2. What is the stain near the fireplace in the library?

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3. Who plays several tricks on the ghost?

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4. Why does the ghost try to take vengeance?

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5. Why does Virginia help the ghost?

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6. How did Sir Simon die?

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7. How can Virginia help the ghost?

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8. What is the Garden of Death?

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9. What is the meaning of those six lines written on the library window of the Canterville Chase?

.....

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10. What do the family do with Sir Simon's skeleton?

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.....

11. What gift did the ghost give to Virginia for helping him?

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VOCABULARY

Mysterious noise

To mind

Stillness

To disappear

To scour

Peal of thunder

To beware

Wan

Ankle

Rusty gyves

Distressed

Grudge

To assert yourself

To harm

Grave

Furniture

Chronic ill-health

To lay out

Guilty spirit

Flash of lighting

To faint

To get up

Wrist

Manacle

Groan

To gibber

Corpse

Shudder

Hearse

Nightingale

Cadavere – Farsi valere – Fare del male – Carro funebre – Tomba – Tremito – Usignolo –
– Quietè – Rumori misteriosi – Sparire – Sistemare – Mobilio – Spirito colpevole –
Dispiacere – Strofinare – Malessere cronico – Lampo di luce – Rancore – Lamento –
Fragore del tuono – Farfugliare – Catene arrugginite – Fare attenzione a –
Stressato – Svenire – Manette – Caviglia – Pallido – Alzarsi – Polso

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THEMES

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854. He was educated first at Portora royal School, and then at Trinity College, where he first revealed his unconventional personality. He was not very popular, he read a lot and his love for the classics eventually won him a Gold Medal for Greek and a scholarship to Madgalen College and Oxford, where he entered in 1874. Here he spent four happy years, soon establishing a reputation as an anticonformist, a wonderful entertainer and a brilliant talker. When he left Oxford in 1878, he was already known as a poet, since, in the same year, he had won the Newdigate Prize for poetry.

Wilde settled in London where, in order to shock the bourgeoisie and draw attention to himself, he began to dress in gorgeous and eccentric way. This exhibitionism earned him frequent caricatures but also frequent invitations from London society charmed by his wit and brilliant conversation.

In 1885 Wilde became a book-reviewer to the "Pall Mall Gazette" and then, from 1887 to 1889, editor of the magazine "The Woman's World", although he never stopped writing works of his own.

In spite of the violent reaction aroused by his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), his literary prestige increased thanks to the success of his so-called "society plays" (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, *The Importance of Being Ernest*), which brought him wealth and fame from 1892 to 1895.

In March 1895 Wilde sued the Marquis of Queensberry, who had accused him of a homosexual relationship with his son. Unfortunately the accusations were proven, and he was arrested and sentenced to two years' hard labour. In prison he suffered every sort of humiliation and when finally released, Wilde was a broken man. He spent some time in Europe writing against the brutality of prison life. Then he settled in Paris where, forgotten by almost everyone, he died on November 1900 from an attack of meningitis.

In his life Wilde tried his hand at drama, poetry and prose. *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) is one of his best-known short stories. It is both a parody of the traditional ghost story and a satire of the American way of life.

A GHOST STORY

Ghost stories belong to the genre called horror literature, whose purpose is to scare the reader with situations that cause horror or fear. The most common technique is suspense, the slow insinuating of a doubt or of a frightening revelation, which keeps the reader interested.

This story can be defined an inverted ghost story, because a lot of elements are different from the traditional ones. The most evident difference is the fact that Mr. Otis is not scared by the ghost, while usually people should be. Moreover, the ghost

himself is frightened by the Otis twins. Wilde tends to reverse situations into their opposites as the Otis family succeed in terrorising the ghost rather than be terrorised by him. Furthermore, this ghost story is told not from the perspective of the Chase inhabitants, as in traditional tales, but from the perspective of the ghost, Sir Simon.

There is also comic relief, as buckets of water balanced on half-open doors, the pratfall of Sir Simon and the fake ghost. But the story has a dark centre. The crime and retribution which led to Sir Simon's guilty spirit haunting Canterville Chase.

AMERICAN AND BRITISH CULTURES

"The Canterville Ghost" is a study in contrasts. Wilde talks about an American family who decides to live in Great Britain. In this way, the author has two different culture in comparison and he puts one against the other. The contradiction between cultures of the New World and the Old World runs through the story. He creates stereotypical characters that represent both England and the United States, and he presents each of these characters as comical figures, satirizing both the unrefined tastes of Americans and the determination of the British to guard their traditions. The ghost doesn't understand the family and his "rude" manner just as they don't understand him and his duties. While the ghost of Sir Simon has been successfully scaring English aristocracy for years, he is unable to frighten the Otis family. Sir Simon expresses his frustration by declaring the Otis family "wretched modern Americans." Far from being scared by Sir Simon, the American family see the ghost as a problem to be solved, they are pragmatic people.

By pitting the two stereotypes against each other, Wilde clearly emphasizes the culture clash between England and the United States. The humor in the story is gentle, not sarcastic. The author is mocking stereotypes, both British (this role plays by the housekeeper) and American (political fancy of the minister, addition to use widely advertised American products) in kind and soft manner, not to offend anybody. Wilde obviously intends to satirize American materialism, but he pokes fun at English traditional culture as well. But still this conflict of spiritual values and consumerism remains one of the main themes of the story.

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

This is really not a comedy at all, but a tale of redemption through the power of love. The innocent girl of the family, appropriately called Virginia, prays for the ghost and endures terrifying if unnamed experiences to release the ghost.

During the story we are so busy with laughing at the poor ghost that we don't see what is hidden deeper in his soul. He is not scary at all, but he is easy to scare. Sometimes we may feel pity for him, but we don't notice how miserable he is. Virginia, thanks to her pure soul, sees that and she wants to help him. She tries to explain the ghost that he shouldn't have killed his wife and when the ghost opens

his soul and tells her everything, she wants to do her best to give him the peace he's searching for and to free his soul. And she did it. She prays and cries for his sins and he is able to go to the Garden of Death, where he is finally free, and all his sufferings are over. He found the peace and rest. And Virginia, who has a kind heart and mercy, is happy for him.

Virginia embodies the narrative's theme of forgiveness. Virginia accompanies Sir Simon into the otherworldly realm in order to ensure his safe passage into the afterlife. While the narrative is full of comedy, the tone of forgiveness and love creates a more serious message. Besides the humorous tale, it appears that Wilde also has a message, and he uses fifteen-year-old Virginia to communicate it. Virginia says that the ghost helped her see the significance of life and death.

LIFE, DEATH AND LOVE

Life and death are two other important themes in the story. The ghost says "Death must be so beautiful", for him death is not the end but it is the beginning of something more than life, it is a desirable peace and calm, it is stronger than life. But there is one more thing that is even stronger than both. It is love. It has the greatest power in the world and if you have love in your heart, you would be happy and would make happy every person around you, like Virginia did.

GHOST STORY

Do you know any ghost stories? Write about it.