In 1854 Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin to affluent parents. His father was a prominent surgeon and archaeologist; his mother was a witty poet, Irish nationalist, and feminist.

Wilde excelled at the Portola Royal school and then at Trinity Colleges, where he took the Gold Medal for Greek.

Wilde attracted a crowd of admirers for his witty, intellectual lectures and his outrageous cult of “aestheticism.” He believed in art-for-art’s-sake, a philosophy he had learned from his association with John Ruskin, an art critic and Oxford don.

A very successful tour of America in the the early 1880 on “The Principles of Aestheticism” earned him much-needed income as well as an international reputation.

While not lecturing, he managed to meet with some of the leading American scholars and literary figures of the day, including Henry Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Walt Whitman. Wilde especially admired Whitman. "There is no one in this wide great world of America whom I love and honour so much,'' he later wrote to his idol.

His marriage to Constance mary Lloyd in 1884 produced two children; it was during this time he wrote his best and famous works: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). His novel The Picture of Dorian Gray and his play The Importance of Being Earnest, are considered among the great literary masterpieces of the late Victorian period.

These works brought him financial sucess and the admiration of the literary circles. His reputation as an insightful, witty, and urbane playwright was established worldwide.

Wilde emerged from prison in 1897, physically depleted, emotionally exhausted and flat broke. He went into exile in France, where, living in cheep hotels and friends' apartments, he briefly reunited with Douglas. Wilde wrote very little during these last years; his only notable work was a poem he completed in 1898 about his experiences in prison, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol."

In the early 1890s, at the peak of his career, Wilde entered into a destructive romantic relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed “Bosie.” After Bosie’s disapproving father, Lord Queensbeery, insulted Wilde, the playwright foolishly sued for defamation of character. Queensbeery’s return suit for “depravity” resulted in Wilde’s two-year jail sentence.