

Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado "Aldo Moro e la sua Scorta"- Ragogna, Udine

The Canterville Ghost

a short story by Oscar Wilde, 1887

Year 8, class 3A and 3B

school year 2011-2012



Abridged version with activities

Chapter I

TASK: **highlight** adjectives

When the American, Mr Otis, bought Canterville Castle, everyone told him that this was very foolish, because the place was haunted. But Mr Otis answered, "I come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy. And if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we would have it at home in one of our museums."

A few weeks later, on a lovely July evening, Mr Otis, his wife and their children, Washington, Virginia and the twins (familiarily known as "stars and stripes"), went down to their new home. When they entered the avenue of Canterville Castle, the sky suddenly became dark and a spooky stillness was in the air.



Mrs Umney, the housekeeper, led them into the library of the castle, where they sat down and began to look around. Suddenly, Mrs Otis saw a red stain on the floor just by the fireplace and said to Mrs Umney, "I am afraid something has been spilt there."

"Yes, madam," said the old housekeeper in a low voice, "blood has been spilt on that spot." "How terrible," said Mrs Otis; "I don't want any blood-stains in my sitting-room. It must be removed at once." The old woman smiled and answered, "It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that spot by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon disappeared seven years later. His body has never been found, but his ghost still haunts the Castle. The blood-stain is a tourist attraction now and it cannot be removed."

"That is all nonsense," said Washington, the eldest son of the Otis family, "stain remover will clean it up in no time," and he took a bottle of stain remover out of his pocket and cleaned the spot. But as soon as the blood-stain had disappeared, a terrible flash of lightning lit up the room and a fearful peal of thunder made the whole building shake.

Plot and main characters. Fill in the blanks:

Mr Otis comes to Canterville, England, from _____ with his wife, his children _____ and _____ (15) and his twins. Mr Otis buys the local manor and prepares to live there with his family and Mrs Umney, the _____. Mrs Umney informs Mr Otis and his family that Canterville Chase is haunted by the ghost of _____ and the first sign of a mysterious presence can be seen in front of the fireplace: a _____ of _____ that nobody can remove. Not considering a word about the ghost and the stain, Mr Otis and family are ready to start their new life in England.

Comprehension

- Which statement about the stain is true?
 - The housekeeper has spilt coffee there.
 - It is the blood of Sir Simon de Canterville.
 - Washington Otis removes the stain.
- Does Mr Otis believe in ghosts? ○ Yes, he does. ○ No, he doesn't.

Vocabulary: if "library" is a *false friend*, what is the English for *libreria*? _____

Chapter II

TASK: **highlight** verbs in the past simple form

There was a horrible storm that night, but apart from that nothing scary happened. The next morning, however, when the family came down to breakfast, they found the terrible stain of blood once again on the floor. Washington cleaned it a second time, but the second morning it appeared again. The third morning it was there, too, although the library had been locked up at night by Mr Otis himself.



The following night, all doubts about the existence of the ghost were finally removed forever. At eleven o'clock the family went to bed and some time after, Mr Otis was awakened by a strange noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounded like the clank of metal, and it came nearer every moment. Mr Otis got up and looked at the time. It was exactly one o'clock. So Mr Otis put on his slippers, went to the door and opened it. There, right in front of him, stood the ghost - his eyes were as red as burning coals; long grey hair fell over his shoulders and from his wrists and ankles hung heavy chains.

"My dear Sir," said Mr Otis, "you must oil those chains. It's impossible to sleep with such a noise going on outside the bedrooms. I have therefore brought you this bottle of lubricator, and I will be happy to supply you with more if you require it." With these words Mr Otis laid the bottle down, closed his door and went back to bed.

Shocked, the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless for a moment, but then he growled angrily. Just at this moment, the twins appeared on the corridor and threw a large pillow at him! The ghost hastily escaped through the wall, and the house became quiet again.

When the ghost reached his small secret chamber, he took a deep breath. No ghosts in history had ever been treated in this manner!

Comprehension

- Which statement is true?
 - The ghost appears on the first night the Otis family spends in the castle.
 - Washington runs out of stain remover.
 - The blood-stain is there again every morning.
- What wakes Mr Otis up?
 - The ghost's chains.
 - His wife's snoring.
 - The screaming of a person.
- Is Mr Otis afraid of the ghost? Yes, he is. No, he isn't.

Find a synonym for each word in the text.

terrible → _____ closer → _____ static, unmoving → _____

Why do we use the simple past in the following sentences?

- He put on his slippers, went to the door and opened it.
 - here simple past is used to illustrate states in the past
 - here simple past is used to illustrate actions that happened one after the other
- His eyes were red; grey hair fell over his shoulders and from his wrists hung heavy chains.
 - here simple past is used to illustrate states in the past
 - here simple past is used to illustrate actions that happened one after the other

What makes the ghost depressed (and the situation quite funny)?

It's the fact that nobody _____ .

Chapter III

TASK: **highlight** expressions of time

The ghost did not appear for the rest of the week. The only strange thing that happened was the blood-stain, which they found on the library-floor every morning. It was also quite strange that the colour of the stain changed from time to time. Some mornings it was red, then brown or purple, or even green. These changes amused the family very much, and bets on the colour were made every evening. The only person who did not enter into the joke was Virginia. For some unexplained reason, she was rather annoyed at the sight of the blood-stain, and nearly cried the morning it was green.

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night. Shortly after the family had gone to bed they heard a fearful crash in the hall. A suit of armour had fallen on the floor and in a chair sat the Canterville ghost and rubbed his knees, which seemed to hurt. When the twins started shooting peas at him with their pea-shooters, the ghost stood up with an angry growl and passed through them like a mist. He also blew out the candle, leaving them all in total darkness. On top of the stairs the ghost turned around and, in order to frighten the Otis boys, laughed his most horrible laugh. Just then, a door opened and Mrs Otis came out of her bedroom. "I am afraid you are not well," she said, "I have therefore brought you this bottle of medicine." The ghost looked at her furiously, and then he disappeared. When he reached his room, he was completely exhausted. This American family was extremely annoying. But what annoyed him most was, that he had not been able to wear the suit of armour. The weight of it had made him fall and hurt his knees.

For some days after this, the ghost only left his room to renew the blood-stain. However, on Friday, the 17th of August, he tried to frighten the Otis family again. At half-past ten the family went to bed. For some time the ghost heard the twins laugh, but at a quarter past eleven all was still. So, at midnight he left his secret chamber and glided through the corridors, when suddenly, behind one corner, a horrible ghost stood right in front of him. As the Canterville ghost had never seen another ghost before, he was terribly frightened. He quickly hurried back to his room. But then he thought that he should go and speak to the other ghost. After all, two ghosts were better than one, and his new friend might help him to frighten the twins. However, when he came back to the spot, he found that this 'other ghost' was not real, but only a white sheet which the twins had hung there to play a trick on him. Very upset the Canterville ghost went back to his chamber.

Comprehension

- What amuses the family about the blood-stain?
 - Every morning it appears somewhere else.
 - Its colour changes.
 - Sometimes it's bigger, sometimes it's smaller.
- Why does the suit of armour fall on the floor?
 - The twins have shot too many peas at it.
 - The ghost has tried to put it on but it was too heavy.
 - A thunder has made the house shake.
- What does the Canterville ghost do when he sees the other ghost?
 - He greets him in a friendly manner.
 - He chases the other ghost away.
 - He is afraid and runs away.



Vocabulary: if "annoyed" is a false friend, what is the English for *annoiato*? _____

Chapter IV

TASK: **highlight** numbers

For five days, the ghost did not leave his room. He was very weak and tired and his nerves were completely shattered. He also gave up the point of the blood-stain on the library floor. If the Otis family did not want it, they clearly did not deserve it. Whenever the Canterville ghost roamed the house now, he was careful to have oiled his chains and not to make a sound. However, the twins still played their tricks on him. They stretched strings across the corridor, over which he tripped in the dark, and once he slipped on a butter-slide, which the twins had constructed for him on the staircase. This so annoyed the ghost, that he decided to teach the twins a lesson and give them the fright of their lives.

All day long the ghost had prepared this grand event and at a quarter past one at night he finally glided out of his room and crept down the corridor. When he reached the twins' bedroom, he found the door slightly open. In order to frighten the boys enormously, he flung the door wide open, when a heavy jug of water fell right down on him, wetting him to the skin. The twins burst out in shrieks of laughter and the ghost fled.

He now gave up all hope of ever frightening this rude American family and, as he was very afraid of the twins, from now on he crept around the house as quietly as possible. One night, it was on the 19th of September, he went downstairs to see if there were any traces left of the blood stain. It was about a quarter past two in the morning, and he thought that everyone was fast asleep, when suddenly from a dark corner two figures came running at him who waved their arms wildly above their heads and shouted "BOOOOO!" in his ear. Full of panic, which under the circumstances was only natural, the ghost hurried back to his room.

After this, he was not seen again at night. His feelings were so wounded that he just did not appear anymore.

Write here the months of the year, paying care to spelling and capital letters.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Consider the following dates and fill in the grid:

date in Italian	date in written English	date in spoken English
16 ottobre 1854 (author was born)		
30 novembre 1900 (author died)		
febbraio 1887 (CG first published)		

Vocabulary: what does "twin" mean?

It means _____ and it reminds of the **number** ____ and the **adverb of place/time** _____.

Chapter V

TASK: **highlight** a funny sentence and be prepared to say it aloud

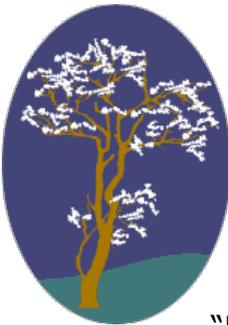
(classwork: WHAT OTHER FUNNY SITUATIONS IN THE STORY CAN YOU RECALL?)

CURIOSITY: "gemelli" can be translated "twins" or "gemini". Can you explain?

One day, Virginia was walking along the corridor, when she saw a person in one of the rooms and went in. To her surprise, it was the Canterville ghost himself and he looked really sad. "I am so sorry for you," she said, "but my brothers are going back to Eton tomorrow, and then, if you behave yourself, no one will annoy you."

"It is absurd asking me to behave myself," the ghost answered, "I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night. It is my only reason for existing."

"It is no reason at all for existing, and you know you have been very nasty. Mrs Umney told us that you had killed your wife."



"Well, I quite admit it," said the ghost, "but my wife was not very nice, you know, and she knew nothing about cookery. However, it is all over now, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death."

"Starve you to death? Oh, Mr Ghost, I mean Sir Simon, are you hungry? I have a sandwich in my case. Would you like it?"

"No, thank you, I never eat anything now; but it is very kind of you. You are much nicer than the rest of your rude, dishonest family."

"Stop!" cried Virginia, stamping her foot, "it is you who are rude, and as for dishonesty, you stole the paints out of my box to renew that ridiculous blood-stain in the library. First you took all my reds and I couldn't do any more sunsets, then you took the green and the yellow. Finally I had nothing left but blue and white, and I could only do moonlight scenes, which are not at all easy to paint."

Having said this, Virginia turned around to leave the room.

"Please don't go, Miss Virginia," the ghost cried; "I am so unhappy and I really don't know what to do. I want to go to sleep and I cannot. I have not slept for three hundred years, and I am so tired." "Poor, poor Ghost," she murmured; "have you no place where you can sleep?" "Well, I know a place where I could sleep – it's the Garden of Death, the churchyard. But only if you weep for me and my sins and pray with me for my soul, the Angel of Death will have mercy on me."

When Virginia promised to help the ghost and pray for him, he rose from his seat, took her hand and kissed it thankfully. Then he led her across the room. Virginia saw the wall slowly fading away like a mist, and a bitter cold wind was around them. "Quick, quick," cried the ghost, "or it will be too late." Then the wall closed behind them, and the chamber was empty.

My **sentence** is : _____

And in Italian it would sound something like: _____

Word formation, adjectives: (common endings for adjectives are: -ous; -ing; -consonant + y):

Chapter VI

TASK: **highlight** situations involving sounds
(classwork: DO THE SOUND)

Other words for "comic / comical" are "fun___ , hilari_____, amus____ , humour____ , wit___".

About ten minutes later, the bell rang for dinner, and, as Virginia did not come down, Mrs Otis sent up one of the servants. After a little time he returned and said that he could not find Miss Virginia anywhere. So, the whole family started looking for her.

The hours passed, but they could find no trace of Virginia. So, after dinner, Mr Otis ordered them all to bed, saying that nothing more could be done that night, and that he would contact Scotland Yard in the morning. Just when everybody was about to leave the dining room, the clock struck midnight, and when the last stroke sounded, a secret door opened in the wall and in that door stood Virginia with a little box in her hand. Everybody ran up to her.



"Good heavens! child, where have you been?" said Mr Otis, rather angrily, as he thought she had been playing a trick on them.

"Papa," said Virginia quietly, "I have been with the ghost. He is dead, and you must come and see him. He had been very nasty, but he was really sorry for all that he had done, and he gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died."

Then she led the others down a narrow secret corridor to a little low room. There the family found the skeleton of Sir Simon, who had been starved to death by his wife's brothers. Virginia knelt down beside the skeleton, and, folding her little hands together, began to pray silently.

Meanwhile, one of the twins was looking out of the window in the little room and suddenly said, "Look! The old almond tree has blossoms..."

"Then God has forgiven him," said Virginia and stood up.

Comprehension

- When does Virginia come back home?
 - ten minutes later.
 - at midnight.
 - the next morning.
- Where does Virginia lead her family?
 - to an old almond-tree.
 - to a skeleton.
 - to Scotland Yard.
- How does Virginia know, that God has forgiven the ghost?
 - Because an old tree has blossoms.
 - Because she receives a box with jewels.
 - Because she finds the room with the skeleton.

Find a word in the text for each definition given below.

- a meal eaten in the evening → _____
- a household with parents and children → _____

Chapter VII

TASK: **highlight** the possessive cases of nouns
(i. Saxon genitive; ii. the.....of.....; iii. possessive adjectives; iv. possessive pronouns)

Four days later, a funeral started from Canterville Castle. In a quiet corner of the churchyard, Sir Simon's skeleton was buried. When the ceremony was over, Virginia stepped forward and laid a large cross made of white and pink almond-blossoms on the coffin.

The next morning, Mr Otis talked to Sir Simon's descendant, Sir Canterville, about the jewels the ghost had given to Virginia. Their value was so great that Mr Otis had scruples about allowing his daughter to keep them. But Sir Canterville shook his hand and said, "My dear Sir, your charming little daughter saved my ancestor's soul. The jewels are hers."

The jewels were admired by everyone when, in the spring of 1890, Virginia married the Duke of Cheshire. After their honeymoon, Virginia and her husband went down to Canterville Castle and on the day after their arrival they walked over to the churchyard. Virginia had brought some lovely roses, which she strewed upon the grave, and after they had stood by it for some time her husband took her hand.

"You have never told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost."

"Please don't ask me, I cannot tell you," she said, "but I owe Sir Simon a great deal. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both."



Comprehension

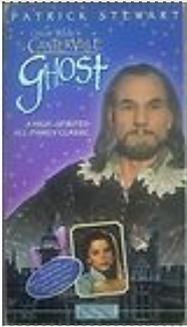
- What do they do with the skeleton?
 - They bury it in the churchyard.
 - They leave it where they have found it.
 - They put it into the library, next to the blood-stain.
- Can Virginia keep the jewels? ○ Yes, she can. ○ No, she can't.
- Why does Virginia like Sir Simon, the ghost?
 - Because he has made her rich.
 - Because he has shown her what Life, Death and Love means.
 - Because he has frightened her brothers.

Join the nouns to specify possession. Careful: in two cases you have to use 's (Saxon genitive) and in the two other cases you have to use the ... of ... (Latin structure):

- a corner / the churchyard _____
- Virginia / jewels _____
- Sir Simon / grave _____
- meaning /life _____

REMEMBER REMEMBER: the "degree of animacy": to possess something, you have to understand with your soul (*animacy*) the idea of possessing. That's why we can say "Vicky's school" but we cannot say ~~the table's legs~~ (in this case we tend to prefer "table legs", as if *table* were an adjective. It's *Canterville Ghost* or *Canterbury Cathedral* or *Ragogna Junior High*.)

Main characters



The **ghost** of the castle for centuries. He was **Sir Simon de Canterville** and died in 1575, his spirit still haunts the Chase. His aspect is really terrible: *"He is an old man, his eyes were as red burning coals, long grey hair fell over his shoulders in matted coils, his garments, which were of antique cut, were soiled and ragged, and from his wrists and ankles hung heavy manacles and rusty gyves."*

Sir Patrick Stewart is in the picture playing the part of Sir Simon de Canterville, the ghost. (Maybe you all best remember him as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in "S___ T___: the Next Generation")

draw
your
picture

Mr Otis. The father of the Otis family. He is a middle-aged American minister; he is determined, inflexible, rational, practical and pragmatic, in conclusion a true American. In fact at the beginning he believes that the ghost doesn't exist, then, when he personally meets him, he is indifferent: he has more important things to do, making money, for example.

Virginia. *"She is a little girl of fifteen, lithe and lovely as a fawn, and with a fine freedom, in her large blue eyes. She is a wonderful amazon. In respect to her family she is kind and with wailing heart."* The daughter is the only one in the family who is scared by the ghost. She never speaks except to the ghost, at the end of the story.

Washington. The Otises' oldest son; *"he is a fire-haired rather good-looking young man; gardenias and peerage are his only weaknesses."*

The twins. They are usually called *"the stars and stripes"*, they are delightful boys and *"the only true republicans of the family."* These children always play tricks on the ghost and make him depressed and desperate. All along the story, they imagine jokes and even dress up as ghosts.

Mrs Otis is not scared at all and even asks him if he wants a remedy for his stomach. *"She is a very handsome middle-aged woman with fine eyes and a superb profile. She has a magnificent constitution and a wonderful amount of animal spirits."*

Duke of Chesire .*"He is a handsome young scapegrace"* desperately in love with the fifteen-year old Virginia Otis. However, his guardians pack him off to Eton, and he must wait to marry. When Virginia vanishes, he insists on being part of the search party. As soon as she reappears, he smothers her with kisses. His devotion is rewarded, and Virginia consents to become the Duchess of Cheshire.

Lord Canterville. A respectable descendent of the Canterville family, that was the owner of the Canterville Chase. *"He is an English man of the most punctilious honour."*

Mrs Umney is the old housekeeper of Canterville Chase and she is terrified by the ghost and tries to warn the family.



Manuela Tellini

SS di 1° Grado di Ragogna, Udine, ITALIA

December 2011