

SHORT STORY

Reading Tips

Because this short story was written more than 150 years ago, some of the words and phrases may seem formal and old-fashioned. It may take a while to get used to the **style**.

- If you are having trouble following a long sentence, try to break it down into smaller chunks. Look for each subject and verb.
- Use **context clues** to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Use the notes in the Guide for Reading to help you understand difficult words and passages.

As the story begins . . .

- Dr. Heidegger, an elderly doctor, is preparing to conduct an experiment.
- Dr. Heidegger has invited four elderly friends to his study.

What Does It Mean?

Melancholy means "sad."

MARK IT UP KEEP TRACK

As you read, you can use these marks to keep track of your understanding.

✓ I understand.

? I don't understand this.

! Interesting or surprising idea

Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

NATHANIEL
HAWTHORNE

PREVIEW In this story, written in the early 1800s, an elderly doctor wants to carry out a mysterious experiment with four of his elderly friends. He offers them water that he says has the power to make them young again. They don't believe him, but they try the water anyway. The effects produce some surprising consequences. Whether the experiment is successful is a matter of opinion—the doctor's, the friends', and the reader's.

FOCUS

The first part of the story introduces Dr. Heidegger and his four friends. It also describes the doctor's study.

MARK IT UP As you read, underline details that describe what each of the four friends has wasted or lost. An example is highlighted.

That very singular man, old Dr. Heidegger, once invited four venerable friends to meet him in his study. There were three white-bearded gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, and a withered gentlewoman, whose name was the Widow Wycherly. They were all melancholy old creatures, who had been unfortunate in life, and whose greatest misfortune it was, that they were not long ago in their graves. Mr. Medbourne, in the vigor of his age, had been a prosperous merchant, but had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was now little better than a mendicant. Colonel Killigrew had wasted his best years, and his health and substance, in the pursuit of sinful pleasures, which had

WORDS
TO
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venerable (vēn'ər-ə-bəl) *adj.* worthy of respect because of age, dignity, or character

GUIDE FOR READING

Use this guide for help with unfamiliar words and difficult passages.

★ Reader Success Strategy

The language of "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" is rather formal, so you may find it helpful to read some sentences aloud. As you read a sentence aloud, imagine that you are telling the story. How would you phrase the sentence in your own words?

6 **Gascoigne:** (gās-coin').

10–11 **whose . . . graves:** The most unfortunate aspect of their lives was that they were not already dead.

14 **speculation:** risky business deals;
mendicant (mĕn'dī-kənt): beggar.



MARK IT UP WORD POWER

Mark words that you'd like to add to your **Personal Word List**. After reading, you can record the words and their meanings beginning on page 476.

What Does It Mean?

Wasted his best years means that Colonel Killigrew had misspent the most active years of his life.

given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout, and divers other torments of soul and body. Mr. Gascoigne was a ruined politician, a man of evil fame, or at least had been so, till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation, and made him obscure instead of infamous. As for the Widow Wycherly, tradition tells us that she was a great beauty in her day; but, for a long while past, she had lived in deep seclusion, on account of certain scandalous stories, which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her. It is a circumstance worth mentioning, that each of these three old gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, were early lovers of the Widow Wycherly, and had once been on the point of cutting each other's throats for her sake. And, before proceeding farther, I will merely hint, that Dr. Heidegger and all his four guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves; as is not unfrequently the case with old people, when worried either by present troubles or woeful recollections.

"My dear old friends," said Dr. Heidegger, motioning them to be seated, "I am desirous of your assistance in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study."

If all stories were true, Dr. Heidegger's study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned chamber, festooned with cobwebs, and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken book-cases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios, and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment covered duodecimos. Over the central book-case was a bronze bust of Hippocrates, with which, according to some authorities, Dr. Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations, in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet, with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the book-cases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor's deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward. The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full length portrait of a young lady, arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin, and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her

GUIDE FOR READING

17 gout (gout): a painful disease of the joints, once thought to be caused by eating too much rich food.

21 obscure instead of infamous (ɪn'fə-məs): little known rather than well-known for wickedness.

25 gentry: respectable or socially high-ranking people.

32 beside themselves: upset; not rational.

40 festooned: decorated in draping curves.

43–44 folios . . . quartos . . . duodecimos: books of different sizes.

45 Hippocrates (hɪ-pŏk'rə-tēz'): a Greek physician, considered to be the father of medicine.

50–55 This is no ordinary mirror. People say that Dr. Heidegger can see in the glass the ghosts of patients who have died.

54 verge: border.

55 thitherward: in that direction.

58 visage (vɪz'ij): face.

Reading Check

The four guests have several things in common. Name two of them.

JOT IT DOWN Reread Lines 26–30

What relationship did the four guests have in their youth? (Clarify)

What Does It Mean?

A *bust* is a sculpture of a person's head, shoulders, and upper chest.

Reading Check

How does Dr. Heidegger behave toward the bust of Hippocrates?

What Does It Mean?

Obscurest means "darkest" or "most hidden."

Reader Success Strategy

Draw a sketch of Dr. Heidegger's study based on the description in this section.

dress. Above half a century ago, Dr. Heidegger had been on the point of marriage with this young lady; but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover's prescriptions, and died on the bridal evening.

The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned: it was a ponderous folio volume, bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back, and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic; and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it, merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor, and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror; while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned, and said—"Forbear!"

Such was Dr. Heidegger's study. On the summer afternoon of our tale, a small round table, as black as ebony, stood in the center of the room, sustaining a cut-glass vase, of beautiful form and elaborate workmanship. The sunshine came through the window, between the heavy festoons of two faded damask curtains, and fell directly across this vase; so that a mild splendor was reflected from it on the ashen visages of the five old people who sat around. Four champagne glasses were also on the table.

Pause **3** Reflect

FOCUS

Dr. Heidegger demonstrates the experiment he wants to carry out with his friends. He will try to make an old dried-up rose bloom again. As you read, look for magical elements in the demonstration.

"My dear old friends," repeated Dr. Heidegger, "may I reckon on your aid in performing an exceedingly curious experiment?"

Now Dr. Heidegger was a very strange old gentleman, whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories. Some of these fables, to my shame be it spoken, might possibly be traced back to mine own veracious self; and if any passages of the present tale


64 ponderous folio volume: a large book.
The magical effects of this book are described later in this paragraph.

72 forbear: stop; cease.

78 damask (dām'əsk): A patterned cloth.

89–94 The narrator admits to having told fables, or untrue stories, about Dr. Heidegger in the past.

92 veracious (vē-rā'shəs): truthful.

 **Reading Check**

What happened to the chambermaid once when she lifted Dr. Heidegger's book of magic?

Pause & Reflect

1. Review the details that you underlined as you read. For each of the four guests, write one word or phrase that describes what that character has lost or wasted. **(Clarify)**

Mr. Medbourne: _____

Colonel Killigrew: _____

Mr. Gascoigne: _____

Widow Wycherly: _____

2. Why has Dr. Heidegger invited his friends to his study? **(Clarify)**

As the story continues . . .

- Dr. Heidegger describes the experiment to his guests.
- He demonstrates the experiment using a dried rose.
- He invites his guests to take part in the experiment but warns them to be cautious.

should startle the reader's faith, I must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction-monger.

When the doctor's four guests heard him talk of his proposed experiment, they anticipated nothing more wonderful than the murder of a mouse in an air-pump, or the examination of a cobweb by the microscope, or some similar nonsense, with which he was constantly in the habit of pestering his intimates. But without waiting for a reply, Dr. Heidegger hobbled across the chamber, and returned with the same ponderous folio, bound in black leather, which common report affirmed to be a book of magic. Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume, and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue, and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

"This rose," said Dr. Heidegger, with a sigh, "this same withered and crumbling flower, blossomed five-and-fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder; and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five-and-fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?"

"Nonsense!" said the Widow Wycherly, with a peevish toss of her head. "You might as well ask whether an old woman's wrinkled face could ever bloom again."

"See!" answered Dr. Heidegger.

He uncovered the vase, and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first, it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon,

however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred, and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a death-like slumber; the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green; and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It was scarcely full-blown; for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bosom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.


WORDS
TO
KNOW

stigma (stīg'mə) *n.* a mark of disgrace

GUIDE FOR READING

94 **fiction-monger:** liar.


95–100 The guests are used to being called in to watch Dr. Heidegger's experiments. They expect nothing unusual.

 **MARK IT UP** Reread Lines 109–114

Who gave Dr. Heidegger the rose and how old is it? Circle words in the boxed passage that tell the answers. **(Clarify)**

116 **peevish:** irritable.

122 **imbibe:** absorb.

 **JOT IT DOWN** Reread Lines 122–131

What happens to the rose? **(Summarize)**

129 **full-blown:** completely open.

"That is certainly a very pretty deception," said the doctor's friends; carelessly, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjurer's show: "pray how was it effected?"

"Did you never hear of the (Fountain of Youth,)" asked Dr. Heidegger, "which Ponce De Leon, the Spanish adventurer, went in search of, two or three centuries ago?"

"But did Ponce De Leon ever find it?" said the Widow Wycherly.

"No," answered Dr. Heidegger, "for he never sought it in the right place. The famous Fountain of Youth, if I am rightly informed, is situated in the southern part of the Floridian peninsula, not far from Lake Macaco. Its source is overshadowed by several gigantic magnolias, which, though numberless centuries old, have been kept as fresh as violets, by the virtues of this wonderful water. An acquaintance of mine, knowing my curiosity in such matters, has sent me what you see in the vase."

"Ahem!" said Colonel Killigrew, who believed not a word of the doctor's story: "and what may be the effect of this fluid on the human frame?"

"You shall judge for yourself, my dear colonel," replied Dr. Heidegger; "and all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this admirable fluid, as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment."

While he spoke, Dr. Heidegger had been filling the four champagne glasses with the water of the Fountain of Youth. It was apparently impregnated with an effervescent gas, for little bubbles were continually ascending from the depths of the glasses, and bursting in silvery spray at the surface. As the liquor diffused a pleasant perfume, the old people doubted not that it possessed cordial and comfortable properties; and, though utter skeptics as to its rejuvenescent power, they were inclined to swallow it at once. But Dr. Heidegger besought them to stay a moment.

"Before you drink, my respectable old friends," said he, "it would be well that, with the experience of a life-time to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance, in passing a second time through the perils of

GUIDE FOR READING

134 **conjuror's**: magician's.

137 **Ponce De Leon** (pŏns' də lē-ŏn'): Spanish explorer who went to Florida in 1513.

162 **was apparently . . . gas**: seemed to have a bubbling gas dissolved in it.

166 **cordial** (kŏr'jəl): stimulating.

167 **rejuvenescent** (rĭ-jŏŏ've-nĕs'ənt): producing renewed youth.

168–169 **besought them to stay**: begged them to wait.

170–176 Dr. Heidegger warns his friends against making the same mistakes they made in their youth. He fully expects them to regain their youth.

Reading Check

What do the guests think of Dr. Heidegger's demonstration with the rose?

More About . . .

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH In the 1500s, the Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon searched all over Florida for the Fountain of Youth. Some people believed that water from the Fountain of Youth would make those who drank it young again.

JOT IT DOWN Reread Lines 142–149

Where did the water for Dr. Heidegger's experiment come from? (**Clarify**)

Reader Success Strategy

A narrator's comments and descriptions can create a mood or influence the reader's opinion about characters and events. As you read, highlight the narrator's words that help to create a mood or to influence the reader.

JOT IT DOWN Reread Lines 156–158

Why doesn't Dr. Heidegger want to drink the water himself? (**Infer**)

Reading Check

Why are the guests willing to drink the water that Dr. Heidegger offers them?

youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be, if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!”


The doctor’s four venerable friends made him no answer, except by a feeble and tremulous laugh; so very ridiculous was the idea, that, knowing how closely repentance treads behind the steps of error, they should ever go astray again.

“Drink, then,” said the doctor, bowing: “I rejoice that I have so well selected the subjects of my experiment.”

Pause & Reflect

FOCUS

The four guests are about to drink the magical water. Read on to see if your prediction on page 163 was correct.

 **MARK IT UP** Underline details that show how each guest acts after drinking the water.

With palsied hands, they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Dr. Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more woefully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of Nature’s dotage, and always the gray, décrepit, sapless,

miserable creatures, who now sat stooping round the doctor’s table, without life enough in their souls or bodies to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water, and replaced their glasses on the table.

Assuredly there was an almost immediate improvement in the aspect of the party, not unlike what might have been produced by a glass of generous wine, together with a sudden glow of cheerful sunshine, brightening over all their visages at once. There was a healthful suffusion on their cheeks, instead of the ashen hue that had made them look so corpselike. They gazed at one another, and fancied that some magic power had really begun to smooth away the deep and sad inscriptions which Father Time had been so long engraving on their brows. The Widow Wycherly adjusted her cap, for she felt almost like a woman again.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

tremulous (trēm'yə-ləs) *adj.* marked by trembling, quivering, or shaking

décrepit (dĕ-krĕp'ĭt) *adj.* weakened, worn out, or broken down by old age or hard use

GUIDE FOR READING

177–180 At this point, the four friends are certain that they would never repeat the errors of their past.

183 **palsied**: trembling.

186 **imputed**: attributed; credited.

191 **dotage** (dō'tīj): feebleness due to old age.

198 **aspect**: appearance.

201 **healthful suffusion**: rosy glow of health.

203–206 **fancied . . . power**: The narrator does not tell you whether the changes are really happening or are just in the characters' minds.

Pause Reflect

1. What do you think will happen when the guests drink the water? (**Predict**)

2. If you were one of the guests, would you join in the experiment? Give your reasons. (**Connect**)

As the story continues . . .

- The guests drink the magical water.
- They ask Dr. Heidegger for more.
- They rejoice in their newfound youth.

Reading Check

What is the “immediate improvement” that happens to the guests after they drink the water?

“Give us more of this wondrous water!” cried they, eagerly. “We are younger—but we are still too old! Quick!—give us more!”

“Patience, patience!” quoth Dr. Heidegger, who sat watching the experiment, with philosophic coolness. “You have been a long time growing old. Surely, you might be content to grow young in half an hour! But the water is at your service.”

Again he filled their glasses with the liquor of youth, enough of which still remained in the vase to turn half the old people in the city to the age of their own grand-children. While the bubbles were yet sparkling on the brim, the doctor’s four guests snatched their glasses from the table, and swallowed the contents at a single gulp. Was it delusion?

Even while the draught was passing down their throats, it seemed to have wrought a change on their whole systems. Their eyes grew clear and bright; a dark shade deepened among their silvery locks; they sat around the table, three gentlemen of middle age, and a woman, hardly beyond her buxom prime.

“My dear widow, you are charming!” cried Colonel Killigrew, whose eyes had been fixed upon her face, while the shadows of age were flitting from it like darkness from the crimson day-break.

The fair widow knew, of old, that Colonel Killigrew’s compliments were not always measured by sober truth; so she started up and ran to the mirror, still dreading that the ugly visage of an old woman would meet her gaze. Meanwhile, the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner, as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities; unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a lightsome dizziness, caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years. Mr. Gascoigne’s mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present, or future, could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory, and the people’s right; now he muttered some

WORDS
TO
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exhilaration (ĭg-zĭl'ə-rā'shən) *n.* a lively delight


GUIDE FOR READING

**READ ALOUD** Reread Lines 208-221

As you read this passage aloud, try to express the excitement and impatience of the guests.

221 **delusion**: trick; deception.

222 **draught** (drăft): the amount taken in a single act of drinking.

 **Reading Check**

What do the guests do when they begin to feel young?

What Does It Mean?

In vogue means "popular" or "in fashion."

perilous stuff or other, in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents, and a deeply deferential tone; as if a royal ear were listening to his well-turned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly bottle-song, and ringing his glass in symphony with the chorus, while his eyes wandered towards the buxom figure of the Widow Wycherly. On the other side of the table, Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents, with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice, by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs.

As for the Widow Wycherly, she stood before the mirror, curtsying and simpering to her own image, and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world beside. She thrust her face close to the glass, to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's-foot had indeed vanished. She examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair, that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

"My dear old doctor," cried she, "pray favor me with another glass!"

"Certainly, my dear madam, certainly!" replied the complaisant doctor; "See! I have already filled the glasses."

There, in fact, stood the four glasses, brim full of this wonderful water, the delicate spray of which, as it effervesced from the surface, resembled the tremulous glitter of diamonds. It was now so nearly sunset, that the chamber had grown duskier than ever; but a mild and moon-like splendor gleamed from within the vase, and rested alike on the four guests, and on the doctor's venerable figure. He sat in a high-backed, elaborately-carved, oaken arm-chair, with a gray dignity of aspect that might have well befitted that very Father Time, whose power had never been disputed, save by this fortunate company. Even while quaffing the third draught of the Fountain of Youth, they were almost awed by the expression of his mysterious visage.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

deferential (dĕf'ə-rĕn'shəl) *adj.* extremely respectful
dispute (dĭ-spyŭt') *v.* to question or doubt

GUIDE FOR READING

246 perilous stuff: dangerous information; Mr. Gascoigne's mind is moving so fast that he talks about all kinds of political subjects, including some secret ones.

259 simpering: smiling in a silly, self-conscious way.

270 complaisant (kəm-plá'sənt): willing to please.

277–283 Dr. Heidegger remains calm, though his guests are quite excited.

281 quaffing (kwɔf'ɪŋ): drinking heartily.

What Does It Mean?

Trolling forth a jolly bottle-song means "singing a merry drinking song."

✓ Reading Check

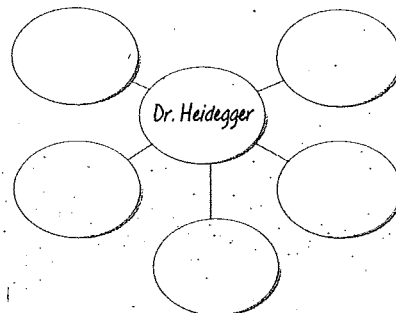
How does the Widow Wycherly act in front of the mirror?

📖 READ ALOUD Lines 271–277

Listen for the repetition of *s*, *m*, and *n* sounds. Try to picture the scene that is described.

★ Reader Success Strategy

The narrator compares Dr. Heidegger to Father Time. Think about why the narrator makes this comparison. In the following web, jot down a few phrases that you would use to describe Dr. Heidegger.



But, the next moment, the exhilarating gush of young life shot through their veins. They were now in the happy prime of youth. Age, with its miserable train of cares, and sorrows, and diseases, was remembered only as the trouble of a dream, from which they had joyously awoke. The fresh gloss of the soul, so early lost, and without which the world's successive scenes had been but a gallery of faded pictures, again threw its enchantment over all their prospects. They felt like new-created beings, in a new-created universe.

"We are young! We are young!" they cried, exultingly.

Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly marked characteristics of middle life, and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters, almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsomeness of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire, the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men, and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor, like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his nose, and pretended to pore over the black-letter pages of the book of magic; a third seated himself in an arm-chair, and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Dr. Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully, and leaped about the room. The Widow Wycherly—if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow—tripped up to the doctor's chair, with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

"Doctor, you dear old soul," cried she, "get up and dance with me!" And then the four young people laughed louder than ever, to think what a queer figure the poor old doctor would cut.

"Pray excuse me," answered the doctor, quietly. "I am old and rheumatic, and my dancing days were over long ago. But either of these gay young gentlemen will be glad of so pretty a partner."

Pause  Reflect

WORDS
TO
KNOW

exultingly (yǐng-zhī' tǐng-lè) *adv.* in a joyful and triumphant way
efface (yǐ-fās') *v.* to rub or wipe out; erase

GUIDE FOR READING

296 **assimilated**: absorbed.

297 **exuberant** (ĭg-zōō'bēr-ənt)

frolicksomeness: joyous playfulness.

298–315 The four guests begin to make fun of old people, even mocking Dr. Heidegger.

308 **mirthfully**: joyfully.

317 **rheumatic** (rōō-măt'ĭk): made stiff by a condition such as arthritis.

Reading Check

What is the guests' attitude toward old age now?

What Does It Mean?

Infirmity means "frailty" or "illness."

Decrepitude means "the weakness of old age."

Pause Reflect

1. In an **allegory**, people and objects represent certain qualities. Write the name of the character who might stand for each of the following qualities:

living for pleasure _____

political corruption _____

pride about appearance _____

love of money _____

(Interpret Allegory)

2. Reread the boxed passage, lines 312–319. Compare the behavior of the four guests with the behavior of Dr. Heidegger.

(Compare and Contrast)

FOCUS

Read to discover the final results of Dr. Heidegger's experiment.

"Dance with me, Clara!" cried Colonel Killigrew.

"No, no, I will be her partner!" shouted Mr. Gascoigne.

"She promised me her hand, fifty years ago!" exclaimed Mr. Medbourne.

They all gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp—another threw his arm about her waist—the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalry, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grand-sires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grand-dam.

But they were young: their burning passions proved them so. Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another's throats. As they struggled to and fro, the table was overturned, and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments. The precious Water of Youth flowed in a bright stream across the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly, which, grown old in the decline of summer, had alighted there to die. The insect fluttered lightly through the chamber, and settled on the snowy head of Dr. Heidegger.

"Come, come, gentlemen!—come, Madam Wycherly," exclaimed the doctor, "I really must protest against this riot."

They stood still, and shivered; for it seemed as if gray Time were calling them back from their sunny youth, far down into the chill and darksome vale of years. They looked at old Dr. Heidegger, who sat in his carved arm-chair, holding the rose of half a century, which he had rescued from among the fragments of the shattered vase. At the motion of his hand, the four rioters resumed their seats; the more readily, because their violent exertions had wearied them, youthful though they were.

GUIDE FOR READING

331 **strove to disengage herself:**
struggled to free herself.

337–338 **grand-sires . . . grand-dam:** old
men . . . old woman.

340 **coquetry** (kō'kĭ-trē): flirtatious
behavior.

355 **vale:** valley.

As the story ends . . .

- The narrator reveals the results of the experiment.
- Dr. Heidegger learns a lesson.

Reading Check

Briefly describe the behavior of the guests now that they are young again.

NOT IT DOWN Reread Lines 334–338

The narrator is unclear about whether the reflection is real or not. What does the image in the mirror reveal? (**Clarify**)

Reader Success Strategy

An author sometimes tells a story to teach a lesson. As you read the end of the story, think of what lesson the author might be trying to teach the reader. (Notice how Dr. Heidegger's behavior is different from that of his guests.)

“My poor Sylvia’s rose!” ejaculated Dr. Heidegger, holding it in the light of the sunset clouds: “it appears to be fading again.”

And so it was. Even while the party were looking at it, the flower continued to shrivel up, till it became as dry and fragile as when the doctor had first thrown it into the vase. He shook off the few drops of moisture which clung to its petals.

“I love it as well thus, as in its dewy freshness,” observed he, pressing the withered rose to his withered lips. While he spoke, the butterfly fluttered down from the doctor’s snowy head, and fell upon the floor.

His guests shivered again. A strange chillness, whether of the body or spirit they could not tell, was creeping gradually over them all. They gazed at one another, and fancied that each fleeting moment snatched away a charm, and left a deepening furrow where none had been before. Was it an illusion? Had the changes of a life-time been crowded into so brief a space, and were they now four aged people, sitting with their old friend, Dr. Heidegger?

“Are we grown old again, so soon!” cried they, dolefully.

In truth, they had. The Water of Youth possessed merely a virtue more transient than that of wine. The delirium which it created had effervesced away. Yes! they were old again. With a shuddering impulse, that showed her a woman still, the widow clasped her skinny hands before her face, and wished that the coffin-lid were over it, since it could be no longer beautiful.

“Yes, friends, ye are old again,” said Dr. Heidegger; “and lo! the Water of Youth is all lavished on the ground. Well—I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to bathe my lips in it—no, though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me!”

But the doctor’s four friends had taught no such lesson to themselves. They resolved forthwith to make a pilgrimage to Florida, and quaff at morning, noon, and night, from the Fountain of Youth.

Pause & Reflect

WORDS
TO
KNOW

transient (trăn’shənt) *adj.* lasting or existing for only a short time

GUIDE FOR READING

362 **ejaculated:** exclaimed.

369-370 Note that Dr. Heidegger still loves the rose, even though it is now old again.

383 **delirium** (dī-līr'ē-əm): a state of uncontrolled excitement or emotion.

389 **lavished:** wasted

 **Reading Check**

How does Dr. Heidegger feel about the rose when it begins to change?

What Does It Mean?

Bemoan it not means "am not sorry."
Dr. Heidegger is not sorry that the water is gone.

Pause & Reflect

1. What do the four guests decide to do at the end of the story? **(Clarify)**

2. What lesson has Dr. Heidegger learned? **(Infer)**

 **CHALLENGE**

Several times the author seems to create uncertainty about whether the four guests really become young again. Do you think the changes are real or imaginary? Mark evidence from the story to support your opinion. Why do you think the author introduces the element of uncertainty? **(Draw Conclusions)**

Active Reading SkillBuilder

Interpreting Allegory

An **allegory** is a work of literature in which people, objects, and events represent general qualities, such as good and evil. Allegories are written not only to entertain but also to teach lessons. As you read "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," complete the following chart by identifying a quality or idea that each guest in the story might represent. An example is given.

Character	What he or she loses or wastes	What happens when he or she is given a second youth	What he or she might represent
Mr. Medbourne	<i>wealth</i>	<i>schemes to make money again</i>	<i>greed</i>
Col. Killigrew			
Mr. Gascoigne			
Widow Wycherly			

- Pride/Vanity is excessive belief in one's own abilities, that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It has been called the sin from which all others arise.
- Envy is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation.
- Gluttony is an inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires.
- Lust is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body.
- Wrath/Anger is manifested in the individual who spurns love and opts instead for fury. It is also known as Wrath.
- Greed is the desire for material wealth or gain, ignoring the realm of the spiritual. It is also called Avarice or Covetousness.
- Sloth is the avoidance of physical or spiritual work.