

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Directed by Jane Campion (1996)

Starring Nicole Kidman and John Malkovich

The Portrait of a Lady (1996) by Jane Campion

232

1. stables: scuderie.

The story on screen so far...

Isabel has been married to Osmond for over a year. She still seems quite happy but the general consensus is that he only married her for her money. In this scene Isabel's cousin, Ralph, pays her a visit for the first time after her marriage. He does not enter her home but meets her in the family stables¹. His health is deteriorating due to his illness. Here he expresses his opinion on Isabel's husband.



▲ Nicole Kidman in a scene from the film *The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996.



OVER TO YOU

① Watch the scene for the first time and underline the correct alternative.

1. Ralph is very *critical* / *complimentary* of Isabel's husband.
2. Isabel *agrees* / *disagrees* with him.
3. She *passes no comment on* / *defends* her husband.
4. Ralph speaks in this way because he is *protective towards* Isabel / *jealous of* Osmond.
5. At the end of the scene Isabel is *frightened* / *angry* while Ralph is *saddened* / *relieved*.

▼ Nicole Kidman in Jane Campion's film *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), based on Henry James's novel.



- 2** Watch again and make a note of all the adjectives Ralph uses to describe Osmond.

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▲ John Malkovich in Jane Campion's film *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), based on Henry James's novel.

- 3** Speaking about Osmond Ralph says: 'He's the incarnation of taste... Have you ever seen such a taste - ruffled?' What is Ralph's tone here, choose.

- ☐ one of admiration
- ☐ complimentary
- ☐ one of sarcasm

- 4** Watch the scene again carefully and complete what Ralph says his hopes were for Isabel's future.

1. 'I should have said that the man for you would have had a more / / sort of nature.'
2. 'But weren't you made for something than to keep guard over the sensibilities of a

2. ruffled: (qui) irritato.

- 5** At the end of the scene Isabel says to Ralph, 'Then you are not disinterested.' What does she mean by this? Choose.

- ☐ when speaking of her husband Ralph cannot be impartial.
- ☐ when speaking of her husband Ralph is speaking from ignorance.

- 6** At the end of the scene Ralph says: 'I love you but without hope.' Why is there no hope for Ralph (2 reasons).

- 7** Why do you think Ralph wanted to meet Isabel in the stables and not in her home?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- 8** Connected to Ralph's comments on Isabel's marriage in what way can the bars we see in the stables be symbolic?

- 9** Comment on Ralph's appearance. How can we understand that he is ill?

- 10** Isabel is very angry with Ralph for criticising her husband but how does she look at him? Choose.

- ☐ with concern
- ☐ with hatred
- ☐ with respect
- ☐ with repulsion