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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

*The Importance
of Being Earnest*

by Oscar Wilde

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ISBN 10: 1-58049-054-9
ISBN 13: 978-1-58049-054-2
Reorder No. 300531

The Importance of Being Earnest

Background Notes

In the plays Oscar Wilde wrote between 1892 and 1895, he largely ignored the trend of the period toward increasing realism in the theater. In an essay, “The Decay of Lying,” Wilde put forth his reason: “As a method, Realism is a complete failure and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject matter.” He pointed out that modernity is quickly outdated and ultimately precludes the reader’s ability to associate with or find meaning in the story.

This is pertinent because Wilde’s plays are not in the tradition most familiar to students. Wilde’s plays are often compared to the comedies of the Restoration period, which do not have realistic, credible plots or fully rounded, believable characters. Some readers view his plot and characters solely as a means to convey many witticisms.

It is for this reason that the critic Eric Bentley (*The Playwright as Thinker*) says that many people dismiss Wilde as a dramatist of little importance.

It is easy to handle this play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, without noticing what it contains. It is so consistently farcical in tone, characterization and plot that very few care to root out any more serious content. The general conclusion has been that Wilde merely decorates a silly play with a flippant wit...He is dismissed as “not really a dramatist at all”...Yet we shall only display our own insensitivity if we dismiss him.

Bentley develops his thesis that one or two witty remarks may be considered flippant, but as Wilde piles flippancies on flippancies, they cease to be flippant. They become a satiric criticism of life. Bentley points out that Wilde’s plays have both a substance and a style worth studying. More relevant, however, is the fact that Wilde survived the fate he had predicted for writers of realism; his plays are still produced today, and people pay him the highest compliment—they pay money to see his plays. We study this play in the hopes that more people may see and enjoy the wit, humanity, and insight of Oscar Wilde.

All references come from the Dover Thrift edition of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, published 1990.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss Wilde's style of writing and contrast the style of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with the style of another comedy with which the student is familiar.
2. identify four targets of Wilde's satire and analyze the treatment of these targets.
3. write a short paper explaining the enduring popularity of Wilde's plays.
4. identify and discuss the following terms:
 - satire
 - farce
 - comedy of manners
 - art for art's sake
5. identify the irony between the elegant, suave demeanor of the characters and their absurd conversations and behavior.
6. identify the pun central to the play and analyze its meaning.
7. discuss the play in the context of a Victorian England audience.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Terms and Definitions

Farce—a broad comedy, dependent on overblown speech, unbelievable situations, exaggerated characters, and, frequently, sexual innuendoes. **Examples:** Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*, Marx Brothers' movies

Satire—using humor to expose something or someone to ridicule. **Examples:** *Animal Farm*; *Gulliver's Travels*

Comedy of Manners—a popular form of satirical drama during the English Restoration (approximately 1660-1700). Satire was often directed at aberrant social behavior. The dialogue was witty and polished, and the plot frequently involved illicit lovers and cases of mistaken identity. As in farces, the characters were more often types than individuals. **Example:** Congreve's *The Way of the World*

Art for Art's Sake—a doctrine that traces itself back to a poetic principle of Edgar Allan Poe which states, "The poem [is] written solely for the poem's sake." The doctrine maintains that the aim of art should be the creation and the perfection of technical expression, rather than the production of some moral, political, or social good. One of the foremost proponents of this doctrine was Walter Pater, who was a professor at Oxford while Oscar Wilde was in attendance. Wilde became a disciple of Pater, and later, a leader in the movement.

Epigram—a short statement or poem with a witty turn of thought or a wittily condensed expression. **Example:** "I can resist anything but temptation."— *Oscar Wilde*

Irony—a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- *Dramatic Irony* - the audience or reader knows more about a character's situation than the character does and knows that the character's understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, "What atrocities could she commit in one day?" The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon's by day's end.
- *Structural Irony* – the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader's correct ones. **Example:** Huck Finn.
- *Verbal Irony* - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. **Example:** A large man whose nickname is "Tiny."

Pun—an expression that achieves emphasis or humor by utilizing:

- two distinctly different meanings for the same word. **Example:** "play" meaning "fun" and "play" meaning a performance on stage.
or
- two similar sounding words. **Example:** close/clothes. **Example:** In *Romeo and Juliet*, one character, Mercutio, says after being fatally stabbed, "Ask for me tomorrow and you will find me a grave man."

The Importance of Being Earnest

Test

1. In this play, the reader may find
 - A. irony.
 - B. satire.
 - C. epigrams.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

2. This play is most like
 - A. an Elizabethan revenge play.
 - B. a realistic drama.
 - C. a historical romance.
 - D. a comedy of manners.
 - E. a Gothic drama.

3. The literary movement with which Wilde is most closely associated is
 - A. Art for Art's Sake.
 - B. existentialism.
 - C. romanticism.
 - D. realism.
 - E. classicism.

4. Of her, it is said, "Her hair has turned quite gold from grief."
 - A. Lady Bracknell
 - B. Gwendolen
 - C. Cecily
 - D. Lady Harbury
 - E. Miss Prism

5. Lady Bracknell changes her opinion of this character after learning of a 130,000 pound inheritance.
 - A. Algernon
 - B. Miss Prism
 - C. Cecily
 - D. Jack
 - E. Dr. Chasuble

6. As the play ends, it is discovered that Jack is
 - A. a member of the royal family.
 - B. an uncle of Lady Bracknell.
 - C. Algernon's older brother.
 - D. Cecily's real blood brother.
 - E. bankrupt.

7. A number of comments in the play indicate that
 - A. style is more important than content.
 - B. honesty is always the best policy.
 - C. we gather what we sow.
 - D. realism is a failure.
 - E. this play is neither a farce nor a satire.

8. This play obviously and purposefully does not have
 - A. well rounded characters.
 - B. epigrams.
 - C. a satirical style.
 - D. a theme.
 - E. irony.

9. A target of Wilde's satire in this play is
 - A. dandies.
 - B. farce.
 - C. working class ignorance.
 - D. Art for Art's Sake.
 - E. royal arrogance.

10. One of Wilde's stylistic techniques is to link incongruous elements in order to
 - A. create humor.
 - B. emphasize setting.
 - C. make a striking metaphor about beauty.
 - D. demonstrate his intellectual skills.
 - E. befuddle the reader.

11. This play pivots on which of the following element(s) found in early farces?
 - A. slapstick comedy
 - B. a shrewd and conniving servant or slave
 - C. a child lost or switched at birth
 - D. vigorous action and emotional cruelty
 - E. all male actors

12. Lady Bracknell opposed Gwendolen's engagement because Jack
- A. lacks sufficient funds to support Gwendolen.
 - B. has the reputation as a real party person.
 - C. had a dubious beginning and can produce neither parent.
 - D. has always been impertinent to her and is a bad influence on Algernon.
 - E. has not been christened.
13. Instead of the baby, what did Miss Prism put in the baby carriage?
- A. the French poodle
 - B. a manuscript for a three-volume novel
 - C. a shopping bag
 - D. the family's silverware
 - E. a poisonous snake
14. Algernon first became aware of Cecily's existence when
- A. he saw her picture in Jack's wallet.
 - B. he saw the inscription in Jack's cigarette case.
 - C. he visited Jack's country home.
 - D. Jack brought her to London.
 - E. she stopped by his house looking for Ernest.
15. The final curtain comes down as Jack says
- A. "All's Well That Ends Well."
 - B. "I've now realised...the vital Importance of Being Earnest."
 - C. "This has truly been a Comedy of Errors."
 - D. "As for the name Earnest, it is all much Ado About Nothing."
 - E. "Forget Being Earnest; being in Love is of vital Importance."
16. Algernon states the opinion that
- A. the essence of romance is uncertainty.
 - B. romance and marriage are like the horse and carriage.
 - C. romance comes first and then love.
 - D. marriage comes first and then romance.
 - E. romance is only a figment of a writer's imagination.
17. In this play, a person who makes up a fictitious friend or relative in order to have an excuse to leave home is called a(n)
- A. divine hypocrite.
 - B. primate.
 - C. Bunburyist.
 - D. anchorite.
 - E. Earnest.

18. Algernon responds to Jack's criticism about being overdressed by saying, "If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being
- A. occasionally a little bit drunk."
 - B. seldom a frightful bore or a fudge."
 - C. invariably the brightest light at the party."
 - D. always immensely over-educated."
 - E. ready for anything."
19. Early in the play, Wilde appears to set up a dichotomy between
- A. science and life.
 - B. love and marriage.
 - C. science and math.
 - D. music and art.
 - E. romance and love.
20. Who asks the question, "Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?"
- A. Lady Bracknell
 - B. Dr. Chasuble
 - C. Algernon
 - D. Gwendolen
 - E. General Bracknell

Essay Questions (Choose two)

1. Compare and contrast Wilde's comedy on points of style, characterization, and plot with a television situation comedy.
2. Discuss the targets of Wilde's satire, and describe some of the techniques he uses to provoke laughter.
3. Consider and discuss how a comedy that is nearly one hundred years old appears to be as popular today as when it was written.
4. Which character in the play is the most shallow and static? Why? Use at least three specific examples.
5. Discuss the central pun of the play (Ernest/earnest) and its significance for the style vs. substance debate at work in the drama.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Test Answer Key

1.	E	6.	C	11.	C	16.	A
2.	D	7.	A	12.	C	17.	C
3.	A	8.	A	13.	B	18.	D
4.	D	9.	A	14.	B	19.	B
5.	C	10.	A	15.	B	20.	A

The Importance of Being Earnest

Questions for Essay or Discussion

1. How did you respond to the characters and plot in this play? Did it bother you that the plot was improbable and the characters unbelievable? Why?
2. Identify at least three scenes that were comic, and explain what created the humor.
3. Identify three people or institutions that Wilde mocks. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being mild amusement and 5 being bitter denunciation, how strong is Wilde's criticism of his targets? Use at least two specific, supporting details to explain your analysis of each.
4. Why is this play popular with audiences? Why do you suppose the play is as popular today as it was when it was written nearly one hundred years ago?
5. Steve Martin, a well-known actor, director, and comedian, has adapted a number of classic books, including *Cyrano de Bergerac (Roxanne)* and *Silas Marner (A Simple Twist of Fate)*, and made them into popular movies with contemporary settings. What changes do you think he would make so he could adapt this book into a contemporary movie?
6. Compare and contrast this play with popular comedies of today. What generalizations can you make about comedies and the time periods in which they are produced?
7. What is the significance of the play's title, *The Importance of Being Earnest*? Is this an appropriate title for the play? Why or why not?
8. The subtitle of this work is "a trivial play for serious people." What do you think Wilde meant by that? Who did Wilde expect his audience to be, and how do you think he felt toward them? Remember that Wilde was writing during the final years of Queen Victoria's reign.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Study Guide

Teacher's Copy

Act One

Vocabulary

apoplexy–stroke
conduce–contribute
cynical–distrustful of human nature and its motives
domesticity–shortened, familiar form
expurgations–removals of objectionable elements
forte–strong point
glibly–nonchalantly, with easy lack of concern
indecorous–unseemly, not proper
invariably–in an unchanging manner
lax–not strict, loose
metaphysical–abstract, theoretical
profligate–dissolute, immoral
propounding–putting forward for consideration
purple–high ranks
salver–serving tray
semi-recumbent–half lying down
sententiously–in a pompously moralizing manner
surmised–guessed
tedious–boring, tiresomely dull

1. Much of the humor in this play arises from the incongruity within conversations, and even within sentences. At the beginning of the act, what statement of Algernon's appears incongruous? Why?

“And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?” The comment joins the lofty “science of Life” to the most trivial, “cucumber sandwiches.” (Act I)

2. Another cause of much of the humor is inverted expectation. That is, the reader is set up to hear a conventional piece of wisdom, but the character delivers a line that is quite the opposite of what is expected. Why are the first two lines in the play examples of that?

Conventional wisdom has it that it is impolite not to listen.

3. One of the concerns of the age is mentioned a number of times in this play. It may be viewed as art (emotion or sentiment) versus science (reason or precision). How does Algernon bring it in as a comment on his piano playing? How else do you see the art versus science analysis used?

He says he does not play accurately (scientifically), but he plays with great sentiment. Romance and marriage are also analyzed according to art and science.

4. In the opening exchange between Lane and Algernon, what satiric shot does Wilde aim at the honesty of servants? Is this characterization supported or refuted by the behavior of Lane?

Algernon says that it is a practice of servants to inflate champagne consumption rates at parties so that they may drink it themselves. This character is refuted because Lane consistently covers for Algernon's behavior, as in the absence of cucumber sandwiches.

5. How does Algernon describe Lane's view on marriage? In that speech, how does Algernon turn conventional wisdom around?

He describes Lane's views on marriage as lax, and Algernon appears upset because the lower class is not providing a good example. Conventional wisdom has it that the upper class, particularly the royal family, ought to provide a good example of family life.

6. When Jack first appears, he delivers one of Wilde's many epigrams. How is it true?

Jack says, "When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people." (Act I)

Answers may vary. Example: Jack comes to town to avoid his responsibilities; at home, he must be a dutiful guardian to his ward, Cecily.

7. What is ironic about Algernon's response to Jack regarding neighbors when he says, "How immensely you must amuse them"? (Act I)

Jack speaks of amusing his neighbors; then he tells us that they are perfectly horrid, and he has never spoken to one of them.

8. What is Algernon's view regarding romance and marriage? Do you agree?

The essence of romance is uncertainty; once one is married, the uncertainty and romance vanish.

Opinions will vary.

9. Who is Cecily, and how did Algernon first become aware of her existence?

She is Jack's ward, and Algernon discovered her existence by reading the inscription in Jack's cigarette case.

10. What does Jack have written on his calling card?

Mr. Ernest Worthing, B4, The Albany

11. What literary device does Wilde employ in Algernon's speech to Jack upon learning his name is not Ernest?

Wilde uses a pun with the words "Ernest" and "earnest." (Act I)

12. What, precisely, is a Bunburyist? How are Algernon and Jack both Bunburyists?

A person who creates a fictitious identity is Wilde's concept of a Bunburyist. The Bunburyists is then able to use the fictitious person as an excuse to be away from home. Algernon has created Bunbury, and Jack has created Ernest.

13. Why does Algernon call Jack a Bunburyist?

Jack has two identities. In the country, he is known as Jack; in the city, he goes by the name of Ernest.

14. Algernon aims a number of satiric barbs at marriage and "the happy English home." (Act I) Do you suppose Wilde means any of the cynical comments, or is he simply being funny?

Opinions will vary. Discussion should include the role of truth in humor.

15. How are Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen related to Algernon?

Lady Bracknell is Algernon's aunt, and Gwendolen is her daughter.

16. We are told that the death of Lady Harbury's husband has altered her. In what way has our expectation been inverted?

We expect that grief has caused her to look terrible; however, we learn that "her hair has turned quite gold from grief." She looks twenty years younger and "seems...to be living entirely for pleasure now." (Act I)

17. Earlier, we learned that Jack was in love with Gwendolen, and we now learn that Gwendolen is also in love with Jack. What first caused Gwendolen to love Jack?

His name Ernest caused her to love him. Gwendolen says, "There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence." (Act I)

18. In Lady Bracknell's interview of Jack, she takes a satiric shot at education in England. What does she say of it?

"Fortunately in England...education produces no effect whatsoever." (Act I)

19. Why does Lady Bracknell conclude that Jack is not a suitable husband for Gwendolen? Why does this matter so much to her?

Jack does not know the identity of his parents. It is a matter of class.

20. Although the conversation seems normal, what is the absurdity of the characters' concerns about the conditions surrounding Jack's discovery as a foundling?

He was found in a handbag in a railroad station cloakroom, but the characters focus on details of the handbag, the train line, and the station.

21. In Wilde's view, style is paramount. How does Algernon's response to Jack regarding cleverness emphasize that?

Asked if his remark about mothers and daughters is clever, Algernon responds, "It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be." (Act I) In addition, Jack's responses, which begin "I am sick..." and "My dear fellow..." reflect Wilde's views on style. (Act I)

22. Why has Jack kept his life in the country a closely guarded secret from Algernon?

For one thing, he does not want Algernon to meet his sweet, innocent ward, Cecily. Perhaps he does not trust Algernon.

23. How does Algernon find out the address of Jack's country house?

He hears Jack give the address to Gwendolen.

Act Two

Vocabulary

apprehensions—fears
arduous—difficult
chafe—become irritated
chronicle—record
débonnaire—suave
demeanour—outward manner
effeminate—unmanly
emigrating—leaving one's country to live elsewhere
equanimity—the quality of being even-tempered under stress
interment—burial
lorgnette—eyeglasses with a handle
machinations—scheming, crafty actions
misanthrope—a person who hates or distrusts humanity
neologistic—relating to a newly coined word
philanthropic—humanitarian, promoting human welfare
portmanteaus—large suitcases
presumptuous—excessively confident
Quixotic—impractically idealistic
reconciliation—restoration of friendship
superciliously—in a haughtily scornful manner, disdainfully
utilitarian—emphasizing usefulness over beauty
vacillating—wavering

1. Who is Miss Prism?

She is Cecily's governess.

2. How did Jack become Cecily's guardian? Is he related to her by blood?

Cecily's grandfather, Mr. Cardew, adopted Jack as an infant. Apparently, on Mr. Cardew's death, Jack became executor of the estate. Since Cecily is Mr. Cardew's granddaughter, she is not related by blood to Jack.

3. Who is Ernest, according to what Jack has told Cecily and Miss Prism? Why?

He has told them that Ernest is his wicked brother. Because Jack often goes into town to take care of Ernest, he has a good reason to absent himself from the house.

4. Why has Jack planned to have Ernest die?

For one thing, Cecily is becoming very interested in Ernest. In addition, Jack plans to stay home with Gwendolen once they are married, so he will not need an excuse to leave.

5. What unexpected guest arrives at Jack's country house? How does he introduce himself?

Algernon shows up and claims to be Ernest.

6. When Algernon tells Cecily that he has not really been all that wicked, what is her response?

“I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.” (Act II)

7. Why does Jack show up in mourning clothes?

He says that Ernest has died in Paris.

8. Why is Jack going to have the minister, Dr. Chasuble, christen him?

To keep Gwendolen’s love, he is going to be christened and change his name to Ernest.

9. What exchange between Jack and Algernon shows that they are both dandies or fops?

Algernon says, “I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.” Jack responds, “That is better than being always over-dressed as you are.” (Act II)

10. In regard to her diary, Cecily tells Algernon, “You see, it is simply a very young girl’s record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication.” (Act II) At whom is this aimed?

It would be aimed at the British press, the British reading public, or both.

11. We learn that Algernon has fallen in love with Cecily, and Cecily for some time has been in love with Ernest, even though she had never met him. What caused Cecily to fall in love with Ernest? Why?

His wicked ways, as reported by Jack, are attractive to her, as is his name. She says, “I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.” (Act II) She sees her own life as so protected and mundane that Ernest seems exciting.

12. When Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew meet, what causes a disagreement to arise between them?

They both believe that they are the one and only true love of Ernest Worthing.

13. How does Act II end?

Jack and Algy console themselves by eating and arguing about muffins.

Act Three

Vocabulary

apprised–informed
credulity–willingness to believe too readily
effrontery–disrespectful boldness
insuperable–incapable of being overcome
irrevocable–unalterable
ostentatiously–showily
Oxonian–graduate of Oxford University
quails–cowers
solicitors–lawyers
tutelage–state of being under a guardian

1. What comment of Gwendolen's at the beginning of Act Three once again brings up the importance of style? What does this illustrate about her character?

*She says, "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing." (Act III)
This indicates that not only is she empty-headed but also that she does not understand what is actually important.*

2. Although both girls forgive Jack and Algy for having deceived them, what do they say remains as an "insuperable barrier" to marriage? (Act III)

Their names are not Ernest.

3. Why does Lady Bracknell say that Mr. Bunbury "seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians"? (Act III)

When his doctors told him that he could not live, "Bunbury died." (Act III)

4. Although Lady Bracknell is initially against Algernon's engagement to Cecily, what wins her over?

She is made aware of the large amount of money Cecily has in the Funds: "Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her." (Act III)

5. For what reason does Jack refuse to give his consent to Algy and Cecily's engagement?

He says he will refuse to give his consent until Lady Bracknell consents to his engagement to Gwendolen.

6. What is Lady Bracknell's response?

It is entirely out of the question that she will ever give her consent because of Jack's dubious beginnings in the railway station.

7. What does Lady Bracknell accuse Miss Prism of having done twenty-eight years ago?

She went out of the house with a baby and never returned.

8. What does Miss Prism admit?

She admits that she put her three-volume manuscript in the baby carriage and mistakenly put the baby in the leather bag; then, she absent-mindedly left the bag and the baby in a railway station.

9. What does it turn out is Jack's real identity? What is his real name?

Jack is Lady Bracknell's nephew and Algy's older brother. He has the same name as his father, Ernest Moncrieff.

10. As the curtain falls, Lady Bracknell accuses Jack of "displaying signs of triviality"; what does Jack say he realizes? (Act III)

"I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest." (Act III)

The Importance of Being Earnest

Study Guide

Student Copy

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Vocabulary

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conduce–contribute
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domesticity–shortened, familiar form
expurgations–removals of objectionable elements
forte–strong point
glibly–nonchalantly, with easy lack of concern
indecorous–unseemly, not proper
invariably–in an unchanging manner
lax–not strict, loose
metaphysical–abstract, theoretical
profligate–dissolute, immoral
propounding–putting forward for consideration
purple–high ranks
salver–serving tray
semi-recumbent–half lying down
sententiously–in a pompously moralizing manner
surmised–guessed
tedious–boring, tiresomely dull

1. Much of the humor in this play arises from the incongruity within conversations, and even within sentences. At the beginning of the act, what statement of Algernon's appears incongruous? Why?

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5. How does Algernon describe Lane's view on marriage? In that speech, how does Algernon turn conventional wisdom around?

6. When Jack first appears, he delivers one of Wilde's many epigrams. How is it true?

7. What is ironic about Algernon's response to Jack regarding neighbors when he says, "How immensely you must amuse them"? (Act I)

8. What is Algernon's view regarding romance and marriage? Do you agree?

9. Who is Cecily, and how did Algernon first become aware of her existence?

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demeanour–outward manner
effeminate–unmanly
emigrating–leaving one's country to live elsewhere
equanimity–the quality of being even-tempered under stress
interment–burial
lorgnette–eyeglasses with a handle
machinations–scheming, crafty actions
misanthrope–a person who hates or distrusts humanity
neologistic–relating to a newly coined word
philanthropic–humanitarian, promoting human welfare
portmanteaus–large suitcases
presumptuous–excessively confident
Quixotic–impractically idealistic
reconciliation–restoration of friendship
superciliously–in a haughtily scornful manner, disdainfully
utilitarian–emphasizing usefulness over beauty
vacillating–wavering

1. Who is Miss Prism?
2. How did Jack become Cecily's guardian? Is he related to her by blood?
3. Who is Ernest, according to what Jack has told Cecily and Miss Prism? Why?
4. Why has Jack planned to have Ernest die?

5. What unexpected guest arrives at Jack's country house? How does he introduce himself?

6. When Algernon tells Cecily that he has not really been all that wicked, what is her response?

7. Why does Jack show up in mourning clothes?

8. Why is Jack going to have the minister, Dr. Chasuble, christen him?

9. What exchange between Jack and Algernon shows that they are both dandies or fops?

10. In regard to her diary, Cecily tells Algernon, "You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication." (Act II) At whom is this aimed?

11. We learn that Algernon has fallen in love with Cecily, and Cecily for some time has been in love with Ernest, even though she had never met him. What caused Cecily to fall in love with Ernest? Why?

12. When Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew meet, what causes a disagreement to arise between them?

13. How does Act II end?

Act Three

Vocabulary

apprised–informed

credulity–willingness to believe too readily

effrontery–disrespectful boldness

insuperable–incapable of being overcome

irrevocable–unalterable

ostentatiously–showily

Oxonian–graduate of Oxford University

quails–cowers

solicitors–lawyers

tutelage–state of being under a guardian

1. What comment of Gwendolen's at the beginning of Act Three once again brings up the importance of style? What does this illustrate about her character?
2. Although both girls forgive Jack and Algy for having deceived them, what do they say remains as an "insuperable barrier" to marriage? (Act III)
3. Why does Lady Bracknell say that Mr. Bunbury "seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians"? (Act III)
4. Although Lady Bracknell is initially against Algernon's engagement to Cecily, what wins her over?
5. For what reason does Jack refuse to give his consent to Algy and Cecily's engagement?

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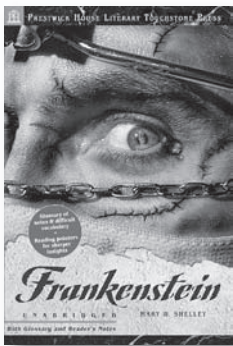
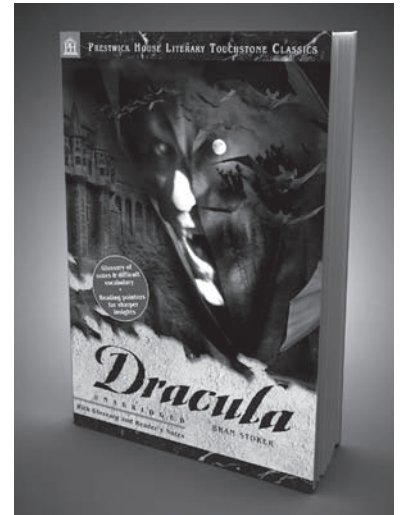
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