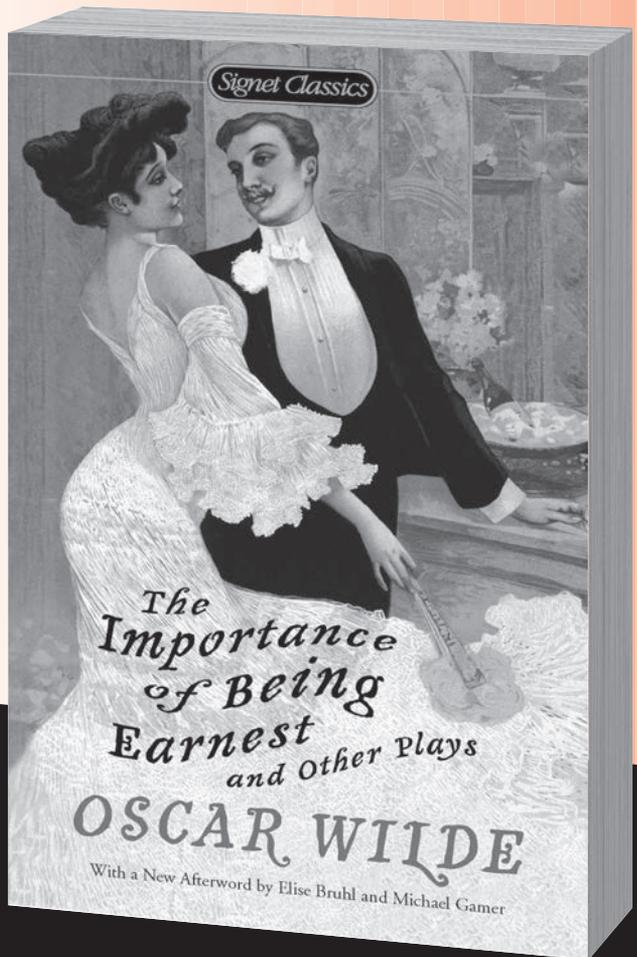


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSICS EDITION OF

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND OTHER PLAYS

BY OSCAR WILDE



BY LISE KLOEPEL

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## INTRODUCTION

Often categorized as a comedy of manners or satirical farce, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, creates a world that inverts reality—where serious themes, such as marriage and class struggle, are trivialized and the trivial aspects of life, such as the amount of sugar in one's tea, are treated as incredibly serious. Wilde was considered a proponent of the aesthetics or “art for art's sake” movement. He believed art should be the ultimate aim of any endeavor, and so he elevated the simple act of speech to an Olympic sport by having his characters compete with one another through his version of verbal gymnastics.

Many young people already enjoy and appreciate the irony and verbal sparring found in popular British comedies, such as *Monty Python* or TV sitcoms such as *Keeping Up Appearances*. A discussion of British humor can be an entry point for students to begin to understand the language, period, and artistry

of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Having your students consider the following essential questions before, during, or after reading this play (written over 100 years ago) might help them find its contemporary relevance: What does it mean to be a “good person” or “do the right thing”? Who decides what is right or wrong? When can goodness be viewed as something negative? For example, what comes to mind when you hear the phrase “do-gooder” or “goody-two-shoes”? How can comedy be used to not only mock but also critique power structures?

This guide is designed to provide an approach to teaching *The Importance of Being Earnest* focusing on themes, character analysis, and drama-based exercises. The before, during, and after reading instructional activities serve to enrich the students' experience of the play and increase their appreciation of the art and craft of theater.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Act I begins with John (Jack) Worthing who assumes the name of Ernest in the city, visiting his fellow bachelor friend Algernon (Algy) Moncrieff at his London flat. It is soon revealed that both have been deceiving their relations. Jack has invented a “wicked” brother named Ernest who conveniently lives in the city and always seems to be getting into trouble. This gives Jack an excuse to escape the routine of his country life. Algy has an imaginary invalid friend named Bunbury who demands much of this time and allows him to escape unwanted social responsibilities, such as dinner parties with his Aunt Augusta.

On this day, Algy's cousin and aunt, Gwendolen Fairfax and Lady Bracknell, join the two men for tea. Jack confesses his love for Gwendolen and asks her to marry him. She accepts his proposal as she's always dreamed of marrying a man with the name Ernest. Lady Bracknell refuses to support their engagement because of Jack's unknown parentage and undignified past of being found as

an infant in a handbag at Victoria Station. Overhearing Jack's invitation for Gwendolen to visit his country home, Algy concocts a mischievous plan to assume the identity of Jack's brother Ernest.

In Act II, the setting shifts to Jack's country estate where Cecily Cardew, Jack's young ward, is practicing her German under the watch of her governess, Miss Prism. Algy, posing as Ernest, arrives and meets Cecily, who immediately confesses her secret love affair with him, as she too has always fantasized about marrying a man with the upstanding and respectable name of Ernest. Meanwhile, Gwendolen decides to pay Jack an unexpected visit and meets Cecily where they both claim to be engaged to the same Ernest. The situation becomes even more ridiculous with Jack's early return home after the sudden “death” of his brother Ernest. The truth can no longer be kept a secret, and Jack and Algy realize they must confess. Planning a christening with the Dr. Chasuble later in

the evening, the men will soon be given the name Ernest to satisfy their fiancés' desires.

Upon Lady Bracknell's arrival, we learn that twenty years ago Miss Prism was the one responsible for misplacing baby Jack, the son of Lady Bracknell's sister, in a handbag at the

train station. In the end, Jack discovers that he is indeed named Ernest and consequently is Algy's real-life older brother. The play concludes with the lovers happily embracing and the lessons of the last few days affirming the "vital Importance of Being Earnest".

## PREREADING ACTIVITIES

### I. THINKING LIKE A DRAMATURGE: BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE ON THE WRITER, GENRE, AND PERIOD

A dramaturge is a very important member of the theatrical production team who supports the actors, directors, and designers by conducting in-depth research on the contextual, literary, and historical aspects of the production. S/he helps the director develop a cohesive concept. Working to contextualize the world of the play, the dramaturge acquires a great deal of background knowledge about the playwright, play, genre, and other influences.

### WILDE, THE ICON

Known as a playwright, essayist, poet, and conversationalist, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Willis Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1854 and died in Paris, France, in 1900. His father was a doctor who opened a hospital for the poor with his own money, and his mother was a well-known revolutionary poet. As a young boy, Wilde would sit in on his mother's salon gatherings. Here he would begin to develop his artistic sensibilities. As the second of three children, he would later be devastated by the sudden death of his younger sister from a fever. Attending Trinity College and later studying classics at Oxford, Wilde excelled at his formal education embarking on a yearlong lecture series on aesthetics in the United States. He married Constance Lloyd and had two sons, Cyril & Vyvyan. A versatile writer, he wrote plays but also numerous essays, a novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and two collections of children's

fairy tales. Have your students refer to the brief chronology of his life on pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. Ask them what aspects of his life do they find the most intriguing and why.

Wilde was famous not only for his literary works but also for his public persona. During his time, he was considered a celebrity "dandy" (a man who pays excessive attention to his appearance). Wilde once said, "One should either be a work of art or wear a work of art." Have your students visit this website to see pictures of Wilde's signature style <http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-quotes-by-oscar-wilde.php>. Ask them to consider the following questions: Why was Wilde described as having a "flamboyant" personal style? What elements (hat, jacket, accessories, shoes, etc.) of his clothing made him unique? Does his clothing remind you of any fashion trends seen today?

Leading a double life of a husband with two children and maintaining a secret relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie), Wilde escaped into writing for its personal as well as financial rewards. Just as he was reaching the height of his success with the opening of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Bosie's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, left a card at Wilde's club that said he was "posing as a sodomite" (sic). In 1885, homosexuality was illegal in the UK so this "accusation" seriously affected Wilde's reputation, leading him to accuse Queensberry of libel. In the three trials that followed, Wilde was found guilty of "gross indecency" and sentenced to two years of hard labor. During the last five years of his life, Wilde lived as a subject of public scandal, isolated and in poverty. Read the "Afterword" (pp. 189-197) to find more information about the play, *Gross Indecency*:

*The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, written in 1997 by Moisés Kaufman and also to discover how the truth of Wilde's real life caused critics to reexamine his literary works. He continues to hold a prominent position in the queer studies movement for aiding the social construction of homosexuality as a distinct identity. Homosexuality wasn't decriminalized in Britain until 1967.

Have students watch these four short videos outlining the major turning points in Wilde's life <http://www.biography.com/people/oscar-wilde-9531078>. Discuss the following questions: In what ways is a trial similar to a performance? Can you think of contemporary examples of highly visible celebrity trials? Why do you think Wilde was publically shamed while he lived but after his death would be embraced and elevated to the status of a literary genius and cultural icon?

### Wilde's Philosophy

For students to get a better sense of Wilde's philosophy, ask them to reflect on some of his famous quotes found at <http://www.cmgww.com/historic/wilde/quotes.htm>. Ask students to describe what is ironic or surprising about each quote.

- "One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that, would tell one anything."
- "People who count their chickens before they are hatched, act very wisely, because chickens run about so absurdly that it is impossible to count them accurately."
- "The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature."
- "Life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it."
- "We are each our own devil, and we make this world our hell."
- "One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry."

- "To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance."
- "The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!"
- "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing."

### WILDE, THE PLAYWRIGHT

"It is, so to speak, a play that is pure play" (p. xxvii). In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde built upon the formula of the well-made play by including mistaken identities, romantic conflicts, a final revelation, and a happy ending. Although he had written more serious plays (read *Salomé* pp. 3-36 as an earlier example), he perfected his dramatic style using the genre known as the Comedy of Manners. Students might read *Lady Windermere's Fan* (pp. 39-105) to see how his high comedy writing developed. In the tradition of Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, Comedy of Manners is described as making fun of well-bred, polite high society. The genre is considered high comedy since it primarily uses language rather than physical actions to evoke laughter from the audience. The genre complemented Wilde's life as an artist who lived among the Victorian elite but due to his Irish ancestry would always remain an outsider. The audience essentially paid to laugh at themselves. Direct students to read and take Cornell notes (<http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>) on the "Introduction," (pp. xxvi-xxxii) to learn more background information about the play. Wilde's brilliant use of wordplay would later influence other British playwrights, such as Noel Coward and Tom Stoppard.

Have students work in small groups and use the notes taken on the "Introduction" to create a flyer or playbill introducing the play. The flyer could include a representative image and three important points gleaned from their reading and three questions which might be answered in the play.

## Comedy of Manners

As a class, watch a portion or the entire episode of the British sitcom “Keeping Up Appearances.” Some of these episodes can be found on youtube, for example [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyvx\\_Xgdgr4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyvx_Xgdgr4).

As students view the program have them use the list below to identify common characteristics found in the Comedy of Manners:

- Witty Dialogue
- Use of sarcasm or irony
- Contrived situations
- Critiques of society, especially marriage
- Portrayals of class differences
- Contrasts between urban and rural

Ask students to discuss their findings and respond to the following questions: What moments in the clip were funny? What made them so? What social classes were represented? How might situational comedies (sitcoms) be considered a modern form of the Comedy of Manners genre?

## Comedic Timing Performance Exercise

Allow students to practice comedic delivery and timing by leading them through the following exercise. Model the sequence of steps using three volunteers who will be assigned the letters A, B, and C. Begin by playing some upbeat music (you might consider using the Benny Hill theme song) as persons A and B enter at the same time from opposite sides of the stage. Person A enters from stage right, and Person B enters from stage left. They meet center stage and face front towards the audience. Music stops. Person A asks a question. (For the model, consider giving them the joke.) For example, “Why was the teacher cross-eyed?” Person B repeats the question, “Why *was* the teacher cross-eyed?” Person A delivers the punch line. “Because she couldn’t control her *pupils*.” Music plays as Person A exits stage left and Person C enters from stage right. Music stops and Person B asks a question, “What language

does a billboard speak?” Person C repeats the question, “What language *does* a billboard speak?” Person B delivers the punch line. “*Sign* language.” Music plays as Person B exits stage right as the next person enters from the opposite side. By now, the students should get a sense of how the vaudeville act works. Check to see if anyone has any questions. Supply appropriate jokes if students can’t recall any or you’re concerned their jokes may not be appropriate. Discuss boundaries for appropriate and inappropriate jokes. If needed, give students a few minutes to practice their jokes out loud and memorize them. Evenly divide the class into two groups. Have one half enter from stage right and the other should enter from stage left. Depending on the class size and time, each student may go more than once. Afterwards discuss with them how important delivery and timing is to the performance of comedy. Have them identify moments from the exercise that were funny and probe them to articulate what elements made these moments comedic.

## What Makes You Laugh?

Humor can be very subjective--what someone finds funny another may not. To encourage students to think about what makes something funny, have them analyze different types of comedic devices by asking them to bring in examples of something that makes them laugh. It might be a clip from a favorite TV show or movie, an excerpt from a book, or a comic strip. As a class, review different devices used in comedy, such as satire, incongruity, slapstick, hyperbole, exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, parody, deadpan, puns, double entendre, and repetition. Have them share their examples with a partner and then identify the comedic devices used.

## Incongruity Game

To help the students understand incongruity, have them play the improvisation game “What are you doing?” Everyone stands in a circle. One person begins by doing an everyday activity, such as combing her hair. The

person to her right asks, "What are you doing?" She then continues to comb her hair but says she is doing something completely different, such as giving her cat a bath. The person who asks must now spontaneously begin to pantomime giving a cat a bath. The next person asks, "What are you doing?" The game continues around the circle until everyone has had an opportunity to pantomime an activity. As a follow-up to the exercise, ask the students to identify the most humorous moments and have them analyze why they were funny. Was it the ridiculousness of hearing and seeing two completely incongruous things? Was it the honest and serious commitment of the students to the action? Were situations that were more exaggerated or extravagant than real-life, everyday activities more comical?

### Anticipating the Play

Before reading the play, consider showing your students this 10-minute video that features highlights from the most recent 2011 Broadway production by the Roundabout Theatre Company: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBCIwj6cqko&feature=related>. After viewing the video, discuss the following questions with your students: What does the background music convey about the tone of the play? Based on the costumes and character accents, where and when do you think the play occurs? Why is a man playing the character of Lady Bracknell? What does it mean to "send up" something? Do you agree with the statement one of the actors makes about "wit never ages---what was funny 105 years ago is funny now"? Do you think the clips from the play are funny? Why or why not? How do you think the actors prepared for their roles?

### VICTORIAN PERIOD

The Victorian age of British history is defined by the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) when the British Empire ruled one quarter of the world's population and land. This was a period of peace, prosperity, refined sensibilities, and national self-confidence for Britain. Marked by a cultural move away from the

rationalism of the Georgian period, the Victorian age emphasized appearance in dress and manners above everything else. This was a time of strict social codes for conduct where morality substituted for religion. Social and sexual restraint was given high priority in public as well as private interactions. The ruling aristocracy consisted of approximately three hundred families, but industrialization brought about a burgeoning middle class. Increased leisure time and advances in technology, such as railways, sewage systems, lighting, and heating, created the conditions of high society. This was also a period of great contradictions as people equated outward appearance with inward morality, but social issues, such as prostitution, child labor, and poverty, were on the rise. After the implementation of several Reform Acts during the period, approximately one in five men had the right to vote. Women would not have the same voting rights as men until 1928. Information available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/hist2.html>.

### KWL Group Research Presentation

Create a class chart with three columns with the labels: What I Know, What I Want to Learn, What I Learned. Engage students in a discussion about what they already know about 19th century England. Encourage them to consider other authors of the time, such as Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens, or Charles Darwin. List this information on the chart. If disagreements arise, suggest listing them in the middle column under questions they want to have answered. Then, tell students to categorize the information. Provide an example to model how they might begin to combine ideas and concepts. Students can work individually or with a partner. Then, discuss the categories and arrive at consensus.

Working individually, students should develop a list of what they want to learn, generating research areas. In addition to the topics that interest the students, consider incorporating the following:

- Courtship and Marriage
- Codes of conduct for men and women
- Clothing and Fashion
- Education
- Food and Dining
- Professions and Occupations

Divide students into research groups. Assign each group specific research questions. Have them use the websites provided below as well as other available media resources to complete the last column, which describes what they have learned. Each group presents their new findings to the class.

### The Victorian Web

<http://www.victorianweb.org>

Peer-reviewed website with primary and secondary texts (including scholarly book reviews) in British Victorian economics, literature, philosophy, political and social history, science, technology, and visual arts

### The Dictionary of Victorian London

<http://www.victorianlondon.org/searchframe.html>

Archival newspaper articles, advertisements, illustrations, letters, and artifacts from the Victorian era

### Victorian Past

<http://www.victoriaspast.com/>

Essays, pictures, and quotes about social customs related to different rooms in the home, leisure activities, historical information, and gender differences to name a few of the many categories of research

### All Change in the Victorian Age

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/speed\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/speed_01.shtml)

An outline of the major changes that happened during the Victorian age

## II. THINKING LIKE A DRAMATURGE: BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THEMES

### LIVING LIFE AS ART

The word *aesthetics* derives from the Greek word for perception and is often referred to as what is pleasing to the senses or what is beautiful. How stimuli, such as art or nature, are perceived is often shaped by personal and cultural values. As part of the Aesthetics Movement of the time, Wilde reversed the typical view of Art as an imitation of Life and thought Life should seek to reflect Art. Ask student to read Wilde's essay "The Decay of Lying" to learn more about the principles of his new aesthetics at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/decay.html>. Use the following prompts to further discuss this essay: Wilde states, "Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us." In what ways is nature our creation? How does Wilde's comment that "At other times it [art] entirely anticipates its age, and produces in one century work that it takes another century to understand, to appreciate and to enjoy" relate to the expression "an artist ahead of his/her time"? Can you think of any artists past or present who fit this description? Why might "lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things," be the aim of Art?

### Values Clarification

Make two signs—one saying, "Agree" and the other "Disagree." Hang them on opposite ends of the room. Students should picture an imaginary line between the two signs that represents a continuum of opinions. Tell students that you will be reading a values statement related to aesthetics, and they should decide where to stand along the line depending on how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement. For example, you might say, "I am an artist." If they

strongly agree with this statement, then they should stand as close as possible to the “Agree” sign. If they are unsure, then maybe they stand in the middle. Below is a list of statements you might use. You may also develop your own statements or ask students to create their own based on what they believe is beautiful or their ideas about art. Encourage a few students to explain why they chose to stand where they did.

- It’s important for people to appreciate art.
- Art influences how I see the world.
- Art can lead a person to truth.
- Classical music is the highest form of music.
- Only people with money can afford to see art.
- I spend a lot of time on my outward appearance.
- Some people dress like a work of art.
- Nature is art.

After the exercise, ask students to discuss what factors (family background, life experience, religion, personality) influence their personal beliefs. Discuss with them or have them journal about how values around aesthetics are shaped by institutions, such as schools, churches, government, entertainment industry, corporations, and/or museums.

## Art for Art’s Sake

Divide students into groups of 3-4. Give them ten minutes to take pictures using digital cameras of anything in the classroom. Some students interested in drawing may wish to quickly sketch a still life of objects in the room. Encourage them to be as imaginative and creative as possible in their visual compositions. After the time has ended, have them choose their top three images. Each group can share their images with the rest of the class and explain what makes them the most aesthetically appealing. Discuss with students: What is the purpose of art? What makes something art? Should art always have a purpose or can it simply be? What makes a person an artist? Can anyone be an artist?

## “Beauty is...”

Ask students to freewrite starting with the phrase “Beauty is...” about what they believe makes something beautiful. Give the students a time limit and encourage them to spend the whole time writing. When the time limit is up, ask the students to underline key words or phrases. Have all the students stand and close their eyes. At the same time, ask them to create a spontaneous frozen image or tableau with their bodies that represents their thoughts on beauty. Cue students by saying, “One, Two, Three, Freeze!” Now ask them to create an image that represents the opposite of beauty. On a three-count, have them seamlessly transition back to their first image of beauty. Ask the students to respond in writing to the following questions: What is your definition of beauty? What criteria did you use? Did you include specific people or things as examples? What experiences or memories were triggered by this exercise? How does your definition coincide with your thoughts about art? Invite students who feel comfortable to share with the whole class or in small groups what they wrote.

## DECEPTION AS A FORM OF SELF EXPRESSION

### Two Truths and A Lie

Give students a slip of paper. Ask them to write down two truths and one lie about themselves. A tip is to make their lie believable and try to throw others off with unusual truths. Have students read aloud what they wrote while the rest of the class votes on which one is the lie. To follow-up the exercise, ask the students to discuss the following questions: What did it feel like to lie? Why do people lie? Why is it difficult for some people to tell the truth? Is it always easy to know the difference between a lie and the truth? Why? In what ways might people’s non-verbal behaviors indicate whether they are lying or telling the truth? Is there a time when it might be necessary to be deceptive in order to protect yourself or do what you need to do?

## Honesty Survey

Have students brainstorm survey questions related to lying and honesty. For example, is it okay to lie in order to protect someone's feelings? Is it okay to exaggerate a story in order to make it more interesting? Is it okay to lie about your age or lie about being sick in order to take a day off work? Is it hard to trust someone who often tells lies? Then, ask them to compile their questions into a survey that can be administrated via <http://www.surveymonkey.com/>. Have the students forward the survey to as many people as possible. Analyze and discuss the results.

After reviewing the survey results, discuss with students: Is there ever a time when a lie can be justified? Can you think of any time when a small lie might reveal a bigger truth or when a small lie can lead to a bigger lie?

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

In Wilde's satire of English aristocracy, marriage often has little to do with love and more to do with achieving or maintaining a certain social status. Assign students to visit this site to learn more about marriage during the Victorian age: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/agunn/teaching/enl3251/vf/pres/ziegenfuss.htm>. Discuss the reasons why Algernon says, "Divorces are made in heaven" (p. 112). In what way has marriage changed or stayed the same since the Victorian times? Is marriage always about love or pleasure? Can you think of examples where marriage might be viewed more like a business transaction?

## Dating Game Improvisation

To get students to contemplate the themes of dating and courtship and also practice their creative thinking and verbal communication skills, have them play the following improvisation game. Ask for four volunteers. One student leaves the room. The other three are assigned specific, usual personality traits or quirks. For example, one might be allergic to cucumbers, another aspires to be a radio deejay while the third is an extreme pessimist. Then, the student who left the room returns and

must ask each of the contestants the same three questions, such as "What would be your dream date? If you only had 24 hours to live what would you do? Why should I pick you?" The contestants would answer each question in character by dropping subtle hints related to their specific trait or quirk. For example, contestant one's response to the first question might be: "I'm unconventional in the sense that I would rather not go out to eat at a restaurant but would cook a meal for you in my home. I have a food allergy. I have to be careful about what I eat. I wouldn't want our date to end with us in the emergency room. This one time I went on a date and ordered a hamburger with no pickles, but the waiter messed up my order, and we had to call 9-1-1." After all three contestants respond to all three questions, then the person asking the questions tries to guess the unique character traits of the three contestants based on how they responded to the questions. Afterwards, discuss with the students: What criteria do they use to determine whether or not someone is suitable dating material? How important is a person's family background, education level, or occupation when it comes to finding a potential mate? What social codes exist around dating today? What are the pros and cons of typical American dating? Are you familiar with any dating rituals from other cultures? How has the Internet changed the way people date? Why was dating in Victorian times called courtship?

## Oral Histories

Have students interview someone they know who is married. Tell them to ask the interviewee how they met their spouse. How long did they date each other before they got married? Did they need to get permission from their families? How long was their engagement? What do they enjoy most about being married? What do they enjoy least? What advice would they offer someone who was planning to get married? What, in their opinion, makes a "good" marriage? Students can work in small groups to compile their results in a graphic organizer and then to discuss their findings with the class.

## ETIQUETTE: RULES OF POLITE SOCIETY

### Introductions

Assign students to read Chapter II on “Introductions” pp. 6-18 from *Manners and Rules of Good Society, or, Solecisms to be Avoided* which can be found by searching for that title at Google Books: <http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=wp>

Working in small groups, students should develop a two-minute scene where three or more characters must use the rules of proper etiquette to introduce themselves to each other. Encourage students to use their imaginations in inventing fictitious characters and settings appropriate to the time period. Students should share their scenes with the class and discuss what they think were the purposes of etiquette during that time. Also discuss: Does etiquette sometimes mask rude or

unfeeling behavior? How is etiquette used to maintain social status?

### Charades Parlor Game

Entertaining friends and family in private homes was a favorite pastime of the Victorians. Many played the popular parlor game, Charades, which was played differently from how we play it today. Assign students to read pp. 177-179 on “Charades” in *Etiquette of Good Society* by Lady Colin Campbell (1893) to learn how to play Charades like people did in the Victorian age. Have students search for the title at Google Books: <http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=wp>

Have the class play a game of Victorian Charades and discuss how household games have changed or stayed the same since the Victorian times. Ask students to share stories about social games they play in their homes. What is the purpose or value of these games in social interactions?

## DURING READING ACTIVITIES

### I. THINKING LIKE A DIRECTOR: SCRIPT, CHARACTER & THEMATIC ANALYSIS

#### PLOT THROUGH-LINE MAP

The plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest* becomes the playground on which Wilde’s witty language romps. One of the responsibilities of a director is to make sure the story of the play is clear. The through-line is what connects the events of the play to the overall story. It becomes the journey that the audience travels from the beginning of the play to the end. To remain fully engaged, the audience must be able to follow the path laid out by the playwright. If the audience misses an important piece of information, then they will get lost. As students read the play, have them map the series of events that move the story forward. Events occur when something happens that causes or permits something else to happen. An event includes the cause and

the effect. For example, Gwendolen accepting Jack’s proposal causes him to decide to “kill off” his brother Ernest would be considered an event. Encourage students to draw or find images to serve as visual landmarks for important plot points and use arrows to show how different events connect. Also get them to think about the shape of the line. Is it straight, zigzag, or spiral? How can you visually represent the plot twists and turns?

### CHARACTER PROFILES

The director’s job is to tell the story of the play as clearly and effectively as possible; therefore, s/he must thoroughly understand who the characters are and how they relate to one another in order to effectively stage and coach the actors. As your students read the play, have them use the diagram below as a guide to create character profiles that represent different areas of the characters’ lives (home, family, play, and daily routine) and the people they interact with at those times.

Example for Cecily:

**MISS CECILY CARDEW, age 18**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HOME</b> (where she lives, who lives with her)</p> <p>The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire</p> <p>Lives with guardian, Jack Worthington</p> <p>Schooled by her governess, Miss Prism</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FAMILY</b> (immediate &amp; extended relations)</p> <p>Calls Jack her “uncle” out of respect</p> <p>Thomas Cardew, deceased grandfather who adopted Jack as a boy</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PLAY</b> (what she does in her free time)</p> <p>Records her secrets in her diary</p> <p>Fantasizes about her imaginary love affair with Ernest</p> <p>Writes letters to herself pretending to be Ernest</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DAY</b> (activities in her daily routine)</p> <p>Waters flowers</p> <p>Practices German</p> <p>Studies geology, political economy</p> <p>Walks in the country</p>

## CHARACTER COUPLES VENN DIAGRAM

There are nine characters in the play. All have their match, except for Lady Bracknell. Discuss why Wilde included an odd number of characters. Have students use Venn diagrams to discover the similarities and differences between the following characters' personality, hobbies, education, occupation, and backgrounds: Gwendolen & Cecily, Jack & Algy, Miss Prism & Dr. Chasuble, and Lane & Merriman.

## GROUP SCULPTURES

A director must also visually tell the story. Before beginning rehearsals, a director typically blocks the show by determining where and how the actors will move on stage and what visual images they will leave in the audience's mind. Use this activity to encourage the students to visualize the action of the play as they are reading it. Divide students into groups of 4-5 students. Pass out one quote

from key dramatic moments in the plays to each group. Have the groups read through the scene to determine the key visual elements of the moments, such as the spatial relationships, body positions, and facial expressions.

Examples:

pp. 124 LADY BRACKNELL: In the carriage, Gwendolen!

pp. 160 JACK: [...] However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all.

pp. 179 JACK: [...] I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I?

Each group should create three frozen pictures with their bodies that illustrate the before, during, and after actions connected to their quote. Then, each group shares their images as the class interprets them. This is less about playing charades (although the students should read their quotes afterward) and more about prompting the students to make meaning from visual pictures and begin to see how visual images tell stories.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A good director knows how to ask and respond to questions. Invite students to develop their own list of discussion questions. Encourage them to include a variety of comprehension and evaluative questions. Here are some to consider:

### Act I

- 1) What does Algernon mean when he says, “I keep science for Life” and later connects this idea to Lane preparing the cucumber sandwiches for Lady Bracknell (p. 109)?
- 2) What do we learn about Algernon’s relationship with his servant Lane from their conversation about marriage?
- 3) In the world of the play, how do expectations related to “moral responsibility” relate to social class differences? Why is this humorous (p. 110)?
- 4) Algernon says, “The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I’ll certainly try to forget the fact” (p. 111). How does this statement critique Victorian attitudes toward marriage?
- 5) “Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn’t. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn’t read” (p. 113). What is Wilde saying about modern culture?
- 6) Why does Jack establish two different identities for himself—one for the country and another for the city?
- 7) Why does Jack initially lie about his relationship to Cecily? What does his decision to lie say about his attitude toward Algernon?
- 8) What is a “Bunburyist” (pp. 115-117)? Why does Algernon find it necessary to be one?
- 9) Why does Algernon consider a woman who flirts with her husband in public scandalous? What do we learn about

Victorian ideals of decorum from this statement (p. 117)?

- 10) In what ways do Algernon and Jack’s views about love and marriage differ? Use specific lines from the script to support your ideas.
- 11) Based on Lady Bracknell and Algernon’s first exchange, what do we learn about Lady Bracknell’s character? What role do you predict she’ll play in the story (p. 118)?
- 12) What kind of relationship do you think Lady Bracknell has with her husband?
- 13) How do we know Algernon and Jack are close friends? Can you think of a similar exchange you’ve had with a good friend?
- 14) What evidence from the script tells us that the setting for the play is late-Victorian England?
- 15) How does Lady Bracknell’s question about whether Jack was born in the “purple of commerce” or “the ranks of the aristocracy” reflect on the social structure of the upper class in Victorian England (p. 126)?
- 16) Explain the absurdity of Jack’s “romantic origin” (p. 132).
- 17) Why does Lady Bracknell not consider Jack an eligible husband for Gwendolen?
- 18) Why does Jack find it necessary to “kill” his brother Ernest?
- 19) Which character do you think most represents the voice of the playwright? Why? Provide evidence to support your claim.
- 20) Identify moments in Act I when Wilde utilizes irony as a comedic device.

### Act II

- 1) What does Cecily mean when she describes her Uncle Jack as being “very serious” (p. 134)?

How does her definition of seriousness differ from Miss Prism? In what ways might their ages affect their views on the subject?

- 2) In Act I, Jack says, "Cecily is not a silly, romantic girl" (p. 130). Do you think his description is accurate? Why or why not?
- 3) What can you infer about Miss Prism when she corrects Dr. Chasuble upon being called "Egeria" and reminds him that her name is Laetitia (p. 136)?
- 4) What new perspectives do Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble bring to the play?
- 5) What is Miss Prism's attitude toward the practices of the Primitive Church? What does her attitude reveal about her relationship with Dr. Chasuble (p. 140)?
- 6) Compare and contrast Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell. What factors have shaped their values?
- 7) What is Miss Prism referring to when she says, "I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject [christenings]. But they don't seem to know what thrift is" (p. 142)? What does her comment reveal about her attitudes toward the lower class?
- 8) What is the significance of a christening? Why are people often christened at birth?
- 9) Responding to Jack's comment about him being overdressed, Algernon says, "If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated" (p. 147). Algernon's character might be described as a "dandy"—a person for whom appearance is of the utmost importance. How does Algernon's comment reflect Wilde's views on aesthetics?
- 10) In what ways is Cecily's personality different from Gwendolen's?
- 11) Why does Cecily say she was engaged to "Ernest" (Algernon) before she ever met him in person?
- 12) How does Cecily's diary mirror Jack's brother and Algernon's invalid friend?
- 13) What is humorous about Algernon's line "Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon" (p. 151)?
- 14) Why do Gwendolen and Cecily want to marry an "Ernest"?
- 15) What is Wilde's view towards formal education?
- 16) Why do Cecily and Gwendolen keep diaries? What's the purpose of a diary for young women during this time?
- 17) How does Gwendolen's assessment of her father's status within his family stand in contrast to conventional Victorian notions of gender?
- 18) How does the scene between Cecily and Gwendolen on pp. 156-158 exemplify the Comedy of Manners genre?
- 19) After Jack and Algernon's lies are revealed, how does Wilde use triviality to keep the play from becoming too "serious"?
- 20) Is it completely absurd for Jack and Algernon to change their names to Ernest in order for Gwendolen and Cecily to marry them? Can you think of other changes (i.e. religion, occupation, residence) individuals living in contemporary society might make to be a suitable mate for their intended partner?

### Act III

- 1) What effect does Lady Bracknell's appearance have on the newly reconciled lovers?
- 2) How does Jack convince Lady Bracknell that Cecily is a suitable wife for her nephew Algernon?
- 3) How is Lady Bracknell's monologue reacting to Cecily's inheritance a way of Wilde mocking the hypocrisy of Victorian society (p. 169)?
- 4) What is ironic about Lady Bracknell saying, "To speak frankly, I am not in favor of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable" (p. 171)?
- 5) How does exaggeration contribute to the humor in the discussion of Algernon's engagement to Cecily?

- 6) After Jack learns the truth of his birth, he excitedly embraces Miss Prism and comments on the double standards between men and women. What statement, if any, do you think Wilde is trying to make about gender inequalities?
- 7) What do we learn about Jack's birth father?
- 8) At the end of the play, Jack says to Gwendolen, "...it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?" She replies, "I can. For I feel sure that you are sure to change" (p. 179). What is Wilde's opinion about honesty?
- 9) What does Lady Bracknell mean when she tells Algernon that he seems "to be displaying signs of triviality" (p. 180)?
- 10) Rank the characters in order from most to least earnest or moral. What are the standards on which you have based your rankings?
- 11) Why does Wilde title the play "The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People"?

## II. THINKING LIKE AN ACTOR: EXPLORING DIALECT AND DIALOGUE

W.H. Auden once said that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is "the only pure verbal opera in English" because Wilde "subordinates every other dramatic element to dialogue for its own sake and creates a verbal universe in which the characters are determined by the kinds of things they say, and the plot is nothing but a succession of opportunities to say them." ("An Improbable Life," review of *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (editor, Rupert Hart-Davis) in *The New Yorker*, (9 March 1963))

### BRITISH DIALECT

Although there is no such thing as a single British dialect since there are as many dialects spoken in Great Britain as in the United

States, actors performing in an Oscar Wilde play would typically use what's called Received Pronunciation (RP) or BBC English, which is considered the standard British dialect.

Watch with your students this scene from Act I between Gwendolen and Jack from the most recent film version of the play: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZK9pY1dA74&list=PLCBBFDF3132ED186A&index=2&feature=plpp\\_video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZK9pY1dA74&list=PLCBBFDF3132ED186A&index=2&feature=plpp_video)

Students can take notes on what produces a British dialect. They should pay attention to variations in pitch, different vowel and consonant pronunciations, and the way the actors form the words with their mouths. They can also listen to an example from the BBC news broadcast <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/>. Ask the students to consider how BBC English is different from American English. What vocal adjustments, such as phonetic substitutions, sound placement, and pitch, produce this distinct dialect? For further study and practice on dialects, have students visit the following websites to learn how to speak with a standard British dialect:

<http://www.videojug.com/film/how-to-do-a-british-accent>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Speak-in-a-British-Accent>

### VERBAL PING PONG

To appreciate the seemingly spontaneous, quick wit of Wilde's writing, students can play the improvisation game "Questions." Working in pairs, they should have a conversation only using questions. Give them a theme for their conversation. For example, if the theme is basketball, Person A would say, "Have you ever played basketball?" Person B would respond, "Why would I want to play a sport that involves so much running?" Person A: "Do you prefer watching basketball?" Person B: "Did you know the Chicago Bulls won the game last night?" Coach students to have a real conversation without repeating questions or changing the subject. The game ends when one person can no longer think of

a question or forgets to answer with a question. Discuss what happened as they played the game. Did you find it easy or difficult? How humorous were your conversations? How might this game help you understand the pace of Wilde's dialogue?

## BODY AND VOICE CONNECTION

Watch this clip from "Inside the Actor's Studio" featuring Colin Firth, a popular actor from the UK: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLuPsnwgf8&feature=related>. He talks about his training and how the language of a script affects his movements. Working in pairs, ask the students to stand up and take turns speaking the following lines of dialogue to each other. They should have fun exploring extravagant ways of using their voices by changing their inflection or emphasizing different words to vary the meaning. Tell them to let their faces and bodies be affected by their voices and feel free to add gestures and movements to fully embody the words.

- "It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression" (p. 115).
- "The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public" (p. 117).
- "...may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?" (p. 168).
- "I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question" (p. 173).
- "If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life" (p. 176).

- "The suspense is terrible. I hope it will last" (p. 177).

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The acting teacher Robert Cohen encourages actors to use an approach to character analysis that he calls GOTE, which stands for Goal, Other, Tactics, and Expectation. Students can create their own GOTESheets based on a character from the play. They should answer the questions *as the character would*. Here's an example of a GOTESheet for Algernon in the first scene of the play.

1. Basic information about the character

Name: Algernon  
 Sex: Male  
 Age: late twenties  
 Marital status and history: single; eligible bachelor  
 Educational level: university  
 Economic/social status: upper class; aristocracy

2. **Goal:** *What do I really want? When do I want it?* I want Jack to tell me the truth about his identity this very instant.
3. **Other:** *From whom do I want it? Why?* I want it from Jack because I hate when people lie to me although I love the excitement.
4. **Tactics:** *How can I get it?* I can get it by interrogating him, drilling him with questions until he cracks, mocking him, and enticing him to join the Bunbury club.
5. **Expectation:** *Why do I expect to get it? Why does it excite me? What will I do when I get it?* I expect to get it because I get everything I want. I actually love lying. It makes life exciting. Almost like a game. Once I learn the truth I will congratulate my friend for giving me such a pleasurable experience.

## AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

After reading the play, students are ready to make connections and engage in activities that deepen their understanding and appreciation of the play's themes and Oscar Wilde's unique perspective.

### I. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ESSAY TOPICS

The following topics and questions can be used for essay topics, whole class, or small group discussions.

#### Character Profiles

If students created character profiles as one of their during-reading activities, ask them to reference the profiles as they respond to the following prompts.

Compare and contrast Jack and Algernon, Gwendolen and Cecily, Lady Bracknell and Ms. Prism. How does this parallel structure relate to the themes of the play?

- What significance do names and acts of naming or christening hold within the play? What do their names reveal about their personalities and backgrounds?
- What relationship, if any, do the characters have to the natural world? What's the significance of setting Act I in the city and Act II and III in the country?

#### Aesthetics

- In what ways could the characters as individuals be considered “works of art”?
- To what extent does the play champion the principles of the Aesthetic Movement?
- After reviewing the first production, George Bernard Shaw commented that the play was “rib-tickling” but lacking in “humanity” (p. xxvii). Do you agree or disagree with Shaw's criticism? Does all art need a purpose or can it simply exist for its own sake?
- Identify specific ironic moments from the play. What effect do these instances of irony have on the reader?

#### Deception

- What is the significance of the notion of “being earnest” for the play?
- What is the importance of being trivial within the play?
- How does Cecily create reality? What is the connection between reality and writing?

#### Social Status

- What do the main characters think about the lower classes?
- What is the correlation between “bun-burying” and wearing social masks?
- How does the play challenge conventional notions of sex and gender and public and private spheres?
- To what extent is Gwendolen a typical Victorian lady? To what extent does she not fulfill typical Victorian standards and requirements for being a lady?

#### Love and Marriage

- What attitudes toward marriage do Algernon and Lady Bracknell represent?
- In what ways are the play's values about love and marriage similar to or different from today's values?

#### Etiquette and Victorian Society

- How does Wilde's tone and style help reinforce his critical perspective on social class in Victorian England?
- In what ways does Wilde attack Victorian values? In what ways does he uphold them?
- What is Wilde's attitude toward the Victorian preoccupation with philanthropy?
- Why is the play considered a Comedy of Manners? What elements of this literary genre are included in the play?

## II. PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

### SCENE WORK

Students can rehearse and perform short scenes from the play for each other. Here are a few key scenes you might use:

- Algernon and Jack pp. 128-131
- Algernon and Cecily pp. 138-140
- Jack, Miss Prism, Dr. Chasuble pp. 141-143
- Cecily and Gwendolen pp. 152-156
- Jack and Lady Bracknell pp. 168-170

Students might consider playing characters of the opposite gender as a man has often performed the role of Lady Bracknell. Here are a few tips for the students to keep in mind:

- Read the scene out loud several times to hear and feel the rhythm of the language.
- Learn the lines *exactly* as written.
- Imagine all the details of the setting. Practice using all Wilde's stage directions—eating sandwiches or taking off gloves.
- Repetition of the lines helps you make it seem as if you've been speaking this way your entire life.
- Believe in the absolute sincerity of the lines. Remember to play the lines as seriously as possible rather than playing for the laugh.
- Imagine your acting partner and the audience are inferior to you in every way.
- Maintain your superior status by moving and speaking as politely and carefully as possible.

### SERIOUSLY TRIVIAL MONOLOGUE

Throughout the play, the characters trivialize serious issues, such as marriage or death, and treat trivial things, such as eating muffins, very seriously. For this activity, students will identify a trivial event, such as the how much milk is left in the refrigerator, and write and perform a monologue as if this were the most serious thing that has ever happened to them.

To assist them in their writing, encourage them to use a four-part structure. The first part is stasis or what life is like every day. Then, the event happens that makes this day different from every other one. Next is the resolution or how successfully or unsuccessfully the event was handled. Lastly, end the monologue with what life was like from that day on. Exaggeration should be encouraged. Afterwards discuss with students what commonalities existed between the monologues. How does an overemphasis on the trivial help people realize what things really matter in life?

## III. CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES

### WORDPLAY

#### Wildisms

Create a list of witty paradoxes and epigrams from the play. Discuss what function they serve. Tell the student to imagine they've been hired by a marketing firm to create the "Oscar Wilde" brand. Decide what type of merchandise matches with each phrase and develop slogans and marketing strategies. For example, "Bunbury Cologne—for the man who seeks adventure." The epigram "The old fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over Mamma, I lost at the age of three" could be on a phrase on a greeting card next to a picture of a small child pouting.

#### Bunburying Diary

As a class listen to the LA Theatre Works audio recording of the scene between Algernon and Jack where he explains what "Bunburying" means: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6DkzntEyiM>. Ask students to write out their own definition of "Bunburying." Cecily's fantastical diary entries may also make her a member of the Bunburying club. Have students invent a double life to explain their absence from something they would rather not do. Ask them to write sev-

eral entries in their imaginary diary that records their Bunburying activities. Here's a sample entry:

Bunburying is the act of avoiding responsibilities by claiming obligations to a fictitious person.

My Bunbury is my visually impaired, yet socially active grandmother. Today my niece, yet slightly annoying, neighbors asked if I might pet sit their six ferrets next week while they go out of town for a camping trip. Although I want to be a good neighbor, I think grandmother may have a reunion planned with her old square dancing club. Looks like I'm going to have to drive her again. I've been wanting to go to the beach so maybe her reunion is in Tampa Bay, FL. Yes, that sounds like a good plan. Get ready to pack your bags, grandma!

### Wilde Love Advice Column

Writing as one of the characters in the play, students can compose a letter to the "Wild(e) Love" advice column seeking counsel on a love-related issue. After everyone writes a letter, then the letters should be redistributed. Students should read the letter they received and then respond to it in character as Oscar Wilde. For closure, each person gets their original letter and reads it aloud in small groups or to the whole class.

### Wilde Review

As a member of the Aesthetic Movement, Oscar Wilde was a strong critic of art. Ask students to write a review of a movie or play they've seen recently. Have them use Wilde's views on art as guidelines. Consider having them read Wilde's essay "The Critic as Artist" <http://www.online-literature.com/wilde/1305/> before writing their reviews to learn more about Wilde's philosophy.

## IV. MEDIA LITERACY ACTIVITIES

### CULTURE JAMMING

The play critiques Victorian society. Discuss with your students similarities and differences between the Victorian era and today. Encourage them to practice a contemporary form of cultural critique known as culture jamming, which is a subversive art form that unmasks the lies often found in the media and attempts to expose a deeper truth in order to encourage viewers to be more conscious and critical of what they are consuming. Have students learn more about culture jamming by visiting the University of Washington's Center for Communication & Civic Engagement website <http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/pol-commcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm>. Students can create their own culture jams based on issues they feel are important. After they share their projects, help the students connect this experience back to the themes of the play by making connections between the role of art and social criticism.

### EARNESTNESS PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT (PSA)

Public Service Announcements are similar to commercials except the purpose is to educate viewers about an issue rather than sell a product. Assign students the task of developing a one-minute PSA that demonstrates the importance of being earnest. In small groups, they should first brainstorm why they believe it's important to be earnest. Then, they can develop a script by answering the following questions: Who is your target audience, i.e. parents, children, general public, or politicians? What's your message? In one sentence, what do you want your audience to remember? What story or action will you communicate? What characters are there, if any? What dialogue is there? Where does the PSA take place? What persuasive techniques (scare tactic, testimonial, re-enactment, symbolism, humor) will you use? What tag line do you want to use? When thinking about your tagline, keep in mind what you want your

audience to take away. What techniques (still images with narration, monologue, dialogue, movement/dance, song/music) will you use to create your PSA? Finally, they should shoot and edit their videos for screening.

## V. MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PLAYS

### OTHER WILDE PLAYS

Students can read the other two plays in the Signet Classics edition—*Salomé* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Ask them to discuss or write essays on the following questions: In what ways does the play comment on morality? How are the themes of triviality and seriousness similar or different from *The Importance of Being Earnest*? What roles do women and men play? Were these conventional or unconventional for the time?

## COMEDY OF MANNERS LITERATURE CIRCLES

Have students participate in literature circles on other plays belonging to the Comedy of Manners genre. First you will give a brief description or “booktalk” on each of the plays you select. Then group students according to their choices. They will choose specific roles, outlined below, for the literature circle.

Comedies of Manners:

- *Twelfth Night, The Comedy of Errors, Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare (1600s)
- *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith (1773)
- *The School for Scandal* by Richard Sheridan (1777)
- *Man and Superman* by George Bernard Shaw (1903)
- *Private Lives* by Noel Coward (1930)
- *The Homecoming* by Harold Pinter (1964)
- *As Bees in Honey Drown* by Douglas Carter Beane (1997)

Literature Circle Roles:

- **Discussion Director** writes specific comprehensive and evaluative questions for each act that prompt thoughtful discussion.
- **Connection Maker** pays particular attention to the moments in the play that are similar to ones in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and/or to contemporary society.
- **Summarizer** prepares a synopsis of each act and a brief description of each character.
- **Word Wizard** creates a glossary of unusual terms or jargon.
- **Key Scene Finder** generates a list and brief description of key scenes pertinent to the play that best represent the playwright's tone and style.

As a post-reading response activity, each group will prepare a dramatic reading or performance of one of the key scenes they select that illustrates a theme of the play.

## FILM-VERSIONS OF THE PLAY

Here is a list of films based on the play. Some youtube clips are available. Choose the same scene from two or three film versions. Show the clips to your students and ask them to consider how different directorial and design choices influence the audience's experience of the scene. Discuss with your students how the different versions are similar to or different from how they pictured the scenes in their minds and how the experience of watching a film-version of a play is different from seeing live actors perform the play.

- *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- Dir. Anthony Asquith. British Filmmakers: 1952
- Dir. Stuart Burge. BBC: 1986.
- Dir. Kurt Baker. Electric Concepts: 1992.
- Dir. Oliver Parker: Miramax Films: 2002.
- The Making of the 2002 film
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ccqJYBT1uM&feature=related>
- Dirs. Brian Bedford & David Stern: All Mobile Video: 2011.

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**NOTES**

# FREE TEACHER'S GUIDES



A full list of *Teacher's Guides* and *Teacher's Guides for the Signet Classic Shakespeare Series* is available on Penguin's website at: [us.penguin.com/tguides](http://us.penguin.com/tguides)

## TEACHER'S GUIDES

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn  
Animal Farm  
Anthem  
■ Atlas Shrugged  
■ The Awakening  
Beowulf  
The Call of the Wild  
Cannery Row  
■ Chekhov's Major Plays  
City of God  
The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories  
The Crucible  
Dear Zoe  
Death of a Salesman  
Doctor Faustus  
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde  
A Doll's House  
Dubliners  
■ Emma  
Ethan Frome

The Fountainhead  
Frankenstein  
The Grapes of Wrath  
Great Expectations  
Heart of Darkness  
■ The Help  
■ The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays  
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl  
Jane Eyre  
A Journey to the Center of the Earth  
The Jungle  
The Kite Runner  
Listening is an Act of Love  
Looking Backward  
Lysistrata  
Main Street  
The Mousetrap and Other Plays

My Ántonia  
A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave  
Nectar in a Sieve  
1984  
The Odyssey  
Of Mice and Men  
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich  
The Pact  
The Pearl  
Persuasion  
■ The Phantom of the Opera  
Poems by Robert Frost  
Pride and Prejudice  
The Prince and the Pauper  
Pygmalion  
Ragged Dick  
A Raisin in the Sun  
The Red Pony

Redwall  
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