

The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde

Part 4 (first part of Act 2)

Teacher's notes

Author: Daniel Barber

Level: Upper intermediate

Age: Young adults / Adults

Duration: Approx. 90 minutes

Aims: In this lesson, the students will:

1. explore the theme of earnestness and pleasure;
2. listen extensively for gist and for pleasure;
3. practise reading aloud, paying attention to 'chunking' and pausing;
4. explore the thoughts and feelings of the main characters.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first section of Part 4); Track 2 (middle section of Part 4); Track 3 (final section of Part 4); Track 4 (extract) and Track 5 (full audio) downloaded from onestopenglish; your own copy of the 'chunking' text and illustration from the worksheet to project in class (optional)

Summary: Two young gentlemen friends use false names to live double lives. These convenient secret identities become a problem, however, when they both fall in love at the same time. As the situation develops, it becomes more and more complicated for these fun-loving men. The story is told in eight parts. In Part 4, we meet Cecily, Jack's young ward, and her governess, Miss Prism, at Jack's country house. Cecily receives an unexpected visitor whom she is very pleased to meet. Jack, however, is not so happy.

Activity 1

Aims: to examine the main characters' attitudes to seriousness and fun; to pre-teach some abstract nouns; to prepare the students for Cecily and Algernon's dialogue

1. At the top of the board, write *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*. Explain that the subtitle of the play suggests opposite attitudes to life: triviality and seriousness (or earnestness). Ask if they can think which character shows both attitudes and how (Jack, in his double life, as Jack and as Ernest).
2. Write *Jack* and *Ernest* on the board, at the top of two columns. Then ask the class which name represents the fun side of life, *Jack* or *Ernest* and which the serious side. Write *fun* and *serious* in their respective columns. Ask the students to copy the columns.
3. Explain to the class that you are going to say various words and that they should write them in the correct column according to Jack's point of view. Does Jack associate these words with the *Jack* part of his life or the *Ernest* part? Tell them not to worry if they are not sure of the meaning of any words, just to write the word somewhere else and they

can add them to the column later. Read out the following words one by one, pausing after each, and allowing students to ask for correct spellings.

Note: There is a variety of word types below, only some are abstract nouns.

city
country
boring
interesting
business
duty
pleasure
misbehaviour
dull
Algernon
responsibility
wicked
worry
romance
earnestness
pleasant

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4. Invite the students to come and write a word on the board one by one in the correct column. Ask the class to check these answers and to challenge any that they think are not in the correct column.

Key:

Jack	Ernest
<i>serious</i>	<i>fun</i>
<i>country</i>	<i>city</i>
<i>boring</i>	<i>interesting</i>
<i>business</i>	<i>pleasure</i>
<i>duty</i>	<i>misbehaviour</i>
<i>dull</i>	<i>Algernon</i>
<i>responsibility</i>	<i>wicked</i>
<i>worry</i>	<i>romance</i>
<i>earnestness</i>	<i>pleasant</i>

5. Invite questions and comments. Be prepared to clarify the distinction, and spelling difference, between the homophones *Ernest* (a man's name) and *earnest* (meaning serious and sincere), and to point out the fact that the play's title is a play on the word. You may also decide to clarify:

- the pronunciation of the 's' in *pleasure*, pronounced /z/ and contrast with the adjective *pleasant*, pronounced with a /z/
- *dull* as a synonym of *boring*
- *wicked* meaning morally wrong but also associated with pleasure

Activity 2

Aims: to introduce the new characters in the play; to check understanding of or pre-teach: *canon*, *sermon*, *baptism*, *housekeeper*, *ward*, *guardian*, *governess*

1. Explain to the class that the next act takes place at Jack's country house. Write *country house* on the board and invite the class to tell you who they might find there (they should remember a young woman called Cecily lives there). Ask them what relationship she has to Jack. Write *guardian* and *ward* on the board. Find out if they can remember who Miss Prism is (Jack mentioned her in Act 1) and explain that Cecily has a private teacher who lives in the house – teach *governess* (this is an old-fashioned word).

2. Ask the students who else might live and work at a country house. Accept various ideas (e.g. *butler*, *maid*, etc.) but ensure it includes *housekeeper* (someone whose job it is to clean someone else's house and sometimes cook their meals). Finally, tell them that another character they will meet is Canon Chasuble. Explain that a *canon* is a person who works in the church, similar to a priest. Elicit some of the things that a canon might do. Guide them to thinking about the speeches that they give as part of religious ceremonies (and write *sermon* on the board) and the different ceremonies that they perform, including weddings and *baptisms* (ceremonies in which someone is given a name, then touched or covered with water to welcome them into the Christian religion).

Note: Jack says the word *baptize* in Act 1, Part 2, so it may have already been taught.

Activity 3

Aim: to listen extensively for gist and for pleasure

1. Explain to the class that they are going to listen to the whole of Part 4 but that you will pause the audio at certain points so they get a chance to discuss their understanding of the play. Hand out one worksheet per student and direct their attention to Activity 3. Show them that the questions are divided into three parts: a., b. and c. Explain that they should read the questions in Part a. before listening to the first part. They should *not* write anything while they listen but will have time after they listen to discuss their answers and make notes.

2. Play Track 1. When it is finished, put students in groups of three or four to discuss the answers to questions 1–5. Then conduct whole class feedback.

Key a:

1. *she wants her to study (German and then Political Economy)*
2. *She is bored and doesn't want to study. She thinks he is too serious (and possibly bored of his responsibilities). She would like to meet him.*

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3. She thinks that they are important and a 'pleasure'. She admires his good sense of responsibility and sympathizes with him because he has to look after his badly-behaved brother. She disapproves of his behaviour and doesn't like the fact that he causes so much trouble for Jack.

4. Many years ago, she wrote a long novel but lost the manuscript.

5. They are good friends and there are indications that they are attracted to one another.

3. Now direct the students' attention to the next set of questions and play Track 2.

Key b:

6. Jack's brother, Ernest. In fact, it is actually Algernon pretending to be him.

7. Cecily is excited and says she is frightened (though this is perhaps an exaggeration).

8. No, she is flirting with him (flirt has been taught in Part 3 of the play).

9. Jack will not return to the house until Monday, by which time Algernon will be gone.

10. They flirt and have fun with each other.

4. After they have compared answers to questions 6–10, conduct a brief class discussion and ask the students what they think is going to happen next.

5. Direct the students' attention to the next set of questions 11–15 and play Track 3.

Key c:

11. They are talking about Canon Chasuble's single life. Miss Prism is interested in him and would like to persuade him to get married (to her!).

12. He is not expected back until Monday.

13. His brother, Ernest, has died in Paris, of a bad cold.

14. Jack asks him to baptize him. He wants to change his name to Ernest to please Gwendolen.

15. Cecily tells Jack that his brother Ernest is here. Jack is very angry that Algernon has come.

Activity 4

Aim: to practise reading aloud, paying attention to 'chunking' and pausing

1. If you have a projector or an interactive whiteboard in the classroom, display the 'Chunking and pausing' text. Otherwise, direct students to the text on the worksheet. Read the text to the class slowly and clearly, pausing for a short time where there is one red line and slightly longer when there are two red lines. You may wish to practise this before the class so that it sounds natural.

2. Ask them to tell you whether you read it clearly, and if so, what you did to make it clear. What do they notice about the single and double red lines?

3. Now put the students in pairs. Direct students to the dialogue extract on the worksheet. Ask them to read the extract together, marking the pauses with one line or two lines.

4. Play Track 4 so that they can check their pauses and chunks.

Key (answers may vary):

Cecily: What is the matter, | Uncle Jack? || Please look happy! || You look as if you have toothache, || and I have got | such a surprise for you. || Who do you think | is in the dining room? || Your brother!

Jack: Who?

Cecily: Your brother | Ernest. | He arrived | about half an hour ago.

Jack: What nonsense! | I haven't got a brother.

Cecily: Oh, | don't say that. | He is still your brother | even though | he has behaved badly | in the past. | You mustn't be so heartless. || I'll tell him to come out. || And you will | shake hands with him, | won't you, | Uncle Jack?

5. Have them read the extract aloud in pairs, taking turns as Jack and Cecily.

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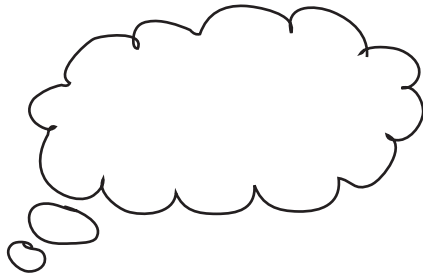
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Activity 5

Aims: to explore the thoughts and feelings of the main characters; to predict the next scene between Jack and Algernon (which will be covered in the next lesson)

1. If you can, display the illustration from the worksheet on a projector or an interactive whiteboard, or direct the students to the illustration on their worksheet. Ask them to think about the feelings and emotions of the characters in the scene.

2. Draw a thought bubble on the board, like this:



Ask the students to draw five thought bubbles on a piece of paper big enough to write a sentence in each. Ask them to write what each character is thinking in a bubble. Give them a few minutes to do this. Monitor the students, prompting them with ideas if necessary.

3. When you can see that everyone has at least two or three sentences written down, let them show their sentences to the people around them. Invite volunteers to suggest their thoughts for each character. Ask whether others had the same ideas.

4. Now focus on Jack and Algernon. Tell the students to imagine that at this point in the play, Jack asks Algernon to come with him for a moment because he needs to talk urgently with him. They walk indoors and have a conversation. Put the students in pairs and ask them to discuss what might be said in such a conversation. Give them a few minutes to come up with some ideas.

5. Write a first line for a role-play: **Jack:** *What on earth are you doing here?!* on the board. Ask the students to imagine they are the two gentlemen then assign each student

in their pairs either the role of Algernon or Jack. Explain that this is an improvisation, and they should not write their dialogue down. However, they will get several chances to practise the conversation until they are happy with it. Give them five minutes to practise the dialogue. You may find that putting some background music on helps to make them feel less self-conscious. As they are practising, monitor the groups, listening, making suggestions and encouraging them to practise until it is as good as possible.

6. Put pairs together into groups of four. Ask them to listen to one another's dialogues and compare with their own. How similar or different are they? Do they end in a similar way? Finally, conclude the activity by asking class members about the dialogues that they performed and listened to, whether they were similar to one another's or not, and how Jack and Algernon end the conversation.

Note: If you have a brave pair of students, you may want to ask them to perform their improvisation in front of the whole class.

Follow-up tasks

1. The students write Cecily's diary entry for that day.

2. Ask the students to write up the imagined dialogue between Jack and Algernon that they acted out at the end of the lesson.

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Activity 3

a. Read the questions below. Listen to the first part of Act 2 and think of your answers to the questions as you listen.

1. What does Miss Prism want Cecily to do?
2. What is Cecily's attitude to:
 - her studies?
 - Jack?
 - Jack's younger brother?
3. What is Miss Prism's attitude to:
 - Cecily's studies?
 - Jack?
 - Jack's younger brother?
4. What do we learn about Miss Prism's past?
5. What is Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble's relationship?

Now make notes about your answers. Compare them in your groups.

b. Read the questions below. Listen to the second part of Act 2 and think of your answers to the questions as you listen.

6. Who arrives at the house?
7. How does Cecily feel about meeting him?
8. Is Cecily being rude when she calls him 'wicked'?
9. Why won't Algernon meet Jack at the country house this weekend?
10. How do Cecily and Algernon behave together?

Now make notes about your answers. Compare them in your groups.

c. Read the questions below. Listen to the third part of Act 2 and think of your answers to the questions as you listen.

11. What are Canon Chasuble and Miss Prism talking about? Why?
12. Why are they surprised to see Jack?
13. What is Jack's news?
14. What does Jack ask Canon Chasuble to do? Why?
15. What is Cecily's news to Jack? How does he feel about it?

Now make notes about your answers. Compare them in your groups.

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Activity 4

Chunking and pausing

When we are talking, || one of the most important ways | we can make it easier | for the listener to understand us | is by pausing || – even long sentences, | like this one, | can be easy to understand | if we pause at the right moments. || But when are these moments? || Well, | at the end of sentences | it is normal | to leave a long pause, | perhaps a second, | to show that the sentence is finished | and a new one is about to start. || In written English, | commas show us | where pauses usually occur, | but a clear speaker | will also pause | for a short time | between ‘chunks’ of language, | as I have done | in this paragraph.

Mark where you think the actors pause with one line or two lines. Two lines mean the pause is longer.

Cecily: What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Please look happy! You look as if you have toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you.
Who do you think is in the dining room? Your brother!

Jack: Who?

Cecily: Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

Jack: What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

Cecily: Oh, don't say that. He is still your brother even though he has behaved badly in the past. You mustn't be so heartless. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack?

Listen and check.

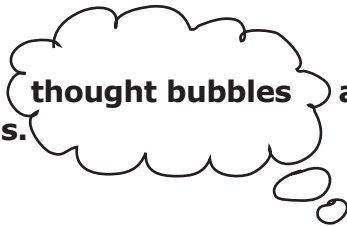
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Activity 5



Worksheet

Draw five thought bubbles and write what each character is thinking in the bubbles.



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Script

Track 1

[The garden at the Manor House in Woolton, Hertfordshire, Jack Worthing's country home. Miss Prism is sitting at a table. Cecily is watering flowers]

Miss Prism: *[Calling]* Cecily, Cecily! I think that watering flowers is a servant's occupation rather than yours, especially at a moment when the pleasures of education are waiting for you. Your German grammar book is on the table. Please open it at page fifteen. We will do yesterday's lesson again.

Cecily: *[Coming over to the table very slowly]* But I don't like German. It isn't a very pretty language. I know that I look quite ugly after my German lesson.

Miss Prism: Child, your guardian is anxious that you improve yourself in every way. As he was leaving for town yesterday, he reminded me how important your German is. Indeed he always reminds me how important your German is when he is leaving for town.

Cecily: Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he must be ill.

Miss Prism: *[Sitting up very straight in her chair]* Your guardian's health is excellent and his seriousness – indeed his earnestness – is very admirable in such a young man. I do not know anyone else who has such a good sense of duty and responsibility.

Cecily: I suppose that is why he often seems a little bored when we three are together.

Miss Prism: Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr Worthing has many troubles in his life. You must remember that he is always worried about that unfortunate young man, his brother Ernest.

Cecily: I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother Ernest, to come here sometimes. We might have a good influence on him, Miss Prism. I am sure that you would. You know German and geology and all kinds of things that influence a man very much. *[Cecily begins to write in her diary]*

Miss Prism: *[Shaking her head]* I do not think that even I could have a good influence on his character. Mr Worthing himself says that his brother's character is weak and indecisive. Indeed, I wouldn't want to have a good influence on him. I do not approve of this modern desire to turn bad people into good people **at a moment's notice**. I think he should suffer because of his misbehaviour. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't understand why you keep a diary at all.

Cecily: I keep a diary in order to write down the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down, I should probably forget all about them.

Miss Prism: Our memory is the diary that we all have with us.

Cecily: Yes, but our memory usually remembers things that have never happened and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that memory is responsible for all the three-volume novels people write.

Miss Prism: Do not be **dismissive** of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself a long time ago.

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Script

Cecily: Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily! I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

Miss Prism: The good people ended happily. The bad people ended unhappily. That is fiction.

Cecily: I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

Miss Prism: I am sad to say it was not. The manuscript, unfortunately, was lost. Now, start work, child. There is no point in thinking about these things.

Cecily: *[Smiling]* But I see dear Canon Chasuble coming towards us through the garden.

Miss Prism: *[Standing up and going towards Canon Chasuble]* Canon Chasuble! It is indeed a pleasure to see you.

Chasuble: And how are we today? Miss Prism, you are, I hope, well?

Cecily: Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her good to have a short walk with you in the park, Canon Chasuble.

Miss Prism: Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

Cecily: No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt that you had a headache. Indeed, I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson, when Canon Chasuble arrived.

Chasuble: I hope, Cecily, that you pay attention to your lessons.

Cecily: Oh, I am afraid I do not!

Chasuble: That is strange. If I were Miss Prism's pupil, I would always pay attention. Has Mr Worthing returned from town yet?

Miss Prism: We expect him on Monday afternoon.

Chasuble: Ah, yes, he usually likes to spend his Sundays in London. He is an earnest young man who does not always look for pleasure as, I believe, his younger brother does. I will see you both at church later, shall I?

Miss Prism: I think, dear canon, I will have a walk with you. I find I have a headache after all and a walk might do it good.

Chasuble: It would be a pleasure, Miss Prism, a pleasure. Let us go to the end of the garden and back.

Miss Prism: That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. *[Miss Prism goes down the garden with Canon Chasuble]*

Cecily: Oh horrid Political Economy! Horrid German!

[Merriman enters with a visiting card on a silver tray]

Merriman: Mr Ernest Worthing has just arrived from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

Cecily: *[Taking the card and reading it]* 'Mr Ernest Worthing, B.4, The Albany, London.' He must be Uncle Jack's brother! Have you told him Uncle Jack is in town?

Merriman: Yes, miss. He seemed very disappointed. I told him that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

Track 2

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Script

- Cecily:** Ask Mr Ernest Worthing to come here. And you had better talk to the **housekeeper** about a bedroom for him.
- Merriman:** Yes, miss. *[Merriman goes off]*
- Cecily:** *[To herself]* I have never met a really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid that he will look just like everyone else. *[Algernon enters looking very handsome and fashionable]* Oh dear, he does!
- Algernon:** *[Raising his hat]* You are my little cousin, Cecily, I'm sure.
- Cecily:** You are making a strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am quite tall for my age. *[Algernon is rather surprised]* But I am your cousin, Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.
- Algernon:** Oh! I am not really wicked at all, Cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.
- Cecily:** If you are not wicked, then I think you have been deceiving us all. I hope that you have not been leading a double life. I hope you have not been pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be **hypocrisy**.
- Algernon:** *[Looking at her in amazement]* Oh! Of course, I have been rather bad.
- Cecily:** I'm glad to hear it.
- Algernon:** In fact, I think that I have been very wicked in my own way.
- Cecily:** I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I'm sure it must have been very pleasant.
- Algernon:** It is much pleasanter being here with you.
- Cecily:** I can't understand why you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back from town till Monday afternoon.
- Algernon:** That is a great disappointment to me. I have to leave for London by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business meeting that I am anxious ... to miss!
- Cecily:** Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?
- Algernon:** No. The appointment is in London.
- Cecily:** Well, of course, I know that it is important not to attend a business meeting. That is what makes life interesting. But I think you should wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigration.
- Algernon:** He wants to speak to me about ... I don't understand!
- Cecily:** About your emigration. He has gone to town to buy your clothes.
- Algernon:** I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my clothes. He has no taste in ties at all.
- Cecily:** I don't think you will require ties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.
- Algernon:** Australia! I'd rather die.
- Cecily:** Well, at dinner on Wednesday he said that you would have to choose between this world, the next world and Australia.
- Algernon:** Oh well! I don't believe Australia and the next world are very nice. This world is good enough for me, Cousin Cecily.

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Script

- Cecily:** Ah, but are you good enough for it?
- Algernon:** I'm afraid I'm not. That is why I want you to **reform** me. Please will you do this, Cousin Cecily?
- Cecily:** I'm afraid I don't have time this afternoon.
- Algernon:** Well, would you mind if I reformed myself this afternoon?
- Cecily:** It is rather ambitious of you. But I think you should try.
- Algernon:** I will. I feel better already.
- Cecily:** You are looking a little worse.
- Algernon:** That is because I am hungry.
- Cecily:** How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that someone who is going to reform himself needs regular meals. Please come in.
- Algernon:** Thank you. May I have a flower for my buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a flower for my buttonhole. I'd like a pink rose.
- Cecily:** *[Picking up scissors]* Why? *[Cutting a flower]*
- Algernon:** Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.
- Cecily:** I don't think that it is right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism doesn't say such things to me.
- Algernon:** Miss Prism must be a very short-sighted old lady. *[Cecily puts the flower in his buttonhole]* You are the prettiest girl I have ever seen.
- Cecily:** Miss Prism says that good looks are a trap.
- Algernon:** They are a trap that every sensible man would like to be caught in.
- Cecily:** Oh, I don't think I would like to catch a sensible man. I wouldn't know what to talk to him about. *[They go into the house. Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble enter]*
-
- Miss Prism:** You are on your own too much, Canon Chasuble. You should get married.
- Chasuble:** The Early Church was very much against marriage.
- Miss Prism:** That is obviously the reason why the Early Church has not lasted to the present day. And you do not seem to realize dear sir, that a man who remains single becomes a permanent temptation.
- Chasuble:** But isn't a man equally attractive when he is married?
- Miss Prism:** No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.
- Chasuble:** And often, I've been told, he is not even attractive to her.
- Miss Prism:** That depends on the woman. If she is a mature woman, she can be relied upon. You cannot rely upon a young woman. But where is Cecily?
- Chasuble:** Perhaps she followed us. *[Jack enters from the back of the garden. He is wearing black mourning clothes]*
- Miss Prism:** Mr Worthing!
- Chasuble:** Mr Worthing!
- Miss Prism:** This is a surprise. We did not expect you till Monday afternoon.
- Jack:** *[Shaking Miss Prism's hand in a tragic way]* I have returned sooner than I expected to. Canon Chasuble, I hope you are well?
- Chasuble:** Dear Mr Worthing, I hope these black clothes do not mean that something dreadful has happened?

Track 3

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Script

- Jack:** My brother.
- Miss Prism:** More shameful debts and bad behaviour?
- Chasuble:** Is he still leading his wicked life?
- Jack:** *[Shaking his head]* Dead!
- Chasuble:** Your brother Ernest is dead?
- Jack:** Quite dead.
- Miss Prism:** What a lesson for him! I hope he will learn from this.
- Chasuble:** Mr Worthing, I offer you my sincere **condolences**. At least you know that you have always been most generous and forgiving to him.
- Jack:** Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is very, very sad.
- Chasuble:** Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?
- Jack:** No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel in Paris.
- Chasuble:** Did the telegram mention the cause of death?
- Jack:** A bad cold, it seems.
- Miss Prism:** **As a man sows, so shall he reap.**
- Chasuble:** **Charity**, dear Miss Prism, charity. None of us are perfect. I myself am particularly sensitive to **draughts**. Will the funeral take place here?
- Jack:** No. It seems he wanted to be buried in Paris.
- Chasuble:** In Paris! *[Shaking his head]* I don't think he was being very serious even at the end. You will want me to mention this sad event in church next Sunday. *[Jack presses Canon Chasuble's hand very hard and looks very sad]* My **sermon** on the mercy of God can be used on any occasion, happy or sad. *[They all sigh]* I have preached it at baptisms, weddings and funerals. The last time I preached it was to the Society for the Prevention of **Discontent** among the Upper Classes. The Bishop, who was present, liked it very much.
- Jack:** Ah! That reminds me. You mentioned baptisms, I think, Canon Chasuble? You know how to baptize people, I suppose? *[Canon Chasuble looks very surprised]* I mean you often baptize people, don't you?
- Miss Prism:** It is, I am sorry to say, one of the canon's most frequent duties. I have often spoken to the poorer classes about it. But they don't take any notice.
- Chasuble:** But is there any particular child in whom you are interested, Mr Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried?
- Jack:** Oh yes.
- Miss Prism:** *[Bitterly]* People who live just for pleasure are usually unmarried.
- Jack:** But it is not for any child, dear canon. No! The fact is that I would like to be baptized myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.
- Chasuble:** But surely, Mr Worthing, you have been baptized already?
- Jack:** I don't remember anything about it. Of course, I don't know if you think I am a little too old now.
- Chasuble:** Not at all. At what time would you like the ceremony performed?
- Jack:** Oh, I'll come about five o'clock if that would suit you.

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Script

Chasuble: Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time – twins who were born in one of the cottages on your estate.

Jack: Oh! I don't think it would be much fun to be baptized along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five be all right?

Chasuble: Of course, of course! *[Taking out his watch from his pocket]* And now, dear Mr Worthing, I will not stay any longer in this house of grief. I ask you not to grieve too much. **Bitter trials** are often **blessings in disguise**.

Miss Prism: This seems to me to be an extremely obvious blessing. *[Cecily enters from the house]*

Cecily: Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you. But what horrible clothes you are wearing. Please go and change them.

Miss Prism: Cecily!

Chasuble: My child! My child! *[Cecily goes towards Jack, who kisses her forehead in a tragic way]*

Cecily: What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Please look happy! You look as if you have toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining room? Your brother!

Jack: Who?

Cecily: Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

Jack: What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

Cecily: Oh, don't say that. He is still your brother even though he has behaved badly in the past. You mustn't be so heartless. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? *[Cecily runs back into the house]*

Chasuble: This is very happy news.

Miss Prism: Since we were just getting used to his departure, his sudden return seems very distressing.

Jack: My brother is in the dining room? I don't know what it means. I think it is perfectly ridiculous. *[Algernon and Cecily enter holding hands. They come slowly towards Jack]* Good heavens!

Track 4

The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde

Part 4 (first part of Act 2)

Glossary

dismissive reacting to something in a way that shows you do not think it is worth paying attention to

housekeeper someone whose job it is to organize all the work that needs to be done in someone's house, such as cleaning, cooking etc

hypocrisy behaviour in which someone claims to have certain moral principles or beliefs but behaves in a way that shows they are not sincere

reform *to reform* someone is to change your own or someone else's behaviour so that it is no longer illegal or harmful

mourning clothes clothes, especially black clothes, that are worn as a sign of respect for someone who has died

condolences the things that you say to show sympathy when someone has just died

charity kindness that you show towards other people by not judging them or criticizing them too severely. *Charity* is more usually used to talk about money or food that is given to people who are poor or ill so that they can live.

draught cold air that blows into a room and makes you feel uncomfortable

sermon a speech made by a priest or religious leader, especially as part of a religious ceremony

discontent the unhappy feeling that you have when you are not satisfied with something

bitterly in a way that shows that you are extremely angry, upset or disappointed about something

Useful phrases

at a moment's notice without being given much warning before something happens

As a man sows, so shall he reap the most basic meaning of this phrase is that the seeds you plant in the ground – *sow* – will grow into the plants which you will cut and gather – *reap*. This phrase is used for saying that something happens to someone because of what they have done in the past. It was originally a religious phrase, but people use it now with a general meaning. Miss Prism says that Ernest died of a bad cold as a result of his bad behaviour.

bitter trials a *bitter trial* is a very painful or difficult experience

blessings in disguise Chasuble says that painful experiences – bitter trials – can be *blessings in disguise*. A *blessing* is something good that you feel very grateful or lucky to have. Chasuble is saying that something can seem to cause problems, but later you realize it is a good thing.