

The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde

Part 3 (final part of Act 1)

Author: Daniel Barber

Level: Upper intermediate

Age: Young adults / Adults

Duration: Approx. 90 minutes

Aims: In this lesson, the students will:

1. recap the story so far;
2. study some of Wilde's 'witticisms';
3. listen for specific language;
4. listen to order events;
5. practise the intonation in making suggestions;
6. predict what is going to happen in Acts 2 and 3.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (beginning of Part 3); Track 2 (rest of Part 3); Track 3 (extract) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of full script per student; one copy of the stage directions sheet for every three students cut into strips where indicated

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 3, the two friends are deciding what to do in the evening when Gwendolen returns unexpectedly to make secret plans with Jack. However, Algernon is listening to every word ...

Activity 1

Aim: to recap what has happened so far

1. Hand out the worksheets and direct students to the illustration of the four main characters in Algernon's drawing room. Ask the class the following questions:
 - *Who is in the picture?* (point to each character individually)
 - *Where are they?*
 - *What are Algernon and his aunt talking about?*
 - *Where do Algernon and Lady Bracknell then go? Why?*
 - *What do Jack and Gwendolen talk about?*
 - *What is the problem?*
 - *What do we know about Jack's past?*
2. Explain that this play, like most traditional plays in English, is made up of three 'acts' and that in this lesson students will listen to the end of Act 1. The entire first act takes place in Algernon's apartment. Explain that traditionally, after each act, the stage curtain goes down, and usually there is a break of several minutes before the start of the next act.

Activity 2

Aim: to sensitize students to the witticisms that feature in the play

1. Explain that Oscar Wilde is famous for his many clever and funny remarks or 'witticisms'. Direct students to Activity 2 and ask them to find the end of the first sentence from the second column (a-l). Ask how they know the answer – someone may be able to remember this line from the second part of the play. Check they remember who said it (Lady Bracknell) and when (when she is 'interviewing' Jack).
2. Get the students to work in pairs to match the other sentence halves. You may need to pre-teach *resist* (to stop yourself from doing something that you would very much like to do) and *gutter* (the edge of the road, where water flows away).
3. When they have finished, elicit the witticisms that come from The Importance of Being Earnest. Get them to read through the quotes again and choose a favourite. Ask volunteers to tell the class their favourite witticism and explain why they like it.

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Key: 1. i; 2. e; 3. b; 4. k; 5. a; 6. f; 7. c; 8. h; 9. d; 10. l; 11. j; 12. g (the ones from the play are 1, 6, 10 and 12)

Activity 3

Aim: to listen for specific language

1. Explain to the students that they are going to listen to the first few minutes of Part 3, a dialogue between Jack and Algernon after the women leave. Explain that they will hear more witticisms and they will need to listen out for these. Show them Activity 3 on the worksheet. Ask the students to read the gapped sentences and to try to guess the missing words. Give them two minutes to do this.

Note: Be prepared to clarify *tragedy* (a bad situation that makes people very upset or angry) and *flirt* (to behave towards someone in a way that shows your sexual or romantic interest in them).

2. Elicit any ideas that the students have for the seven sentences. Don't spend too long on each sentence; if there are no suggestions, just move on to the next gap. Don't say whether their guesses are correct or not at this stage.

3. Play Track 1. When the track has finished, give the students a minute to check their answers with a partner. Conduct whole class feedback, during which time you may ask whether they think the witticisms are true / funny / interesting etc.

Key: 1. live, die; 2. mothers, men; 3. clever, fools; 4. the truth; 5. pretty, pretty, flirt with someone else; 6. sister, lots of other things; 7. very hard work, very hard work

Activity 4

Aim: to listen for specific information

1. Tell the students that they are going to listen to the last part of Act 1. Direct them to Activity 4 on the worksheet and explain that this is a summary of the last part but that the events have been mixed up. Show them that the first event has been given and explain that they must put the other events in the correct order. Give them a minute to read the sentences beforehand.

2. Play Track 2. When it has finished, nominate individuals to say the events in the correct sequence.

Key:

1. Gwendolen returns to speak to Jack.
2. She tells her cousin to leave.
3. Gwendolen explains that she and Jack will not be allowed to do what they had planned.
4. Gwendolen explains why they cannot get married.
5. Jack tells Gwendolen where he lives when he is not in London.
6. Gwendolen promises Jack that she will send him letters.
7. Jack accompanies Gwendolen to the door.
8. Algernon makes plans.
9. Jack comes back in the room.

Activity 5

Aims: to complete the students' understanding of the scene by focusing on the stage directions; to prepare for Activity 7

1. Remind students that a play is a combination of the words that the actors say and the actions they perform on stage, called stage directions, but the directions are not given on the audio version. Explain that the stage directions to the part of the play that they have just listened to give important information. Hand out the script and point out that the stage directions are missing for the part of the play that they just heard. They need to put each set of stage directions back in its correct place in the script.

2. Put students in groups of three or four, in a circle if possible. Hand out the stage directions cut up and mixed up, one per group. Tell them to read the script and put the stage directions in the correct order. As they do this, you should go around the classroom visiting groups and making suggestions to help them where they are having difficulty.

Note: If you don't have time to cut up the stage directions, they are already mixed up on the sheet.

3. When they have mostly finished, explain that you will now play the last part again. When it gets to a stage direction, you will pause the audio and they can put their hands

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up if they think they know the correct stage direction. Play Track 2 again, pausing at each stage direction. Nominate volunteers to suggest the stage direction. Ask the class if they think each answer is correct. Confirm correct answers.

Key:

1. Lane enters;
2. Gwendolen enters. Lane goes off;
3. Algernon goes to the other side of the room near the fireplace and stands with his back to them;
4. Algernon, who has turned round and has been carefully listening, smiles to himself and writes the address on the cuff of his shirt. Then he picks up a railway timetable from a shelf;
5. Algernon rings the bell;
6. To Lane, who now enters;
7. Jack and Gwendolen go off;
8. Handing Algernon his glass of wine;
9. Jack enters. Lane goes off;
10. Algernon is laughing loudly;
11. Jack shakes his head at him and leaves the room. Algernon lights a cigarette, looks at his shirt-cuff and smiles

Activity 6

Aim: to practise the intonation in making suggestions

1. Ask the class to listen to an extract from the play and answer two questions:

- What is Algernon doing in this extract?
- What is Jack's attitude?

Play Track 3.

Key: Algernon is making suggestions. Jack is being obstructive and refusing to agree to anything.

2. Direct students to Activity 6 on the worksheet. Tell the students to underline the sentences where Algernon makes suggestions. Play Track 3 again and ask students to listen to the intonation of those sentences.

3. Explain that you are going to play it one more time, but that you will pause after each of Algernon's sentences. The students should repeat what he says and try to copy the intonation.

4. Now ask the students to quickly write down three things they could do with a friend in the evening (e.g. *cinema, skate park* etc.). Place students in pairs and instruct them to repeat the dialogue, taking turns as Algernon but with their own suggestions. The 'Jacks' should think of a reason why they don't want to do what their partner suggests.

Activity 7

Aim: to get students thinking about the story so far by predicting the rest of the story

1. Ask the class what Algernon did at the end of Act 1 (he wrote Jack's address and looked at a train timetable) and elicit his plan (to go to Jack's country house). Tell them that they are now going to think about the rest of the play. Pretend that Acts 2 and 3 were destroyed in a fire at Oscar Wilde's house and that a London theatre wants to recreate the play by employing the finest writers (that's the students!) to invent endings for it. At this stage, they are not looking for a script, just a plot outline (a general explanation of what happens).

2. On the board, write the questions below. Ask the students to write some answers on their own.

- What other characters have been mentioned?
- What other places have been mentioned?
- What problems are there for the characters?
- Do you think this will end happily or tragically?

3. Now put students into small groups to discuss what they think happens in the rest of the play. Give them 5-10 minutes for this and make sure that they write notes. Go around the room listening to each group's ideas, asking questions and challenging them to include many elements into the play (e.g. *What happens to Cecily? What about Lady Bracknell?*)

4. Regroup the students so that they can share their plot ideas with other members of the class. Allow them time to tell each other their ideas.

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5. Conclude the class by asking a few class members which idea they like best, which they think is most likely to happen and so on.

Follow-up task

1. Ask students to write the first of the letters that Gwendolen promised to send Jack.
2. Ask students to research the life of Oscar Wilde and write a mini-biography. (Note: Wilde was sent to prison over allegations about his sexuality – the cause of scandal at the time. If this would not be a suitable biography for your learners to read about for any reason, it may be advisable not to set this task.)

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Activity 1

Look at the picture and answer the questions given by your teacher.



Worksheet

Activity 2

Work in pairs. Match the sentence halves to recreate some of Wilde's famous witticisms. Which ones come from *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. A man who wants to get married | a. but temptation. |
| 2. Always forgive your enemies; | b. everyone gives to their mistakes. |
| 3. Experience is the name | c. I prefer other people's. |
| 4. I am not young enough | d. is not being talked about. |
| 5. I can resist anything | e. nothing annoys them so much. |
| 6. I hope I am not perfect. | f. There would be no room
for development. |
| 7. My own business always bores
me to death; | g. I always feel certain they mean
something else. |
| 8. Nothing annoys people more | h. than not receiving invitations. |
| 9. The only thing worse than being
talked about | i. should know everything or nothing. |
| 10. To lose one parent is unfortunate; | j. some of us are looking at the stars. |
| 11. We are all in the gutter, but | k. to know everything. |
| 12. When people talk to me about
the weather | l. to lose both seems like carelessness. |

Which is your favourite? Why? _____

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Activity 3

Listen and complete the witticisms.

1. Relations are simply a boring group of people who don't know how to _____ and don't know when to _____.
2. All women become like their _____. That is their tragedy. No _____ become like theirs. That is *their* tragedy.
3. You meet _____ people everywhere. I wish that there were a few _____ left in the world.
4. One does not tell _____ to a nice, sweet girl.
5. The only way to behave to a woman is to flirt with her if she is _____. And if she isn't _____, you must _____.
6. Women only call each other _____ after they have called each other _____ first.
7. Doing nothing is _____. However, I don't mind _____ if there is nothing definite to do.

Activity 4

Listen and order the events of the story.

- Gwendolen explains that she and Jack will not be allowed to do what they had planned.
- Gwendolen explains why they cannot get married.
- Gwendolen promises Jack that she will send him letters.
- 1 Gwendolen returns to speak to Jack.
- Jack accompanies Gwendolen to the door.
- Jack comes back in the room.
- Jack tells Gwendolen where he lives when he is not in London.
- She tells her cousin to leave.
- Algernon makes plans.

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Activity 6

a. Underline the sentences in which Algernon is making suggestions. Listen to the intonation of these sentences.

Algernon: What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

Jack: Oh no! One has to listen at the theatre. I hate listening.

Algernon: Well, let us go to the Club.

Jack: Oh no! One has to talk at the Club. I hate talking.

Algernon: Well, we could go to the Empire Music Hall at ten.

Jack: The Music Hall? Oh no! I hate looking at things.

Algernon: Well, what shall we do?

Jack: Nothing!

b. Listen again and copy Algernon's intonation.

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Stage directions sheet

[To Lane, who now enters]

[Algernon is laughing loudly]

[Algernon goes to the other side of the room near the fireplace and stands with his back to them]

[Algernon rings the bell]

[Gwendolen enters. Lane goes off]

[Jack and Gwendolen go off]

[Jack enters. Lane goes off]

[Jack shakes his head at him and leaves the room. Algernon lights a cigarette, looks at his shirt-cuff and smiles]

[Algernon, who has turned round and has been carefully listening, smiles to himself and writes the address on the cuff of his shirt. Then he picks up a railway timetable from a shelf]

[Handing Algernon his glass of wine]

[Lane enters]



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Script

Track 1

- Jack:** *[Algernon starts singing a **Wedding March** in the music room. Jack looks very angry and goes to the door] Stop singing that awful tune, Algy! *[The singing stops and Algernon enters cheerfully]**
- Algernon:** Didn't everything work out all right, old fellow? Did Gwendolen refuse to marry you?
- Jack:** Oh, Gwendolen was fine. She believes we are engaged. Her mother is awful. I've never met such a monster. Oh, I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way in front of you.
- Algernon:** My dear fellow, I love hearing people being rude about my relations. Relations are simply a boring group of people who don't know how to live and don't know when to die.
- Jack:** Oh, that is nonsense!
- Algernon:** It isn't!
- Jack:** Well, I won't argue about it. You always want to argue about things.
- Algernon:** Things were made for arguing about.
- Jack:** If I believed that, I'd shoot myself ... *[A pause]* You don't think Gwendolen will become like her mother in a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?
- Algernon:** All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No men become like theirs. That is their tragedy.
- Jack:** Have you said something clever?
- Algernon:** They were very fine sentences and they are very true.
- Jack:** I'm tired of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You meet clever people everywhere. I wish that there were a few fools left in the world.
- Algernon:** There are.
- Jack:** I should like to meet them. What do they talk about?
- Algernon:** The fools? They talk about the clever people, of course.
- Jack:** What fools!
- Algernon:** By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about being Ernest in town and Jack in the country?
- Jack:** My dear fellow, one does not tell the truth to a nice, sweet girl. You have extraordinary ideas about how to behave to a woman!
- Algernon:** The only way to behave to a woman is to flirt with her if she is pretty. And if she isn't pretty, you must flirt with someone else.
- Jack:** Oh, that is nonsense.
- Algernon:** What about your badly behaved brother Ernest? Did you tell her about him?
- Jack:** Oh, I shall have got rid of him before the end of the week. I'll say he died in Paris of a heart attack. Lots of people die of a heart attack quite suddenly, don't they?
- Algernon:** Yes, but it's **hereditary**, my dear fellow. It's the sort of thing that **runs in families**. You had better say that he died of a bad cold.

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Script

Jack: Are you sure that a bad cold isn't hereditary?

Algernon: Of course it isn't.

Jack: Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest will die suddenly, in Paris, of a bad cold. That gets rid of him.

Algernon: But you said that your ward ... Miss Cardew ... was a little too interested in your poor brother Ernest. Won't she be very distressed?

Jack: Oh, that's not a problem. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am pleased to say. She eats big meals, goes for long walks and doesn't pay attention to her lessons.

Algernon: I would like to meet Cecily.

Jack: I will make sure that you never meet her. She is extremely pretty and she is just eighteen.

Algernon: Have you told Gwendolen that you have an extremely pretty ward who is just eighteen?

Jack: Oh, one mustn't tell people everything all at once. Cecily and Gwendolen will be great friends, I'm sure. They will be calling each other sister half an hour after they meet.

Algernon: Women only call each other sister after they have called each other lots of other things first. Now, my dear fellow, if we want to get a good table at the restaurant, we must go and change our clothes now. It's nearly seven. I'm hungry.

Jack: *[Irritably]* I never knew a time when you weren't hungry.

Algernon: What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

Jack: Oh no! One has to listen at the theatre. I hate listening.

Algernon: Well, let us go to the **Club**.

Jack: Oh no! One has to talk at the Club. I hate talking.

Algernon: Well, we could go to the Empire **Music Hall** at ten.

Jack: The Music Hall? Oh no! I hate looking at things.

Algernon: Well, what shall we do?

Jack: Nothing!

Algernon: Doing nothing is very hard work. However, I don't mind very hard work if there is nothing definite to do. *[(1) _____]*

Lane: Miss Fairfax has returned, sir. *[(2) _____]*

Algernon: Gwendolen. Hello!

Gwendolen: Algy, please go away. I have something which I want to say to Mr Worthing in private.

Algernon: Really, Gwendolen. I don't think I can allow you to do that.

Gwendolen: Algy, you are not quite old enough to say things like that. *[(3) _____]*

Jack: My own darling!

Gwendolen: Ernest, we may never be married. I saw the frown on Mama's face. Few parents these days pay attention to what their children say to them. I was three years old the last time I had any influence over my mother. Ernest, she may stop us from getting married. I may get

Track 3

Track 2

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Script

married to someone else, I may get married again and again – but nothing will ever change my love for you.

Jack: Dear Gwendolen!

Gwendolen: Mama told me the romantic story of your birth. She is displeased about it, but I love it. Your name – Ernest – fascinates me. You are so simple and good-natured and that makes you wonderfully complicated. I've got your town address at The Albany. What is your address in the country?

Jack: The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire. [(4) _____] *[Algernon, who has turned round and has been carefully listening, smiles to himself and writes the address on the cuff of his shirt. Then he picks up a railway timetable from a shelf]*

Gwendolen: It may be necessary to do something **impetuous**. We will have to think carefully about this. I will write to you every day.

Jack: My own one!

Gwendolen: How long will you be in town?

Jack: Till Monday.

Gwendolen: Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

Algernon: Thanks, I have turned round already.

Gwendolen: You may also ring the bell for Lane to take me to the door. [(5) _____]

Jack: Let me take you to the door, my own darling.

Gwendolen: Certainly.

Jack: [(6) _____] I will take Miss Fairfax to the door.

Lane: Yes, sir. [(7) _____]

Algernon: Bring me a glass of wine, Lane.

Lane: Yes, sir.

Algernon: Tomorrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

Lane: Yes, sir.

Algernon: I shall probably not be back till Monday. Pack my evening clothes, some casual clothes and all my Bunbury suits ...

Lane: Yes, sir. [(8) _____]

Algernon: I hope that tomorrow is a fine day, Lane.

Lane: It never is, sir.

Algernon: Lane, you are a pessimist.

Lane: I do my best, sir. [(9) _____]

Jack: What a sensible, intelligent girl! The only girl I've ever cared for in my life. [(10) _____] What on earth are you laughing at?

Algernon: Oh, I'm a bit worried about poor Bunbury, that is all.

Jack: Your friend Bunbury will get you into trouble one day, you know.

Algernon: I love trouble. It's the only thing which is never serious.

Jack: Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

Algernon: Nobody ever does. [(11) _____]

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Glossary

Wedding March a piece of music traditionally played when a woman arrives at her wedding or when she and her husband leave after it

hereditary a *hereditary* disease or quality is passed from a parent to a child in their genes

Club an organization that provides a place where its members, especially men, can go and eat, relax or stay

Music Hall a type of entertainment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that consisted of a series of short performances by singers, dancers and comedians in a theatre

cuff the part of a sleeve that fits around your wrist

impetuous done quickly, without thinking about what the effects will be

Useful phrases

runs in families (something runs in the / someone's family) if something such as a quality or disease runs in someone's family, a lot of people in the family have it and it is passed from parents to their children in their genes