

The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde

Part 7 (first half of Act 3)

Author: Daniel Barber

Level: Upper intermediate

Age: Young adults / Adults

Duration: Approx. 90 minutes

Aims: In this lesson, the students will:

1. discuss the play so far and the likely direction in the final act;
2. listen for gist and detail;
3. practise writing tweets;
4. explore the character and opinions of Lady Bracknell;
5. role-play the discussion between the characters;
6. practise intonation in surprised exclamations.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first part of Part 7); Track 2 (rest of Part 7); Track 3 (extracts) downloaded from onestopenglish; one set of role-play cards for every five students cut up

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 7, disaster is averted as the women forgive their fiancés to be, but then an unwelcome visitor threatens to ruin the romantic scene once more ...

Activity 1

Aim: to prepare for the final act by summarizing students' beliefs and expectations about the play

1. Explain that today the class is going to start by discussing the play so far. Put them into groups of three to five students and hand out the worksheet. Ask them to talk about the questions in Activity 1 together.
2. Get feedback as a whole class. Spend time on each question, exploring the students' ideas about each one in detail. The key below is quite detailed for this reason, and includes some follow-up questions for you to ask them (in brackets).

Key:

1. *The men have lied about their names, both claiming to be Ernest Worthing. (How serious is it that the men have lied? Would you be angry with them if you were Cecily and Gwendolen?)*
2. *They are both planning to be baptized with the name Ernest. (Is getting baptized a big decision or a difficult thing to do? Is it really a solution to the problem?)*

3. *It is a comedy. The themes of love and marriage, the domestic settings, happy characters and the light atmosphere all suggest a happy ending. (What would have to happen if it were a tragedy?)*
4. *The students will have their own views here but clearly we are leading to a situation where the two couples will be happy in love and free to marry. (What will happen to Algernon, Jack, Cecily and Gwendolen? What about the other characters: Lady Bracknell? Canon Chasuble? Miss Prism?)*
5. *The men's lies might mean the women are so unhappy that they refuse to marry them. As Cecily's guardian, Jack may decide that she should not marry Algernon because he is irresponsible or not really in love with her. (Why is his approval necessary? Because he is in charge of her life, her education and her money.) Lady Bracknell is unhappy with Jack marrying her daughter. (Why is her opinion important? Because without her parents' approval, she may not be allowed to get married. If she does so against their wishes, she might be left without any money or position in high society.)*

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Activity 2

Aim: to listen for gist and detail

1. Ask the students to read the questions in Activity 2 on the worksheet. Play Track 1.
2. After the students have listened to the track, give them a couple of minutes to compare their answers in pairs. Hand out the scripts for them to check their answers, indicating Track 1.

Key:

1. *The women are now in the house. The men are still in the garden (but come inside to talk to the women).*
2. *It doesn't last at all. She is the first to speak.*
3. *It was their way to be with the women.*
4. *They do accept it. They say that the style of what they say is important and that they sound truthful even though they don't believe them. (In short, they enjoy the romance of the answer!)*
5. *They cannot accept that they are not called Ernest.*
6. *They think that getting baptized Ernest is a very courageous thing to do. (You could ask the students here if they agree.)*
7. *Lady Bracknell arrives.*

Activity 3

Aims: to explore the character of Lady Bracknell further and predict her likely reaction to the news about her daughter and nephew; to practise writing succinctly, as for tweets

1. Ask students what they remember about Lady Bracknell. Encourage the class to think of ways of describing her by asking some basic questions first, (*How old is she? What is she interested in? etc.*) followed by more complex questions. (*What is her attitude to her daughter, Gwendolen? Her husband? Marriage? etc.*) Introduce the adjective *opinionated* to describe her (someone who is opinionated has very strong opinions that they refuse to change even when they are clearly unreasonable).
2. Ask students what social media they can imagine Lady Bracknell using – she is very

concerned about her social situation, after all! Explain that they are going to imagine what Lady Bracknell would write on her Twitter account if she were alive today. Write on the board:

@LadyBracknell #marriage
@LadyBracknell #agoodhusband

Ask the class what the @ and # signs mean (@introduces a Twitter account name and # introduces a topic). Elicit the 140-character limit on tweets, too.

3. Ask the students to write tweets as if they were Lady Bracknell explaining her opinions on marriage and 'a good husband'. These tweets must be a maximum of 140 characters including spaces. As they are writing, go around the room checking students are on task. Encourage abbreviations and short cuts typical of tweets and notes, such as 'U' for you, 'R' for are, 'LOL' for *laugh out loud*, '2moro' for *tomorrow* etc. (Comprehensive twitter dictionaries can be found online.)
4. Explain that the students are now going to tweet their messages. To simulate the 'twittersphere', have students get up and walk around the room reading out their messages to one another. Before they do this, make sure they know how to say '#' (hashtag) and '@' (at). Ask students to make a note of the tweets they would 'retweet' because they found it funny or clever. Give them a few minutes to do this and join in as a way to listen to their ideas.
5. When the class has sat down again, ask what different ideas they heard, how similar they were to one another's and whether there were any that they would retweet.

Activity 4

Aim: to listen for detail

1. Ask the students to look at Activity 4 on the worksheet. Give them a minute to read through. Before you play the audio, invite suggestions as to what words or phrases could be missing. Play Track 2.
2. Go through the answers with the whole class.

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Part 7 (first half of Act 3)

Key:

1. Gwendolen's (trusted) maid / the maid;
2. engaged / going to get married;
3. his doctors said he could not live;
4. large railway stations in London;
5. three; 6. money / wealth / income / fortune;
7. wearing your chin high / holding your chin up;
8. rich / wealthy;
9. Aunt Augusta;
10. Jack

Activity 5

Aim: to practise intonation in showing surprise

1. Direct the class's attention to Activity 5 on the worksheet and ask them to decide which characters make the exclamations in pairs. Give them a minute to talk about this then play Track 3. Quickly go through the answers.

Key:

Gwendolen: How dare they!; Jack: Good heavens!; Lady Bracknell: Dead!; Exploded?; I beg your pardon?

Activity 6

Aims: to predict the end of the play; to encourage students to get into character

1. Ask the class why they think Jack refuses to give his consent to Cecily's marriage with Algernon. Accept whatever ideas they come up with – there are no wrong answers here. Explain that in the next lesson they get to hear the last part of the play and will find out whether the couples get to marry. Before they do, however, they will attempt to continue the story themselves, by playing the parts in an improvised role-play. Point out that there are five characters in the scene at the moment and assign each group one character.
2. Put the class into five groups, one for each character in the scene. If the class total is not a multiple of five, ensure that the group or groups with fewer members represent Lady Bracknell, Jack and Gwendolen. For example, if there are 13 in the class, have three Lady Bracknells, three Jacks, three Gwendolens, two Algernons and two Cecily's. Hand out copies of the role-play cards cut out so that each group represents one character. Write on the board:

*What do / don't you want to happen?
What do you want to say to the
other characters?*

3. Tell the groups to discuss their character's point of view in this situation and answer the questions on the board. Once they have discussed it, tell the class that they will now be regrouped in order to talk to the other characters and to try to reach a conclusion – satisfactory or not. One easy way to do this is to 'label' each student in each group with a number, then direct all the 1s to one area of the room, all the 2s to another, etc. (i.e. 1234, 1234, 1234, 123 → 1111, 2222, 3333, 444)
4. Ask the Jacks to begin the conversation by repeating his final statement (which you can also write on the board):

'I am Miss Cardew's guardian and she cannot marry without my consent. I do not give my consent.'

You can encourage a lack of inhibition with some suitable background music if you have some. Instruct the groups to begin. While they perform the role-play, listen carefully to check that they are all getting started well and not faltering.

5. When the conversations have ended or reached some sort of conclusion, get the class's attention. Invite each group to tell the class about their conversation and its outcome. Round up the lesson by asking which of the groups' conversations they think is most likely to be closest to the real play.

Follow-up tasks

1. The students write the end of the play as they imagine it!
2. The students review the play so far and choose short extracts from the play to include in the trailer of a film version.

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Part 7 (first half of Act 3)

Activity 1

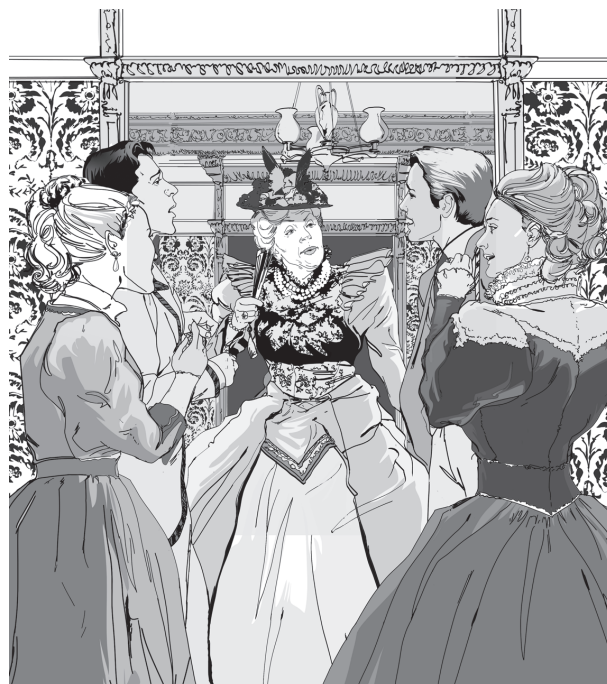
Discuss the questions in groups.

1. What have Jack and Algernon done to make the women angry with them?
2. What are the men planning to do to make the women agree to marry them?
3. Traditionally, plays are either comedies or tragedies, ending happily or sadly. Is *The Importance of Being Earnest* a comedy or a tragedy, do you think? Why?
4. What do you think will happen at the end?
5. What or who threatens to spoil this ending? Why are they important?

Activity 2

Listen and answer the questions.

1. Where are the women at the start of the scene? Where are the men?
2. Gwendolen says: 'Let us be silent and dignified'. How long does her silence last?
3. What reason do the men give for lying to them?
4. Do the women accept this reason? Why?
5. What other problem do the women have with the situation?
6. How do the women react to the men's solutions?
7. What happens next?



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Part 7 (first half of Act 3)

Activity 4

Listen to the rest of Part 7 and fill in the gaps.

1. Lady Bracknell discovered where Gwendolen had gone by asking _____.
2. She refuses to accept that Jack and her daughter are _____.
3. Algernon says that Bunbury died because _____.
4. When enquiring about Cecily, Lady Bracknell's first question is about Cecily's connection with _____.
5. Cecily's grandfather owned _____ properties.
6. Lady Bracknell is particularly impressed by Cecily's _____.
7. She tells Cecily that _____ is very fashionable in London at the moment.
8. She admits to Cecily that Algernon isn't _____.
9. She lets Cecily call her _____.
10. The one person who is against Algernon and Cecily's engagement is _____.

Activity 5

Do you remember who makes the following exclamations?

How dare they!

Good heavens!

Dead!

Exploded?

I beg your pardon?

Listen and check. Listen again and repeat. Make sure you sound surprised!

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Lady Bracknell

You are very keen to see your nephew Algernon married to Miss Cardew, especially now that you know how rich she is! You don't like this Jack Worthing fellow, however; how can you trust someone with no parents? You simply cannot accept a man whose family is unknown to marry your daughter Gwendolen. And now he is stopping Miss Cardew from marrying Algernon! Surely there is something you can do?

Gwendolen

You love Jack very much and you are extremely angry with your mother for stopping you from marrying him. So what if he doesn't know who his parents are?! But she is very stubborn and you know she can't be persuaded easily. Perhaps there is some way of persuading her to think differently about it. As for his name, you will still insist on him changing it to Ernest – it's very important to you.

Jack

You love Gwendolen very much and feel that it is totally unfair of Lady Bracknell to judge you on your lack of a father or mother. Can't she see all your good points? You can see no way of persuading her but perhaps you can force her somehow. Otherwise, you will need a miracle to find your parents.

Algernon

You are so happy that your aunt was finally persuaded of Cecily's suitability. She's rich as well as pretty! You can't believe your luck. But now that scoundrel Jack is preventing you and Cecily from being together. What could his reason be? How unfair! He's worse than Aunt Augusta! Perhaps you can say something that would encourage Jack to change his mind.

Cecily

You are ever so happy that Aunt Augusta has finally accepted you as her future niece. It means you can be with Algernon after all! Such a shame that his name isn't Ernest though. And what is Uncle Jack doing, not letting you marry Algernon? You will never forgive him if he is serious about this.

cut-out cards



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Script

- [The living room at the Manor House. Gwendolen and Cecily are at the window looking out into the garden]*
- Gwendolen:** They have not followed us into the house, as anyone else would have done. They must be ashamed.
- Cecily:** They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance to me.
- Gwendolen:** *[After a pause while she thinks about what Cecily has said]* They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?
- Cecily:** But I haven't got a cough.
- Gwendolen:** They're looking at us. How dare they!
- Cecily:** They're coming towards us. How presumptuous of them.
- Gwendolen:** Let us remain silent and dignified.
- Cecily:** Certainly. It is the only thing to do now. *[Jack enters, followed by Algernon. They are whistling the tune of a popular song]*
- Gwendolen:** This dignified silence is rather unpleasant.
- Cecily:** Yes, I agree. It is.
- Gwendolen:** But we will not be the first to speak.
- Cecily:** Certainly not.
- Gwendolen:** Mr Worthing, I have something to ask you. Your reply is extremely important.
- Cecily:** Gwendolen, I value your common sense. Mr Moncrieff, I would be grateful if you would answer the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?
- Algernon:** In order that I might have the opportunity of meeting you.
- Cecily:** *[To Gwendolen]* That seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?
- Gwendolen:** Yes, dear, if you can believe him.
- Cecily:** I don't believe him. But it is a wonderful answer.
- Gwendolen:** That is true. If you are talking about something very serious, the style of what you say is much more important than the sincerity. Mr Worthing, why did you pretend to have a brother? Was it in order that you could come to town as often as possible to see me?
- Jack:** Can you doubt that, Miss Fairfax?
- Gwendolen:** I have very strong doubts. But I intend to ignore them. *[Going closer to Cecily]* Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr Worthing's. His answer seems to me to be particularly truthful.
- Cecily:** I am very happy with what Mr Moncrieff said. The sound of his voice alone makes me feel certain that I should believe him.
- Gwendolen:** Then, do you think we should forgive them?
- Cecily:** Yes ... I mean no.
- Gwendolen:** I agree! I had forgotten something. We have ideals which we must not ignore. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.
- Cecily:** Could we not both speak to them at the same time?
- Gwendolen:** That is an excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Are you ready?

Track 1

Track 3.1

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Script

Cecily: Certainly. *[Gwendolen beats time with a finger as if she is conducting an orchestra]*

Gwendolen and Cecily: *[Speaking together]* Your first names are a problem that cannot be solved. That is all!

Jack and Algernon: *[Speaking together]* Our first names! Is that all? But we are going to be baptized later this afternoon.

Gwendolen: *[To Jack]* Are you really prepared to do this terrible thing for my sake?

Jack: I am.

Cecily: *[To Algernon]* Are you really prepared to face this awful **ordeal** to please me?

Algernon: I am!

Gwendolen: How absurd to talk about the equality of the sexes! Men are **infinitely** better than us at self-sacrifice.

Jack: We are! *[Getting hold of Algernon's hand]*

Cecily: They have moments of courage of which we women know nothing.

Gwendolen: *[To Jack]* Darling!

Cecily: *[To Algernon]* Darling!

[They fall into each other's arms. Merriman enters. When he sees the situation, he coughs loudly]

Merriman: Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell is here.

Jack: **Good heavens!**

[Lady Bracknell enters. The couples separate very quickly. Merriman goes off]

Lady Bracknell: Gwendolen! What does this mean?

Gwendolen: It means that I am engaged to be married to Mr Worthing, Mama.

Lady Bracknell: Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. *[To Jack]* I learnt of Gwendolen's sudden departure from her trusted maid, who gave me the information after I had given her a small coin. I followed her at once on the next train. Her father does not know where she is and I don't propose to tell him the truth. In fact, I never tell him the truth about anything. I would consider it wrong to do so. You must understand that all communication between you and my daughter must stop immediately. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

Jack: I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell!

Lady Bracknell: You are not, sir. And now ... Algernon! ...

Algernon: Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: Is this the house in which your invalid friend Mr Bunbury lives?

Algernon: *[Finding it difficult to speak]* Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell: **Dead! When did Mr Bunbury die?** His death must have been extremely sudden.

Algernon: Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon ... I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

Track 3.2

Track 2

Track 3.3

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Part 7 (first half of Act 3)

Script

Lady Bracknell: What did he die of?

Algernon: Bunbury? Oh he was quite **exploded**.

Lady Bracknell: Exploded? Was he the victim of a terrorist plot? I was not aware that Mr Bunbury was interested in politics. If so, he deserved his punishment.

Algernon: My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean that he was found out! What I mean is the doctors found out that Bunbury could not live – so he died.

Lady Bracknell: He seems to have had great confidence in his doctors' opinions. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind to do something definite and acted on proper medical advice. And now, Mr Worthing, may I ask: who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is holding? He is holding it, I may add, in a most unnecessary way.

Jack: The lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [*Lady Bracknell bows coldly to Cecily*]

Algernon: I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: I beg your pardon?

Cecily: Mr Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: [*Shivering, then moving over to the sofa and sitting down*] I do not know whether there is anything very exciting about the air in Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements being made seems to be considerably above the expected average. I think that it would be a good idea for me to make some preliminary enquiries. Mr Worthing, is Miss Cardew connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I am merely asking for information. I did not know until yesterday that there were families or persons who were related to railway stations.

Jack: [*Speaking in a cold, clear voice*] Miss Cardew is the granddaughter of the late Mr Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, London; of Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and also of The Sporrán, Fifeshire, Scotland.

Lady Bracknell: That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence. But I have no proof that they are real.

Jack: Miss Cardew's family lawyers are Markby, Markby and Markby.

Lady Bracknell: Markby, Markby and Markby? They are lawyers in the very highest position of their profession. Indeed I know that one of the Mr Markbys is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. I am almost satisfied.

Jack: [*Very irritably*] How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also got, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism and confirmation of vaccinations for **whooping cough** and the **measles** – both German and English.

Lady Bracknell: Ah! A busy life, I see. Though perhaps it has been too exciting for a young girl. I do not believe a young girl should have too many experiences. [*Standing up and looking at her watch*] Gwendolen!

Track 3.4

Track 3.5

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Script

We must leave. We have not a moment to lose. Since I am making enquiries, Mr Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any personal fortune.

Jack: Oh! She has an investment of a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in **Government Stocks**, so her annual income is very large. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

Lady Bracknell: *[Sitting down again]* Just a moment, Mr Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in Government Stocks! Miss Cardew seems to me to be a very attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls today have any good qualities which last and improve with time. We live in a time, sadly, when beauty is the only important thing. *[To Cecily]* Come here, dear. *[Cecily goes to her]* You are a pretty child! Your dress is not very fashionable and your hair has not been styled very well. But we can soon alter that. An experienced French maid will produce a very good result in a short time. I remember recommending one to Lady Lancing and after a few months her own husband did not know her.

Jack: After a few months nobody knew her.

Lady Bracknell: *[Glaring at Jack, then pretending to smile at Cecily]* Turn round, sweet child. *[Cecily turns completely round in a circle]* No, I want to see you from the side. *[Cecily turns round so that Lady Bracknell can see her face in profile from the side]* Yes, very good. There is much about your situation which is promising – you could fit well into good society. Hold your chin a little higher, dear. Chins are worn very high at present. Algernon!

Algernon: Yes, Aunt Augusta!

Lady Bracknell: There is much about her situation which is promising – she could fit well into good society.

Algernon: Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care about her fitting into good society.

Lady Bracknell: Do not be dismissive of good society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into good society speak like that. *[To Cecily]* Dear child, of course Algernon has no money. He has nothing but his debts to bring to a marriage. But I do not approve of marrying for money. When I married Lord Bracknell, I had no fortune at all, but I didn't allow that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent to this marriage.

Algernon: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: Cecily, you may kiss me!

Cecily: *[Kissing her]* Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: You may also call me Aunt Augusta in future.

Cecily: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: The marriage ought to take place quite soon.

Algernon: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

The Importance of Being Earnest

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Part 7 (first half of Act 3)

Cecily: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: I do not approve of long engagements. They give people a chance to find out about each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

Jack: I beg your pardon, Lady Bracknell, but their engagement is not acceptable. I am Miss Cardew's guardian and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. I will not give my consent.

Glossary

ordeal an extremely unpleasant experience, especially one that lasts for a long time

infinitely very, or very much

exploded to explode something to prove that a story or theory that many people believe is in fact false

whooping cough an infectious disease of children that causes them to cough and make a loud noise when they breathe

measles an infectious disease common in children in which there are red spots all over the body and a high temperature

Government Stocks a type of investment which is offered