**PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3:** Study the following passage from Act II and write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the sources of humor in the scene. Do not merely summarize the plot.

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| **1**  **5**  **10**  **15**  **20**  **25**  **30**  **35**  **40**  **45**  **50**  **55**  **60**  **65**  **70**  **75**  **80**  **85**  **90** | **Algernon**. I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.  **Cecily**. I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary. [Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.]  **Algernon**. Do you really keep a diary? I’d give anything to look at it. May I?  **Cecily**. Oh no. [Puts her hand over it.] You see, it is simply a very young girl’s record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don’t stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached ‘absolute perfection’. You can go on. I am quite ready for more.  **Algernon**. [Somewhat taken aback.] Ahem! Ahem!  **Cecily**. Oh, don’t cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don’t know how to spell a cough. [Writes as **Algernon** speaks.]  **Algernon**. [Speaking very rapidly.] Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.  **Cecily**. I don’t think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn’t seem to make much sense, does it?  **Algernon**. Cecily!  [Enter **Merriman**.]  **Merriman**. The dog-cart is waiting, sir.  **Algernon**. Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.  **Merriman**. [Looks at **Cecily**, who makes no sign.] Yes, sir.  [**Merriman** retires.]  **Cecily**. Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.  **Algernon**. Oh, I don’t care about Jack. I don’t care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won’t you?  **Cecily**. You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.  **Algernon**. For the last three months?  **Cecily**. Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.  **Algernon**. But how did we become engaged?  **Cecily**. Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him, after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.  **Algernon**. Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?  **Cecily**. On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover’s knot I promised you always to wear.  **Algernon**. Did I give you this? It’s very pretty, isn’t it?  **Cecily**. Yes, you’ve wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It’s the excuse I’ve always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. [Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.]  **Algernon**. My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.  **Cecily**. You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.  **Algernon**. Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?  **Cecily**. Oh, I couldn’t possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [Replaces box.] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.  **Algernon**. But was our engagement ever broken off?  **Cecily**. Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [Shows diary.] ‘To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.’  **Algernon**. But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.  **Cecily**. It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn’t been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.  **Algernon**. [Crossing to her, and kneeling.] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.  **Cecily**. You dear romantic boy. [He kisses her; she puts her fingers through his hair.] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?  **Algernon**. Yes, darling, with a little help from others.  **Cecily**. I am so glad.  **Algernon**. You’ll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?  **Cecily**. I don’t think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.  **Algernon**. Yes, of course. [Nervously.]  **Cecily**. You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love someone whose name was Ernest. [**Algernon** rises, **Cecily** also.] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.  **Algernon**. But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?  **Cecily**. But what name?  **Algernon**. Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance…  **Cecily**. But I don’t like the name of Algernon.  **Algernon**. Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can’t see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily… [Moving to her]… if my name was Algy, couldn’t you love me?  **Cecily**. [Rising.] I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention. |