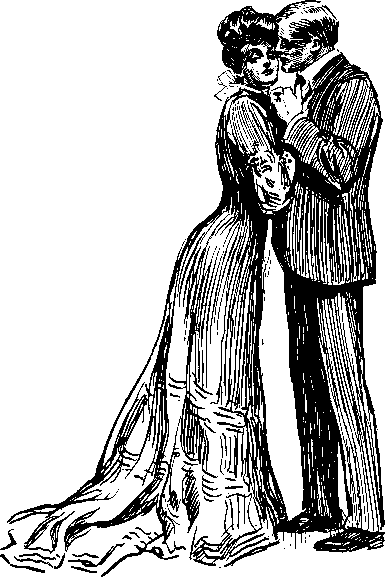
South Pasadena High School

The English Seminar--AP [Nicholson]



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| **Oscar Wilde** |
| **The Importance of Being Earnest** | |

Questions**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. The tone of the first conversation between Algernon and Jack alerts us that this is not a serious drama, but a comedy. Identify specific instances of humorous irony.
2. Oscar Wilde—and his characters—delight in word-play and the invention of neologisms. “Bunburyist” and “Bunburying” are instances. Define “Bunburying” in your own words, and explain how “Bunburying” contributes to the dramatic situation of this play.
3. How much of what Lady Bracknell says can be taken seriously? How do her attitudes satirize the English upper class?
4. *The Importance of Being Earnest* burlesques not only the manners of society but also the clichés of nineteenth-century melodrama. Discuss the love-scene between Jack and Gwendolen and how it burlesques a conventional. sentimental love-scene.
5. Foreshadowing, in the theater, is a clue or suggestion that some important event will transpire or that some secret will be revealed. Is there any foreshadowing early in the play of the fact that Miss Prism left Jack in the hand-bag at Victoria Station?
6. To what extent do the opinions and behavior of Canon Chasuble satirize the Church of England?
7. A common form of comic irony occurs when a character suøers embarrassment because he does not immediately understand his predicament. How is Jack an object of comic irony in Act 2?
8. In ancient Greek drama, threatened characters were sometimes rescued by a *deus ex machina*, or god from the machine, who would swoop down on the stage to carry them out of harm’s way. The term has come to refer to any last-minute revelation that improves a character’s fortune. Explain how Jack benefits from the deus ex machina effect in Act 3.

### Amassing evidence

The characters do not say what they think; what they say has little connection with what they do.

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| *What they say…* | *What they do…* |
| Algernon and Jack deplore the doldrums of marriage and domesticity… |  |
| The Rev. Chasuble exalts the celibacy of the Primitive Church… |  |
|  |  |

Regardless of the crucial implications of their situation, the characters respond with studied self-possession, with bland detachment, or nonchalant blandness…

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| *What happens..* | *What we expect…* | *What we hear…* |
| Lady Bracknell learns that Mr Bunbury is ill | Compassion or sympathy or at least delicacy |  |
| Lady Bracknell learns that Jack is an orphan | Compassion or sympathy or at least delicacy |  |
| Lady Bracknell learns that Jack smokes | Disapproval |  |
| Cecily suggests Miss Prism that they might be a good inÿuence on the wicked Earnest | Agreement to a plan or at least approval of Cecily’s desire to help |  |
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### Some references from the play to explain

1. [Royal] Tunbridge Wells (Act 1)
2. Grosvenor Square
3. Liberal Unionists
4. the Gorgon
5. Egeria (Act 2)
6. Lætitia
7. Evensong
8. the Rupee
9. Maréchal Niel
10. [clerical] celibacy
11. the Court Guides (Act 3)
12. the Funds
13. Perrier-Jouet, Brut, ‘89
14. Anabaptists
15. [Royal] Leamington [Spa]

1. 1-8 from Bergman, *Heath Guide to Lit*, 3rd. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)