

Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*  
WS\_6\*

***Be prepared to turn in this assignment at the end of class on Friday, April 18 for credit.***

1. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, many of the presumed lies turn out to have a grain of truth in them. Jack, who is pretending to be Ernest, really does turn out to be named Ernest. And while Jack has pretended to have a brother, he does, in fact, turn out to have a real brother. What role does lying play here?

2. What significance does the title of *The Importance of Being Earnest* have to the play's themes?

3. In the first act, Lady Bracknell cross-examines Jack about his habits and background to determine if he is a suitable match for her daughter, Gwendolen. She comes to the conclusion that "To be born, or at any rate, bred in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution." What does this exchange tell you about the values of the upper classes?

4. How does the play undermine Victorian social conventions? Pay close attention to the use of wordplay, paradox, and satire.

5. What is the play's attitude toward the working classes, as exemplified by Algernon's servant, Lane? Is Lane ridiculed as much as Lady Bracknell? Are the servants butts of humor or just as verbally adept as those who employ them?

6. In the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde asserts that "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors." Evaluate this statement in relation to *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

7. Find one epigrammatic set of lines from the play. Write down the reference, copy the lines here, and explain how they embodies a theme in Wilde's play.

\*Questions are taken from the NAEL teaching guide, sometimes with modifications.