***The Importance of Being Earnest***

***A Trivial Comedy for Serious People***

By Oscar Wilde

**Act 1 Discussion Questions**

**Act I**

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*Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.*

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1. The play opens on what setting?

2. Who is coming to visit Algernon?

3. Mr. Worthing is known to Algernon as Ernest but we come to realize that his name is really what?

4. What has Mr. Worthing lost? Who is Cecily? What does the lost item reveal about Jack?

5. How does Jack feel about Gwendolen?

6. What is a Bunburyist and how are both Algy and Jack “confirmed Buburyists”?

7. Jack is shocked when he learns that a great deal of Gwendolen’s attraction to him is what?

8. Lady Bracknell says she will not let Jack marry Gwendolen why?

9. At the end of the Act, we can surmise from Algy’s eavesdropping that he will be doing what?

10. Wilde employs the use **puns, epigrams,** and **inversion** (thought, situation, character, morality, etc.). Define and find examples of each.

**Analysis**

10. Gwendolen’s actions, her concern for the name Ernest, Bunburying and Lady Bracknell’s questioning of Jack all serve to flip (invert) Victorian ideals and highlight what about Victorian society?



## WILDE’S WORDPLAY AND SLASHING WIT

Earnest is Wilde's most perfect attempt to fence with Victorian mores. Wilde uses his wit like a sword to slash through rules of etiquette, to poke fun at the aristocracy and academia, and to thrust forward his own philosophy as a committed aesthete (one who finds truth and meaning only in beauty).

**Epigrams**: a short, witty, pointed statement often in the form of a poem

Ex. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

Ex. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.

**Assignment**:

* Choose 1 of your favourite epigrams in *Act 1.*
* Take an 8X11 piece of paper, type or write out your epigram on the front with an illustration (it can be a cut and paste photo) and on the back, in your own words, explain what Wilde is saying and what is his point.

*Hint*: *some students find it difficult to pick out epigrams. Your epigram should be able to stand on its own and be understood on its own.*

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