

A GUIDE TO



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST BY OSCAR WILDE

CONSTELLATION
STAGE + SCREEN

IU Credit Union

FALL 2022

**IDENTITY +
IDENTIFICATION**



COLLEGE OF ARTS + SCIENCES
THEMESTER

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SETTING

London and Hertfordshire, England, in the Late 19th Century (The Victorian Era)

CHARACTERS

Jack Worthing (Ernest) - a young gentleman from the country, in love with Gwendolen Fairfax

Algernon Moncrieff - a young gentleman from London, the nephew of Lady Bracknell, in love with Cecily

Gwendolen Fairfax - a young lady, loved by Jack Worthing

Lady Augusta Bracknell - a society lady, Gwendolen's mother

Cecily Cardew, a young lady - the ward of Jack Worthing

Miss Prism - Cecily's governess

The Reverend Canon Chasuble - the priest of Jack's parish

Lane - Algernon's manservant

Merriman - the butler of Jack's country house



SYNOPSIS

Jack Worthing, a carefree young gentleman, is the inventor of a fictitious brother, "Ernest," whose wicked ways afford Jack an excuse to leave his country home from time to time and journey to London, where he stays with his close friend and confidant, Algernon Moncrieff. Algernon has a cousin, Gwendolen Fairfax, with whom Jack is deeply in love. During his London sojourns, Jack, under the name Ernest, has won Gwendolen's love, for she strongly desires to marry someone with the confidence-inspiring name of Ernest. But when he asks for Gwendolen's hand from the formidable Lady Bracknell, Jack finds he must reveal he is a foundling who was left in a handbag at Victoria Station. This is very disturbing to Lady Bracknell, who insists that he produce at least one parent before she consents to the marriage.

Returning to the country home where he lives with his ward Cecily Cardew and her governess Miss Prism, Jack finds that Algernon has also arrived under the identity of the nonexistent brother Ernest. Algernon falls madly in love with the beautiful Cecily, who has long been enamored of the mysterious, fascinating brother Ernest.

With the arrival of Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen, chaos erupts. It is discovered that Miss Prism is the absent-minded nurse who twenty years ago misplaced the baby of Lady Bracknell's brother in Victoria Station. Thus Jack, whose name is indeed Ernest, is Algernon's elder brother, and the play ends with the two couples in a joyous embrace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Oscar Wilde, 1882
Photo by Napoleon Sarony

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854, lived a gloriously notorious, eccentric and decadent life until his tragic demise in 1895, and died in obscurity in Paris, 1900. More than one hundred years later we are still celebrating his plays, his life and his inimitable style. He was born to Jane and William Wilde, both extremely accomplished individuals in their own right. William Wilde was knighted for his work as an internationally recognized ear and eye specialist; his mother was referred to as one "of Ireland's noblest daughters" for her outspoken and unfailing nationalist views. She was a regular columnist in one of Ireland's leading newspapers, as well as the author of articles, plays and poems. She was perhaps the greatest influence on Wilde's life. "Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them; sometimes they forgive them." *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1891.

When he was 27, following his notoriety in Europe, Oscar Wilde took the U.S. and Canada by storm on a whirlwind lecture tour, spreading the beautifying gospel of the British "Aesthetic Movement", of which he considered himself a true "Professor". With unabashed self-promotion, he achieved remarkable celebrity status, well known for his famous eloquence on all things regarding society, philosophy, beauty, manners and fashion. His fame as a writer, and his tragic infamy as a lover of men, were still years away. The tour made him famous as a wit and an eccentric, but some painted him as a dilettante and a clown, even an unhealthy influence. These conflicting views followed him all of his life.

Wilde married Constance Lloyd in 1884. She was a linguist, beautiful and intelligent, and they had two sons, Vyvyan and Cyril. But after Wilde's imprisonment in 1895, Constance changed her name to protect her two young boys from the devastating effects of his notoriety. She too died young, shortly before Oscar; tragically, the boys were not allowed to see their father and were subsequently raised by guardians. In an essay about his father's brilliant collection of fairy stories, Vyvyan Holland credits Constance for his early introduction to the world of imagination. Poignantly, he remembers only her, and not his father, reading him his bedtime stories.

"The truth is rarely pure and never simple." *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895.

In 1891, Oscar met Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas, the third son of the Marquis of Queensberry, and they soon became lovers. But in April 1895, the Marquis accused Wilde of homosexuality and in return Oscar sued for libel. He withdrew his case but was ultimately arrested and convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years hard labor. He never recovered from the prison experience, never finished another play or novel, and in 1900 he died penniless in Paris, shunned by all but his closest friends. Still, the Wildean wit was not easily suppressed. In the final week of his life, bedridden, he confided to a friend, "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One of us has to go."

BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

- First performed in London in 1895
- Farical satire of Victorian society
- Trivializes common Victorian mainstays such as marriage and social obligations, particularly in upper class society

Background Information

- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Importance-of-Being-Earnest>
- <https://www.britannica.com/event/Victorian-era>
- <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/oscar-wilde-trial>



MAIN THEMATIC ELEMENTS



- Identity and how identity can be changeable or manipulated
- Gender Roles: how men and women make their way in the world
- Social Class: money + social standing = power
- Oppressive nature of societal obligations, particularly in Victorian England
- Romantic Love and marriage

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Examining *Earnest* through the lens of "Identity"

"...my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence."
– Gwendolen

By the time Gwendolen speaks this line in Act I, the audience already knows that she should not have "absolute confidence" in Jack. He's been lying about his name since he met her, and lying to all of his friends in London as well. Jack is *performing* the role of "Ernest Worthing," a carefree London dandy. He does this to escape the pressures of his everyday role as a respectable country gentleman. He tells Algernon, "When one is placed in the position of a guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects." And indeed, the more we learn about Jack, the more we realize that he is a pretty serious fellow who is very protective of his ward Cecily.

Algernon is a different story. Algernon is the carefree London dandy, who sneers at marriage and romance and values style over substance in all things. He assumes the identity of "Ernest Worthing" to have a little fun at Jack's expense. His version of "Ernest" is the opposite of himself, a romantic at heart. And thus, he *performs* the role of a redemption-seeking lover when he encounters Cecily in the country.

In their performance of different identities, Jack and Algernon reveal something about themselves. For both of these characters, the assumption of a false identity enables them to experiment with aspects of their personalities which aren't normally expressed. In the country, under the weighty mantle of "guardian", Jack feels like he can't be or have fun. In the city, with a carefree reputation to uphold, Algernon never entertains the possibility of genuine romance.

Oscar Wilde knew quite a bit about performing different identities in different circumstances. As a gay man in Victorian England, he played a number of roles in his own life. He was married to Constance Lloyd, with whom he had two children. But he was also in a long-term, on-again-off-again relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. He was a fame-seeking socialite who became known as a witty conversationalist and trend-setter. But that reputation proved to be an obstacle when he sought to be recognized as a serious poet and intellectual. He is notable as a man who very intentionally curated his public image with his choice of clothing, hairstyle and clever commentary. But as careful as he was about how he appeared, he was often careless about how he behaved. Eventually, the rumors about Wilde's homosexual lifestyle became too numerous to be dismissed. He wound up paying a steep price for being true to himself at a time when being gay was a crime.

Wilde was a man of complexity who recognized that people didn't fit into the neat boxes that were established by Victorian society. In *Earnest*, Wilde has great fun playing with the concept of identity and upending societal and gender-based assumptions. The female characters in the play all embody wonderful contradictions. Cecily is an innocent country girl who pines away for a wicked lover. Gwendolen is confident and educated, but also clings to what is superficially fashionable. And the queen of contradiction is Lady Bracknell – the matriarch who holds fast to classist opinions and rules, but didn't have a dime to her name when she was married.

So, what's in a name? Very little, in Wilde's opinion.

-Kate Galvin, Director

DISCUSSION:

- Have you or anyone you know ever been judged based on family name or reputation?
- In your community, are there family names associated with different professions or characteristics?
- Do you associate any first names with certain characteristics in people? If so, is this association caused by the sound of the name or your knowledge of people who have the name?
- In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, two lovers are forbidden to marry because of their family names. Do such situations exist in real life today?
- Many authors have written under assumed names or pseudonyms. Research either a modern author (Stephen King, for example) or an author from the past (George Eliot, for example), who have published novels under names other than their own. Why do you think someone would choose to write under an assumed name?

WRITING PROMPTS:

Personal Reflection

- Consider your own identity. Can you think of circumstances where you behave differently? How are you different at home compared to at school? What about with different circles of friends?
- What does your name mean to you? Are you attached to it? Does your name convey some meaning about your personality? Or have you always wanted to change it? If so, why?

WRITING PROMPTS (CONTINUED):

Textual Analysis

- In this play, Jack enjoys pretending to be a carefree bachelor when he goes to London, but his more conservative nature is revealed in several ways. What does Jack do or say that leads you to believe his values are more “traditional” than Algernon’s?

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PLACE

One of the main characters in the play (Algernon) lives in the city and visits the country. Another main character (Algernon’s friend, Jack) lives in the country and visits the city.

Jack says that he visits the city for pleasure, to avoid the responsibilities of home. He states: “When one is in town, one amuses oneself. When one is in the country, one amuses other people.”

DISCUSSION:

- What do you think would be the major city and country pastimes of the wealthy in 1895, the year the play was first produced?
- In today’s society, what activities do we associate with the city? What activities do we associate with the country?
- How do you think today’s city schools are both similar and different from today’s country schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages of attending a city school/country school?

ACTIVITIES:

Activity 1: Soundscapes

A soundscape is an aural depiction of a location. Its visual equivalent is a landscape picture.

In groups of about 6 people, create soundscapes of either the city, the country, or both. After performing the soundscapes, compare the types of sounds associated with each location.

Steps for creating a soundscape:

1. Identify sounds associated with a particular setting, environment or experience.
2. Assign at least one sound to each group member.
3. Practice creating the sounds individually.
4. Determine which sounds should be introduced first, second, third, etc.
5. Experiment with the beginning of the soundscape, gradually building to a crescendo.
6. Determine which sounds should be dropped first, second, third, etc.
7. Experiment with the ending of the soundscape, gradually going from crescendo to silence.
8. Put the entire soundscape together.
9. Practice until everyone is satisfied with the order of sounds, volume and tempo.

Activity 2: Modern Gothic/Modern Urban

The American artist, Grant Wood, who grew up in rural Iowa, painted a depiction of life in the country called *American Gothic*. The painting features a farmer holding a pitchfork and standing next to his spinster daughter. They are posed before their house, whose gabled window and tracery, in the *American Gothic* style, inspired the painting's title. *American Gothic* captures the Puritan ethic that Wood believed defined the Midwestern rural character of the early 20th century.

In pairs, representing a father and a daughter, create a modern version of *American Gothic* to depict rural life today. What object would be included in the picture? What would the living quarters look like?

In the same pairs, create a depiction of a modern urban father and daughter. What object would be included in the picture? What would the living quarters look like?

Practice moving slowly from one picture to the other, revealing the difference between life in the city and life in the country for the people in both pictures.

Activity 3: Country Mouse/City Mouse

Literature and television have built stories on the topic of adapting to life in either the city or country. How many students in the class recall the children's story of *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse*? How many have watched the old sit-com *Green Acres*? What other examples of rural/urban contrast can they recall from either literature or media?

In groups of 3-4, students will decide on creating a scene to take place in either the country or the city. At least one character in the scene will be unaccustomed to life in this environment.

Identify two problems the character might face during a typical day in the location your group has selected.

In drama, characters usually do not solve problems easily. Imagine three possible attempts the character(s) might make to solve each of the two problems you have identified. It will be up to you to decide whether or not the character(s) succeed(s) in solving the problems.

Improvise the characters' attempts to solve the problems in these stages: first, a character meets problem #1; next, show the initial attempt to solve the problem; then the second attempt; then the third. After the first problem has been dealt with, work on the second problem. Finally, figure out a way to end the scene.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL RULES AND RITUALS: AFTERNOON TEA

What Is Afternoon Tea? [Afternoon tea](#) is a British food tradition of sitting down for an afternoon treat of tea, sandwiches, scones, and cake. Afternoon tea is served around 4 p.m. When afternoon tea became fashionable in the early 19th century thanks to [Anna, Duchess of Bedford](#), it was never intended to replace dinner but rather to fill in the long gap between lunch and dinner at a time when dinner was served as late as 8 p.m.



Afternoon Tea, Jean Carolus (1814–1897)

The Importance of Being Earnest depicts several pivotal scenes that revolve around tea. While these moments might seem mundane, they are actually carefully crafted scenes in which the characters negotiate tricky scenarios. In Act II Cecily and Gwendolen thinly veil their antagonism towards each other during a tea service, a delicate demonstration of grace and manners. Gwendolen makes digs at Cecily's lack of taste by refusing her offer of sugar and cake on account that such cuisine is out of date in London. Cecily masks her displeasure under the pretense of graciousness, offering Gwendolen healthy helpings of cake and sugar, as a good hostess should. Despite this appearance of composure, each woman's jealousies are reaching their boiling points. From slicing cake to sipping tea, the tea service is a means by which the characters negotiate tense social situations under the pretense of civility.

DISCUSSION:

- Eating is an important social activity in most cultures. What social events are associated with eating in contemporary society? What rituals or customs of eating accompany these events?
- According to Algernon, food is a comfort in times of trouble. For what reasons, aside from hunger, do people most often eat?



THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

October 21 – 29, Indiana University’s Department of Theatre, Drama, and Dance will present *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* by Moisés Kaufman at the Ruth N. Halls Theatre.

A dramatically charged trove of trial transcripts, personal correspondence, interviews and other source materials tell of the downfall of the great man of letters, Oscar Wilde, whose artistic genius has long been overshadowed by the scandal surrounding his imprisonment. Directed by Daniel Sappington.

Click [here](#) for more information and to purchase tickets.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PROJECT

1. “Keeping Up With the Moncrieffs/Bracknells”

Create a reality show episode, podcast, or dramatic performance based on the Moncrief/Bracknell family with Lady Bracknell, Algy, and Gwendolen. Document their day to day in the ways that modern reality shows do. You can even include Jack and Cecily as people of interest. Make sure to place the characters speak in Wildean witticisms as they comment on the trivialities of their lives writ large. Try to capture what their world is like and how they feel about it.

2. Mayor Bracknell Town Hall/Character Hot seat

Create a Town Hall Meeting where Lady Bracknell must answer questions pertaining to why she must control the social proprieties of her family. You could also put other characters in the hot seat and seek questions from the crowd why they feel the need to adhere to societal and class conventions.

WRITING PROMPTS

(Essay: intro, body, & conclusion or Reflection: intro & body)

1. In what ways have the roles of men and women changed from the Victorian era to present day? In what ways have they remained the same? Give specific examples from the play, other things we've read, and from our society and world.
2. In societies like the U.S., the role of social class in our lives may be vastly different than how Wilde perceived it in Victorian England. Make a case for how the wealth of social class (or socioeconomic standing) works in our society and persuade an audience that it is either vastly different or entirely the same as we understand it from the play.
3. In the play, both Algy and Jack (Ernest) long to escape from the pressures that their societies place on them. They go so far as to create alter egos in order to escape such oppression. In essence, the playwright is satirizing the restrictive natures of the world in which he lived. Are there ways in which you feel you need to escape the obligations of your world? What are those avenues of escape?

TEACHER RESOURCES

Social and Political References in The Importance of Being Earnest

Liberal Unionist

A party concerned especially with individual rights, the rule of law, and questions of individual conscience (according to one dictionary), but advocating keeping Britain intact as a Union with Ireland. This is particularly interesting given Wilde's Irish heritage and his mother's political background.

"I am a Liberal Unionist." (Jack, 20)

Modern Education

During the late 1800s, the British government took a stronger hand in education, using such provisions as the Education Act of 1870 to provide schooling to children who had previously been unable to afford it, and to make education mandatory for all. The wealthy had been getting on quite well without government-regulated education, having the money to send their sons to private schools and prestigious universities, and enjoying the freedom to educate their daughters strictly from the home (perhaps with the aid of a governess). For many in the upper class, education meant little and was put to less use. Already secured of livelihood through land and inheritance, more focused on socialization, they found little use for philosophy, literature, or economics, let alone any practical skills that might be taught (the upper class was opposed to anything utilitarian). Perhaps there was some concern that further knowledge and awareness would bring questions directed toward the social system. Indeed, it was typically well-educated men (such as Wilde) who challenged Victorian values (though Oxford hadn't exactly praised his behavior).

"The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound." (Lady Bracknell, 18)

Philanthropic Work

The 19th Century saw a steep rise in societal concerns, and many Victorians began to take up the task of aiding the poor and ailing. Women of the middle class showed themselves to be particularly keen on such ventures, dedicating their spare time and energy to numerous societies (many of which were headquartered in London). This might have demonstrated a growing sense of humanity, but it has been said that much charity was sparked by more selfish reasons. Some women may have been seeking a way to spend time or improve their own skills, while others helped in order to impose their values on the poor (there was a widespread hope of pushing middle class values on the unruly masses). Whatever the intent, their work did improve conditions somewhat.

"I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London." (Cecily, 52)

Radical Papers

Publications, such as People's Paper, that gave voice to extreme policies and were known for being outspoken, even brash. Largely connected with the working class, these papers of the "by the people, for the people" variety also supported and were supported by many among the middle class. By the end of the 19th century, radical papers had been drastically muted—though not entirely silenced—by ever-rising publication costs.

"Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?" (Lady Bracknell, 20)

Social Legislation

Laws enacted to aid the cause of the poor, or of those who have suffered inhumane abuse. Social legislation came as part of a widespread tide of social reform and philanthropic work, most of which was pursued by the middle class. Social issues and extensive involvement with reform were not seen to be a proper concern for the upper class, as the problems of the lower classes were far removed and—so they felt, if they noted the poor at all—no matter of theirs. Lady Bracknell's remark suggests that anyone mixing with such uncouth people would be liable to meet a sticky end (after all, as she observes, look at what happened during the French Revolution).

"Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation." (Lady Bracknell, 70)

Temperance Beverage

A drink acceptable to those opposing alcohol (the drink might contain either no or very slight traces of alcohol). The temperance movement grew as part of Victorian England's mania for social reform and philanthropic work. Alcohol was branded the devil's brew (particularly in middle class eyes), an impression perhaps egged along by the devastation caused among the working classes by the ready availability of cheap gin. Of course, none of this stopped the upper class from downing its share of liquor.

"Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of the Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington." (Miss Prism, 80)

University Extension Scheme

These were courses that could be considered early developments in adult education, offered by universities to non-resident students and auditors. As with her reference to German skepticism, this may indicate that Gwendolen is more thoroughly informed than many young women of her class.

"Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture at the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a Permanent Income on Thought." (Lady Bracknell, 69)

TRANSPORTATION

Brighton Line

Prior to 1924, Victoria Station was essentially two separate stations: The London Brighton South Coast Railway station and the London Chatham and Dover Railway station. The Brighton line itself connected London with Brighton, a popular seaside town located on the southern coast of England in East Sussex, approximately eleven miles east of Worthing. The first train from London to Brighton arrived in 1841.

"The Brighton Line." (Jack, 21)

Dog-Cart

An open, two-wheeled cart that was drawn by horses. The cart seated a driver and two passengers, and was constructed to safely carry dogs (hence, of course, the name). Only the wealthy were able to afford to keep a cart and attendant horses, as well as the servants to maintain and drive these. Such carts would often be used for leisurely excursion as well as basic transportation.

"Merriman, order the dog-cart at once." (Jack, 44)

Omnibus

Horse-drawn wagon built to support many passengers, who paid to catch a ride. The omnibus (from Latin meaning "by, with, or from everybody") became a popular mode of transportation within a city, following a regular route. The omnibus was particularly useful for those who could not afford to take a smaller, more fashionable cab. London's system was overseen by the London General Omnibus Company. The word was eventually shortened to just 'bus....

"Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of the Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days." (Miss Prism, 80)



Railway Guide

A train timetable. Such guides could be almost overwhelmingly comprehensive, as they were by this time many trains to note. England's first passenger-carrying railway, running between Liverpool and Manchester, had opened in 1830. Although wary at first, the English had quickly grasped the benefit of this mode of transport, and as improvements were made (for comfort, speed, and safety), travel by train became immensely popular. Suddenly, it was possible to make quick trips from one end of England to another, to visit acquaintances and relations or simply take a day's trip to some place more amenable (say, a seaside resort). The rise of the railway came as part of the 19th Century's rapidly increasing pace of life.

"Then picks up the Railway Guide." (stage direction, 26)

Victoria Station

Major railway station in London. Until 1924, essentially composed of two separate stations: the London Brighton South Coast Railway (the Brighton Line) and the London Chatham and Dover Railway Station.

"In the cloak-room at Victoria Station." (Jack, 21)

MISCELLANY

Agricultural Depression

The 1870s heralded an economic depression in England that was to last beyond the turn of the century. The depression could be largely attributed to the rise of global industry and increased competition with other nations; Britain was not able to keep up in the economic race (one of many signs that the Empire was perhaps not eternal or all powerful), and a devastating outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 1883 did not help matters any. Partly as a result of this, land values took a turn for the worse, causing difficulties for many of the aristocracy, who claimed and might be supported by their expansive tracts of land. Indeed, as British merchants were rising through accumulations of cash, the aristocracy had begun to falter, having much land (becoming steadily less valuable) and little money.

"Ah, this is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not?" (Cecily, 57)

Bunburyist

When a young man, Wilde may have made the acquaintance of a man called Bunbury (Richard Ellman suggests "Henry S. Bunbury"). It is more than likely that he was part of the rather extensive, historical Anglo-Irish family of Bunbury—which originated in the 16th Century and continues to this day. Among various noteworthy members of the Bunbury clan, one was the aunt of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (author of the poem "Come into the Garden, Maude" sung in this production in a popular Victorian setting.)

"...I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now." (Algernon, 7)

General

The upper ranks in the British army, including those of generals, were almost uniformly (!) filled by members of the upper class, who paid to acquire their commissions. To maintain the life of an officer, it was necessary to have an outside source of income, as the costs of uniforms and the like (frequently including horses) far outweighed the salary earned in the military. Notwithstanding Gilbert and Sullivan's HMS Pinafore, stories of men rising from office clerk to "ruler of the Queen's Navies" (or Armies) were unheard of, and there were not the same opportunities to rise by merit as enjoyed by, say, a Ulysses S. Grant in the States...

...That he started off as a Lieutenant and was able to rise to General, and that his career spanned from at least 1840-1869, suggests that Moncrieff père made a career of the military, a fairly typical pursuit.

"I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was." (Lady Bracknell, 82)

Oxonian

A graduate of Oxford University, along with Cambridge one of the two truly elite universities in England. Though there was academic rigor, it was typical for upper class men to attend a prestigious university, and equally typical that they not make practical use of their education—if indeed they acquired any at what often served them as an extended finishing school. College often proved more useful in establishing connections than instilling knowledge. Wilde himself attended Oxford and, though his behavior raised many a stir and an unfriendly eyebrow, he famously distinguished himself in his studies.

"Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible. He is an Oxonian!" (Lady Bracknell, 74)
"It is rather Quixotic of you." (Cecily, 35)

Respectability

"Respectability" held different shades of meaning for the different classes, but was perhaps most strongly connected to the middle class. To be respectable was to be utterly moral and hard-working, the picture of middle class virtue. Such virtue and industrious labor was neither attractive nor impressive to those of the upper class.

"She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability." (Chasuble, 77)

Scotland Yard

Common nickname or shorthand for the Metropolitan Police force, created in 1829 and named for the location of its headquarters at 4 Whitehall Place, backing into Great Scotland Yard.

"I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it." (Jack, 5)

Womanthrope

A word made up by Miss Prism (a neologism, in fact) for a person who hates women, a play on misanthrope and an alternative to misogynist. See also Wilde in *The Critic as Artist*: "It is sometimes said of them [reviewers] that they do not read all through the works they are called upon to criticize. They do not. Or at least they should not. If they did so, they would become confirmed misanthropes, or if I may borrow a phrase from one of the petty Newnham graduates, confirmed womanthropes for the rest of their lives."

"A misanthrope I can understand--a womanthrope, never!" (Miss Prism, 36)

Your Book

The register in which the butler or manservant would record household accounts, purchases, and consumption, including—as here—use of the wine "cellar." This was partly to discourage theft or fraud on the part of the servant, but was obviously subject to massive abuse. Many of these books survive and give a great look at domestic life of the day.

"Oh! ... by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed." (Algernon, 1)

"Glossary." Digital Dramaturgy. Centerstage.org. Updated October 4, 2009. Web.

TEACHER RESOURCES

EXTENDED READING LIST

The following reading recommendations are linked to their respective pages on the Monroe County Public Library website:

- [*The Canterville Ghost*](#) by Oscar Wilde
- [*Much Ado About Nothing*](#) by William Shakespeare
- [*The Plays of Oscar Wilde*](#) (*Lady Windermere's Fan*; *Salomé*; *A Woman of No Importance*; *An Ideal Husband*; *The Importance of Being Earnest*)
- [*Pygmalion*](#) by George Bernard Shaw
- [*Twelfth Night, or, What You Will*](#) by William Shakespeare
- [*The Europeans*](#) by Henry James (eaudio book)
- [*Pride and Prejudice*](#) by Jane Austen
- [*The Most of P.G. Wodehouse*](#) (collected works)

TEACHER RESOURCES:

INDIANA STATE ELA STANDARDS

11-12.RL.2.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences and interpretations drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

11-12.RL.2.2: Compare and contrast the development of similar themes or central ideas across two or more works of literature and analyze how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.

11-12.RL.3.2: Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.

11-12.W.3.1: Write arguments in a variety of forms that –

- Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.
- Use effective transitions as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- Establish and maintain a consistent style and tone appropriate to purpose and audience.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented

