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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The Importance of Being Earnest

### 2: The proposal



*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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#### LANGUAGE FOCUS:

Passives

#### Narrator

Algernon has just asked his good friend Jack to explain why he calls himself Jack in the country but Ernest in London. Jack says it's because he is the **guardian** of a girl called Cecily, who lives with him in the country. She looks up to him and he feels he should behave well when he's with her, so he pretends he has a younger brother called Ernest so that when he comes up to London, he can enjoy himself.

#### Jack

That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth.

#### Algernon

So, Ernest, you are a **Bunburyist**!

#### Jack

What on earth do you mean?

#### Algernon

You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, so that you can come to London as often as you like. I have invented a sick friend called Bunbury so that I can go to the country whenever I like. Bunbury is **invaluable**. For example, if Bunbury didn't have such bad health, I would have to have dinner with my aunt Lady Bracknell tonight. And I have no intention of doing that.

#### Jack

Why not?

#### Algernon

Well, to begin with, I had dinner with her on Monday – once a week is quite enough to eat with your own relations. Secondly, I know **I will be seated** next to Mary Farquhar, who always **flirts** with her own husband – most unpleasant! Besides, I want to have dinner with you and talk about Bunburyism.

**Jack**

I'm not a... Bunburyist. In fact I think I am going to kill my brother Ernest. Cecily is a little too interested in him. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr... with your sick friend.

**Algernon**

**I will not be separated** from Bunbury... [a bell rings.] Ah! That must be my aunt now. Now, if I keep her busy for ten minutes so you can **propose** to Gwendolen, will you have dinner with me tonight?

**Jack**

Alright Algy...

**Lane**

Lady Augusta Bracknell and Miss Gwendolen Fairfax.

**Narrator**

A well-dressed, elderly woman and her daughter, a pretty, young lady enter the room.

**Lady Bracknell**

Good afternoon, dear Algernon. Oh, hello, Mr Worthing.

**Jack**

Hello, Lady...

**Lady Bracknell**

Now, Algernon... I'd like a nice cup of tea, and one of those cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

**Algernon**

Certainly, Aunt Augusta. Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches?

**Lane**

There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir.

**Algernon**

No cucumbers!

**Lane**

No, sir.

**Algernon**

I am very sorry, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell**

It doesn't matter, Algernon. Pour me some tea.

**Algernon**

Here you are.

**Lady Bracknell**

Thank you. Now, Algernon, about tonight – **you will be seated** next to Mary Farquhar.

**Algernon**

I'm afraid, Aunt Augusta, I won't be able to have dinner with you tonight.

**Lady Bracknell**

But why not, Algernon?

**Algernon**

Well, I have just heard that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. I'll have to go and see him.

**Lady Bracknell**

It's very strange. This Mr Bunbury seems to have curiously bad health. I think it is time that he made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. And I would be very grateful if you could ask Mr Bunbury to please not be ill on Saturday, because I need you to organise my music at my *soirée*.

**Algernon**

I'll speak to him, Aunt Augusta, and I'm sure he'll be well by Saturday. But why don't we go next door to look at the programme of music I've prepared.

**Lady Bracknell**

Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you.

**Narrator**

Algernon and his aunt go into the music room, leaving Jack and Gwendolen alone.

**Jack**

It has been a lovely day, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen**

Please don't talk to me about the weather, Mr Worthing. Whenever people talk about the weather, I am sure they mean something else. And that makes me nervous.

**Jack**

I do mean something else.

**Gwendolen**

I thought so.

**Jack**

Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you. . .

**Gwendolen**

Yes, I realised that. Actually, I **have always been fascinated** by you... even before we met.

**Jack**

Really?

**Gwendolen**

Yes, I've always wanted to love someone called Ernest. That name **inspires** complete confidence. When Algernon first mentioned that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was **destined** to love you.

**Jack**

You really love me, Gwendolen?

**Gwendolen**

**Passionately!**

**Jack**

But you don't really mean that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

**Gwendolen**

But your name *is* Ernest.

**Jack**

Yes, I know. But what if it was something else? Do you mean you couldn't love me then? Personally, I don't think the name suits me.

**Gwendolen**

It suits you perfectly.

**Jack**

But there are lots of other much nicer names. Jack, for instance, is a charming name.

**Gwendolen**

Jack? Oh, no, Jack does not have the same sound at all. It's not exciting. The only really safe name is Ernest.

**Jack**

Gwendolen, **I must get christened** at once – I mean, we must get married at once.

**Gwendolen**

Married, Mr Worthing?

**Jack**

Well... surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you felt the same.

**Gwendolen**

I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. **Nothing has been said** at all about marriage.

**Jack**

Well... may I propose to you now?

**Narrator**

And so Jack **kneels** down and asks Gwendolen to marry him. She accepts and Jack is still on his knees when Lady Bracknell returns.

**Lady Bracknell**

Mr Worthing! Do get up!

**Gwendolen**

Mamma! Please leave us. Mr Worthing has not quite finished yet.

**Lady Bracknell**

Finished what, may I ask?

**Gwendolen**

**I am engaged** to Mr Worthing, mamma.

**Lady Bracknell**

Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged, I, or your father will tell you. **A young girl should be surprised** by an engagement, pleasantly or unpleasantly. It is not something that **she is allowed** to arrange for herself... And now I would like to ask you a few questions, Mr Worthing. Gwendolen, can you wait for me below in the carriage.

**Gwendolen**

Mamma!

## Vocabulary

### **guardian**

someone who is legally responsible for someone else, such as a child whose parents cannot look after them (perhaps because they have died)

### **Bunburyist**

an invented word meaning someone who invents a fictitious person (either themselves or someone else)

### **invalid**

a person who is ill or disabled and is unable to look after themselves

### **invaluable**

extremely useful or valuable

### **flirts**

to behave towards someone as if you are romantically or sexually interested in them

### **soirée**

a small party in someone's house, usually with music

### **fascinated**

very interested or attracted

### **inspires**

makes someone enthusiastic about something

### **destined**

certain to happen because of fate

### **passionately**

with very strong feeling or enthusiasm

### **christened**

named in a ceremony that usually happens in a church

### **kneels**

in a position with one or both knees on the floor

## Quiz

1. Who is Ernest?
  - a) A friend of Jack.
  - b) Jack's invented younger brother.
  - c) Jack's guardian.
  
2. Why has Algernon invented an invalid friend called Bunbury?
  - a) So that he can go to dinner with his aunt whenever he likes.
  - b) So that he always has an excuse for not doing what he doesn't want to do.
  - c) So that he can go to London whenever he likes.
  
3. Why is Jack worried that Gwendolen might find out that his name is not Ernest?
  - a) Because he thinks she might not love him.
  - b) Because he thinks she will want to marry him.
  - c) Because he thinks she will tell her mother.

## Feedback

1. Who is Ernest?
  - a) Wrong answer – He is connected to Jack, but he is not his friend.
  - b) Correct answer – Well done!
  - c) Wrong answer – He is connected to Jack, but he is not his friend.
  
2. Why has Algernon invented an invalid friend called Bunbury?
  - a) Wrong answer – Algernon does not like having dinner with his aunt too often!
  - b) Correct answer – Well done!
  - c) Wrong answer – He has invented Bunbury so he can go somewhere as often as he likes, but it's not to London.
  
3. Why is Jack worried that Gwendolen might find out that his name is not Ernest?
  - a) Correct answer – Well done!
  - b) Wrong answer – Jack does want Gwendolen to marry him!
  - c) Wrong answer – There is a different reason why Jack doesn't want Gwendolen to find out.