
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Importance of Being Earnest

3: Lost and found



This is not a word-for-word transcript

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Comparatives and superlatives

Narrator

Jack has asked Gwendolen to marry him. She thinks his name is Ernest, her favourite name, and has happily accepted. But her mother, Lady Bracknell, is not pleased about the engagement. She wants to ask Jack some questions about his background and finances.

Lady Bracknell

Now, Mr Worthing, I am quite prepared to add your name to my list of **eligible** young men for my daughter if you answer my questions in a suitable way... Do you smoke?

Jack

Well, yes, I do.

Lady Bracknell

I'm glad to hear it. How old are you?

Jack

Twenty-nine.

Lady Bracknell

The **best** age to be married in my opinion. What is your **income**?

Jack

Between seven and eight thousand a year.

Lady Bracknell

Se... ven... and... eight... thou... sand. Do you own a house?

Jack

Well, I have a country house with some land.

Lady Bracknell

A country house! How many bedrooms? You have a town house, I hope? A girl like Gwendolen could not be expected to live in the country.

Jack

Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but I rent it to Lady Bloxham.

Lady Bracknell

Very well. Now to **more minor** subjects. Are your parents living?

Jack

I have lost both my parents.

Lady Bracknell

To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, is unlucky; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father?

Jack

I'm afraid I don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be **more truthful** to say that my parents lost me... I was... well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell

Found!

Jack

The **late** Mr Cardew, one of the **kindest gentlemen** I've ever met, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is in **Sussex**. It's **the most delightful** seaside resort...

Lady Bracknell

Where did this kind gentleman find you?

Jack

In a handbag.

Lady Bracknell

A handbag?

Jack

Yes, Lady Bracknell, I was in a handbag – a rather large, black handbag, with **handles** to it.

Lady Bracknell

And where did Mr Cardew come across this ordinary handbag?

Jack

In the **cloakroom** at Victoria Station. It was given to him by mistake instead of his own.

Lady Bracknell

The cloakroom at Victoria Station?

Jack

Yes.

Lady Bracknell

Mr Worthing, I have to say I feel rather confused by what you have just told me. To start life in a bag, whether it had handles or not, shows a lack of respect for family life. As for the bag being found in a cloakroom at a railway station, that isn't the **best** way to begin a successful life in society today.

Jack

May I ask you then what I should do? I would do anything to **ensure** Gwendolen's happiness.

Lady Bracknell

I would strongly advise you, Mr Worthing, to **acquire** some relations as soon as possible, and to try to produce at least one parent.

Jack

Well, I don't see how I can do that. I can produce the bag now. It's at home. That should be enough for you, surely, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell

Mr Worthing! You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would allow our only daughter to **marry into** a cloakroom, and **form an alliance** with a parcel? Goodbye, Mr Worthing!

Jack

Goodbye!

Algernon

How did it go? Oh, didn't it go well, old boy? Did Gwendolen refuse you?

Jack

Oh, as far as Gwendolen is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother, though, is perfectly **unbearable**. She's a monster... I beg your pardon, Algy, I shouldn't talk about your aunt in that way in front of you.

Algernon

My dear boy, I love people being rude about my relations. It's the only thing that makes me **put up with** them.

Jack

You don't think Gwendolen could become like her mother, do you, Algy?

Algernon

Gwendolen is **the most sensible, intellectual girl** I know. But all women become like their mothers. That is their **tragedy**. By the way, did you tell Gwendolen about being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

Jack

My dear fellow, the truth isn't the sort of thing you tell a nice, sweet girl.

Algernon

What about your brother? What about Ernest?

Jack

Oh, I shall have finished with him by the weekend. I'll say he died in Paris from a severe cold.

Algernon

But I thought you said that... Cecily was interested in Ernest? Won't she be very sad?

Jack

Oh, that's all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a good appetite, goes on long walks, and pays little attention to her lessons.

Algernon

I would like to see Cecily.

Jack

I will take very good care you never do. She is very pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

Algernon

Have you told Gwendolen about Cecily?

Jack

Oh! Cecily and Gwendolen are certain to be extremely good friends. Half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

Algernon

Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's for dinner, we must go. It's nearly seven.

Narrator

Just then, Gwendolen comes in and tells Jack that she will always love him, even if they don't get married. She asks him for his address in the country, and Algernon – listening quietly – secretly writes it down. Jack takes Gwendolen to her carriage and Algernon is left on his own, with a smile on his face.

(A bell rings)

Lane

You called, sir.

Algernon

Tomorrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

Lane

Yes, sir.

Algernon

I'm going to Hertfordshire. I shall probably not be back until Monday. You can prepare all my Bunbury clothes.

Lane

Yes, sir.

Algernon

I hope tomorrow will be a fine day, Lane.

Lane

It never is, sir.

Algernon

Lane, you are a perfect pessimist.

Lane

I do **my best** to give satisfaction, sir.

Vocabulary

income

money someone gets from work or from investments

late

describing someone who has recently died

gentlemen

old-fashioned word used to describe men from higher classes of society

Sussex

a county in the south of England

handles

parts attached to a bag or other object so that you can hold it

cloakroom

place in a theatre, restaurant and previously in railway stations, where you can leave coats, bags and other small items.

bewildered

confused

decent

socially acceptable

ensure

to make certain that something happens

acquire to get

marry into

(phrasal verb) to become a member of a family or group by marrying someone who already belongs to it. (Here Wilde is comparing the cloakroom with a family)

form an alliance

become connected

put up with (phrasal verb)

to continue to accept someone or a situation that is unpleasant

tragedy

a very sad event or situation

Hertfordshire

a county in the south of England, near to London

Quiz

1. Where was Jack found as a baby?

- a) In a bag in a seaside resort
- b) In a bag in a railway station
- c) In a house in the country

2. Who would Algernon like to meet?

- a) Earnest
- b) Cecily
- c) Jack's parents

3. Why do you think Algernon writes down Jack's address in the country?

- a) Because he wants to visit Jack.
- b) Because he wants to meet Cecily.
- c) Because he wants to introduce Gwendolen to Cecily.

Feedback:

1. 1 Where was Jack found as a baby?

a) In a bag in a seaside resort – Wrong – He was found in a bag but not in a seaside resort.

b) In a bag in a railway station – Correct – Well done!

c) In a house in the country – Wrong – He was found somewhere else.

2. Who would Algernon like to meet?

a) Earnest – Wrong – Earnest is Jack's other name. Algernon would like to meet someone else.

b) Cecily – Correct – Well done!

c) Jack's parents – Wrong – Jack doesn't know who his parents are. Algernon would like to meet someone else.

3. Why do you think Algernon writes down Jack's address in the country?

a) Because he wants to visit Jack – Wrong – Algernon wants to meet someone else who lives there.

b) Because he wants to meet Cecily – Correct – Well done!

c) Because he wants to introduce Gwendolen to Cecily. – Wrong – He wants to meet someone who lives there.