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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The Importance of Being Earnest

### 8: The truth about Ernest

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

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**LANGUAGE FOCUS:** Defining and non-defining relative clauses

**Narrator**

Cecily and Gwendolen both thought they were engaged to someone called Ernest. But Gwendolen has just found out her man's real name is Jack. Let's join them in the garden now, where Cecily is asking Algernon an important question...

**Cecily**

Are you engaged to Gwendolen?

**Algernon**

Engaged to Gwendolen? Of course not! What made you think that?

**Cecily**

Thank you.

**Narrator**

And Cecily lets Algernon kiss her on her cheek.

**Gwendolen**

I knew there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. **The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr Algernon Moncrieff.**

**Cecily**

Algernon! Is your name Algernon?

**Algernon**

I cannot **deny** it.

**Cecily**

Oh!

**Gwendolen**

Is your name really Jack?

**Jack**

My name certainly is Jack. It's been Jack for years.

**Cecily**

Gwendolen, we have both been greatly **deceived**.

**Gwendolen**

My poor Cecily!

**Cecily**

My sweet Gwendolen!

**Jack and Algernon**

[groan]

**Gwendolen**

Mr Worthing, there is just one question I would like to ask you. Where is your brother Ernest? Cecily and I are both engaged to be married to your brother, so it is a **matter** of some importance to us to know where he is at present.

**Jack**

Gwendolen, Cecily, it is very painful for me to speak the truth and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I don't have a brother Ernest. I don't have a brother at all. I've never had a brother in my life, and I don't plan to ever have one in the future.

**Cecily**

No brother at all?

**Jack**

None!

**Gwendolen**

Have you never had a brother of any kind?

**Jack**

Never. Not even of any kind.

**Gwendolen**

Cecily, it's quite clear that neither of us are engaged to be married to anyone.

**Cecily**

It's not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

**Gwendolen**

Let's go in the house. They'll dare not come after us there.

**Cecily**

No, men are so **cowardly**, aren't they?

**Narrator**

And the two women, who minutes before were arguing, now go arm in arm into the house.

**Jack**

This awful situation is what you call **Bunburying**, I suppose?

**Algernon**

Yes, and a wonderful Bunbury it is.

**Jack**

Well, you've no right to Bunbury here.

**Algernon**

That's absurd. People can Bunbury anywhere they choose. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

**Jack**

Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

**Algernon**

Well, you have to be serious about something.

**Jack**

Well, the only satisfaction I have in all this terrible business is that your friend Bunbury is finished. You won't be able to run to the country quite as often as you used to, dear Algy.

**Algernon**

Your brother is a little unwell, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently now.

**Jack**

As for your behaviour towards Miss Cardew, I must say that fooling a sweet, innocent girl like that is quite **inexcusable**. To say nothing of the fact that I am her guardian.

**Algernon**

I can see no excuse at all for you deceiving a clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

**Jack**

I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

**Algernon**

Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

**Jack**

There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

**Algernon**

And I don't think it's very likely, Jack, that you and Miss Fairfax will be together. Ooh... muffins...

**Jack**

Well, that's no business of yours... And how can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble? You seem perfectly **heartless**.

**Algernon**

[eating] Well, I can't eat muffins in a nervous way. The butter would probably get on my sleeves. You should always eat muffins quite calmly. It's the only way to eat them.

**Jack**

Well, that's no reason to eat them all in that greedy way. Give them to me.

**Algernon**

But you just said it was heartless to eat muffins.

**Jack**

Algy, I wish you would go.

**Algernon**

You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. Besides I have just arranged with **Reverend** Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six with the name of Ernest.

**Jack**

My dear fellow, please stop that nonsense. I arranged this morning with Reverend Chasuble to be **christened** myself at 5.30, and I will, of course, take the name of Ernest. We can't both be called Ernest. Besides, I have a perfect **right** to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been christened by anybody. You, on the other hand, have already been christened.

**Algernon**

Yes, but I haven't been christened for years.

**Jack**

Yes, but you have been christened. That's the important thing.

**Algernon**

Yes, so I know I can stand it. You're not quite sure that you have ever been christened, and I think it would be rather dangerous to do it now. It might make you very unwell.

**Jack**

[eating] Oh, that's nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

**Algernon**

Jack, you're eating the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

**Jack**

Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here.

**Algernon**

I haven't quite finished my tea yet! And there is still one muffin left.

**Jack**

[groans in despair]

## **Vocabulary**

### **embracing**

holding someone in your arms to show you love them

### **deny**

to say something is not true

### **deceived**

tricked

### **cowardly**

not brave enough to do something they should

### **Bunburying**

invented word which means inventing a person (either for yourself or a different person) to give you an excuse for behaving in a different way or to avoid situations

### **inexcusable**

describing behaviour that is very bad

### **muffins**

small, round breads that are sliced and eaten hot with butter

### **heartless**

showing no feeling or consideration for others

### **Reverend**

title for a person who performs religious duties in the Christian Church

### **christened**

given a name (usually as a baby) during a religious ceremony in the Christian Church

### **right**

something a person is allowed to do or have

### **constitution**

state of someone's health

## Quiz

1. Jack finally admits to Gwendolen that...

(Hint: What does he say about his brother Ernest?)

- a) ... he has a brother but he's not called Ernest.
- b) ... he doesn't have a brother at all.
- c) ... his brother Ernest is already married.

2. When Gwendolen and Cecily find out Ernest doesn't exist...

(Hint: They leave the boys and go into the house)

- a) ... they laugh.
- b) ... they are angry.
- c) ... they argue with each other.

3. Jack thinks that Algernon shouldn't be christened by Reverend Chasuble because...

(Hint: One of the men hasn't been christened, but who?)

- a) ... Algernon might become ill.
- b) ... it could be very dangerous.
- c) ... Algernon has already been christened.

## Feedback

1. Jack finally admits to Gwendolen that ...

a) ... he has a brother but he's not called Ernest. – Wrong – Jack says 'I don't have a brother Ernest. I don't have a brother at all.'

**b) ... he doesn't have a brother at all. – Correct – Well done!**

c) ... his brother Ernest is already married. – Wrong – Jack says 'I don't have a brother Ernest. I don't have a brother at all.'

2. When Gwendolen and Cecily find out Ernest doesn't exist ...

a) ... they laugh. – Wrong – They are not very happy at all.

**b) ... they are angry. – Correct – Well done!**

c) ... they argue with each other. – Wrong – They were arguing earlier, but now they are not happy with the men.

3. Jack thinks that Algernon shouldn't be christened by Reverend Chasuble because ...

a) ... Algernon might become ill. – Wrong – It's Algernon who says to Jack 'It might make you very unwell.'

b) ... it could be very dangerous. – Wrong – It's Algernon who says to Jack 'I think it would be rather dangerous to do it now.'

**c) ... Algernon has already been christened. – Correct – Well done!**