
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Importance of Being Earnest

9: A reunion and a death



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LEARNING
ENGLISH

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

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Adverbs 2

Narrator

Gwendolen and Cecily are angry with Jack and Algernon now they know their real names – neither of them are called Ernest. The two women are inside the house. The men come in trying to look and sound cheerful.

Jack and Algernon

[whistling Daisy, Daisy]

Gwendolen

I'm sure they're feeling sorry. Let's not say anything.

Cecily

Certainly not. Mr Moncrieff, why did you pretend to be my **guardian's** brother?

Algernon

So that I had the opportunity to meet you.

Cecily

That seems a satisfactory explanation, doesn't it Gwendolen?

Gwendolen

Yes, if you can believe him.

Cecily

I don't. But his answer was so beautiful.

Gwendolen

True. In matters of great importance, it's style, not truth that is essential. Mr Worthing, why did you pretend to have a brother? Was it so you could come to London to see me?

Jack

Do you have any doubts, dear Gwendolen?

Gwendolen

I have serious doubts. But I intend to ignore them. Cecily, should we forgive them?

Cecily

Yes. I mean no. **Probably** not. What about their names?

Gwendolen

True! I had forgotten!

Gwendolen and Cecily

Your names are still a huge problem!

Jack and Algernon

Our names! Is that all? But we are going to be **christened** with a different name this afternoon.

Gwendolen

You are prepared to do this terrible thing for me, Jack?

Jack

I am.

Cecily

To please me you are ready to face this awful experience, Algernon?

Algernon

I am!

Gwendolen

How can people talk about the equality of the sexes! Men have moments of physical **courage** which we women know **absolutely** nothing about.

Cecily

Jack, darling!

Algernon

Cecily, darling!

Narrator

And they fall into each other's arms. Merriman comes in and coughs **loudly**. He announces a visitor.

Merriman

Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

Jack

Good heavens!

Lady Bracknell

Gwendolen! What does this mean?

Gwendolen

Simply that I am engaged to Mr Worthing, mamma.

Lady Bracknell

Mr Worthing, I followed my daughter by train. Gwendolen is meant to be attending a university lecture. Well, that is what her father thinks. All communication between yourself and my daughter must end **immediately**.

Jack

We are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell!

Lady Bracknell

You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, what about Algernon! ... Algernon!

Algernon

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell

May I ask if it is in this house that your sick friend Mr Bunbury lives?

Algernon

Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at the moment. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell

Dead! When did he die?

Algernon

Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

Lady Bracknell

He died so **suddenly**? What did he die of?

Algernon

I mean he was discovered! The doctors discovered that he could not live, so he died.

Lady Bracknell

He seems to have had great **confidence** in the opinion of his doctors. I am glad that he **finally** made up his mind to take some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now, Mr Worthing, who is the young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is holding in an unnecessary way?

Jack

That is Miss Cecily Cardew, I'm her guardian.

Algernon

I am engaged to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell

I beg your pardon?

Cecily

Mr Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

Narrator

Lady Bracknell has to sit down at this news.

Lady Bracknell

There seems to be something **unusually** exciting in the air – the number of engagements seems to be above average. Mr Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any railway stations in London? I am **simply** asking. Until yesterday I didn't know any families or people whose origin was a station.

Jack

Miss Cecily Cardew is the granddaughter of the **late** Mr Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square; Gervase Park, **Surrey**; and the Sporrans, **Fifeshire**.

Lady Bracknell

Three addresses. That **always** gives me **confidence**. I am not unsatisfied.

Jack

How **extremely** kind of you, Lady Bracknell!

Lady Bracknell

Now Gwendolen, we have to leave... Just one thing, Mr Worthing, does Miss Cardew have any money?

Jack

Oh! About £130,000. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

Lady Bracknell

A moment, Mr Worthing. £130,000! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Come over here, dear... Turn round, dear child, so I can see your face. There are definite social possibilities in your face. Algernon!

Algernon

Yes, Aunt Augusta!

Lady Bracknell

There are definite social possibilities in Miss Cardew.

Algernon

I don't care about social possibilities.

Lady Bracknell

Never speak **disrespectfully** of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. Now Miss Cardew, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his **debts** to depend upon. But I do not approve of marriages for money. Well, I suppose I must give my **consent**.

Algernon

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell

The marriage had better take place quite soon. I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the chance to find out each other's characters before marriage – never a good thing.

Jack

I'm sorry to interrupt you, Lady Bracknell, but I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and I don't give my consent to this marriage.

Lady Bracknell

And why not may I ask? Isn't Algernon an extremely **eligible** young man? He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

Jack

The fact is that I do not **approve** of his **moral** character. He has not been honest.

Narrator

Algernon and Cecily look at him amazed.

Lady Bracknell

Untruthful! Algernon? Impossible!

Jack

I'm afraid there is no doubt. This afternoon he came to my house pretending to be my brother. He has succeeded in one afternoon to change the affections of dear Cecily. He then stayed to tea, and ate all the **muffins**.

Lady Bracknell

Ahem! Mr Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided to forgive my nephew's behaviour.

Jack

That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. However I have not changed my mind. I do not give my consent.

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)

christened

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

courage

the ability to face difficult situations or danger without showing fear

late

recently died

Surrey

a county in England near London

Fifeshire

a county in Scotland

confidence

thinking that someone is good and honest

disrespectful

showing lack of respect

debts

amounts of money you owe to someone

consent

permission

eligible

suitable as someone to marry

approve

to think someone or something is good

moral

good and honest

muffins

small, round type of bread that is sliced and eaten hot with butter

Quiz

1. Why do Gwendolen and Cecily think that Jack and Algernon are very brave?

(Hint: They both plan to get christened.)

- a) Because they are going to talk to Lady Bracknell about the engagements.
- b) Because they are going to change their names.
- c) Because they are going to meet Jack's brother.

2. What does Algernon say about Bunbury?

(Hint: What does he tell Lady Bracknell?)

- a) He's dead.
- b) He was found in the house.
- c) He's gone to live somewhere else.

3. Who does not agree to the marriage of Algernon and Cecily?

(Hint: Cecily's 'guardian' doesn't agree to the marriage.)

- a) Lady Bracknell
- b) Jack
- c) Gwendolen

Feedback

1. Why do Gwendolen and Cecily think that Jack and Algernon are very brave?

a) Because they are going to talk to Lady Bracknell. – Wrong – It is for a different reason.

b) Because they are going to change their names. – Correct – Well done!

c) Because they are going to meet Jack's brother. – Wrong – Jack doesn't have a brother.

2. What does Algernon say about Bunbury?

a) He's dead – Correct – Well done!

b) He was found in the house. – Wrong – Algernon says Bunbury has been 'discovered' but he doesn't mean in that way.

c) He's gone to live somewhere else. – Wrong – He says 'Bunbury is somewhere else at the moment. In fact, Bunbury is dead.'

3. Who does not agree to the marriage of Algernon and Cecily?

a) Lady Bracknell – Wrong – She does agree.

b) Jack – Correct – Well done!

c) Gwendolen – Wrong – It was someone else.