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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## The Importance of Being Earnest

### 10: The real Ernest is discovered



BBC  
LEARNING  
ENGLISH

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

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**LANGUAGE FOCUS:** Narrative tenses

**Narrator**

Lady Bracknell is visiting Jack's house in the country. She won't allow Jack to marry Gwendolen, and Jack, who is Cecily's **guardian**, won't allow Cecily to marry Algernon.

**Lady Bracknell**

Come here, dear child. How old are you?

**Cecily**

Eighteen.

**Lady Bracknell**

Well, you'll soon be able to decide yourself who to marry.

**Jack**

Excuse me, Lady Bracknell, but Miss Cardew doesn't **come of age** until she is 35, only then can she marry who she likes.

**Lady Bracknell**

Oh, that's not a problem. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women who have remained 35 for years. Lady Dumbleton, for example, she's been 35 ever since she turned 40, a long time ago.

**Cecily**

But I can't wait that long. I hate waiting even five minutes for someone. Waiting, even to be married, is just not possible.

**Algernon**

Well, what shall we do, Cecily?

**Cecily**

I don't know, Algernon.

**Lady Bracknell**

My dear Mr Worthing, as Miss Cardew says she cannot wait till she is 35 – which seems to indicate she is a little impatient – could you change your mind?

**Jack**

My dear Lady Bracknell, the moment you agree to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will happily allow your nephew to become engaged to Cecily.

**Lady Bracknell**

That is impossible. Look at the time! Gwendolen, dear, we've already missed five trains.

**Narrator**

But they'll miss the next one, too, because Reverend Chasuble arrives to announce that everything is ready for the **christenings**.

**Lady Bracknell**

Christenings, sir! Isn't that a little **premature**?

**Chasuble**

Both these gentlemen have said they want to be christened this afternoon.

**Lady Bracknell**

At their age? That's ridiculous! Algernon, Lord Bracknell would be very unhappy if he knew this was how you wasted your time and money.

**Chasuble**

So, no christenings this afternoon?

**Jack**

It would be no use to either of us, Reverend Chasuble, at the moment.

**Chasuble**

Well, I'll return to the church straight away. It seems Miss Prism has been waiting there for me for an hour and a half.

**Lady Bracknell**

Miss Prism! Did you say Miss Prism?

**Chasuble**

Yes, Lady Bracknell. I'm going to see her now.

**Lady Bracknell**

Wait a moment. Is this Miss Prism an unattractive woman, connected with education?

**Chasuble**

She's very well educated indeed.

**Lady Bracknell**

It's obviously the same person. And what position does she have in your house?

**Jack**

Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, is Miss Cardew's **governess**.

**Lady Bracknell**

I must see her at once.

**Chasuble**

Well, she's here now! Look, she's coming up the garden path.

**Narrator**

Miss Prism arrives. When she sees Lady Bracknell, she goes white.

**Lady Bracknell**

Prism! Come here! Where is that baby? Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, **you left my house with a pram in which a male baby was sleeping**. You never came back. **The police found the pram**. It contained a novel but no baby! Prism! What happened to that baby?

**Miss Prism**

Lady Bracknell, I really don't know. I wish I did. This is what happened. I took the baby out in its pram as usual. **I also took with me a large, old handbag in which I was intending to put the novel that I had written**. In a moment **when I wasn't thinking, I put the novel in the pram, and placed the baby in the bag**.

**Jack**

But where did you put the bag?

**Miss Prism**

I left it in the **cloakroom** of a railway station in London.

**Jack**

Which railway station?

**Miss Prism**

Victoria.

**Jack**

I must just go to my room.

**Narrator**

He rushes off. After several minutes, Jack returns carrying a black leather bag.

**Jack**

Is this the bag, Miss Prism?

**Miss Prism**

Yes, here are my **initials**. I'm so pleased to get it back so **unexpectedly**. It has been very **inconvenient** not to have it all these years.

**Jack**

Miss Prism, it's not just the bag that has been given back to you. I was the baby in it.

**Miss Prism**

You?

**Jack**

Yes... mother!

**Miss Prism**

Mr Worthing, there is some mistake! Lady Bracknell can tell you who you really are.

**Jack**

Lady Bracknell, I hate to be **inquisitive**, but could you tell me who I am?

**Lady Bracknell**

I'm afraid you are the son of my poor sister, Mrs Moncrieff. You are Algernon's elder brother.

**Jack**

Algy's elder brother! Then I do have a brother. I always said I had a brother! Algy, you'll have to treat me with more respect in future. You have never behaved like a brother to me.

**Algernon**

I did my best.

**Gwendolen**

My darling! But what is your christian name, now that you have become someone else?

**Jack**

Good heavens! I had forgotten about that. Lady Bracknell, **when Miss Prism left me in the bag, had I been christened already?**

**Lady Bracknell**

Your parents gave you everything, including a christening.

**Jack**

Well, what name was I given?

**Lady Bracknell**

You were the eldest son, so you were given your father's name.

**Jack**

Yes, but what was his name?

**Lady Bracknell**

I cannot remember the General's full name.

**Jack**

Algy! Can't you remember what our father's name was?

**Algernon**

My dear fellow, I was one when he died.

**Jack**

His name would appear in the army lists, wouldn't it, Lady Bracknell?

**Lady Bracknell**

That's true.

**Jack**

I have the lists of the last 40 years here.

**Narrator**

He rushes to the bookcase and pulls the books out.

**Jack**

Generals... Mallam, Migsby, Moncrieff! General 1869, his full name was... Jack Ernest! ... I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all.

**Gwendolen**

Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the beginning that you could have no other name!

**Jack**

Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to suddenly find out that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

**Gwendolen**

I can. For I'm sure you will change.

**Jack**

My darling!

**Narrator**

And Jack **embraces** Gwendolen. Algernon does the same with Cecily. Even Reverend Chasuble embraces someone – Miss Prism, much to her delight.

**Jack**

Gwendolen! At last!

**Lady Bracknell**

My nephew, you are showing a lack of seriousness.

**Jack**

No, it's the opposite, Lady Bracknell. I've now realised for the first time in my life the extreme Importance of Being **Earnest**.

## **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)

### **comes of age**

when a person becomes adult by law

### **christening**

a religious ceremony in the Christian Church during which a baby is given a name and becomes a member of the Christian Church

### **premature**

too soon

### **governess**

a woman who in the past lived with a family and taught the children

### **cloakroom**

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

### **initials**

the first letters of a person's names

### **unexpectedly**

surprisingly

### **inconvenient**

difficult

### **inquisitive**

curious, asking lots of questions

### **luxury**

something that is very nice to have but is not necessary

### **embraces**

holds someone in your arms to show you love them

### **earnest**

serious and determined

## Quiz

1. Jack won't agree to the engagement of Cecily and Algernon because \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Hint: His real reason is not the first one he gives)
- a) Cecily is not 35
  - b) Lady Bracknell won't agree to his marriage to Gwendolen
  - c) Cecily has changed her mind
2. The baby left in the bag at Victoria station by Miss Prism was \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Hint: Lady Bracknell is Algernon's aunt)
- a) Lady Bracknell's son
  - b) Algernon's younger brother
  - c) Lady Bracknell's nephew
3. Ernest was the real name of \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Hint: What did the army lists say?)
- a) Jack
  - b) Algernon
  - c) Gwendolen's brother

## Feedback

1. Jack won't agree to the engagement of Cecily and Algernon because \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Cecily is not 35 – Wrong – He won't agree for a different reason.
  - b) Lady Bracknell won't agree to his marriage to Gwendolen – Correct – Well done!**
  - c) Cecily has changed her mind – Wrong – Cecily still wants to marry Algernon. It's for a different reason.
2. The baby left in the bag at Victoria station by Miss Prism was \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Lady Bracknell's son – Wrong – It was her sister's son.
  - b) Algernon's younger brother – Wrong – He was Algernon's brother, but he wasn't younger than Algernon.
  - c) Lady Bracknell's nephew – Correct – Well done!**
3. Ernest was the real name of \_\_\_\_\_.
- a) Jack – Correct – Well done!**
  - b) Algernon – Wrong answer – Algernon's real name is Algernon.
  - c) Gwendolen's brother – Wrong – It is the name of a relation of Gwendolen, but it's not her brother.