

Unit 1

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde (1895)

ENGLISH 10B WORKSHOP - MS. BILLET

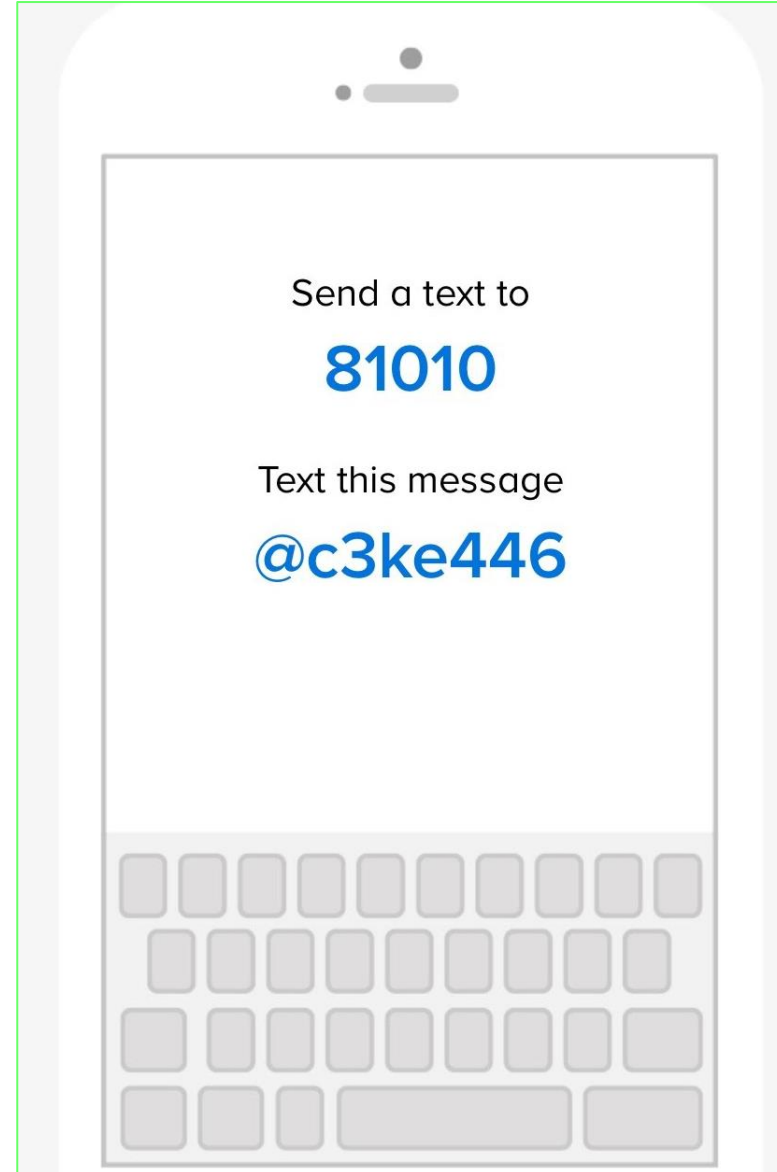
JANUARY 22, 2024



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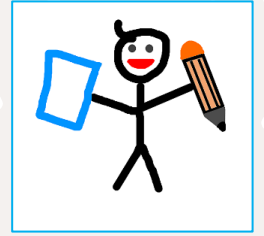




This is a FUNNY play!



British humor from 1895



Ernest vs. “earnest”

- The main character’s name in town (London) is **Ernest** (no a). It comes from the German word “ernst” which means serious.
- The descriptive word “**earnest**” means someone who is sincere. People who are earnest are serious about what they say or do. They really mean it. The opposite is fake or insincere.

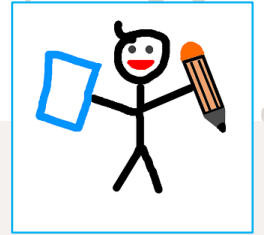


Dictionary
Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

 **ear·nest**¹
/ˈɜːnɪst/
adjective

resulting from or showing sincere and intense conviction.
"an earnest student"

Similar: serious serious-minded solemn grave



Character List

- **John “Jack” Worthing** – goes by the 1st name **Ernest** when he’s living “in town (London)”; goes by real name Jack at his country home (Manor House in Hertfordshire).
- **Algernon “Algy” Moncrieff** – best friend to Ernest/Jack; ends up pretending to be Jack when he goes to the country.
- **Lane** - butler to Algernon “Algy” in London
- **Gwendolen** Fairfax “Miss Fairfax” – upper-class woman in love with Ernest
- **Lady Bracknell** – upper-class snob, mother to Gwendolyn and aunt to Algy.
- **Cecily Cardew** (say: cess-ih-lee) – 18 yr old lives at Uncle Jack’s Manor House in the country; Uncle Jack is her guardian
- **Miss Prism** – Cecily’s nanny
- **Reverend Chasuble** – local pastor (“rector”)
- **Merriman** – butler at Jack’s Manor House I the country





“to bunbury” / a Bunburyist

Important term to know

Use the Connections Academy Study Guide



QUESTIONS

- 2. What is **Bunburying**?
How does it serve the pursuit of pleasure so valued by these characters?
- 3. Why does Jack pretend to have a brother?

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS



4. About what is Jack most angry when describing Algernon's deception to Lady Bracknell? What is the relevance of this?

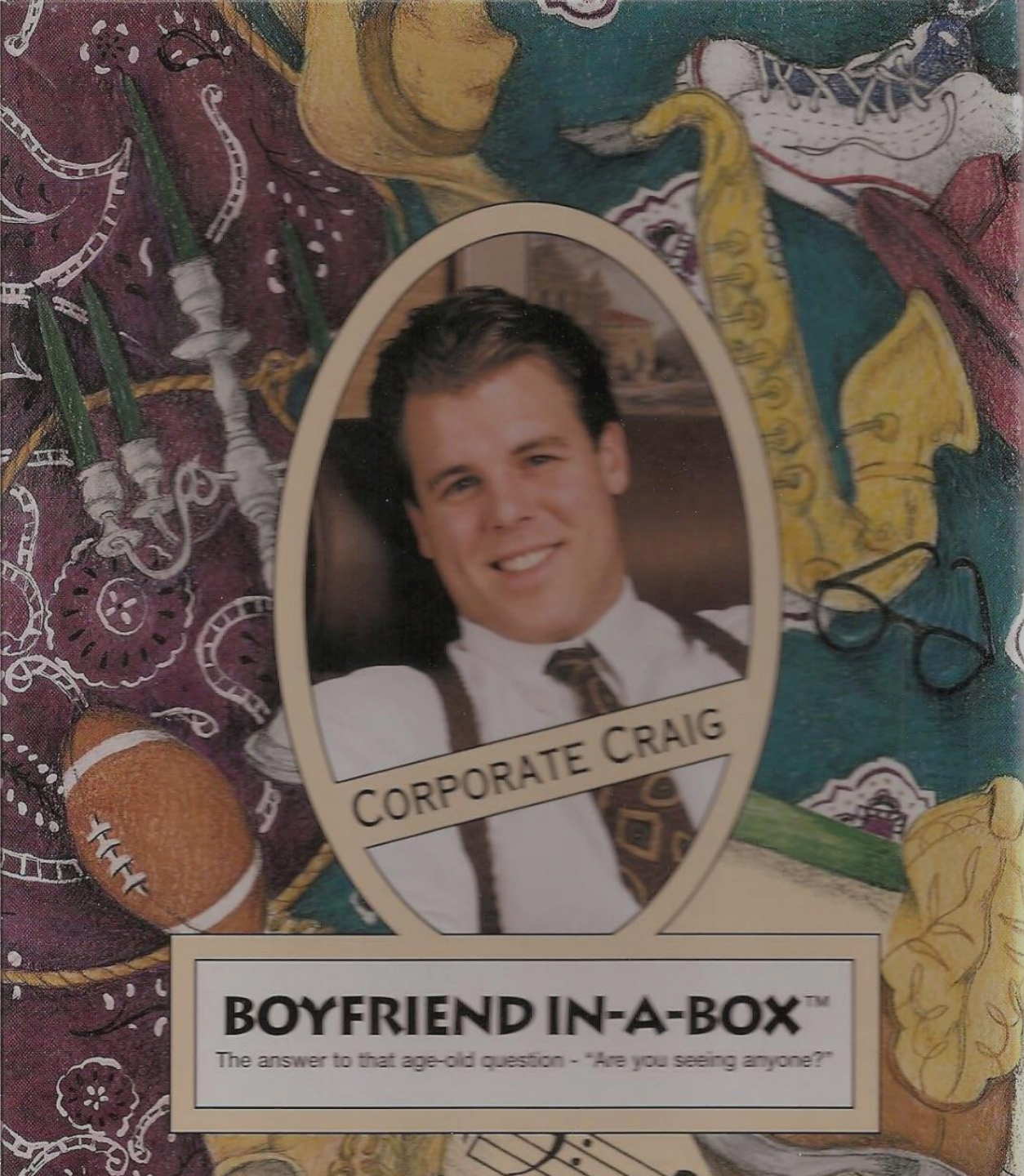
Answers to Review Questions

Act I, First Half Answers

1. They are most critical of the more trivial, appearance-based aspects of their characters and behaviors, such as when and how they eat. Answers to second part will vary, but should recall Wilde's comments to Robert Ross in which he points out that trivial things should be treated seriously and serious things should be trivialized.
2. Algernon has made up an invalid friend named Bunbury. He uses the term to describe any situation in which a person invents a cover story to excuse himself from boring duty-based tasks and gatherings in favor of doing whatever he wants to do instead. Both Jack and Algernon are willing to go to elaborate lengths in pursuit of pleasure—this is how important that goal is to them.

Jack He pretends to have a brother in order to escape the country for trips to London whenever he likes.

1990s "Boyfriend in a Box"



While You Were Out...

FOR _____

DATE _____ TIME 9:00 ^{A.M.}/_{P.M.}

M. Craig called

OF _____

PHONE _____

AREA CODE	NUMBER	EXTENSION
TELEPHONED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PLEASE CALL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
CAME TO SEE YOU	<input type="checkbox"/>	WILL CALL AGAIN <input type="checkbox"/>
WANTS TO SEE YOU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RUSH <input type="checkbox"/>
RETURNED YOUR CALL	<input type="checkbox"/>	SPECIAL ATTENTION <input type="checkbox"/>

MESSAGE Wants to get together for lunch

Call him

SIGNED [Signature]

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Reading strategies



**Make a movie in
your head
with all the senses**



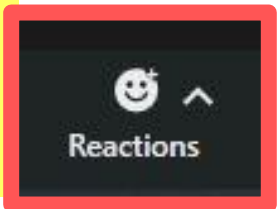
Make connections

- with your own life
- with what you know about the world
- with other stories you've read (or movies you've seen)



**“Read between the
lines.”**

Take what you learn +
what you already know,
= draw a conclusion.





kitchen joy

Part of the “quiet” message of this play is that the upper class of society engaged in “**excess**” – too much (the opposite of moderation).

It can be **food**, but the “excess” can be **other** topics such as manners, society’s expectations, etc.



4. He focuses on Algernon drinking an entire bottle of his Champagne and eating all of the muffins. This is another example of treating trivial things seriously, and of food as a symbol for (here, Algernon’s) self-indulgence and obedience to impulse.



Take notes on food as symbols

Cucumber sandwiches are the 1st in the play.

Example of the **excess** (and superficiality) of the upper class:

CECILY: But I don't like German.
It isn't at all a becoming language. I
know perfectly well that I look
quite plain after my German
lesson.





Cucumber sandwiches

(British style)

Act I (scene 1) – at Algy’s apartment in London

ALGERNON And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the
cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE Yes, sir. [*Hands them on a* ^{tray} *salver.*]

ALGERNON [*Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.*] Oh! . . .
by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord
Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of
champagne are entered as having been consumed.

Act I (scene 1) – at Algy's apartment in London, cont. Jack enters.

ALGERNON And who are the people you amuse?

JACK [*Airily.*] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

ALGERNON Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

ALGERNON How immensely you must amuse them! [*Goes over and takes sandwich.*] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

Act I (scene 1) – at Algy's apartment in London, continued with Algy & Jack

ALGERNON Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven--[*JACK puts out his hand to take a sandwich. ALGERNON at once interferes.*] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [*Takes one and eats it.*]

JACK Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [*Takes plate from below.*] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

Act I (scene 1) – at Algy's apartment in London, continued – now Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen, Algy & Jack

GWENDOLEN Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

tray

ALGERNON [*Picking up empty plate in horror.*] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE [*Gravely.*] There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

ALGERNON No cucumbers!



Exit Ticket

1. What is the most important **reading strategy** to use when *reading the text* of the play?
2. Which **symbol** should you pay attention to the play?

See you next Monday!

Ms. Billett

Reading Success Coach

12 Noon Mntn / 11:00 am Pacific

