

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND OTHER PLAYS

OSCAR WILDE

LIVING
LITERATURE
SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

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SYNOPSIS

Salomé

On the terrace of Herod's palace in Judaea, Roman visitors enjoy a banquet while soldiers look into an old cistern, where the prisoner Jokanaan [John the Baptist] languishes in the dark. The captain of the guard, a young Syrian named Narraboth, gazes at Herod's stepdaughter, the princess Salomé. An unnamed soldier characterizes the Jews as constantly disputing aspects of religion. The Cappadocian and the Nubian discuss customs in their countries. From below, the stark cry of Jokanaan predicts the coming of a messiah. The second soldier confides that Naaman, the executioner, murdered Herod's elder brother. Herod usurped the throne, then married Herodias, the dead man's wife and the mother of Salomé.

Salomé wonders why Herod stares at her and why Jokanaan indirectly defames her mother. The princess orders a slave to bring the prophet to the terrace. The young Syrian refuses, then relents. Jokanaan stands before the princess and speaks of an immoral woman. Salomé looks closely at him; he calls her a daughter of Sodom. She lusts for him, but he rejects her touch. She longs for a kiss. The young Syrian grows distracted and kills himself.

Herod approaches and slips in blood. He hears the beating of invisible wings. Herodias complains that Jokanaan insults her. The first Nazarene reports that the messiah performed miracles. Herod forbids raising of the dead. He requests a dance from Salomé. Herodias refuses to allow it. Herod fears that his marriage to his sister-in-law is incestuous, as Jokanaan has said.

Herod offers a reward up to half his kingdom if Salomé will dance. After performing the dance of seven veils, she demands Jokanaan's head, which Naaman lops off. To Herod's revulsion, she fondles the head. Hearing the engulfing wings, Herod calls her crime monstrous and orders her killed. Soldiers crush her with their shields.

Lady Windermere's Fan

Act I: At Carlton House, in the morning room of Arthur and Margaret, Lord and Lady Windermere, Parker the butler presents Lord Darlington, a womanizer who toys with Lady Windermere's affections. He implies that, after two years of marriage, her husband dallies with another woman and pays her bills.

The Duchess of Berwick and her daughter, Lady Agatha Carlisle, enter. The duchess warns Agatha that Darlington is a wicked man. Lady Windermere describes the evening's forthcoming dance as a small gathering on the occasion of her birthday. Darlington declares that she is reforming him of his cynicism toward marriage.

The duchess worries that her brother, Lord Augustus Lorton, pursues Mrs. Erlynne, a disreputable woman. The Duchess

informs Lady Windermere that Arthur has seen the woman on the sly continually since her arrival in London six months before. After the duchess departs, Lady Windermere realizes that Darlington had been trying to inform her of Arthur's indiscretions. In his private account book, she finds large sums transferred to Mrs. Erlynne.

Arthur finds her perusing his private papers. She asks about the money he spends on Mrs. Erlynne. Although he defends the woman, his wife considers him wrong. He demands an invitation for the dance for Mrs. Erlynne. Margaret refuses; he writes one himself on his card and dispatches it by Parker. Margaret threatens to insult Mrs. Erlynne publicly if she comes to the dance. He fears to admit the woman's true identity.

Act II: That evening at the dance, the duchess makes overtures to Mr. Hopper on behalf of Agatha. Augustus confesses that he wants to marry Mrs. Erlynne. When she arrives, Margaret drops the fan that Arthur gave her as a birthday present. Mrs. Erlynne charms other guests, collects invitations from her conquests, and dances with Arthur. In desperation, Margaret turns to Darlington. He urges her to elope that night and live with him. He plans to leave England the next day. Meanwhile, Hopper proposes to Agatha.

Mrs. Erlynne, who last saw Margaret twenty years before, finds her pretty. Without shame, Mrs. Erlynne wants Arthur to arrange her engagement to Augustus and intends to extort more money from Arthur. Margaret writes a farewell letter to Arthur and slips out to join Darlington. Mrs. Erlynne reads the letter and orders Arthur to join Augustus at the club.

Act III: Margaret arrives at Darlington's empty residence. Mrs. Erlynne appears and warns her that she will ruin her reputation if she doesn't return to Arthur. Mrs. Erlynne confesses reading Margaret's letter and convinces her to give up the elopement for her son's sake. When Darlington arrives with Augustus, Arthur, and two others, the women hide.

Darlington declares that he loves a married woman who has changed his attitude. Cecil Graham finds the fan and tells Arthur that there is a woman present. Arthur recognizes the fan. Immediately, Mrs. Erlynne comes from behind a curtain to claim that she took Margaret's fan by mistake.

Act IV: The next day, Margaret, back home once more, worries about the missing fan. Arthur finds her weeping and proposes that they withdraw to the country. He admits that Mrs. Erlynne is a bad woman. Parker brings the fan and shows Mrs. Erlynne into the room. She claims to be leaving England that afternoon and asks for a photo of Margaret with her son Gerald. When Margaret leaves the room, Arthur accuses Mrs. Erlynne, whom he identifies as Margaret's mother and a blackmailer.

Arthur threatens to expose Mrs. Erlynne to his wife. Mrs. Erlynne counters with threats of public infamy. She elicits family memories from Margaret, who recalls how her father died of a broken heart after his wife died. Mrs. Erlynne

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pledges Margaret to silence about the ordeal in Darlington's rooms. Receiving the fan, monogrammed with "Margaret," she departs with Augustus, who treats her coldly. When he returns to the room, he is once more in her power and intends to live with her outside of England.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Act I: In Algernon Moncrieff's morning room, Ernest "Jack" Worthing enters at 5:00 P. M. before the arrival of Augusta and her daughter Gwendolen. Algernon withholds permission for Jack to marry Gwendolen until he explains the cigarette case engraved with love from Cecily. Jack claims that Cecily is his aunt by reason of his adoption by Thomas Cardew when Jack was a little boy. He pretends to have a younger brother named Ernest, which is the name he goes by in London. Algernon admits to having invented the invalid Bunbury, whom he supposedly visits in the country. Jack plans to rid himself of his make-believe brother; Algernon advises him to keep the second identity.

The two women arrive. Algernon lies that he must break the evening's dinner engagement to be with Bunbury. While Augusta and Algernon discuss music for her reception, Jack woos Gwendolen, who wants him to change his name to Ernest. Augusta returns to the room to find Jack proposing to Gwendolen. After she withdraws to the carriage, Augusta extracts Jack's age, 29, and the fact that he smokes and has an income of seven or eight thousand pounds annually from investments and a country house with ample acreage. His politics are Liberal Unionist; his parents, whom he never knew, are dead. Thomas Cardew discovered the boy in a black leather bag at Worthing, a coastal resort.

Augusta fears that such a birth was ignoble and advises Jack to locate his relatives. Jack offers existence of the bag as proof. Augusta spurns him and sweeps out. Algernon warns him that women become like their mothers. Jack intends to kill off the fictional Ernest by week's end. Algernon suggests that Jack should also account for his ward, Cecily, who is pretty and only 18.

Gwendolen returns to warn that Augusta rejects their union because of Jack's unconventional family. Jack gives her the address of his country house. When Jack escorts her to the carriage, Algernon receives his mail, tears it up, and asks Lane to pack for a trip to the country the next day. Jack predicts that deception will get Algernon into trouble.

Act II: In July at the garden of Manor House, Miss Prism orders Cecily to return to her German lesson, which Jack insists on. Reverend Chasuble invites Miss Prism for a walk and leaves Cecily to study political economy. Algernon, pretending to be Ernest, arrives and flirts with her. Jack appears in mourning for his brother and asks Chasuble to christen him that afternoon. The minister sets the christening for 5:30.

Jack joins Algernon, who plans to stay the week, and sends for the dog-cart to take him back to town. Infatuated with Cecily, Algernon chooses to remain. She claims to have loved his wicked reputation since February 14 and to dream of loving a man named Ernest.

When Gwendolen arrives during Jack's visit at the rectory, Cecily confides that she is Jack's ward. To the news of Gwendolen's engagement to Ernest, Cecily is distressed. The two take tea with mutual hostility. When Jack reenters, Gwendolen becomes confused about his identity. Algernon's appearance complicates the scene. Jack admits that he has no brother. Algernon refuses to leave.

Act III: The two couples unite in the morning room at Manor House. Augusta rejects Gwendolen's engagement. Algernon kills off Bunbury. When Jack claims that Cecily has 130,000 pounds, Augusta takes interest. Jack refuses to consent until Augusta allows him to marry Gwendolen. The idea of christenings for Jack and Algernon disgusts Augusta.

When Miss Prism enters, Augusta accuses her of taking a baby in a pram from Lord Bracknell's house and never returning. Jack withdraws to his room in agitation and returns with a black handbag. Augusta identifies Jack as her sister's son and Algernon's older brother. Algernon recalls that their father died when Algernon was a year old. Jack looks up his name in the Army Lists and finds that it was General Ernest John Moncrieff. Three couples embrace—Jack with Gwendolen, Algernon with Cecily, and Chasuble with Miss Prism.

AUTHOR SKETCH

Oscar Wilde challenged the conservatism of his day by his writings and flamboyant life. Born Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde in Dublin in 1854, he was the son of surgeon Sir William Wilde and author Jane Francesca "Speranza" Elgee. He studied the classics at Trinity College and won a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford. He earned a reputation as an aesthete and iconoclast and graduated with the highest honors. Under the influence of critic John Ruskin, poet Matthew Arnold, and essayist Walter Pater, Wilde developed a sensual, hedonistic philosophy of art and literature. He won the Newdigate Prize for literature in 1878 with the poem *Ravenna*.

After a tour of Greece, Wilde settled in London and shed all semblance of the outsider with his flair for wit and eccentricity. Widely lampooned, he succeeded on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1884, he married Constance Mary Lloyd; they had two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan. He mastered verse, lectures, and critical essays; edited *Woman's World*; and published *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

The following year, Wilde changed the face of English comedy with the clever repartee of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. He quickly issued three major achievements: *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). A play in French, *Salomé* (1893), was banned in England, but produced in Paris, with Sarah Bernhardt playing the lead.

Despite his outward facade of a happily-married man, Wilde was a closeted homosexual who delighted in the company of younger lower-class men. In 1891 he met and fell in love with Lord Alfred Douglas, the 21-year-old son of the Marquis of Queensberry. Their relationship ended in tragedy when, in 1895, Wilde sued the Marquis for libel after the nobleman publicly denounced Wilde over the affair with his son. Wilde's case fell apart after Queensbury's lawyers presented overwhelming evidence of the playwright's homosexual behaviors.

Arrested shortly after the trial, Wilde was found guilty of homosexual practices and was sentenced to two years at hard labor, which he served in Reading Gaol. In 1898, he composed *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Unfortunately, imprisonment broke his spirit. Bankrupt, he wandered Italy, Switzerland, and France under the alias of Sebastian Melmoth. Near the end of his life, he converted to Roman Catholicism. He existed on charity until his death in a Paris hotel on November 30, 1900. His friends moved his remains

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to Père Lachaise Cemetery in the Paris suburbs in 1909.

CRITIC'S CORNER

A cult idol, Wilde was, nonetheless, the butt of English humor, ridiculed in *Punch* and in Gilbert and Sullivan's satiric *Patience*. Still, his valiant assault against the musty uprightness of Victorianism led to a revitalization of British drama, particularly drawing room comedy. Aphorists winnowed his works for gems such as "A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing," and "I can resist everything except temptation."

Criticized for creating insincere, worthless characters against a backdrop of triviality and moral decay, Wilde presents the paradox of life in the Edwardian era, when moral choices were less obvious than the black-and-white verities of the preceding age. Beneath the bantering superficialities of Wilde's wit, his characters know a world that demands punishment for thoughtless behaviors. He maintained the moral and literary centrality of art for art's sake. Certainly his incarceration in Reading Gaol proves his point. As he stated in *The Critic as Artist* (1891): "It is through art, and through art only, that we can realize our perfection; through art and art only that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual experience."

WILDE'S PUBLISHED WORKS

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898)
The Canterville Ghost (1887)
The Critic as Artist (1891)
A Critic in Pall Mall (1919)
De Profundis (1897)
Decorative Art in America (1906)
The Duchess of Padua (1883)
Early Poems and Fragments (1974)
A Florentine Tragedy (1908)
For Love of the King (1922)
The Happy Prince and Other Tales (1888)
Harlot's House (1885)
The House of Pomegranates (1892)
An Ideal Husband (1895)
The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)
Impressions of America (1906)
Intentions (1891)
Lady Windermere's Fan (1892)
Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories (1891)
Mr. and Mrs. Davenport (1956)
Pan (1909)
Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young (1894)
The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891)
Poems in Prose (1894)
Poems (1881)
The Portrait of Mr. W. H. (1889)
Ravenna (1878)
Remorse (1961)
The Rise of Historical Criticism (1905)
Salomé (1893)
Serenade (1962)
The Soul of Man Under Socialism (1891)
The Sphinx (1894)
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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the importance of appearances in social relationships
2. To account for dissension and disapproval
3. To interpret social and family pressures
4. To contrast the morality of various characters
5. To discuss the themes of deception and hostility
6. To explain background events in time order
7. To analyze the elements of drama
8. To describe attitudes toward women and marriage
9. To particularize elements that delineate atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the roles of informer and agitator
11. To differentiate between specious logic and fact
12. To account for changes in characters

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain how the cistern sets the tone in *Salomé*
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title in *The Importance of Being Earnest*
3. To account for the destruction of the letter in *Lady Windermere's Fan*
4. To summarize Jack's early life in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

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5. To justify Jokanaan's imprisonment in *Salomé*
6. To predict how Jack and Algernon will settle into matrimony in *The Importance of Being Earnest*
7. To summarize challenges to Herod's power in *Salomé*
8. To discuss the implications of secrets in *Lady Windermere's Fan*
9. To describe the style of courtship in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*
10. To list events caused by hatred, suspicion, and oppression in *Salomé*

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Oscar Wilde's plays, present the following terms and applications:

drama a literary work that re-creates actions that tell a story. Drama advances from the exposition or introduction of characters and situations to the rising action or complication, climax or crisis, falling action or denouement, and resolution or catastrophe. This arrangement of actions describes *Lady Windermere's Fan*, which begins with Margaret anticipating her birthday day and grows complicated from Darlington's passion for her and from the duchess's announcement that Arthur has been seeing a suspect woman. The climax occurs when Margaret determines to leave Arthur for Darlington. As Mrs. Erlynne intercedes to guide her daughter back to a stable marriage, the plot resolves into an alliance for both women and a separation that keeps Margaret from knowing her mother's true identity.

foreshadowing an event or motif that anticipates a later occurrence in fiction. The invisible beating wings that terrify Herod and alert Jokanaan of his approaching death enfold the one-act *Salomé* in a grand controlling metaphor of a dire, compelling rhythm. Suggestive of the seven veils that *Salomé* removes during her dance for Herod, the wings destroy the evening's delight for Herod, who is spooked by a slip on blood, the sight of the young Syrian's corpse, and Jokanaan's prophecies that thunder upward from the cistern like the pangs of Herod's conscience.

literary foil a character who serves as an opposite or as a standard by which another character is measured, as with Mrs. Erlynne and Margaret. Ironically, the mother and daughter share the same first name and the same love for little Gerald. The two clash over public behavior and the importance of an introduction to polite society at Lady Margaret Windermere's birthday dance. Mrs. Erlynne's willingness to jeopardize her relationship with Augustus indicates an unspoken motherliness, despite her reputation as a woman of easy virtue.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of each of Oscar Wilde's three plays depends on social conviviality and underlying intrigue. At Herod's palace in Judaea, the characters of *Salomé* gather on the terrace near a gloomy cistern under a bright moon. The banquet that continues offstage loses its hold on Herod and his wife and stepdaughter as they ponder the prophecies of Jokanaan and his insults of unidentified immoral women.

For *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the reception of guests in the morning room and on the terrace of Carlton House form the setting for a social drama that pits Margaret, the hostess, on the night of her birthday celebration with an unwanted guest, Mrs. Erlynne, who enjoys flirting, making friends, advancing herself with prominent people, and dancing with Arthur Windermere, the hostess's husband. Because the nearness of

the disreputable guest drives Margaret from home and husband, the setting shifts to Darlington's rooms, the residence of a dissolute male who threatens the reputations of both Margaret and Mrs. Erlynne. The return of characters to the Windermere household prepares for the resolution and separation of mother and daughter, who never meet as relatives and who continue their lives as passing acquaintances with a mutual interest in Arthur and his infant son Gerald.

The final play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, contrasts city and country settings by presenting friends Algernon and Jack, who enjoy the leisure to entertain Aunt Augusta and her daughter Gwendolen for tea at Algernon's luxurious London flat. When Jack expresses serious intent toward Gwendolen, the scene shifts to Manor House, his country home in Shropshire, which stands near a hill offering a view of five counties. At Manor House, he superintends the actions of his ward, Cecily, who gathers roses from the garden, a symbol of her wholesome innocence. The arrival of all major characters to his reception area ends deceptions and lies and rids relationships of misconceptions. Wilde's choice of setting implies that social deception flourishes better in the city than in the open countryside in Shropshire.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

Novels

Aphra Behn, *The City Heiress*
Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*
E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* and *Howard's End*
Henry James, *Daisy Miller* and *Washington Square*
Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*
William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*
William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*

Plays

Pierre Beaumarchais, *Figaro*
Mary Chase, *Harvey*
John Gay *The Beggar's Opera*
Lillian Hellman, *The Little Foxes*
Moises Kaufman, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*
Anita Loos, *Gigi*
Moliere, *The School For Wives*
Plautus, *Menaechmi*
William Shakespeare, *A Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Twelfth Night*
G. B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*

Poetry

Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*

Musical

Kurt Weill, *The Threepenny Opera*

Opera

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Figaro*
Richard Strauss, *Salomé*

Short Stories

Rudyard Kipling, "Miss Youghal's Sais"
Katherine Mansfield, "The Garden Party"

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A Passage to India (1984)

Pride and Prejudice (1997)

Sense and Sensibility (1995)

The Trials of Oscar Wilde (1960)

Washington Square (1997)

Wilde (1997)

Wings of the Dove (1997)

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Wilde's plays should include these aspects:

Themes

- reputation
- seduction
- courtship
- deception
- immorality
- choices
- social class
- property
- parenthood

Motifs

- coping with the consequences of illicit behaviors
- seeking satisfaction in marriage
- assuming the role of informer
- the triumph of truth over lies

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the play. Explain each in context. Title, act, and page numbers pinpoint each entry so you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? (*Salomé*, Act I, p. 7)
(In classical Mediterranean time, the tetrarch ruled one-quarter of a region or province as absolute monarch. Under Hellenized rulers in Syria and Palestine, the Romans placed a tetrarch over a divided kingdom or a district too small to be a realm.)
2. There are those who say he is Elias. (*Salomé*, Act I, p. 9)
(The drama of Hebrew history reaches a climax with the divided monarchy and the rise of the prophet Elijah, also called Elias, and his successor Elisha before the collapse of Israel and Judah. Elijah is revered among Christians and Jews as the greatest prophet of the Old Testament.)

3. For from the seed of the serpent shall come a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds. (*Salomé*, Act I, p. 9)
(The basilisk was a legendary monster also called a cockatrice. Grottesquely sinuous on top of the gorgon's head, it could turn the unsuspecting gazer to stone. The mythic basilisk gave its name to a member of the iguana family.)
4. You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, Act I, p. 44)
(The Puritans, conservative Christians who sought to purify the English church of vestiges of Roman Catholicism, flourished in the Tudor era and into the 17th century. In 1649, they controlled enough of England's power structure to execute King Charles I and place Oliver Cromwell as ruler of the Commonwealth. During this period, Puritans closed theaters, which they considered sinful, and taxed frivolities such as chimneys and glass windows. Puritan rule lasted until 1660, when King Charles II returned to power in 1660.)
5. Table C. with syphons, glasses, and Tantalus frame. (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, Act III, p. 80)
(Syphons were decorative instruments used in beverage and bar service. Charged with dry compounds, they produced carbon dioxide for adding fizz to non-carbonated drinks.)
6. What cynics you fellows are! (*Lady Windermere's Fan*, Act III, p. 92)
(The cynics were Greek philosophers of the 4th century B. C. who followed the example of Antisthenes, a disciple of Socrates, in challenging family and social conventions through outspoken opinions and shameless behaviors.)
7. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard. (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act I, p. 119)
(Scotland Yard, headquarters of London's Metropolitan Police near St. James's, Westminster, was the place from which Sir Robert Peel launched the first bobbies in 1829 to keep the peace, supervise traffic, and investigate local crime. In 1967, the new headquarters of London's police force opened at Victoria Street and Broadway.)
8. Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a university. (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act I, p. 123)
(Algernon, a supercilious Oxford man, sneers at Jack about the sophistication of literary criticism, the reasoned analysis, classification, interpretation, and evaluation of artistic works and popular culture through the application of established principles of excellence.)
9. Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation. (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act I, p. 129)
(Metaphysics is a philosophical study that determines the true nature of things, i. e., the meaning, structure, and principles of reality. Gwendolen describes Jack's confession of love as metaphysical speculation, an implication that his emotion is not real.)
10. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act I, p. 137)
(Apoplexy was a popular term for stroke or cerebral hemorrhage, caused by a broken blood vessel in the

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cranium. The seepage of blood creates pressure, causing a number of symptoms—physical collapse, unconsciousness, paralysis, aphasia, coma, and sudden death.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the three plays.

Motivation

1. What causes the change in Lord Darlington?

(Lord Darlington is a rake and man of the world who knows the failings of married men. His wooing of Lady Margaret Windermere begins with cynicism and lust, but shifts to compassion for her husband's faults. Without directly naming Arthur and Mrs. Eryllyne, Darlington implies that a similar couple married only two years have drifted apart. He insists that Margaret offer her opinion of obviously illicit behavior.)

Although Darlington realizes that Margaret and her associates think him wicked, he insists on an invitation to the birthday dance at Carlton House. When he witnesses her despair after Mrs. Eryllyne arrives and dances with Arthur, Darlington pursues Margaret as a means of rescue rather than debauchery. His intent to leave England the next day suggests that he is distancing himself from a doomed fascination with a married woman. At his residence, he confesses to Cecil Graham that he loves someone who can't return his ardor and that her sterling character has redeemed him from his former profligacy.)

Setting

2. Describe the dramatic qualities of Herod's palace.

(The setting for Salomé is a stagy blend of royal Judaeon banquet hall and terrace alongside the dark opening into an old cistern, now used as a prison for Jokanaan the prophet. The tetrarch's guests receive the ministrations of servants as they dine, drink, and laugh. A separate set of employees guards the terrace and cistern. Above the open terrace, the moon casts evocative shadows that cause characters to see images and feel idiosyncratic moods, which are the cause of the young Syrian's despair and suicide.)

The use of the terrace as the meeting place between Salomé and Jokanaan allows the soldiers to observe her willful, intoxicating behavior. The area suits the confrontation between Salomé and Herod and the wanton dance that he wheedles from her. The presentation of the prisoner's head and her removal of veils during the dance ally both the punitive and entertaining qualities of the tetrarch's residence. The tensions between the contrasting atmospheres erupt in the final action, in which the alluring dancer dies at her stepfather's command under the soldiers' shields.)

Character Development

3. How does Margaret mature on the night of her birthday dance?

(At a pivotal moment in her life and marriage, Lady Margaret Windermere learns something about herself, her husband, and her capacity for compassion. The playwright's choice of a birthday background suits her coming to knowledge about Arthur, Lord Windermere. She

learns from Lord Darlington, a disreputable man, that her husband lives a double life and gives money to a fallen woman. In her innocence, Margaret fails to pursue matters face to face and to differentiate between rumor and fact.

The birthday dance makes Margaret even more vulnerable. In the presence of esteemed guests, she attempts to welcome and entertain all without openly confronting Mrs. Eryllyne or angering Arthur, who dances with the woman that Margaret threatens to insult. Because husband and wife have not faced serious challenge to their relationship, each fails to be candid about the importance of Mrs. Eryllyne to their marriage. Margaret's flight to the residence of the dissolute Darlington and her concealment behind the curtain in his rooms result from her inexperience with serious interpersonal relationships. Meeting and appreciating the cool expertise of Mrs. Eryllyne educates Margaret about mature behavior. Ironically, the education comes from Margaret's own mother, whom she assumes is dead.)

Historical Milieu

4. How does Salomé illuminate the times?

(The tenuous position of the Judaeon tetrarch is obvious in his sycophantic relationship with Roman ambassadors. His edgy, unloving relationship with his wife/sister-in-law indicates his grasp of control through devious and dishonorable means. In the background conversation, commentary on the Jews and their squabbles over philosophical differences sets the tone of the first century A.D. Jokanaan, Wilde's fictional name for John the Baptist, predicts that the time is right for the arrival of the Messiah.)

Theme

5. How does Wilde illuminate fault in the concept of monogamous marriage?

(Wilde, like the playwrights of the Restoration era, stresses the weaknesses of matrimony as a human institution. Jaded and dubious about humanity's capability to remain monogamous, he presents multiple images of faithlessness—in Herod and his wife, Darlington, Mr. Hopper, and the married men who pursue Mrs. Eryllyne. The cynicism of Darlington and Algernon shows a pervasive belief that only the naive and inexperienced expect marital vows to bind people for life.)

Whatever his doubts about matrimony, Wilde stops short of lauding adulterers. He depicts Herod and Herodias as discontented in a relationship built on the murder of Herodias's first husband. Wilde depicts Darlington, a blatant roué with a bad reputation around women, as capable of falling in love with a dedicated wife and mother and of departing England to end his yearning for a pure woman who has no intention of betraying her family. Wilde also depicts both Algernon and Jack as eager to abandon their double identities in city and country for the sake of marriage to Cecily and Gwendolen, both worthy women. Overall, the lure of adultery belies the true behaviors of his characters, who choose marriage over cyclical pursuit of sexual conquests.)

Interpretation

6. What does Jack's interest in family establish about his values?

(Compared to other figures in Wilde's two drawing room comedies, Jack Worthing is the most vulnerable charac-

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ter in terms of family ties. Lacking his true identity, he clings to the black leather bag and the particulars of its discovery after Thomas Cardew found him in the pram in Victoria Station and brought him up like a son. Obviously loved and treasured in childhood, Jack is stable and financially secure, yet lacking in knowledge of his birth parents.

For all his reputation as a bounder, Wilde remains true to the values of family by turning Jack into a family man. The insistence of Algernon's Aunt Augusta that Jack reveal his qualities as a potential husband for Gwendolen is the force that drives his probing of the past. Wilde inserts the unlikely coincidence that Cecily's governess, Miss Prism—the glass through which the characters view the past—knows the reason for the disappearance of the baby boy and the discovery of the abandoned pram. Jack's search of army lists for the general's christian names completes the genealogy and proves that Algernon and Ernest are brothers.)

Conflict

7. How does Salomé cause her own death?

(From the beginning of the play, Salomé and her mother are uncomfortable under Herod's lustful gaze at his stepdaughter. Salomé knows her allure for the soldiers and guests and uses sexual wiles to gain a face-to-face confrontation with Jokanaan, the mystical prophet who scorns her mother as a fallen woman. Prophetically, her conquest of the young Syrian, who is captain of the guard, causes his suicide, the source of the blood on which Herod slips.

Herod's perpetuation of tension between himself, his wife, and his stepdaughter brings out the sybarism in Salomé. His foolish offer of anything up to half his kingdom leaves open to her the one favor she wants him to grant. After retrieving her garments and perfumes for the dance of the seven veils, she holds Herod in her power while beguiling him with sensuous dance. By forcing him to make good his promise, she unleashes anger and regret in a dangerous man, who had no intention of executing Jokanaan. Just as Herod was capable of imprisoning his own brother, the former tetrarch, he is sated of his desire to see her dance and cruelly orders her murder.)

Atmosphere

8. How does the identity of Margaret's mother intensify drama?

(Throughout *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Margaret ironically thinks of her mother and fantasizes about the kind lady who died and broke Margaret's father's heart. Arthur's willingness to pay blackmail and to risk his reputation by meeting with the scandalous Mrs. Erylne proves his great love for Margaret, whom he wants to protect from the revelation of an unsavory past. As Margaret and her mother come together at the birthday party, Arthur whisks the mother away in a dance and continues shielding his wife from associating too freely with her. He also protects Mrs. Erylne from public insult to stave off a confrontation that might destroy Margaret's reputation in front of her guests.

After the escapade in the wee hours at Darlington's residence, Margaret is filled with remorse for her hasty action. Mrs. Erylne comes close to revealing her par-

enthood, but manages to accept blame for the indiscretion, thus ruining her chances with Augustus. When Margaret withdraws to locate the photo of herself with Gerald as a parting gift, Arthur is able to speak openly with the blackmailer about the past and his attempt to conceal all from Margaret. When she returns to the morning room at Carlton House, Mrs. Erylne intentionally conceals her identity, accepts the picture and monogrammed fan, and encourages Margaret's daughterly relationship with her. The two women, both named Margaret, part forever, leaving the younger with her illusions about the beloved dead mother and the elder with her hopes for another chance far from England with Augustus.)

Author Purpose

9. Why does Wilde write about marriage?

(Marriage and the family were at the center of Victorian society, as exemplified by the devotion of Queen Victoria to her husband Albert. Married in 1840, they had nine children and a relationship that, with its love and fidelity, stood in stark contrast to that of previous royal marriages. After Albert's death in 1862, she spent the remaining years of her reign in mourning.

However, like many other aspects of Victorian society, the reverence for marriage hid a double standard. Women who committed adultery or had a child out of wedlock were scorned, but the same sins were ignored and tolerated among men. A classic example is Victoria's oldest son Albert, the future Edward VII, whose reputation for self-indulgence and womanizing stood in stark contrast to his father, who was respected for fidelity and Spartan virtues. Wilde's insight and understanding of late Victorian-era values provided the basis for his drawing room comedies and peripherally for the historical play about Herod, which present the realities of marriages that bring together men and women laden with human faults.)

Structure

10. Why does Wilde present *Salomé* in one act?

The play lacks enough character interaction for a lengthy presentation. Instead, Wilde presents the drama as a single act, a fictional footnote to an historical event that presages the emergence of Christianity. The duality of the staging presents Herod the monarch and his guests on one side of the stage and the dark past that brought him to power at the other end. Like a guilty conscience, the voice of Jokanaan refuses to cease its assault on the tetrarch's consciousness and immorality. Exacerbating the evil that beats like the wings of death overhead is the blood of the young Syrian, who, like the master, couldn't take his eyes from the temptress. His self-sacrifice causes Herod to slip on the terrace floor and to interpret the incident as a negative omen.

In one scene, the two sides of the stage merge in the murder and beheading of Jokanaan and the presentation of his head on a salver for Salomé's monstrous titillation. Herod realizes that the conniving stepdaughter has manipulated his desire for her own good and that she has no qualms about using the murder of a prophet as a reward for her dance.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Oscar Wilde delineates character not only by action and

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motivation, but by creating ideosyncratic language from a variety of sentence types and rhetorical patterns. Thus, each sounds like an individual speaking a unique and identifiable style:

1. In *Salomé*, the young Syrian speaks in bold hyperbole, he croons, "She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing."
2. In brief sentences, like an underling hissing a warning, the page of Herodias warns, "You are always looking at her. You look at her too much."
3. Jokanaan, the disembodied voice from the deep well, speaks the bold, far-seeing prophecy that rivets listeners with symbols: "The suckling child shall put his hand upon the dragon's lair, he shall lead the lions by their manes."
4. Herod, the man who is accustomed to supreme power, condemns in three words, "Kill that woman!"
5. Lord Darlington, the roué of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, speaks the hedging, hinting lines of a voyeur and gossip: "Do you think, then—of course I am only putting an imaginary instance—do you think that, in the case of a young married couple, say about two years married, if the husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of—well, more than doubtful character, is always calling upon her, lunching with her, and probably paying her bills—do you think that the wife should not console herself?"
6. Like Eve, misunderstanding the evil in the serpent's voice, Lady Windermere rises and innocently comments, "Don't stir, I am merely going to finish my flowers."
7. Mrs. Eryllynne, the supposed despoiler of marriages, is sure-footed in social settings. With purpose, she directs Arthur to suit her needs: "I am afraid of the women. You must introduce me to some of them."
8. Like a coaxing father, Arthur patronizes his inexperienced wife by offering to remove her from hardship: "You'll be all right at Selby. The season is almost over. There is no use staying on."
9. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the languid, self-indulgent voice of Algernon sounds like a man talking with an aura of casual self-absorption: "I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte."
10. Jack rejects Algy's insouciance with direct challenge: "For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical."
11. Cecily, the ingenue, sounds like a social butterfly-turned-flirt: "I have never met any really wicked person before. I felt rather frightened."
12. Lady Bracknell, who is Algy's Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen's mother, encapsulates in one comment her venality: "Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and dotting parents."

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art

1. Make an illustrated notebook of terms such as portmanteau, Tory, and the dance of the seven veils.
2. Sketch several poses of Margaret and infant Gerald. Select the ornate hats, gloves, dresses, jewelry, and

shoes of the period. Indicate the style in which upper class people dressed and blanketed babies and the type of prams in which they showed them off on outings.

Cinema

View films with late Victorian or Edwardian settings, characters, and situations. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and religious backgrounds.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of Jack's proposal to Gwendolen, Miss Prism's walk with Reverend Chasuble, Salomé's dance of the seven veils, Algernon eating muffins, Lady Windermere and Mrs. Eryllynne hiding behind the curtain, Arthur dancing at the birthday party, and Jack presenting the black leather bag as evidence to Aunt Augusta. Supply sketches of costumes and props.
2. Create a storyboard account of Jack's disappearance. Introduce witnesses and evidence in time order, beginning with his birth, Miss Prism's departure with the pram, arrival at Victoria Station, Mr. Cardew's discovery of the baby, and the discovery of the abandoned pram. Make a parallel storyboard about the unusual circumstances of Lady Margaret Windermere's or Salomé's childhood.
3. Compose a flow chart summarizing each character's opinions and participation in the discussion of marriage, including Herod, Herodias, Darlington, Margaret, the duchess, Agatha, Algernon, Gwendolen, and Aunt Augusta. Determine which characters care more about true love and commitment than about money, propriety, power, royal title, and social position.
4. Discuss additional details that the plays omit, for example, Salomé's relationship with her father, Aunt Augusta's memories of Jack in infancy, Mrs. Eryllynne's life after she abandoned her daughter, Herod's explanation of his older brother's 12-year imprisonment and murder, Narraboth and Naaman's qualifications for their jobs, Mr. Hopper's settlement with Agatha, Augustus's proposal to Mrs. Eryllynne, the young Syrian's reason for despair and method of suicide, and music, dress, refreshments, and decorations for Margaret's birthday dance.

Education

1. Role-play the part of Thomas Cardew. Outline a plan of bringing up an abandoned son and educating him for membership in the gentry, inheritance of property, and marriage with a suitable mate.
2. Propose ways of preparing Salomé for a royal role in the political, economic, and religious affairs of Judaea, for example, by introducing her to Roman legates or to Pharisees and Sadducees and encouraging her understanding of local interest in prophecy and a messiah.

Geography and Culture

1. Create a mural or web site on London in the late Victorian era or Judaea in the first century A. D. Note the sharp separation of classes into oppressors and oppressed, lay persons and religious hierarchy, natives and newcomers, poor and rich, aristocrats and working class, servants and masters, and royalty and subjects. Account for the tenuous position of Herod in Judaea and of Mrs.

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Erlynn in London.

2. Make a web site or bulletin board characterizing attitudes toward relatives. Include the duchess/Augustus, Mrs. Erlynn/Margaret, Aunt Augusta/Algernon, Cecily/Jack, Herod/Herodias, Gwendolen/Aunt Augusta, Agatha/the duchess, Jack/Thomas Cardew, and Salomé/Herod.
3. Explain the history of tea in England. Account for the choice of time, foods, and beverages. Discuss the use of tea as a late afternoon meal, a social occasion, and a family tradition. Describe dress, manners, and settings for tea.
4. Comment on snide references to Australia in Oscar Wilde's plays. Explain why the English have reason to disdain and regret the island continent's history and colonization by Europeans.

History and Social Studies

1. Discuss with a small group how money influences Augustus's engagement to Mrs. Erlynn, Herod's request for Salomé to dance, Mr. Hopper's engagement to Agatha, Aunt Augusta's acceptance of Cecily, Mrs. Erlynn's demands on Arthur, and Jack's appeal to Aunt Augusta as a suitable mate for Gwendolen.
2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of losing both parents. Account for Jack's presentation of the black leather bag and Lady Margaret Windermere's recollections of her father dying from heartbreak.
3. Divide the class into small groups to brainstorm ways to improve marriage for Herod and Herodias, Margaret and Arthur Windermere, Augustus and Mrs. Erlynn, Gwendolen and Jack, Miss Prism and Reverend Chasuble, the Duke and Duchess of Berwick, and Algernon and Cecily.
4. Lead a panel discussion of the effects of disenfranchisement of women on the choices that they make in when and whom to marry. Contrast the dependence of Miss Prism with that of Cecily, Agatha, Mrs. Erlynn, and Gwendolen. Explain why modern women live more equitable lives by educating themselves, owning their own property, working for a living wage, and managing their own finances.

Language Arts

1. Contrast news releases for radio, television, or print announcing the 12-year imprisonment and death of Herod's older brother and the marriage between the tetrach and his sister-in-law. Indicate public reaction to each event, especially Salomé, palace guards, Roman ambassadors, Pharisees, and Sadducees.
2. Prepare a dialogue dramatizing the reaction of guests to the arrival of Mrs. Erlynn and her dance with the host, Lord Arthur Windermere. Include the responses of Mr. Hopper, Margaret, the duchess, Agatha, Darlington, and Augustus.
3. Compose several possible notes from Margaret to Arthur concerning her whereabouts after the dance and her reasons for leaving home, husband, and child to elope with Lord Darlington.
4. Lead a debate about the weaknesses of Salomé, Herod, Herodias, Margaret, Arthur, Mrs. Erlynn, Darlington, Augustus, Jack, Algernon, Aunt Augusta, Gwendolen, and Cecily. Explain how the strengths of each make them interesting characters.

5. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, essays, and stories that reflect themes similar to those of Oscar Wilde's plays.
6. Explain in a theme the significance of the title *The Importance of Being Earnest*, particularly as it applies to deception to acquire social advancement or illicit pleasures. Propose other titles that express the sly bachelor shenanigans of Jack and Algernon, for example Bunbury Cross.
7. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character. Determine which characters reflect decadence or immorality.
8. Explain how clothing and mannerisms reflect character and events.

Law

1. Read aloud state laws governing the rights of children lost or abandoned at birth and adopted by strangers. Discuss Jack's relationship with Miss Prism, his mother, and Aunt Augusta; his adoption by Thomas Cardew; the inheritance of Manor House and five hundred acres in Shropshire; and wardship of Cecily.
2. Make a chart of advice to Arthur and others targeted by a greedy or desperate blackmailer. Comment on methods of ending Mrs. Erlynn's demands for money without subjecting the Windermeres to public humiliation.

Logic

Act out examples of specious logic. Choose models that display surface simplicity and hidden complexities, such as why Augustus returns to Mrs. Erlynn, how Herod won his sister-in-law Herodias as his wife, and why Jack is delighted with the truth about his past.

Psychology

1. Describe aloud the coquetry of Agatha, Mrs. Erlynn, Gwendolen, Salomé, and Cecily. Discuss the dishonesty of melodramatic poses, such as ignorance of a wooer's intentions, hurt feelings, jealousy, curiosity, shock, and dismay.
2. Using incidents from the three plays, comment on gradual changes in Herod, Darlington, the young Syrian, Jack, and Aunt Augusta. Discuss how past wrongs and poor choices victimize all five characters.
4. Characterize the moral strength and influence of Lady Margaret Windermere on Lord Darlington. Define her views on Puritanism and express their influence on her choices.
5. Write an encyclopedia entry on child abandonment. Add details that explain why Mrs. Erlynn chooses to pass as a childless woman and why her request for a picture of Margaret and Gerald suggests an emptiness in her life.

Science and Health

1. Compose a lecture on photos, blood typing, fingerprints, and DNA as methods of identifying parenthood. Explain why the latter two are more accurate than blood type as proofs of identity.
2. Make an illustrated time line of the tube, the public transportation system in London. Include names of rail lines that intersect at Victoria Station and a map indicating the area served by the Brighton Line.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of classism and exclusion.

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TEACHER'S NOTES

Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle identifiable groups, especially illegitimate children, fallen women, followers of a religious faith, and people lacking knowledge of their parentage? Why are good manners essential to heated discussions? How does coincidence explain the resolution of issues and triple reunion at the end of *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

2. Compose a print or audio guide and diagram to Shropshire. Contrast the lifestyle of country folk to that of urban dwellers in London flats like Algernon's luxurious apartment. Point out sites of interest in Shropshire, especially trails and walkways that offer a view.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Account for violence in the lives of characters in *Salomé*.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate compassion.
3. Compose a scene in which Jack and Algernon discuss the assets of married life. Include comments about Lane's cynicism, Cecily and Gwendolen as wives, the loss of Bunbury, satisfactions of city and country life, and the end of bachelorhood.
4. Make a character list and explain the personal flaws of each.
5. Account for the recurring motif of failed marriage in all three plays.

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VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

aberration	basilisk	debonair	loins	onyxes
absurd	censure	ignominy	mercenary	pagan
alienating	Christian	indiscretion	mitre	spheres
allusion	confounded	invaluable	nymphs	tetrarch

1. And mind you don't take this little _____ of Windermere's too much to heart.
2. Is that the Queen Herodias, she who wears a black _____ sewed with pearls, and whose hair is powdered with blue dust?
3. Most women, for instance, now-a-days, are rather _____.
4. Can't you recollect what our father's _____ name was?
5. You would stand anything rather than face the _____ of a world, whose praise you would despise.
6. I have _____ like the eyeballs of a dead woman.
7. The centaurs have hidden themselves in the rivers, and the _____ have left the rivers, and are lying beneath the leaves of the forest.
8. And Windermere knows that nothing looks so like innocence as an _____.
9. It is obvious that our social _____ have been widely different.
10. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in _____ the affections of my only ward.
11. And a sentimentalist, my dear Darlington, is a man who sees an _____ value in everything and doesn't know the market price of any single thing.
12. You knew that to spare her the _____ of learning that a woman like you was her mother, I would endure anything.
13. He was clothed in camel's hair, and round his _____ he had a leathern belt.
14. No use beating around the _____ bush.
15. I have invented an _____ permanent invalid called Bunbury.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND OTHER PLAYS

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the play with the corresponding character. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. Some of the answers will be used more than once and some not at all.

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| A. Duchess of Berwick | F. Mrs. Erylne | K. Jack | P. Naaman |
| B. Algernon | G. Agatha | L. Augustus | Q. Darlington |
| C. Cecily | H. Miss Prism | M. Chasuble | R. Parker |
| D. Salomé | I. Gwendolen | N. Herodias | S. Jokaanan |
| E. young Syrian | J. Herod | O. Margaret | T. Augusta |

- _____ 1. consents to a christening
- _____ 2. receives a fan for a birthday gift
- _____ 3. wants a proper husband for Agatha
- _____ 4. rants about wicked women, Sodom, and a messiah
- _____ 5. pretends to be Ernest at Manor House
- _____ 6. refuses to let her daughter dance
- _____ 7. married her brother-in-law
- _____ 8. reads and destroys a letter
- _____ 9. leaves a trail of blood on the terrace
- _____ 10. dances with an Australian
- _____ 11. confesses that Margaret has changed him
- _____ 12. orders soldiers to kill the dancer with their shields
- _____ 13. wrote a multi-volume sentimental novel
- _____ 14. recognizes the woman who took the baby away
- _____ 15. keeps a diary

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Jack appears at Manor House in mourning.
- _____ 2. The card that Mrs. Erylne receives is in Arthur's handwriting.
- _____ 3. Both Salomé and Gwendolen use seduction to win men.
- _____ 4. Augusta and the Duchess of Berwick refuse to compromise on worthy mates for their daughters.
- _____ 5. Margaret is unaware that she dropped her fan on the terrace of Carlton House.
- _____ 6. The photo taken with Gerald is a gift to the child's grandmother.
- _____ 7. The black leather bag proves that Miss Prism carried Jack to Victoria Station and abandoned him.
- _____ 8. Guests at the dance suspect that Mrs. Erylne will marry Augustus.
- _____ 9. Mrs. Erylne blackmails Arthur by threatening to expose Margaret's past.
- _____ 10. Jack thinks fondly over Thomas Cardew's charity.

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Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. Herod offers a reward up to half his _____ to Salomé, who performs the dance of seven _____.
2. To the womanizer, Lord _____, _____ declares she holds values in common with Puritans.
3. In _____'s private account book, Margaret finds large sums transferred to _____.
4. _____ pretends to have a younger brother named Ernest, which is the name he goes by in _____.
5. _____ recognizes the _____ on the black leather bag.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how the characters determine Jack's birth parents.
2. Explain why Herod imprisons Jokanaan.
3. Discuss the Duchess of Berwick's influence on Margaret.
4. Account for Mrs. Erlynne's lies and deceptions.
5. Summarize events that cause the deaths of Jokanaan and Herodias's first husband.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND OTHER PLAYS

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. After the dance, the duchess questions
A. Mrs. Eryllyne about Augustus's proposal.
B. Agatha about Mr. Hopper's intentions.
C. Margaret about Arthur's absence.
D. Mrs. Eryllyne about her past.
- _____ 2. The Nazarenes discuss the whereabouts of
A. Herod's older brother.
B. Salomé.
C. the Roman ambassadors.
D. the Messiah.
- _____ 3. Observers on the terrace comment on
A. Mrs. Eryllyne's resemblance to Margaret.
B. Naaman's skill.
C. Algernon's huge appetite.
D. the moon.
- _____ 4. The army list indicates
A. the general's christian names.
B. that the young Syrian is captain of the guard.
C. that the Messiah had left Samaria for Jerusalem.
D. an unsuccessful search for the owner of the abandoned pram.
- _____ 5. The police found
A. a three-volume novel.
B. a fan.
C. a salver holding calling cards.
D. Algernon's missing baby brother.
- _____ 6. Herod thinks it a bad omen
A. to slip in blood.
B. for the moon to be hidden in clouds.
C. for Salomé to dance before the palace staff.
D. that Naaman was the executioner for the former tetrarch.
- _____ 7. Chasuble informs Augusta that
A. the double christenings took place in the vestry.
B. he has married the governess.
C. he is celibate.
D. Jack is upstairs looking for proof of his birth in the dressing room.
- _____ 8. Mrs. Eryllyne asks
A. for Margaret to write her name on the fan.
B. Lady Windermere for a picture that includes Gerald.
C. Augustus to forgive her for following Darlington home after the dance.
D. Arthur to stop sending her money.
- _____ 9. The guests seem unaware that
A. Herod has left the party to retire for the evening.
B. Arthur dances first with Mrs. Eryllyne.
C. Margaret resents Mrs. Eryllyne's presence at the birthday celebration.
D. Cecily and Gwendolen have become close friends.
- _____ 10. Jack is delighted
A. to have Cecily's approval of his choice of wife.
B. with Chasuble's interest in Miss Prism.
C. to have a brother.
D. with the news of Bunbury's sudden death

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND OTHER PLAYS

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Match the following actions with names of places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| A. Manor House morning room | F. cistern | K. Algy's morning room |
| B. Carlton House | G. Rome | L. behind the curtain |
| C. Victoria Station | H. dressing room | M. garden |
| D. Herod's terrace | I. desert | N. Sydney |
| E. Grosvenor Street | J. vestry | O. Cappadocia |

- _____ 1. Mr. Hopper proposes.
- _____ 2. Eryllyne overhears Arthur's reaction to finding his wife's fan.
- _____ 3. Thomas Cardew finds a baby boy.
- _____ 4. Aunt Augusta finds the cucumber sandwiches all gone.
- _____ 5. Algernon eats muffins.
- _____ 6. The host slips on blood.
- _____ 7. Herod imprisoned his elder brother.
- _____ 8. Jokanaan feeds on locusts and honey.
- _____ 9. Everybody laughs at Stoics.
- _____ 10. People are more exclusive than Londoners.
- _____ 11. Miss Prism prepared a baby for an outing.
- _____ 12. Miss Prism awaits Chasuble for an hour and 45 minutes.
- _____ 13. A king insults Herod's ambassadors.
- _____ 14. Lane reports the consumption of eight bottles of champagne and a pint.
- _____ 15. The duchess wonders why Windermere isn't attending a party.

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. Who invites Mrs. Eryllyne to the birthday dance?
- _____ 2. Who considers Herodias a disreputable woman?
- _____ 3. Who writes during unoccupied hours?
- _____ 4. Who keeps a diary?
- _____ 5. Who intends to leave England the next day?
- _____ 6. What food is Augusta's favorite at tea?
- _____ 7. Whom does the duchess consider a wicked man?
- _____ 8. Who insists that a guest return to town in the dog-cart?
- _____ 9. Who forbids the raising of the dead?
- _____ 10. Who rejects fifty peacocks?

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Describe how three couples come together at the end of *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*.
- 2. Contrast the flirtations of Herod, Cecily, and Mrs. Eryllyne.
- 3. Describe events on the night of the birthday dance.
- 4. Summarize the proofs of true love in Arthur, Darlington, and Jack.
- 5. Describe personal details that characterize the good humor of Jack and Algernon.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AND OTHER PLAYS
ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. aberration | 6. onyxes | 11. absurd |
| 2. mitre | 7. nymphs | 12. ignominy |
| 3. mercenary | 8. indiscretion | 13. loins |
| 4. Christian | 9. spheres | 14. confounded |
| 5. censure | 10. alienating | 15. invaluable |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. M | 6. N | 11. Q |
| 2. O | 7. N | 12. J |
| 3. A | 8. F | 13. H |
| 4. S | 9. E | 14. T |
| 5. B | 10. G | 15. C |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

- kingdom, veils
- Lord Darlington, Lady Windermere
- Arthur, Mrs. Eryllyne
- Jack, London
- Miss Prism, initials

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A |
| 2. D | 7. C. |
| 3. D | 8. B |
| 4. A | 9. C |
| 5. A | 10. C |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. D | 11. E |
| 2. L | 7. F | 12. J |
| 3. C | 8. I | 13. O |
| 4. K | 9. G | 14. K |
| 5. M | 10. N | 15. B |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. Arthur | 6. cucumber sandwiches |
| 2. Jokanaan | 7. Darlington |
| 3. Miss Prism | 8. Jack |
| 4. Cecily | 9. Herod |
| 5. Darlington | 10. Salomé |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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