

## **“The Importance of Being Earnest”**

### **CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

**NOTE: All characters need excellent Standard BRITISH Accent with excellent, even clipped, diction:**

AGE RANGES NEEDED:      Jack Worthing (28 to 35ish)  
   Algernon Moncrieff (25 to 30ish)  
   Gwendolyn Fairfax (25 to 30ish)  
   Cecily Cardew (18 to 23ish)  
   Lady Bracknell (50ish)  
   Miss Prism (50+)  
   Reverend Chasuble (50ish)  
   Servants Lane & Merriman (50ish)

**John\* Worthing:**            (\*AKA: “Jack” and “Ernest” Worthing)

The play’s protagonist, Jack Worthing, is a seemingly responsible and respectable young man who leads a double life. In Hertfordshire, where he has a country estate, Jack is known as Jack. But in London he is known as “Ernest”. As an infant, Jack was discovered in a large handbag left in the cloakroom of Victoria train station by a wealthy old man who adopted him and later made Jack the guardian to his granddaughter, Cecily.

Jack is in love with his friend Algernon’s cousin, Gwendolyn Fairfax.

**Algernon Moncrieff:**

Algernon is a charming, idle, well-dressed bachelor and nephew of Lady Bracknell and cousin of Gwendolyn Fairfax, and best friend of Jack Worthing, whom he has known for years as Ernest.

Algernon is brilliant, witty, selfish, and given to making delightful paradoxical and epigrammatic pronouncements. He has invented a fictional friend called “Bunbury” (who he says is a poor invalid whose frequent sudden relapses allow Algernon to wriggle out of any unpleasant or dull social obligations).

**Gwendolyn Fairfax:**

Algernon’s cousin. Lady Bracknell’s daughter. Gwendolyn is in love with Jack but knows him only as “Ernest”. She is the epitome of taste and high fashion. She speaks with authority on matters of society and morality. She is sophisticated, intellectual, cosmopolitan and utterly pretentious. Gwendolyn is fixated on the name “Ernest” and says she will not marry a man with any other name.

Cecily Cardew:

Jack's ward, the granddaughter of the old gentleman who found and adopted the infant Jack. Cecily is probably the most realistically drawn character in the play. Like Gwendolyn, she too is obsessed with the name "Ernest". But from her ultra sheltered background, she is even more intrigued by the idea of "wickedness". She has only heard of Jack's invented brother (named Ernest) and in her imagination she imagines an elaborate romance and even courtship between herself and her guardian's imaginary brother, Ernest.

Lady Bracknell:

Algernon's snobbish, mercenary and domineering aunt. Gwendolyn's mother. Lady Bracknell married late and well. Her primary goal in life is to see Gwendolyn does the same. She has a list of "eligible young men" and gives each a thorough interview. She is given to making hilarious pronouncements which she purports to be ultimate truth. Through this character the author (Oscar Wilde) satirizes the hypocrisy and stupidity of 1890 British aristocracy. When she gives a dinner party she prefers her husband to eat downstairs with the servants if it will "put her planned table seating off". She is cunning, narrow-minded, authoritarian and possibly the most quotable character in the play.

Miss Prism:

Cecily's governess. A sweet, exacting teacher who speaks in clichés. A Puritan of the first order but secretly in love with Dr. Chasuble. Despite her rigidity, she has a softer side. She speaks wistfully of having once written a 3-volume romantic novel which was unfortunately lost or abandoned.

Dr. Chasuble:

(Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.) A vicar on Jack's estate. A soft cheery soul, who brings sunshine with him. He's very proper, an old bachelor, but has feelings for Miss Prism which he knows he must keep in check. The D.D. after his name means "Doctor of Divinity".

Servants:

There are two different Servants: Lane and Merriman. They will be played by one person and needs to be completely unique from one another in voice, posture and deportment. (Lane is in the first part of the play and Merriman is in the last half.)