The Importance of Being Earnest

PORTFOLIO ASSIGNMENTS

This portfolio is to be completed as we read the play The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde. It consists of questions on the novel and topics mentioned and/or suggested by the novel. You will also write short essays and a short story.

Make sure to submit your assignments in your portfolio binder. ALL assignments are to be in the order assigned.

This portfolio is to be placed in a new or like-new one-inch three-ring binder which will be kept in the classroom for this purpose. It is not to be used for any other purpose. (They sell these at stores like WalMart for about 97 cents.)

You may either hand-write or type this assignment. Do not answer any of the questions with a "yes" or "no." Each question should be answered in a way that fully responds to the question, always using complete sentences (and paragraphing as appropriate).

For example, if you are asked who the author is, answer in complete sentences, beginning with something like, "The author’s full name is . . ."

More complex questions will require more complex, longer answers.

If using a computer you should copy the full question, then provide your answer under it before moving on to the next question. (An easy way to do this would be to copy and paste the questions from the website to your document.) Always include the section heading (“BOOK PRE-READING ASSIGNMENTS” for example). If you are handwriting your portfolio make sure to include the section heading, the question number, and the topic of the question before providing your complete answer.

This Portfolio is to be submitted in chunks/sections, as we read. You will be told when each portion is due. You will have one late day on each section.

BOOK PRE-READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read "Oscar Wilde Goes West" by Margaret Malkind (p. 100-109). Then write 125 words on What Oscar Wilde Was Like to Lillie, based upon that reading.
2. On page 127 we find an Oscar Wilde quote, "Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught." What does Wilde mean by this?
3. Read "The Days I Knew" by Lillie Langtry (p. 112-117). Then write 125 words on What Oscar Wilde Was Like to Lillie, based upon that reading.
4. Write 50 words explaining what you think the title of the play means.

SECTION ASSIGNMENTS

ACT 1 Part 1

1) What does Algernon mean when he says, “I keep science for Life” and later connects this idea to Lane preparing the cucumber sandwiches for Lady Bracknell (p. 1)? (50-word minimum)
2) What do we learn about Algernon’s relationship with his servant Lane from their conversation about marriage? (50-word minimum)
3) In the world of the play, how do expectations related to “moral responsibility” relate to social class differences? Why is this humorous (p. 2)? (50-word minimum)
4) Algernon says, “the very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact” (p.4). How does this statement critique Victorian attitudes toward marriage? (50-word minimum)
5) “Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn’t. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn’t read” (p. 6). What is Wilde saying about modern culture? (50-word minimum)
6) Why does Jack establish two different identities for himself—one for the country and another for the city? (50-word minimum)
7) Why does Jack initially lie about his relationship to Cecily? What does his decision to lie say about his definition of seriousness differ from Miss Prism? In what ways might their ages affect their views on the subject? (50-word minimum)
8) In Act I, Jack says, “Cecily is not a silly, romantic girl” (p. 27). Do you think his description is accurate? Why or why not? (50-word minimum)
9) What is Miss Prism’s attitude toward the practices of the Primitive Church? What does her attitude reveal about the Primitive Church? What does her attitude reveal about the Primitive Church? What does her attitude reveal about

ACT 1 Part 2

11) Based on Lady Bracknell and Algernon’s first exchange, what do we learn about Lady Bracknell’s character? What role do you predict she’ll play in the story (p. 16)? (50-word minimum)
12) What kind of relationship do you think Lady Bracknell has with her husband? (50-word minimum)
13) How do we know Algernon and Jack are close friends? Can you think of a similar exchange you’ve had with a good friend? Describe. (50-word minimum)
14) What evidence from the script tells us that the setting for the play is late-Victorian England? (50-word minimum)
15) How does Lady Bracknell’s question about whether Jack was born in the “purple of commerce” or “the ranks of the aristocracy” reflect on the social structure of the upper class in Victorian England (p. 23)? (50-word minimum)
16) Explain the absurdity of Jack’s “romantic origin” (p. 29). (50-word minimum)
17) Why does Lady Bracknell not consider Jack an eligible husband for Gwendolen? (50-word minimum)
18) Why does Jack find it necessary to “kill” his brother Ernest? (50-word minimum)
19) Which character do you think most represents the voice of the playwright? Why? Provide evidence to support your claim. (50-word minimum)
20) Identify moments in Act I when Wilde utilizes irony as a comedic device. (50-word minimum)

ACT II Part 1

1) What does Cecily mean when she describes her Uncle Jack as being “very serious” (p. 33)? How does her definition of seriousness differ from Miss Prism? In what ways might their ages affect their views on the subject? (50-word minimum)
2) In Act I, Jack says, “Cecily is not a silly, romantic girl” (p. 27). Do you think his description is accurate? Why or why not? (50-word minimum)
3) What can you infer about Miss Prism when she corrects Dr. Chasuble upon being called “Egeria” and reminds him that her name is Laetitia (p. 35)? (50-word minimum)
4) What new perspectives do Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble bring to the play? (50-word minimum)
5) What is Miss Prism’s attitude toward the practices of the Primitive Church? What does her attitude reveal about
her relationship with Dr. Chasuble (p. 40)? (50-word minimum)
6) Compare and contrast Miss Prism and Lady Bracknell. What factors have shaped their values? (100-word minimum)
7) What is Miss Prism referring to when she says, “I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject [christenings]. But they don’t seem to know what thrift is” (p. 43)? What does her comment reveal about her attitudes toward the lower class? (50-word minimum)
8) What is the significance of a christening? Why are people often christened at birth? (50-word minimum)
9) Responding to Jack’s comment about him being overdressed, Algernon says, “If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely overdressed” (p. 48). Algenon’s character might be described as a “dandy”—a person for whom appearance is of the utmost importance. How does Algernon’s comment reflect Wilde’s views on aesthetics? (100-word minimum)
10) In what ways is Cecily’s personality different from Gwendolen’s? (100-word minimum)

**Act II Part 2**

11) Why does Cecily say she was engaged to “Ernest” (Algernon) before she ever met him in person? (50-word minimum)
12) How does Cecily’s diary mirror Jack’s brother and Algernon’s invalid friend? (50-word minimum)
13) What is humorous about Algernon’s line “Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon” (p. 54)? (50-word minimum)
14) Why do Gwendolen and Cecily want to marry an “Ernest”? (50-word minimum)
15) What does Wilde’s view seem to be towards formal education? (50-word minimum)
16) Why do Cecily and Gwendolen keep diaries? What’s the purpose of a diary for young women during this time? (50-word minimum)
17) How does Gwendolen’s assessment of her father’s status within his family stand in contrast to conventional Victorian notions of gender? (50-word minimum)
18) How does the scene between Cecily and Gwendolen on pp. 55-62 exemplify the Comedy of Manners genre? (50-word minimum)
19) After Jack and Algernon’s lies are revealed, how does Wilde use triviality to keep the play from becoming too “serious”? (50-word minimum)
20) Is it completely absurd for Jack and Algernon to change their names to Ernest in order for Gwendolen and Cecily to marry them? Can you think of other changes (i.e. religion, occupation, residence) individuals living in contemporary society might make to be a suitable mate for their intended partner? (75-word minimum)

**Act III**

1) What effect does Lady Bracknell’s appearance have on the newly reconciled lovers? (50-word minimum)
2) How does Jack convince Lady Bracknell that Cecily is a suitable wife for her nephew Algernon? (50-word minimum)
3) How is Lady Bracknell’s monologue reacting to Cecily’s inheritance a way of Wilde mocking the hypocrisy of Victorian society? (77-word minimum)
4) What is ironic about Lady Bracknell saying, “To speak frankly, I am not in favor of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other’s character before marriage, which I think is never advisable”? (78-word minimum)
5) How does exaggeration contribute to the humor in the discussion? (50-word minimum)
6) After Jack learns the truth of his birth, he excitedly embraces Miss Prism and comments on the double standards between men and women. What statement, if any, do you think Wilde is trying to make about gender inequalities? (50-word minimum)
7) What do we learn about Jack’s birth father? (50-word minimum)
8) At the end of the play, Jack says to Gwendolen, “…it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?” She replies, “I can. For I feel sure that you are sure to change” (p. 89). What is Wilde’s opinion about honesty? (50-word minimum)
9) What does Lady Bracknell mean when she tells Jack that he seems “to be displaying signs of triviality” (p. 89)? (50-word minimum)
10) Rank the characters in order from most to least earnest or moral. What are the standards on which you have based your rankings? (Ranking chart plus 50-word minimum)

**AFTER READING ASSIGNMENTS**

1) Why does Wilde title the play “The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People”? (50-word minimum)
2) What are the conflicts in The Importance of Being Earnest? What types of conflict (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) did you notice in this work? (100-word minimum)
3) Which of the characters in the play are fully developed. Explain how and why. (100-word minimum)
4) How does dramatic irony create humor in The Importance of Being Earnest? Identify a handful of instances in which the audience members know more about what is going on than the characters on stage. Why does this create humor? (100-word minimum)
5) What is the role of textuality in this play—do letters and diaries have a stronger reliability or ring of truth than conversation? (50-word minimum)
6) Analyze the various times that the characters eat in this play, primarily the cucumber sandwiches and the muffins. Does eating serve a primarily social or anti-social function? (75-word minimum)
7) What is the role of women in the text? How are mothers represented? What about single/independent women? (75-word minimum)
8) Algernon observes that: “Women only call each other sister when they have called each other a lot of other things first.” How does the development of the relationship between Cecily and Gwendolen bear out this remark? What causes them to bond together? What causes them to behave competitively? (150-word minimum)
9) How does Wilde use the subject of cucumber sandwiches to reveal the characters of Jack and Alg? (50-word minimum)
10) To a certain extent, Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble are also satirical figures through whom Wilde attacks British institutions, namely education and the Church of England. Explain briefly what aspects of these institutions Wilde is satirizing. (75-word minimum)

**CREATIVE WRITING**

Continue the story. What happens to the characters next? Either in the form of a play, or as a short story, continue the tale of The Importance of Being Earnest. (750-word minimum)