



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

The Importance of Being Earnest

based on the book by
Oscar Wilde

Written by
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oscar Wilde

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on October 16, 1854, in Dublin, Ireland, to Sir William Wilde, a renowned ear and eye surgeon, and Jane Francesca Elgee, a writer and Irish nationalist.

After being home schooled by his mother until the age of nine, Oscar Wilde went to Portora Royal School in 1864. In 1871, he entered Trinity College in Dublin, and proved himself to be an outstanding student, winning the Berkeley Gold Medal, the highest award for students of classical studies. Shortly afterward, Wilde won a scholarship to Magdalen College in Oxford, where he continued his study of the classics and became part of the Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetes believed that art should be valued based on beauty and the pleasure that can be derived from observing it, an idea that is discussed extensively in Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. While at Magdalen College, Wilde won the 1878 Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna." He graduated in 1878, with a double first (highest honors in two areas of study) in classical moderations and Literae Humaniores.

Wilde returned to Ireland after graduating from Magdalen. In Dublin, he met and fell in love with Florence Balcombe. When she did not return his affections and, instead, became engaged to Bram Stoker (author of *Dracula*), Wilde vowed to leave Ireland forever. He spent the next six years on a lecture tour that took him to London, Paris, and parts of the United States. While in London, Wilde met Constance Lloyd, the daughter of Queen's Counsel Horace Lloyd, and they married in 1884. Constance was given a generous allowance by her father, allowing her and Wilde to live a comfortably luxurious lifestyle. The couple had two sons, Cyril (1885) and Vyvyan (1886).

In 1891, Wilde was introduced to Lord Alfred Douglas, the third son of the 9th Marquess of Queensberry. The two became close companions, and although Wilde affirmed that he and Douglas were only emotionally and intellectually intimate, the Marquess suspected that Wilde was corrupting his son and encouraging him to engage in homosexual acts. The idea led the Marquess to enter Wilde's home, verbally harass him, and leave a visiting card at Wilde's club denouncing him as 'a posing sodomite.' Wilde responded to the latter action by accusing the Marquess of committing criminal libel. Although the Marquess was arrested, the conflict exposed Wilde's controversial relationship with Douglas to public censure. In 1895, Wilde was put on trial for homosexual acts. He was convicted of 'gross indecency' and sentenced to two years of hard labor.

Wilde was imprisoned in the Reading Gaol, where he composed a 50,000-word letter to Douglas, but was prohibited from sending it until his release. An abridged version of the letter was afterward published by Wilde's friend Robert Ross under the title *De Profundis* in 1905, and it has since been reproduced in various lengths until the final version was published by Wilde's son in 1965.

Following his release in May 1897, Wilde reunited with Douglas. He then spent the remainder of his life abroad. Wilde lived in relative poverty at the Hotel d'Alsace in Paris, until he died of cerebral meningitis on November 30, 1900.

Major Works

“The Happy Prince and Other Tales” (children’s stories, 1888)

“The House of Pomegranates” (children’s stories, 1892)

The Picture of Dorian Gray (novel, 1891)

Lady Windermere’s Fan (play, 1892)

A Woman of No Importance (play, 1893)

An Ideal Husband (play, 1895)

The Importance of Being Earnest (play, 1895)

“The Ballad of Reading Gaol” (poem, 1898)

INTRODUCTION - *The Importance of Being Earnest*

This LitPlan has been designed to develop students' reading, writing, thinking, and language skills through exercises and activities related to *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It includes seventeen lessons, supported by extra resource materials.

The **introductory lesson** will familiarizes students with the Victorian Era and prompt them to make predictions about the themes and motifs in the play.

The **reading assignments** vary in length but are fairly short. Students have approximately 15 minutes of pre-reading work prior to each reading assignment. This pre-reading work involves reviewing the study questions for the assignment and doing vocabulary work for selected words students will encounter in their reading.

The **study guide questions** are fact-based; students can find the answers right in the text. The questions come in two formats: short answer or multiple-choice. To best use these materials, we recommend using the short answer questions as study guides for students (since answers will be more complete) and the multiple-choice questions for occasional quizzes.

The **vocabulary work** is intended to enrich students' vocabularies as well as to aid in their understanding of the play. Prior to each reading assignment, students will complete a two-part worksheet for selected vocabulary words in the upcoming reading assignment. Part I focuses on students' use of general knowledge and contextual clues by giving the sentence in which the word appears in the text. Students are to write down what they think the word means based on its usage. Part II reinforces comprehension of the words by having students match them to the correct definitions based on the words' contextual usage. Students should then have an understanding of the words when they encounter them in the text.

After each reading assignment, students will formulate answers for the study guide questions. Discussion of these questions serves as a **review** of the most important events and ideas presented in the reading assignments.

After students have read the play, the teacher can use the **vocabulary review** lesson to compile the vocabulary lists for the reading assignments and give students a review of the words they have studied.

There is a **Group Project and Presentation** in this unit. Students are asked to rewrite a section of the play so that the story is set in the present day, and the characters use colloquial speech. This project requires students to not only understand the basic essence of the plot and the characters, but also write in a way that makes the dialogue and action informative and entertaining. Furthermore, students will be asked to memorize their lines and perform their scenes in front of the class, thus practicing their public speaking skills.

There are three **writing assignments**, each with the purpose of informing, persuading, or expressing personal opinions. The first writing assignment asks students to research and report on Victorian marriage conventions. The second writing assignment asks students to explain how Oscar Wilde's life, the Victorian Era, and the Aesthetic Movement influenced the text. In the third assignment, students must use the play to develop an opinion about how personal identities are created and developed.

There is a **non-fiction reading assignment**. Students must read non-fiction articles, books, etc., to gather information about the themes discussed in the play.

The **review lesson** pulls together the entire unit. The teacher is given four or five choices of activities or games to use, all of which serve to review the information presented in the unit.

The **unit test** comes in two formats: multiple-choice or short answer. As a convenience, two different tests for each format have been included. There is also an advanced short answer unit test for higher-level students.

This unit includes additional **support materials**. The **Unit Resource Materials** section provides suggestions for **bulletin board ideas**, crossword and word search puzzles related to the play, and extra worksheets. This section also includes a list of **extra class activities** the teacher can choose from to enhance the unit or use as a substitution for an exercise the teacher might feel is inappropriate for his or her class. In addition, there are **extra discussion questions/writing assignments**. These questions focus on interpretation, critical analysis, and personal response, employing a variety of thinking skills and adding to the students' understanding of the play. **Answer keys** are located directly after the **reproducible student materials** throughout the unit. The **Vocabulary Resource Materials** section includes similar worksheets and games to reinforce the vocabulary words.

The **level** of this unit can be varied depending upon the criteria on which the individual assignments are graded, the teacher's expectations of his or her students in class discussions, and the formats chosen for the study guides, quizzes, and test. If the teacher has other ideas or wants to use other activities, they can usually easily be inserted prior to the review lesson.

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UNIT OBJECTIVES - *The Importance of Being Earnest*

1. Students will research the historical context of the play and determine how the work is a product of its time period.
2. Students will determine to what extent the author's life influenced the play.
3. Students will compare and contrast characters in the play and identify characters who act as foils in the story.
4. Students will trace the motif of courtship and marriage in the text.
5. Students will identify and explain the function of dramatic and verbal irony.
6. Students will practice oral reading.
7. Students will analyze the use of epigrams in the play.
8. Students will demonstrate their creative writing skills.
9. Students will effectively inform, persuade, and express their personal opinions through their writing.
10. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical, and personal.
11. Students will make connections with the material in the text and apply the lessons learned to their lives.
12. Students will answer questions to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the main events and characters as they relate to the author's theme development.
13. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the play through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with it.
14. Students will participate in large and small group discussions.

READING ASSIGNMENTS - *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Date Assigned	Assignment	Completion Date
	Reading Assignment 1 Act I	
	Reading Assignment 2 Act II	
	Reading Assignment 3 Act III	
	Whole Play Whole Play	

UNIT OUTLINE - *The Importance of Being Earnest*

1	2	3	4	5
Victorian Era Lecture Theme and Motif Prediction Distribution of Materials	Oscar Wilde Biography Theme and Motif Prediction (cont.) PVR: Act I	Study ?s Act I Jack and Algernon Venn Diagram Foils	Non-fiction Assignment	Writing Assignment #1: Inform PVR: Act II
6	7	8	9	10
Study ?s Act II Viewpoints of Marriage in the Play	Dramatic and Verbal Irony Cecily and Gwendolen Character Motivation	Oral Reading Assignment PVR: Act III	Study ?s Act III Character Review Project Assignments	Epigrams Group Work for Project
11	12	13	14	15
Ideal Husband Comparison Writing Group Work for Project	Writing Assignment #2: Persuade Group Work for Project	Writing Assignment #3: Personal Opinion Group Work for Project	Group Performances	Group Performances Vocabulary Review
16	17			
Unit Review	Test			

Key: P = Preview Study Questions V = Vocabulary Work R = Read

LESSON ONE

Objectives:

1. To learn about the important political, economic, and social issues in the Victorian Era
2. To discuss the extent to which literature is the product of the time period in which it is written
3. To make predictions about what themes and motifs will be developed in the play

Activity 1:

Ask students the following preliminary discussion questions about the Victorian Era:

- What do you already know about the Victorian Era (1837-1901)? The Industrial Revolution? British Imperialism?
- To what extent do you think politics and the economy influence literature?

Then, present the lecture notes on the Victorian Era that accompany this lesson.

Activity 2:

When you have concluded the lecture, ask students to make predictions about the themes and motifs of the play based up on what was happening at the time it was written. Create a list of the students' answers on an overhead or poster board that can be displayed to the class. Keep a copy of the responses, and revisit them when your class has finished reading the play.

Activity 3:

Distribute the materials students will use in this unit. Explain in detail how students are to use these materials.

Study Guides: Students should read the study guide questions for each reading assignment prior to beginning the reading assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in the section they are about to read. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the questions to review the important events and ideas from that section of the book. Students should keep the study guides as study materials for the unit test.

Vocabulary: Prior to reading a reading assignment, students will do vocabulary work related to the section of the book they are about to read. Following the completion of the reading of the book, there will be a vocabulary review of all the words used in the vocabulary assignments. Students should keep their vocabulary work as study materials for the unit test.

Reading Assignment Sheet: You need to fill in the reading assignment sheet to let students know by when their reading has to be completed. You can either write the assignment sheet up on a side blackboard or bulletin board, and leave it there for students to see each day, or you can make copies for each student to have. In either case, you should advise students to become very familiar with the reading assignments so they know what is expected of them.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 - *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Informational: Courtship & Marriage in the Victorian Era

Prompt:

The Importance of Being Earnest focuses not only on issues of mistaken identity, but also on courtship and marriage in the Victorian Era. The motif first presents itself in Act I, when Jack proposes to Gwendolen, and Lady Bracknell expresses disapproval of the match. The reader can correctly assume that this play is a romantic comedy and that ideas of love, engagement, and marriage will be prevalent.

Research the conventions of upper-class courtship and marriage in the Victorian Era, answering the following questions:

- Why was marriage important in the Victorian Era?
- In general, at what age did men and women get married?
- What characteristics did men and women typically look for in their marriage partners?
- Where and how did people interested in marriage initially meet?
- How did two people who were interested in each other become better acquainted?
- How did men and women become engaged?
- How much involvement did the fiancés' families have in their engagement and marriage?

Pre-writing:

After researching the required information at the library/media center, use your findings to write a report about Victorian upper-class courtship and marriage. Paraphrase or summarize what you have read instead of using direct quotations.

Drafting:

Introduce your topic in the first paragraph, being sure to end it with a thesis statement. Then, write several body paragraphs, each describing the courtship and marriage conventions in Victorian society. Conclude your essay by making modern connections to the courtship and marriage practices in the 21st century.

Peer Conference/Revising:

When you finish the rough draft of your composition, ask a student who sits near you to read it. After reading your draft, your classmate should tell you what he or she liked best about your work, which parts were difficult to understand, and ways in which your work could be improved. Reread your paper considering your classmate's comments, and make the corrections you think are necessary.

Proofreading/Editing:

Do a final proofreading of your essay, double-checking your grammar, spelling, organization, and the clarity of your ideas.