

Reflections:

*A Student Response Journal for...*

*The Importance  
of Being Earnest  
by Oscar Wilde*

written by Amber Reed

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**Act I**

1. Algernon admits to lacking musical talent, but he claims that a passion for music is his gift. Write a one-page journal entry about a hobby or activity that you enjoy. What skills are involved, and how do you rate yourself in skill? Do you believe that doing it well is important, or is the pleasure from simply doing what you like all that matters. Why or why not?
2. Lane ridicules marriage when he comments on the poor quality of champagne found in the households of married couples. His comment signifies an underlying theme of the play: the lack of reverence for marriage.

Compose a list of eight advantages and disadvantages of marriage. When your list is complete, write a brief summary paragraph on whether you believe that marriage is a positive or negative venture.

3. Algernon insinuates that the upper class is immoral and that the lower class makes up the moral composition of society. In your opinion, is this an accurate depiction? Write a letter to a friend discussing how money affects an individual's moral values. Do you believe, for instance, that money changes a person? Relate an example from a book, movie, or real life to support your point of view.

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## *Response Journal*

4. In his discussion with Jack, Algernon states that marriage proposals are unromantic because they conclude the excitement of dating. Choose one of the following activities to complete:
  - A. If the time comes, how do you imagine your engagement will take place? Write a descriptive paragraph about how you want the event to go.
  - B. Write a paragraph about a marriage proposal that you think is funny, exciting, or strange. The story may be from a book, movie, or real life. You do not need to know the people; the story may be something that you heard about in the news. Describe the event and why you think it is interesting.
5. Algernon states, "If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact." Jack replies, "The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted." Consider the high divorce rate today. Create a list of five common causes of divorce. Next, create a list of five ways in which you believe the divorce rate might be able to be lowered.
6. Jack withdraws his offer for a reward once his missing cigarette case is found. His retraction, however, offends Algernon, who found the case and expects a reward. Pretend that you are Algernon, and you are confronting Jack about the reward. Write a conversation between yourself and Jack in which you express how his behavior makes you feel.

**Jack:** There is no reason that I should offer an award now that the case is found. Why should you care? Return it to me at once.

**You:** I feel that you...

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7. Jack and Algernon nonchalantly lie to their relatives and friends. Do you believe that their actions are ethically correct? Which is worse: Jack creating a troublesome brother or Algernon creating an invalid friend? Why? Write a diary entry on the importance of honesty. Why should a person strive to be truthful; in your opinion, are there any instances when a person should lie or is entitled to lie?
8. Imagine that you have the opportunity to lead a double life. What would your second identity be? Write a letter from your fictional self to a friend. In the letter, include details such as your interests, profession, and, of course, your new name. You may also wish to incorporate information such as where your new persona lives and why a double personality is necessary.
9. There is someone in your class who has not been paying attention to the reading. Explain to that person what a Bunburyist is.
10. Algernon advises Jack to avoid critiquing literature, saying, "Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers." Write a brief paragraph explaining what Algernon means in this passage. In your opinion, what is he implying about the media or writers?
11. Compose a literary review about a book or article that you have recently read. Begin by giving a brief synopsis and then supply your opinion about various aspects of the piece. How is the quality of the writing? Is the plot interesting or boring? Is the book or article easy to understand, and do you recommend that other people read it? Include any additional information that you believe your readers would like to know. Your final draft should be at least one-half page in length.

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12. The fictional character, Bunbury, provides an easy excuse for Algernon to avoid his family. Relate a funny story from a movie or television show in which a character frantically tried to avoid someone but failed. What efforts did the character make, and what was the outcome?
13. Algernon dines with his family once a week, which he considers to be more than enough time. Think about your relationship with your family, and choose one of the following exercises to complete:
  - A. Write a letter to a relative with whom you are close. In the letter, express how this person makes you feel and how he or she influences your life.
  - B. Write a journal entry about a tradition that your family practices. The practice may relate to a special event, such as a holiday, or a daily routine. Explain why this tradition is special to you.
14. Remarks are made about the rising amount of public affection shown by married couples, and how these displays are “scandalous.” How do you feel about public displays of affection? Is it relevant whether or not the couple is married? Provide your opinion in a paragraph. If possible, include an example of something you witnessed that supports your point of view.
15. Algernon is cynical about many things, especially marriage. Think about a cynical character from your personal life, or from a book, television show, or movie, and write a letter to this character about his or her attitude. Convey whether or not you agree with the character’s outlook, and why.

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16. Lady Harbury has recently been widowed, and her condition becomes a topic of conversation. Lady Bracknell states, "I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger." Many people in modern times alter their looks, either by plastic surgery, injections, hair transplants, etc. What are your feelings about these types of cosmetic changes people make? Write a letter to the editor of your school paper detailing your beliefs.
17. Read the following passage, made by Lady Bracknell, and answer the questions that follow.

Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life.

Lady Bracknell seems to be saying that Mr. Bunbury needs to decide if he's going to live or die, and he should decide soon. What, according to you, are the primary duties of life? Compose a short note to Lady Bracknell explaining how you feel about her comments.

18. Jack has difficulty expressing his love to Gwendolen even though she reciprocates his feelings. Imagine that you are Jack. Compose a six-line poem to Gwendolen telling her how you feel. Remember that not all poems need to rhyme, although yours certainly can.