



# *The Importance of Being Earnest*

*By Oscar Wilde*

## Teacher Guide

Welcome to Taproot Theatre Company and our Student Matinee Program. We are thrilled that you have decided to join us in educating students through theatre. In this Teacher Guide you will find useful materials to help prepare your students to see *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Thank you for choosing Taproot and we look forward to seeing you at the performance!

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### ***The Importance of Being Earnest*** **Student Study Guide**

A complimentary and companion study guide for students is available on Taproot Theatre's website, [www.taproottheatre.org/StudentMatinees.htm](http://www.taproottheatre.org/StudentMatinees.htm). The Student Study Guide includes even more historical information surrounding the play, production information, as well as playwright and casting information.

**Taproot encourages making copies and distributing the study guides to your class.**

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#### **Preview *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Taproot Theatre**

If you are interested in previewing the show before the student matinee performance you are welcomed to do so. Please contact Darrell Olson, (206) 529-3668, or [darrell@taproottheatre.org](mailto:darrell@taproottheatre.org) for a pair of complimentary preview tickets.

#### **Preview Opportunities**

Sept. 26 & 27	7:30pm, Preview Performance
Sept. 29	2:00pm, Saturday Performance
Sept. 29	8:00pm, Saturday Performance

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#### **Driving Directions to Taproot Theatre Company**

**From I-5** Take the N. 85<sup>th</sup> St. exit. Go west on N. 85<sup>th</sup> for about 2 miles, crossing Aurora Ave. N. and Greenwood Ave. N. The theatre is ½ block west of Greenwood Ave. N. at **204 N. 85<sup>th</sup> St.**

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#### **Bus Parking**

Heading west on 85<sup>th</sup>, take a right on 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. W. (past Taproot Theatre **204 N. 85<sup>th</sup> St.**) Take a right into the parking lot of Thriftko. **The NW corner of the parking lot is reserved and authorized for school busses.** Taproot is not responsible for busses parked in an unauthorized area.

# About the Play

## Play Synopsis

Algernon and Jack are earnest about love. Cecily and Gwendolyn adore the name Ernest. But who is earnest about being Ernest? A rousing escapade of romance, mistaken identities and comic twists leads the young lovers to the countryside where truth is unveiled through surprising and delightful discoveries.

## Cast

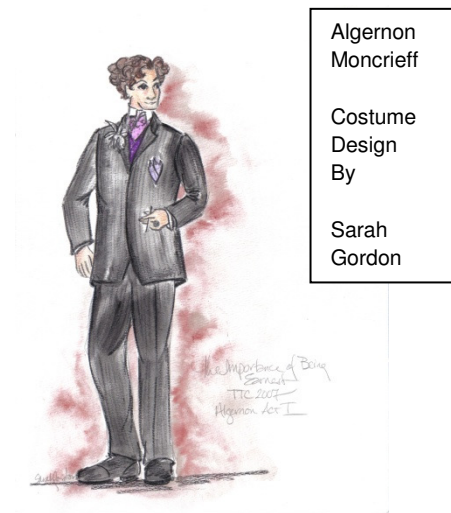
### In order of appearance

Nolan Palmer  
Aaron Lamb  
Kevin Brady  
Pam Nolte  
Charity Parenzini  
Bethany Hudson  
Kim Morris  
Bill Johns  
Nolan Palmer

Lane  
**Algernon Moncrieff**  
**John Worthing**  
**Lady Bracknell**  
**Gwendolen Fairfax**  
**Cecily Cardew**  
**Miss Prism**  
**Rev. Canon Chasuble**  
**Merriman**



GWENDOLEN, JOHN AND LADY BRACKNELL



## Setting:

Act 1: Algernon Moncrieff's flat in Half-Moon Street, W,  
Act 2: The garden at the Manor House, Woolton  
Act 3: Drawing-room at the Manor House, Woolton

## Production Team

Director	Karen Lund
Sound/Scenic Designer	Mark Lund
Costume Design	Sarah Gordon
Stage Manager	Rebecca Olson
Lighting Designer	Jody Briggs
Props Master	Jodi A. Sauerbier
Dramaturg	Morgan Aldrich
Assistant Director	Laura Bannister
ASM	Jenn Fjsone
Dresser	Katie Tibbits
Sound Board Operator	Dustin Morache
Dialect Coach	Nikki Visel

# Oscar Wilde



**Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde**  
(October 16, 1854 – November 30, 1900)

## Birth and early life

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin, to Sir William Wilde and his wife Jane Francesca Elgee. Jane was a successful writer and an Irish nationalist, known also as 'Speranza', while Sir William was Ireland's leading ear and eye surgeon, and wrote books on archaeology and folklore.

## Aestheticism

While at Magdalen College, Wilde became particularly well known for his role in the aesthetic and decadent movements. He began wearing his hair long and openly scorning so-called "manly" sports, and began decorating his rooms with peacock feathers, lilies, sunflowers, blue china and other *objets d'art*. Legends persist that his behavior cost him a dunking in the River Cherwell in addition to having his rooms trashed.

The aesthetic movement had a permanent influence on English decorative art. As the leading aesthete in Britain, Wilde became one of the most prominent personalities of his day. Though he was sometimes ridiculed for them, his paradoxes and witty sayings were quoted on all sides.

## Career and Family

Wilde's output was diverse. A first volume of his poetry was published in 1881 but as well as composing verse, he contributed to publications such as the 'Pall Mall Gazette', wrote fairy stories and published a novel 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' (1891). His greatest talent was for writing plays, and he produced a string of extremely popular comedies including 'Lady Windermere's Fan' (1892), 'An Ideal Husband (1895)' and 'The Importance of Being Earnest' (1895). 'Salomé' was performed in Paris in 1894

He married Constance Lloyd in 1884 and they had two sons Cyril (born 1884) and Vyvyan (born 1886.) In 1895 Wilde was arrested and tried for gross indecency. He was sentenced to two year hard labour, composing the poem 'De Profundis' while in prison. His wife took their children to Switzerland and adopted the name 'Holland'. Wilde was released with his health irrevocably damaged and his reputation ruined. He spent the rest of his life in Paris, publishing 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' in 1898. He died in Paris on 30 November 1900 from cerebral meningitis in the Hôtel d'Alsace, now known as L'Hôtel.

Edited from:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar\\_Wilde.com](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde.com)

## *About The Importance of Being Earnest*

The Importance of Being Earnest was an early experiment in Victorian melodrama. Part satire, part comedy of manners, and part intellectual farce, this play seems to have nothing at stake because the world it presents is so blatantly and ostentatiously artificial. Below the surface of the light, brittle comedy, however, is a serious subtext that takes aim at self-righteous moralism and hypocrisy, the very aspects of Victorian society that would, in part, bring about Wilde's downfall.

Wilde addresses many themes and motifs throughout The Importance of Being Earnest, some of the larger ones are: the nature of marriage, the constraints of morality and hypocrisy vs. inventiveness.

### Our Production

The Artistic Vision is the overall mood, theme and message of a play that a director enhances through their design team and by their own direction of the actors. For instance, if a director wants to convey a mood and message of happiness and love they might ask their design team to create areas on the stage that are brightly lit, with lighter colors for costume pieces and a

set that has warm color tones that create a comfortable and light feeling for the audience.

“Light, frothy, and bubbly.” That’s what director Karen Lund wants her production of The Importance of Being Earnest to be. Being one of the most popular and well written Comedy of Manners plays, it’s quite easy for actors to get caught up with the comedy, wit, and chaos of the script and loose touch of the sincerity and truthfulness of the characters and story. However misguided and over the top the characters and situations might want to become, Karen is very set on making sure that the show stays grounded in earnestness and truthfulness that Oscar Wilde wanted.

The show has two locations. The first is Algernon’s flat in London and the second is Jack’s manor house in the country. Taproot’s artistic designers decided to make the costumes and set at Algernon’s house in darker, cooler colors which allows them to give the country house a brighter and more open feeling. The costume designer also wanted the clothing worn in the city to come across as staunch and tight, which helps in indicating an upper class and posh feel. This also allows her to design the clothing worn at the country home to be looser and lighter in color and weight.



By attending Taproot Theatre's production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, having a pre-performance classroom visit, using the study guide and actively engaging in the pre and post show activities your students can begin to fulfill the following EALR's.

### Arts

1. The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills
  - 1.1 Understand arts concepts and vocabulary
  - 1.2 Develop arts skills and techniques
  - 1.3 Apply audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances
  - 1.4 Apply audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances.
2. The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.
  - 2.1 Apply a creative process in the arts: **Reflect** for the purpose of elaboration and self evaluation.
  - 2.3 Apply a responding process to an arts presentation
    - Engage** actively and purposefully
    - Describe** what is seen and/or heard
    - Analyze** how the elements are arranged and organized
    - Interpret** based on descriptive properties
    - Evaluate** using supportive evidence and criteria
4. The student makes connections within and across the arts to other disciplines, life, cultures, and work.
  - 4.1 Demonstrate and analyze connections among the arts disciplines
  - 4.3 Understand how arts impact lifelong choices
  - 4.4 Understand that the arts shape and reflect culture and history.
  - 4.5 Demonstrate the knowledge of arts careers and the knowledge of arts skills in the world.

### Communication

1. The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.
  - 1.1 Focus attention
  - 1.2 Listen and observe to gain and interpret information.
  - 1.3 Check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing
3. The student uses communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others.
  - 3.1 Use language to interact effectively and responsibly with others
  - 3.2 Work cooperatively as a member of a group
  - 3.3 Seek agreement and solutions through discussion

### Writing

1. The student writes clearly and effectively
  - 1.1 Develop concept and design. Develop a topic or theme; organize written thoughts with a clear beginning, middle, and end; use transitional sentences and phrases to connect related ideas; write coherently and effectively
  - 1.2 Use style appropriate to the audience and purpose. Use voice, word choice, and sentence fluency for intended style and audience
  - 1.3 Apply writing conventions. Know and apply correct spelling, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and capitalization

## *Pre-show Activities*

- 1) Have students think about their expectations for seeing a live performance. Ask them to write down three of their expectations and share it with two or three other people. Ask the groups to talk about why they have those expectations and why it is important to them.
- 2) Give students time in the library to research the Victorian Era. Ask them to find some of the aspects and elements that create the style of the Victorian Era, i.e. social class rules, manners, social expectations etc. and discuss the impact of each item.
- 3) Have them research Oscar Wilde and *A Comedy of Manners*. Has there been another playwright as witty and as popular as Wilde? What T.V shows are, or have been good examples of *A Comedy of Manners*.

## *Post-show Activities*

- 1) Class Discussion Topics
  - a. What impressions were created by your first view of the set? What expectations did you form about the play's tone as you listened to the music before the performance started?
  - b. What about the production surprised or impressed you?
  - c. Were the actors believable in their roles?
  - d. What do you think would happen next if the play were to continue?
  - e. Jack and Algernon get caught in a big lie. Tell a story where you got caught telling a fib.
  - f. One of the funny elements of this show is Algernon falling madly in love with Cecily after just meeting her. Have you ever desired something really badly after seeing it? Perhaps a vacation spot, a new video game, or article of clothing?
  - g. What was the purpose of doing a production like this? Did you learn anything from the production?
- 2) Have the students think back to the expectations they wrote down before they came to see the production. With the same groups ask them to share those again and then talk about whether or not their expectations were met when they saw the production. Ask them to think about why they were or were not met and if that influenced whether or not they liked the production.
- 3) Have students write a critique of the production. Encourage them to be specific about their likes and dislikes, and their reasons for each. Help them to understand the differences between critiquing the play (text, storyline, character development) and the production (acting, lighting, directing, sound, set, costumes).
- 4) Have students read a newspaper review of the production. Ask them to write two paragraphs explaining why they agree or disagree with the newspaper review. Encourage them to use specific examples from the play and quotes from the newspaper article to support their argument.
- 5) Frames are frozen pictures that students make with their bodies. Divide students into groups of four or five and give them 15 minutes to come up with five frames from the play and a title for each one. There should be no talking or movement.
  - a. They should pick the five most important points of the story so if someone who had not seen the play saw their frames, they would be able to understand what happens.
  - b. Ask students to assign one person in their group to say the title of each frame as they work on their interpretation.
  - c. When time is up have students show their frames to the whole class.
  - d. Allow the students that are watching to ask questions of the performing group at the end of their frames. Encourage them to ask a question about something that wasn't clear.
  - e. Groups can then redo a frame to clarify the picture.

## Theatre Games

### 1. **Arms** (Purpose: To work together in order to perform tasks)

Seeing as *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a Comedy of Manners, I feel it's important to include a game where manners, efficiency and proficiency go right out the door.

Have your class partner up with some one of the same gender. Have one student stand in front of the other. The one in front puts their hands behind their backs leaving a small space between their torso and their arms where the person behind them can stick their own arms through. The person behind the one in front then uses their own arms as the front person's arms. Have them pretend to be the upper class in the Victorian Era where there are strict codes of conduct and social rules. Give them a scene to play out. Perhaps a friend is coming over for tea and they must serve them tea, with sugar, along with cake. See how well they can perform these tasks while keeping the attitude and air of a wealthy upper classman, all the while justifying whatever their arms are doing.

Variation: If you have an extra person let two people play the arms, each giving one arm.

### 2. **Wilde** (Purpose: To perform a scene in the style of Oscar Wilde)

Have the class get into groups of 3 or 4 students. Have them make a list of issues that would be of personal or social importance and another list of things that would be of minor importance. For instance a list of important items could include: world hunger, wars, public health, they're having a baby, global warming or hurricanes. A list of trivial matters would be: all clocks and watches in the world needing to be synchronized, the proper way to mow a yard, gossip, having to lick stamps and the adhesive tastes bad. Once each list is made, give the students a location to perform in. Perhaps it's in the large tea garden of a mansion and they're all very wealthy people. Then have the characters dialogue about the trivial matters as if they were very serious matters. While this dialogue is happening have a character bring up a topic of personal or social importance. When an actual serious topic is brought up have all the other characters dismiss the idea of its importance, the person who brought up the issue will agree and they will go back to their trivial matters until a different character brings up another serious matter which gets quickly dismissed again. Here is an example from *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

**Lane (Algernon's butler).** I believe (marriage) is a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

**Algernon.** I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

**Lane.** No, Sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

**Algernon.** Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

## *Objectionable Material*

Please remember that you're the best judge of what's appropriate for your students. On this page you'll find a thorough account of everything in the script which might be found to be objectionable to students and adults. If you have questions about the content of the script please read it, don't rely 100% on this page or what you've been told about the show. If you would like a perusal script (copy of the play) just call Darrell at 206-529-3668, or email him at [darrell@taproottheatre.org](mailto:darrell@taproottheatre.org).

- The show was written in 1895, so there's nothing in this show that couldn't easily be shown on network T.V. today. . . or even in 1950. ☺
- There is no swearing, minor or otherwise throughout the show.
- As for any references to God, there are a few "Good heavens!" and the characters do inquire about discovering his father's "Christian name".
- *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is a very funny show, written in the style of, A Comedy of Manners, meaning it pokes fun at the social rules and understandings of the day.
- Most of the humor of the show comes from characters taking serious matters with a boring disregard, and turning trivial issues into serious matters.

## *Set Design by Mark Lund*

ALGERNON'S LONDON FLAT



JACK'S COUNTRY HOUSE



*Costume Designs by*  
*Sarah Gordon*

To the right: Lady Bracknell

To the bottom right: Cecily

To the bottom left: Merriman



## *Additional Resources*

### Bibliography of Oscar Wilde

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#### **Poetry**

*Ravenna* (1878)

Poems (1881)

The Sphinx (1894)

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898)

#### **Plays**

Vera; or, The Nihilists (1880)

The Duchess of Padua (1883)

Salomé (French version) (1893, first performed in Paris 1896)

Lady Windermere's Fan (1892)

A Woman of No Importance (1893)

Salomé: A Tragedy in One Act: Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde by Lord Alfred Douglas with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley (1894)

An Ideal Husband (1895) (text)

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) (text)

(Dates are dates of first performance, which approximate better with the probable date of composition than dates of publication.)

#### **Prose**

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891, Wilde's only novel)

### Further Reading

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#### **Books**

*Oscar Wilde: Art and Morality* by Stuart Mason (1907)

*The Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde* by Frank Harris (1914)

*My Friendship with Oscar Wilde* by Lord Alfred Douglas (1932)

*Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Karl Beckson (1970)

*Trials of Oscar Wilde* by H. Montgomery Hyde (1975)

*Oscar Wilde: A Biography* by H. Montgomery Hyde (1975)

*Oscar Wilde: Art and Egotism* by Rodney Shewan (1977)

*Oscar Wilde* by Richard Ellman (1987)

*Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel* by Norbert Kohl (1989)

*Rediscovering Oscar Wilde*, ed by C. George Sandulescu (1993)

*Oscar and Bossie* by Trevor Fisher (2002)

**Theatre:**

*Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* by Moises Kaufman (1997)

**Films:**

*The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1960), dir. by Ken Hughes, starring Peter Finch, Yvonne Mitchell, Lionel Jeffries, Nigel Patrick, James Mason.

*Wilde* (1998), dir. by Brian Gilbert, starring Stephen Fry, Jude Law, Tom Wilkinson, Vanessa Redgrave, Jennifer Ehle.

*The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002), dir. by Oliver Parker, starring Rupert Everette, Colin Firth, Frances O'Connor, Reese Witherspoon, Judi Dench

*An Ideal Husband* (1999), Dir. by Oliver Parker, starring Minnie Driver, Cate Blanchett, Rupert Everette, Julianne Moore.

We are so glad you are joining Taproot Theatre for a student matinee performance. Audience Etiquette is important for everyone to experience an enriching and educational experience. See you at the performance!

### Audience Etiquette

- It is appropriate to talk quietly until the performance begins.
- If you need to use the restroom, please do so before the performance begins. Restrooms are located in the upper and lower lobbies.
- Be sure to be seated before the performance begins
- No food, gum, candy or beverages are to be brought into the theatre.
- Please don't wear headphones during the performance.
- Please turn off watch alarms, cellular phones, and other electronic devices.
- Students who disturb other members of the audience may be asked to leave the theatre and wait in the lobby.
- Remember: you will get an opportunity to talk with the actors and director at the end of the performance. Be prepared with questions about the production!
- Please stay out of the aisles (also called "voms") during the performance.
- Enjoy the Show!

## Taproot Theatre Company

Taproot Theatre Company is a professional, nonprofit theatre company with a multi-faceted production program. Founded in 1976, they serve the Pacific Northwest with Mainstage Productions, Touring Productions and Acting Studio. Taproot exists to create theatre that explores the beauty and questions of life while bringing hope to our search for meaning.