

# Importance of being earnest passage analysis essay sample



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This scene, found at the end of Act 3, features all of the major characters together at the end. They have just heard Miss Prism's story of how she switched the baby and the manuscript into the hand-bag and perambulator, respectively. The scene begins with Jack questioning Lady Bracknell about his identity. He discovers his Moncrieff lineage and relations to Algernon (his true brother), Lady Bracknell (his aunt), and transitively, Gwendolen (his cousin).

In this passage, each of the characters' dialogue and actions serves to help define their characters and roles in the play. Jack's calm, unruffled demeanor and lines, even in the face of discovering his true origins, illustrate the traditional societal values that he represents. He is very smart and quick to think of checking the Army Lists for his father's name. However, we see that when he is on the brink of finding his name, he gets excited and acts melodramatically.

Algernon, on the other hand, is much more epicurean and informal with addressing the other characters, calling Jack, "old boy." He cannot even recall his own father's Christian name, using his premature death as an excuse.

Lady Bracknell is stiff and mostly speaks indirectly, embellishing answers to Jack's questions. She also remains calm and meditative in the face of Jack's personal discovery. She generally seems to disapprove of all actions the other characters take.

Gwendolen is mainly shown in this passage to be completely consumed with the name "Ernest." Even after Jack ascertains his past, she remains firm in

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her feelings toward his name. This makes her seem foolish and insensitive. Her sudden change in attitude toward Jack is a mockery of her fixation. Similarly, the judgment she makes that Jack will change, based on her feelings, characterizes her as irrational. Cecily is characterized similarly, based on her admiration of and judgment of Gwendolen as “ noble.”

One interesting thing to note is the sudden switch in the way Jack and Lady Bracknell address each other. Upon discovery of Jack’s relation to her, he immediately switches to calling her “ Aunt Augusta,” and she calls him “ nephew.” This shows how the two most conservative characters react automatically to the norms of society in addressing family members and non-family members.

The entire situation presented in this scene is altogether unrealistic. Beginning with Miss Prism’s ridiculous story of switching the baby and the manuscript, to the discovery of Jack’s true name as Ernest, the events that transpire at the end of the play serve to complete Wilde’s social commentary. Gwendolen’s and Cecily’s obsession with the name “ Ernest” is emphasized to the point of ridiculousness. He uses irony (“ I never change, except in my affections,” in response to Jack’s question about her decision on his name) to illustrate that her attempts to seem conciliatory are useless.

The series of embraces at the end is also entirely unrealistic, especially because of Chasuble’s sudden declaration of feelings for Miss Prism. Without explanation, he renounces his previous belief in celibacy. The ridiculousness of this scene provides humor to the ending of the play.

The play ends with a pun on the word “earnest.” The situation presents somewhat of a paradox because Jack, who we now know is Ernest, has been truly earnest the whole time, whilst he thought he was lying the whole time. Thus we are left with the question of whether or not lying is necessary or a wrongdoing.