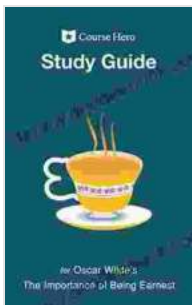


Study Guide for Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest

Course Hero Study Guide

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a classic comedy of manners that satirizes Victorian society. The play follows the misadventures of two young men, Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, who create alter egos to escape their social obligations. Wilde's witty dialogue and clever social commentary make *The Importance of Being Earnest* a timeless classic.



Study Guide for Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (Course Hero Study Guides) by Dhiraj Bhuyan

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 917 KB

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Context

The Importance of Being Earnest was written in 1895, at the height of the Victorian era. Victorian society was characterized by its strict social hierarchy and rigid moral code. Wilde's play satirizes these social conventions, poking fun at the hypocrisy and artifice of upper-class society.

Characters

The play features a cast of memorable characters, each with their own unique quirks and foibles:

- **Jack Worthing:** A young gentleman who creates the alter ego "Ernest Worthing" to escape his country life and pursue a romance in London.
- **Algernon Moncrieff:** Jack's best friend, who creates the alter ego "Ernest Moncrieff" to escape his social obligations and pursue a life of pleasure.
- **Lady Bracknell:** Jack's formidable aunt, who is determined to find a suitable husband for her daughter, Gwendolen.
- **Gwendolen Fairfax:** Lady Bracknell's daughter, who is engaged to Jack but falls in love with "Ernest Worthing."
- **Cecily Cardew:** Jack's ward, who is engaged to "Ernest Moncrieff" but falls in love with Jack.
- **Miss Prism:** Cecily's governess, who is unknowingly responsible for the confusion over the two "Ernests."

Plot

The play begins with Jack visiting Algernon in London. Jack confesses that he has created the alter ego "Ernest Worthing" in order to escape his country life and pursue a romance with Gwendolen Fairfax. Algernon, in turn, reveals that he has created the alter ego "Ernest Moncrieff" in order to escape his social obligations and pursue a life of pleasure.

Jack and Algernon's plan soon goes awry when Lady Bracknell arrives to investigate Jack's suitability as a husband for Gwendolen. Lady Bracknell is horrified to learn that Jack's father was a foundling, and she forbids the marriage. Jack and Algernon then decide to switch places, with Jack posing as "Ernest Moncrieff" in London and Algernon posing as "Ernest Worthing" in the country. This leads to a series of hilarious misunderstandings and mishaps.

The play climaxes when Lady Bracknell discovers that the two "Ernests" are actually the same person. She is furious at first, but she eventually relents and gives her blessing to the marriages of Jack and Gwendolen and Algernon and Cecily.

Themes

The Importance of Being Earnest explores a number of themes, including:

- **Identity:** The play explores the theme of identity through the use of mistaken identities and alter egos. Wilde suggests that our identities are not fixed, but rather are fluid and constantly changing.
- **Social conventions:** The play satirizes the social conventions of Victorian society, such as the importance of marriage and the rigid class structure.
- **Hypocrisy:** The play exposes the hypocrisy of Victorian society, which purports to value morality but is in fact full of corruption and deceit.
- **Love:** The play celebrates the power of love, which can overcome all obstacles.

Legacy

The Importance of Being Earnest has been a popular stage play for over a century. It has been adapted into several films and television shows, and it has been translated into over 20 languages.

Wilde's play continues to be relevant today because it satirizes the social conventions and hypocrisies that are still prevalent in our own society. It is a witty and charming comedy that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Study Guide Questions

1. What are the main themes of *The Importance of Being Earnest*?
2. How does Wilde use mistaken identities and alter egos to explore the theme of identity?
3. How does Wilde satirize the social conventions of Victorian society?
4. What is the role of love in the play?
5. How has *The Importance of Being Earnest* influenced other works of art and literature?

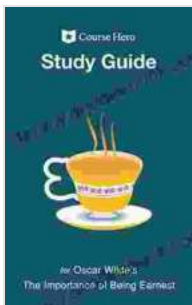
Further Reading

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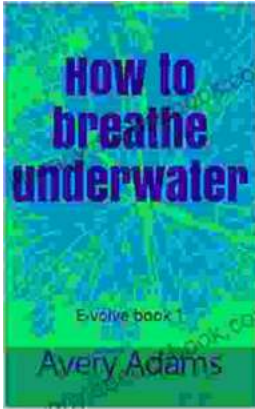
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