

The Importance of Being Earnest Characters

Writer: Oscar Wilde | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Major Characters

- **Jack Worthing (John/Ernest Worthing, J.P.):** Jack is the protagonist of the play. In the countryside, he is "Jack," Cecily's guardian. In London, he lives as "Ernest," a made-up brother, so he can enjoy freedom. His origins are mysterious because he was abandoned as a baby in a handbag at Victoria Station. He wants to marry Gwendolen, but Lady Bracknell rejects him for his unknown family background. His double life represents hypocrisy in Victorian society.
- **Algernon Moncrieff:** Algernon is Jack's witty and charming friend and Lady Bracknell's nephew. He enjoys food, music, and pleasure more than responsibilities. To escape boring social duties, he invents an imaginary invalid named "Bunbury." This practice is called "Bunburying." He visits Jack's house pretending to be "Ernest". He falls in love with Cecily. Algernon represents the dandy figure of Wilde's era. He represents clever, stylish, lazy, but full of paradoxical truths.
- **Gwendolen Fairfax:** Gwendolen is Lady Bracknell's daughter and Algernon's cousin. She loves Jack. But she insists she can only marry a man named "Ernest,". She thinks the name shows honesty and seriousness. Gwendolen is intelligent, fashionable, and confident. She often speaks with wit and pride. She mirrors her mother's authority but also follows her own desires in romance. Her obsession with names satirizes the Victorian concern with appearances over real character.
- **Cecily Cardew:** Cecily is Jack's young ward and the granddaughter of his adoptive father. She is imaginative, romantic, and dreamy. Before meeting Algernon, she creates a fantasy love story with "Ernest. She writes fake letters and diary entries about their relationship. When Algernon arrives, she believes he is the man of her dreams. Cecily represents youthful innocence but also mocks the seriousness of older characters. Her playful imagination adds charm and comedy to the play.
- **Lady Bracknell (Aunt Augusta):** Lady Bracknell is Gwendolen's mother and Algernon's aunt. She represents the strict rules of Victorian society. She believes wealth, class, and family background are more important than love. Her famous question about Jack's origins, "A handbag?". It shows her obsession with respectability. Lady Bracknell blocks marriages

to which she disagrees. But quickly changes her mind when money or status is revealed. She is Wilde's greatest comic creation and a satire of social pretension.

- **Miss Prism:** Miss Prism is Cecily's governess and teacher. She is strict, moral, and talks about duty and discipline. However, her past mistake of losing a baby in a handbag at Victoria Station becomes the play's great secret. She secretly loves Dr. Chasuble, which shows her softer side. Miss Prism represents the outward seriousness of Victorian middle-class women. But her comic blunder changes Jack's entire life and reveals the truth of his birth.
- **Dr. Chasuble:** Dr. Chasuble is the local rector. He is a gentle and absent-minded clergyman. He represents the Church. But he is shown humorously. He is willing to baptize both Jack and Algernon under the name "Ernest." He shares a quiet romance with Miss Prism, which adds comic sweetness. Wilde uses Chasuble to mock religious seriousness. Wilde also uses him to show how love appears in all social classes.
- **Minor Characters**
 - **Lane:** Algernon's manservant in London. He is calm and witty. His dry comments add humor and reveal the silly habits of his upper-class master.
 - **Merriman:** Butler at Jack's country estate. He is proper and formal. He provides comic moments in the country scenes.
 - **Mr. Thomas Cardew:** Jack's adoptive father, now dead. He made Jack guardian of Cecily. He is important only in the background.
 - **Lord Bracknell:** He is the husband of Lady Bracknell and father of Gwendolen. He never appears on stage but is mentioned.
 - **Mrs. Moncrieff:** She is the sister of Lady Bracknell. She is the true mother of Jack. Her hidden identity connects Jack to Algernon's family.
 - **General Moncrieff:** He is Jack's real father, a general in the army. His name was also "Ernest." That's how Jack learns his "real" name at the end.