

The Importance of Being Earnest Key Facts

Writer: Oscar Wilde | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Key Facts

- **Full Title:** The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People
- **Original Title:** Same title (no alternate title)
- **Author:** Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)
- **Prize/Recognition:** Considered Wilde's comic masterpiece; one of the greatest English comedies
- **Source:** Satire of Victorian society, morality, and obsession with social status and marriage
- **Written Time:** 1894
- **First Performed:** 14 February 1895 at St. James's Theatre, London
- **Publisher:** Leonard Smithers (first published 1899)
- **Genre:** Comedy of Manners / Satire
- **Form:** Three-act play
- **Tone:** Satirical, witty, humorous, ironic
- **Point of View:** Third-person stage directions; dialogue-driven play
- **Significance:** Critiques Victorian seriousness, hypocrisy, and social pretensions; celebrates humor, wit, and the absurdity of social conventions
- **Famous Line:** "The truth is rarely pure and never simple."

Setting:

- **Time:** Late Victorian England (1890s)
- **Place:** London and Hertfordshire (country estate)

Key Notes

- **Comedy of Manners:** The play mocks the artificial manners of Victorian upper-class society. It satirizes marriage, morality, and obsession with appearances.
- **Earnestness and Triviality:** Wilde plays with the idea of being "earnest" (serious and moral) versus being Ernest (a fashionable name). The pun drives the humor and satire.

- **Marriage and Social Status:** Almost every character is obsessed with marriage, wealth, and family background. Wilde mocks the shallow reasons behind Victorian marriages.
- **Wit and Epigrams:** The play is filled with Wilde's witty sayings and paradoxes, such as "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy."
- **Double Life/Identity:** Characters like Jack and Algernon lead double lives ("Bunburying"). This reflects hypocrisy and the absurd rules of society.
- **Satire of Hypocrisy:** Wilde ridicules social conventions, seriousness about trivial matters, and moral pretension.

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