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Readers Theatre Starter Packet #3

by MELVIN R. WHITE

1. The Importance of Being Earnest

by OSCAR WILDE

adapted for Readers Theatre

by MELVIN R. WHITE



Meriwether Publishing Ltd.

Contemporary Drama Service

PO Box 7710 • Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7710

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- ERNEST "JACK" WORTHING** — Straight juvenile lead type, but temperamental. Voice suggestive of 29 years.
- ALGERNON MONCRIEFF** — A "smart-alec" juvenile, about the same age as Ernest Worthing. Voice may suggest aestheticism and tendency to think he is cute.
- CECILY CARDEW** — A saccharine-sweet ingenue of about 18 years.
- GWENDOLYN FAIRFAX** — A hard and brittle ingenue of character type. A little older than Cecily, and in direct contrast to the latter's excessive sweetness.
- LADY BRACKNELL** — A "gorgon" or domineering character of powerful voice and personality. Age, 50 to 60 years.
- LANE AND MERRIMAN** — Typical middle-aged character butlers; may be played by the same man.
- MISS PRISM** — A fluttery middle-aged old maid.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

by Oscar Wilde. Adapted for Readers Theatre by Melvin R. White. Adapted and printed with the permission of The Northwestern Press, 5100 West 82nd Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55437.

1 *(As the reading starts, the MASTER of CEREMONIES*
2 *stands, walks to the Downstage Left lectern and reads:)*
3 **M.C.:** The first act of *The Importance of Being Earnest*
4 takes place in the morning room of Algernon Moncrieff's
5 flat in London. It is luxuriously and artistically furnished.
6 As the curtain rises, we hear the sound of a piano in
7 an adjoining room. Lane is arranging afternoon tea on
8 the table. *(LANE rises.)* After the music stops, Algernon
9 enters. *(ALGERNON rises.)*
10 **ALGY:** Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?
11 **LANE:** I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.
12 **ALGY:** I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play
13 accurately — anyone can play accurately — but I play
14 with wonderful expression.
15 **LANE:** Yes, sir.
16 **ALGY:** Have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for
17 Lady Bracknell?
18 **LANE:** Yes, sir.
19 **ALGY:** Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book
20 that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr.
21 Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of
22 champagne are entered as having been consumed.
23 **LANE:** Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.
24 **ALGY:** Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the
25 servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely
26 for information.
27 **LANE:** I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine,
28 sir. I have often observed that in married households
29 the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.
30 **ALGY:** Good Heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as
31 that?
32 **LANE:** I believe it is a very pleasant state, sir. I have had
33 very little experience of it myself up to the present. I
34 have only been married once. That was in consequence
35 of a misunderstanding between myself and a young

1 woman.

2 ALGY: (*Languidly*) I don't know that I am much
3 interested in your family life, Lane.

4 LANE: No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never
5 think of it myself.

6 ALGY: Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank
7 you.

8 LANE: Thank you, sir. (*LANE sits.*)

9 ALGY: Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax.
10 Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example,
11 what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a
12 class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

13 LANE: (*Stands.*) Mr. Ernest Worthing. (*JACK stands.*
14 *LANE sits.*)

15 ALGY: How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up
16 to town?

17 JACK: Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one
18 anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

19 ALGY: (*Stiffly*) I believe it is customary in good society
20 to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where
21 have you been since last Thursday?

22 JACK: In the country.

23 ALGY: What on earth do you do there?

24 JACK: When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one
25 is in the country one amuses other people. It is
26 excessively boring.

27 ALGY: And who are the people you amuse?

28 JACK: (*Airily*) Oh, neighbors, neighbors.

29 ALGY: Got nice neighbors in your part of Shropshire?

30 JACK: Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

31 ALGY: How immensely you must amuse them! By the
32 way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

33 JACK: Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all
34 these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such
35 reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming

1 to tea?

2 ALGY: Oh! Merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolyn.

3 JACK: How perfectly delightful!

4 ALGY: Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt
5 Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

6 JACK: May I ask why?

7 ALGY: My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolyn
8 is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way
9 Gwendolyn flirts with you.

10 JACK: I am in love with Gwendolyn. I have come up to
11 town expressly to propose to her.

12 ALGY: I thought you had come up for pleasure? I call
13 that business.

14 JACK: How utterly unromantic you are!

15 ALGY: I really don't see anything romantic in proposing.
16 It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing
17 romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be
18 accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement
19 is over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If
20 ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

21 JACK: I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The
22 Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose
23 memories are so curiously constituted.

24 ALGY: Oh! There is no use speculating on that subject.
25 Divorces are made in heaven. Please don't touch the
26 cucumber sandwiches. They are specially for Aunt
27 Augusta.

28 JACK: Well, you have been eating them all the time.

29 ALGY: That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt.
30 Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is
31 for Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn is devoted to bread and
32 butter.

33 JACK: And very good bread and butter it is, too.

34 ALGY: Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you
35 were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were

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