



# The Importance of Being Earnest, extract 1, Act I (p.50 to p. 62)

1<sup>st</sup> extract: very beginning till "JACK: *Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.*" (p.62)

1) Where does the scene take place ?

The scene takes place in Algernon's flat, Half-moon Street, London W.

2) Fill in this table about the characters and their actions :

	Who	What are they doing	why
p.50 & 52	Algernon Lane	They are talking about champagne and marriage  And cucumber sandwiches	Algernon received people  Algernon will receive people
p.52 to 62	Algernon and Jack (Ernest)	They are talking about countryside, Gwendoline, marriages, and a cigarette case and a person called Cecily	Jack often goes there  Jack is in love with Gwendoline, Jack has a secret life

3) What can you say about the food or drink mentioned ?

Champagne was very expensive and a lot was drunk, cucumber sandwiches has a very low nutritional value, not interesting for lower classes but fashionable for upper class as a pre-dinner snack, bread and butter were expensive too. > very aristocratic place and customs

4) Quote one funny extract. Why is it funny ?

"A : Did you hear what I was playing, Lane ? L : I didn't think it polite to listen, Sir. " (p.50)  
=Algernon wanted to show off, but Lane used a polite way to say he didn't play well.

5) Quote one reference to social classes, what's the point ?

"A : Really, if the lower orders don't set up a good example, what on earth is the use of them ? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility." (p. 52) very ironic

6) Quote two extracts about marriage. What do you think of them ?

"Lane :I have been married only once. That was the consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person. " (p. 52)

"Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right. " (p.56)  
> marriage as a farce, something not serious

7) Nonsense is "statements, ideas that go against good sense". Find two nonsense passages. What is their effect ?

"JACK : It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case." (p.58)

"JACK : Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself." p.60 > very ridiculous, very trivial details (reference to full title)

8) What can you say about this meeting ?

It's a meeting between two friends but apparently, they know very little of each other. Victorian society and its hypocrisy are criticised here in a very ironic and funny way.

