



THE IMPORTANCE OF



BEING EARNEST

EDUCATION PACK

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Production Photographs by **Philip Tull**

Introduction



This behind the scenes pack has been designed to give you an insight into the making of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at The Watermill. The pack is aimed primarily at teachers or students at Secondary School.

Your feedback is most welcome, please email (outreach@watermill.org.uk) or call us on 01635 570927.

Don't forget that we offer workshops on most aspects of drama, and visit many schools in the surrounding area to work with students and teachers. For a workshop menu, please visit the Outreach pages on our website, or get in touch.

I hope you find the pack useful.

Emma Bradbury

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Synopsis

In his apartment, Algernon is playing piano, badly.

His servant Lane has made cucumber sandwiches for Aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell).

Lane says Ernest has arrived.

Ernest wants a sandwich but Algernon is keeping them for Lady Bracknell and her daughter Gwendolen. (Algernon quietly eats all the sandwiches himself!)

Ernest wants to marry Gwendolen.

Algernon asks Ernest about his cigarette case. Inside is an inscription 'from little Cecily with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack'. Algernon has a calling card proving Ernest is called Ernest, not Jack.

Ernest admits that he has two names. His real name is Jack but in the country he has invented a brother called Ernest who lives in town and needs Jack's help when he gets into trouble. In the town he calls himself Ernest. 'Little Cecily' is in fact his ward, the granddaughter of the late gentleman that adopted Jack when he was a baby.

Algernon is delighted. He too has invented a made-up imaginary person who needs his help. This invented person is Bunbury. When Algernon wants an excuse to avoid something, he pretends Bunbury is ill. Algernon calls Ernest a 'Bunburyist'. Algernon wants to have dinner with Ernest tonight.

Lady Bracknell arrives with Gwendolen. All her sandwiches are gone. Lane lies and pretends there were no cucumbers to buy.

Algernon tells Lady Bracknell he can't have dinner with her tonight because Bunbury is ill.

Lady Bracknell asks Algernon if Bunbury will be ill on Saturday. She needs Algernon's help to organise a party. Algernon promises to be at her party. He

takes her into another room to talk about the party, so that Ernest can be alone with Gwendolen.

Ernest proposes to Gwendolen. She accepts and says yes. She has always wanted to marry someone called Ernest. Ernest is worried because secretly his real name is Jack. He decides to be christened and officially change his name.

Lady Bracknell returns. She disapproves of Ernest. She quizzes him to check if he's suitable. She asks about his parents. Ernest explains he doesn't know who his parents are. He was adopted by Mr Thomas Cardew who found him as a baby in a handbag at Victoria train station.

Lady Bracknell is outraged. She leaves with Gwendolen.

Algernon returns. Jack dislikes Lady Bracknell. Jack will tell everyone his pretend brother has died in Paris from a chill. Algernon wants to meet Cecily but Ernest says no.

Gwendolen returns. Her mother has told her Ernest's story. She thinks his childhood is romantic. She asks Ernest for his country address. When he tells her, Algernon eavesdrops and writes the address down secretly. Gwendolen leaves.

Algernon tells Lane he will be away for the weekend 'Bunburying'.

INTERVAL

In the country, at Jack's house, in the garden Cecily and her governess Miss Prism are learning German. Cecily keeps a diary.

Dr Chasuble is a vicar. He flirts with Miss Prism and they go for a walk.

Merriman is the servant. He tells Cecily that 'Ernest' has arrived. It is Algernon, pretending to be Ernest!

Cecily is surprised to meet Ernest. She says Jack is away until Monday and that he is sending Ernest to live in Australia. Cecily takes Algernon into the house.

Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble return. She says Dr Chasuble should get married.

Jack arrives, dressed in black. He says his brother has died in Paris from a chill.

Dr Chasuble is sympathetic. Miss Prism thinks he deserved it.

Jack asks Dr Chasuble to christen him.

Cecily returns and says Jack should get changed because Ernest is here!

Everyone is confused.

Cecily fetches Algernon. They return holding hands. Cecily tells Jack that Ernest looks after his friend Bunbury.

Algernon and Jack are left alone. Jack is cross with Algernon for coming to his house and pretending to be Ernest.

Merriman returns. He has unpacked Algernon's bags. Jack wants Algernon to leave. He tells Merriman to book a cart to take Algernon back to the train station.

Algernon won't leave unless Jack gets changed. Jack agrees and goes into the house.

Cecily returns. Algernon tells her Jack is sending him away.

Merriman returns. The cart is ready. Algernon sends it away until next week.

Algernon says he loves Cecily. Cecily writes his words in her diary. Algernon proposes and Cecily says they are already engaged. She fell in love with Ernest

without meeting him. She wrote letters to and from herself as Ernest. She bought a ring and bracelet from Ernest. She broke off the engagement once. She has always dreamed of marrying someone called Ernest.

Algernon decides to be christened and officially change his name. He rushes away to find Dr Chasuble.

Merriman arrives. Miss Gwendolen Fairfax is here to see Mr Worthing.

Gwendolen and Cecily introduce themselves. Gwendolen thinks Cecily is visiting Ernest. Cecily explains she lives here as Mr Worthing's ward. Gwendolen says Ernest never mentioned having a ward. Cecily says Jack is her guardian, and that she is engaged to Ernest. Gwendolen disagrees, Ernest is engaged to her.

Merriman returns and offers tea. Gwendolen and Cecily bicker about what is best: town or country, sugar in tea, cake or bread.

Jack arrives, soon followed by Algernon and their true names are revealed. Jack confesses he has no brother. Gwendolen and Cecily storm into the house. Jack and Algernon are both sad that they might not be able to marry who they want. Algernon eats muffins. Both plan to be christened Ernest.

Meanwhile inside the house, Gwendolen and Cecily are spying on Jack and Algernon. Jack and Algernon come inside. The women confront the men about why they lied. The women whisper together about Jack and Algernon's answers.

Merriman says Lady Bracknell has arrived because she found out Gwendolen was here. Lady Bracknell hasn't told her husband, Gwendolen's father.

Algernon tells Lady Bracknell that Bunbury has died, from an explosion, or because he couldn't live.

Algernon tells Lady Bracknell that he is engaged to Cecily.

Lady Bracknell quizzes Jack about Cecily. Cecily is rich so Lady Bracknell approves and agrees to the marriage.

But Jack says no to the marriage because Algernon isn't a virtuous person: he faked being Ernest, drank Jack's special wine, romanced Cecily and ate every muffin.

Lady Bracknell suggests Algernon and Cecily get married when Cecily is old enough to be independent and not need Jack's permission. This is called 'coming of age'. Jack says Cecily will come of age when she is 35 years old. She is 18 years old now. Algernon says he will wait but Cecily is impatient.

Jack will let Cecily marry Algernon if he can marry Gwendolen. Lady Bracknell refuses and tells Gwendolen they will leave.

Dr Chasuble arrives to say he's ready for the christenings. Jack says they don't need christening now.

Dr Chasuble says Miss Prism is waiting at church. Lady Bracknell knows Miss Prism. Miss Prism arrives and confesses that when she worked for Lady Bracknell she took a baby out in a pram. She also had a large handbag and a book she was writing. She accidentally swapped the book and baby. She put the book in the pram and left the baby in the handbag at Victoria train station. She never returned to Lady Bracknell.



Jack goes upstairs. The others wait and hear banging upstairs.

Jack has fetched the handbag he was found in. Miss Prism recognises the bag. It is her bag! Jack is the baby Miss Prism left in the handbag. Jack thinks Miss Prism is his mother.

Lady Bracknell realizes Jack is the son of her sister. This means Jack is Algernon's older brother. Jack was given the same name as his father but Lady Bracknell can't remember that name. They look up his name in the army lists. Jack's true name is Ernest!

Jack and Gwendolen will marry. Algernon and Cecily will marry. Dr Chasuble and Miss Prism will marry.

THE END

The Characters

(Jack/Ernest) Worthing, J.P. - The play's protagonist. Jack Worthing is a seemingly responsible and respectable young man, but in fact, he leads a scandalous double life. In Hertfordshire, where he has a country estate, Jack is known as Jack. But when he wants to escape the mundanity of country life, he goes to London, where he is known as Ernest. As a baby, Jack was adopted by an old gentleman, and subsequently was made guardian to his granddaughter, Cecily Cardew. Jack is in love with Gwendolen Fairfax, his friend Algernon's cousin. The initials after his name indicate that he is a Justice of the Peace.

Algernon Moncrieff - The play's second protagonist. Algernon is a charming, yet lazy bachelor, nephew of Lady Bracknell, cousin of Gwendolen Fairfax, and best friend of Jack Worthing, whom he has known for years as Ernest. Algernon is clever and witty, but also selfish and amoral, with a habit of making inconsistent and absurd pronouncements. He too has invented a fictional friend, "Bunbury"; an invalid whose frequent and sudden relapses of illness are used as Algernon's excuse to avoid 'unpleasant or dull social obligations.'

Gwendolyn Fairfax - Algernon's cousin and Lady Bracknell's daughter. Gwendolen is in love with Jack, whom she knows as Ernest. An influential person of high fashion and society, Gwendolen speaks with unquestionable authority on matters of manners and morality. She is sophisticated, intellectual, and completely pretentious.

Cecily Cardew - Jack's ward; the granddaughter of the old gentlemen who found and adopted Jack. Cecily is probably the most realistic character in the play. Like Gwendolen, she is obsessed with the name Ernest, but she is even more intrigued by the idea of mischief. This idea, rather than the actual name itself, has caused her to become besotted with Jack's scandalous brother Ernest, and to invent an elaborate imaginary romance between them.

Lady Bracknell - Algernon's snobbish, money-focused, and domineering aunt. She is Gwendolen's mother, and her main goal in life is to see her daughter marry well. She has a list of "eligible young men", and a prepared interview she gives to potential suitors. Like her nephew, Lady Bracknell has a habit of making hilarious statements, but where Algernon means to be witty, the humour in Lady Bracknell's speeches is unintentional.

Miss Prism - Cecily's governess; a woman employed to teach children in their own homes. Miss Prism is pedantic, puritanical, and an endless source of clichés. She highly approves of Jack's presumed respectability, and harshly criticizes his "unfortunate" brother. She also has romantic feelings for Dr. Chasuble.

Dr. Chasuble - The Reverend on Jack's estate. Both Jack and Algernon approach Dr. Chasuble to ask that they be christened "Ernest." Dr. Chasuble also shares secret romantic feelings for Miss Prism.

Lane - Algernon's servant. When the play opens, Lane is the only person who knows about Algernon's practice of "Bunburying."

Merriman - The butler at the Manor House, Jack's estate in the country.

Meet the Cast



CHARLOTTE BEAUMONT

CECILY



PETER BRAY

ALGERNON



JIM CREIGHTON

DR CHASUBLE



CLAUDIA JOLLY

GWENDOLYN



WENDY NOTTINGHAM

MISS PRISM



MORGAN PHILPOTT

LANE / MERRIMAN



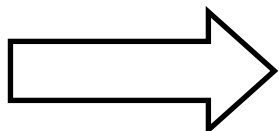
BENEDICT SALTER

JACK



CONNIE WALKER

LADY BRACKNELL



You can find more information about the cast including training and credits [here.](#)

Oscar Wilde, Social Comedy, and *'The Importance of Being Earnest.'*

Oscar Wilde was an Irish poet and playwright, born in 1854, into a household of brilliant minds. His mother was a brilliant poet, who read to and taught him about classics and poetry from a young age, and his father a celebrated surgeon, that was knighted for his services in the medical field. Quickly becoming known for his sharp wit, intelligence, and flamboyancy, Wilde became one of London's most popular playwrights in the early 1890s. But that wasn't without struggle!

While attending Oxford University, he became known for his involvement in the rising philosophy of 'aestheticism'. The Aesthetic Movement was basically the belief that Art should be separate from a Social, Political, or Moral purpose. That Art should just simply be beautiful. Art for Art's sake. This led him to travel in fashionable social circles, and to pursue poetry, interior design, and writing for a women's fashion magazine. He was fast becoming a household name at this point, and famously said to his friends; ***'I'll be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other I'll be famous, and if not famous, notorious.'*** At the turn of the 1890s, he incorporated his themes of self-indulgence, deceit, and beauty into what would be his only novel, ***'The Picture of Dorian Gray'***, now considered to be one of his greatest works. The opportunity to construct aesthetic imagery, and combine them with larger social themes, drew Wilde to move on to writing drama.

Wilde believed in 'the philosophy of pleasure' and felt that the conservative Victorian society was so conservative and serious, that it was in fact, laughable. At the time, English theatre had finally moved away from Melodrama, and was in the era of

'Social Problem Plays'. The truth being that 'Social Problem Plays', ultimately reinforced the conservative bourgeois order, and really weren't that different from domestic melodramas. Wilde however, wanted to rehabilitate theatre. After writing two rather provocative plays, ***'Vera'***, and ***'Salome'***, which were flops with his contemporary audience, Wilde hit upon his winning theatrical style; social comedy.

Wilde's style of ***'Social Comedy'*** meant that his plays looked like a 'social problem play', and seemed to resolve conventionally the way that social problem plays were supposed to – the bourgeois being comfortable and out of trouble – but in fact allowed him to use wit to make fun of the very society he was writing about. This style brought him great success with his plays, ***'Lady Windermere's Fan'*** and ***'A Woman of No Importance'***.

At the peak of his success, Wilde wrote ***'The Importance of Being Earnest'***. One of the great stage comedies; it's a sparkling whirl of disguise, coincidence, and mistaken identity. But amongst all the comedy, ***'Earnest'*** is also earnestly undermining comfortable conventional beliefs about love, marriage, family, and hard work. It argues that the truth, the thing that's usually at the core of any problem play, is overrated and unstable. Wilde spends most of the play making fun of society and undercutting the whole idea of conventional morals; the play demonstrates his belief that ***'we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality'***.

When the play was first performed, Wilde and his producer, George Alexander, tirelessly revised and

rehearsed every line, scene and setting in the months before the opening night; creating a carefully constructed representation of late-Victorian society, balanced with the simultaneous mocking of it. *'Earnest's* immediate reception as Wilde's best work to date finally set his fame into a solid artistic reputation.

One of the reasons for *'Earnest's* success above Wilde's other plays was its lighter tone, and more complex characters. The characters are neither villainous nor cunning, and the idealistic young women are not that innocent. Mostly set in drawing rooms and completely lacking in action or violence, *Earnest* lacks the self-indulgence found in Wilde's previous works. *The Importance of Being Earnest* remains his most popular play to be performed to this date.

Sadly, Wilde's luck was soon to run out. The same year that *'Earnest'* premiered; Wilde was put on trial for 'gross indecency'; which at the time was a euphemism for being gay. He served two years hard labour, including a stay at Reading Prison, and died penniless a few years later. In *'De Profundis'*, his final work, he wrote ***'I took the Drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric, or the sonnet'***.

In Oscar Wilde's short time, he created some of the most celebrated work in literature; filled with wit, beautiful imagery, social commentary and moral debates that remain relevant to this day. Oscar Wilde lived an exciting, scandalous, brilliant, and beautiful life – but also a tragic one.



Connie Walker as Lady Bracknell quizzing Jack on whether he's suitable to marry her daughter, Gwendolyn.



Claudia Jolly (Gwendolyn) and Charlotte Beaumont (Cecily)

An Interview with the Director

Kate Budgen

What kind of preparation did you do before stepping foot in the rehearsal room?

I did a lot because it's such a well-known play. I felt like I had a duty to really get under the skin of it, before I could understand how I could make it fresh and new.

I read the play a lot. I also spent about four months reading through a book which takes you, step by step, through Oscar Wilde's entire life. I found that very useful because his world was the world he represented on stage. It was really interesting seeing all the little nuggets of his life that somehow found their way into the play.

I also wanted to cut the play a little bit. I know to some people that sounds like sacrilege. I listened to radio versions, I read loads of different versions, and then I compared and contrasted them. I spent weeks trying to work out which bits I could trim down without ruining the beautiful rhythm and musicality of his text.

Then myself and Amy, the designer, did a lot of research into the visual aesthetic of the time period. Appearances and what houses looked like and what you looked like, was really important.

Did all the research and reading feed into what you've done with the show?

I didn't want to do a crazy conceptual version necessarily, but I wanted to find a version that that meant something to me, and would hopefully resonate to an audience now. I wanted to blow the dust off it and make it feel like we were looking at a new play.

Wilde's mum said that "paradox is a keen social weapon". I like the idea of paradox and contradiction, which is the heart of the play. I thought how can we play with those things on stage knowing how well everybody knows this play, as well as knowing how much baggage comes with it.

We also had to consider the rules of theatre; Oscar Wilde was very provocative, playful and subversive



Director, Kate Budgen, in rehearsals.

with the rules of the theatre, and the rules of society. So we asked 'How can we do something similar to that?'

From the very beginning, it felt like I wanted to keep them in their little Victorian bubble. And then how we view them was through a slightly different frame. Setting up the idea of how important objects and rituals are.

If you're using objects that don't fit in with those pictures, you look at it in a slightly different way. The very heart of the play it's about people pretending to be other people. We thought there's a game there. What's the game of the space, and the game of the space is that objects pretending to be other objects and just those modern or abstract objects sitting with the very authentic Victoriana.

An Interview with Peter Bray (Algernon)

How are rehearsals going?

Great fun and really busy. There's lots and lots to learn and to figure out. It's like Oscar Wilde has set up a big game and you just have to figure out all of the games inside the play. It's great fun, but at the same time that we are working really hard.

What's special about working in a comedy?

There are a few things that are really particular. Firstly, there is the pressure to be funny, which is pretty obvious because that is your job. You can't dodge that!

At the same time, you have to start off by putting the story together with integrity. It's not just a string of gags where the rest is irrelevant; the story and the play comes first, and then the comedy arises out of the situation that is been written by the author.

Do you have a favourite moment? Either that you're in or when you're at the side watching?

I have a lot and they're all ones I enjoy watching from the side. If I had to choose just one, it might be - and I don't want to spoil it—but it's a moment

where a proposal is involved, and some of the beats played by Benedict and Claudia around it involves the importance of the name 'Earnest'. It really makes me cackle every time I watch it!

Just for someone who doesn't know, how would you describe what the term 'a beat' means?

A beat is the smallest type of event, or moment, that's part of the story. An exchange between two characters; for example a handshake, or some small moment of social interaction. It's something small that changes the tone or intention.

And lastly, what advice would you give to a young aspiring actor that wants to play a comedic role?

I would say it's part craft, part talent and part practice. For me, there's no way I can do it on my own. I rely on other people, like our wonderful director Kate, to say 'that's nearly there, but let's try this as well'.



Peter Bray (Algernon) in rehearsals with Charlotte Beaumont (Cecily)



Claudia Jolly (Gwendolyn) and Charlotte Beaumont (Cecily) spying on their husbands through the window!

An Interview with Connie Walker

(Lady Bracknell)

What's the process been like in the rehearsal room?

Really fun. Because this play has so much history, and so much baggage—so much hand-baggage even! - that comes with it, and expectations by the public. Kate the director is very keen to make sure it's not a museum piece, because it shouldn't be a museum piece. It's called a play, so we play together, and that's what we've been doing, so it's been fun. It's been really good fun.

What's it like approaching a character that has got so much cultural weight to her?

At first, really terrifying! I mean you look at all the grand Dames that have played it; Dame Judi Dench, Dame Maggie Smith. Judi Dench did hers a couple of years back, and she was in her eighties I think, but when she originally played it she was 44 years old, and that is really the right age for Lady Bracknell, because she's got a daughter who's 24/25. But it was following in those footsteps, at first you think, 'oh I'm not old enough, I'm not posh enough, I'm not tall enough, I'm not classy enough', but then you have to go 'Well look at the Queen! She's the poshest person I know, and she's small!' And if she says it's Christmas, it's Christmas, so that made me to decide to approach the part as a bit of a bull-dog! If you try to copy it won't work. Everyone has to have their own rhythm or their own way of doing it. It was quite scary thinking of all these people that have done it before, and you start to think 'oh should I do it like that?' There are so many different ways of saying the famous lines, I just had to get on with it.

The script is so fantastic, it's a vocal workout. I do a huge warm-up before I start just to get my mouth

around those words. Because it takes nearly twenty words just to say 'Sit down'!

When we did the read-through in the morning—I have to say on my first day I said 'I'm so scared' and lovely Charlie (Charlotte playing Cecily) just grabbed hold of me and gave me a hug and went 'it's going to be great!' and after the read-through she went 'see we did it!' And that was just doing the read-through! Because the lines are just so famous. Every time I said I was doing this play to someone, they would quote it back to me every single time. So to try and get away from that pressure, and it's only a few words, you have to just say it!

The way that you as a team are putting together this particular production, I suppose there will be surprises as well?

Yes! A reinvention of 'Earnest'! Still pure, but there is some really lovely, quirky, gorgeous bits that—one character in particular, Lane, who normally is just in and out, has a massive presence in this play, and it's absolutely incredible. The Physical Theatre that he uses, the physical presence of him is absolutely wonderful. I go in to watch rehearsals when I'm not called just to watch him—he's superb! He creates this world for us all to exist in, but to us, and Kate made note of this, that to us, the upper-classes, the servants are always invisible, but actually they are the ones who hold it all together. So when we pass our gloves to him we don't even look at him, but to the audience it's completely different. He's fabulous. He really is. It's just overall a really great re-imagining of it.

Creating *The Importance of Being Earnest*

- Behind the Scenes Team

Playwright: The person who writes the script for the play that is performed. One script may be redrafted lots of times before it is handed to a Director and it may have further changes made to it throughout the rehearsal process.

Performer: A person who entertains an audience. At The Watermill the most common performers are actors, musicians and dancers. They have several weeks of rehearsals before the show begins its performances in a theatre or theatres. All of the performers in the production form a company.

Understudy: A member of the company who learns another role or roles during rehearsals in case of a performer being unable to perform in a production. For example if a performer is ill, their understudy will step in to cover their role during that performance.

Designer: Responsible for the overall visual appearance of the performance. The director and all of the designers work together to make sure the production has the same themes and coherent design throughout. Designers are often a freelance position, instead of being employed full time by a theatre. This means they may have several different projects that they are working on at the same time. The number of designers working on one production can vary, for example, a set designer may also design the costumes.

- **Lighting designer:** Once the lighting designer is aware of the overall creative vision for the production they first create a lighting plot for the play. This involves drawing a rig plan which

has instructions for where in the theatre each of the lights should be placed or hung. This plan is very important as the lighting designer may not rig the lights in the theatre themselves. Therefore, the plan needs to be clear to a technician so they can rig the theatre exactly how the designer wanted it.

- **Sound designer:** a sound designer has to be very skilled and able to operate and install different types of audio equipment and systems. They follow the creative vision made by all the designers and directors to research or create the sounds that would work the best for the production. Sound designers can also be the musical composers for the show.
- **Set designer:** The first job of a set designer is to create a scale model of their vision. This is first made out of white card and then into a more sturdy material. The set designer uses this model to pitch their idea to the director and design team (**see page 15**). The team building the set then use this model to know the measurements and details. The set designer also designs/chooses the props to be used on stage.
- **Costume designer:** The costume designer initially draws their ideas for each character's costume. These drawings can be shown to the director and design team. The costume designer then is responsible for either making the costumes, selecting the right fabrics or sourcing, buying and hiring costumes.

Technician: Usually works for the theatre, not the theatre company. They are responsible for the day-to-day running of the technical aspects of the theatre. They work as part of the technical team to plan, 'get in' maintain and 'get out' all of the equipment used during a production.

Director: Responsible for artistic control over the production to make sure the performance is polished in all areas. They oversee the cast in rehearsals as well as working closely with the design team to create a coherent vision across every aspect of the play.



Morgan Philpott (Lane/Merriman) in rehearsals.

Stage manager (SM): The leader of the stage management team. They are responsible for the organisation and communication between all of the departments working on the show. During rehearsals the SM ensures production elements are in the right place at the right time. During a performance they are responsible for the backstage area and scene changes. If the director is not present for a performance then the SM has overall responsibility in making sure the show runs smoothly.

Theatre manager: Are responsible for personnel, financial and administrative control of the theatre. The manager is in charge of the theatre as a business. All heads of department report to the manager. Therefore, the manager oversees, for example staff, potential projects and performances, the budget and networks with the local community.



Wendy Nottingham (Miss Prism) and Charlotte Beaumont (Cecily) in rehearsals.

The Design Process

The set is what we put onstage to help re-create the world of the play. The set designer makes a model box of the set to show the production department, director and actors what they want the set to look like. *The Importance of Being Earnest* Designer, Amy Jane Cook, talks to the cast and production team about the design on the first day of rehearsals. There are many stages the designer goes through before they get to this point.

Step 1. Research

The first step is to research the time period and location of the piece. Often the designer will create a scrap book of images, materials and textures that may inspire their design. Initial ideas are discussed with the director to make sure they fit with the director's overall vision. These can also be given to the production team to help them when bringing the design to life. For example, the designer sometimes draws sketches of how they would like the costume to look and this is given to the wardrobe department as a reference.



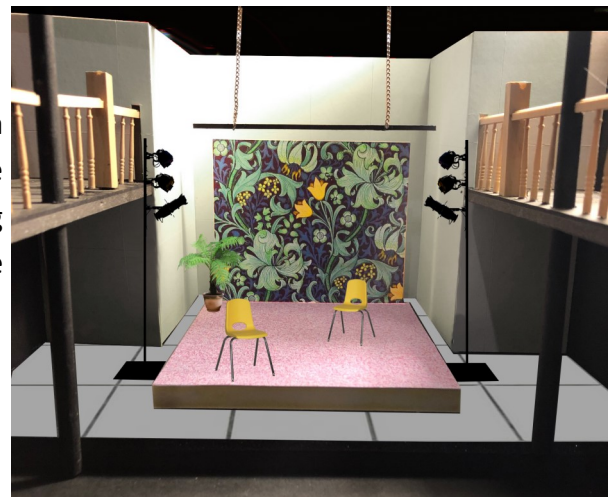
An example piece of wallpaper used as creative inspiration for the set design.

Step 2. White Card

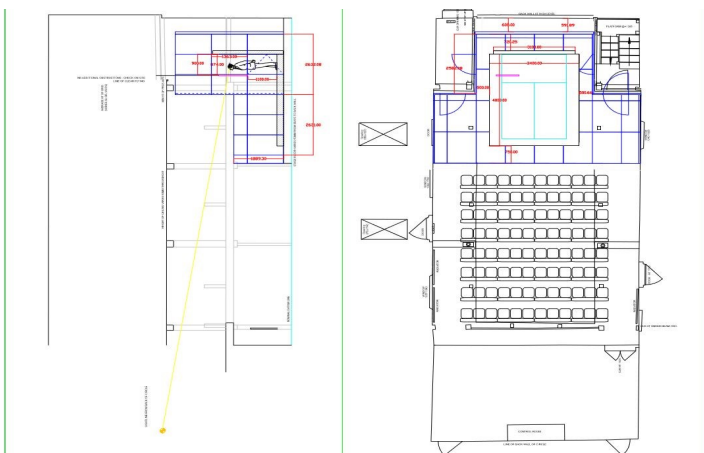
The White Card is an unpainted model of the set which is sent to the production team who makes sure it fits the space and the budget that is available.

Step 3. Model Box

The designer then creates a model box. This is made on a 1:25 scale to give the creative team a clear picture of the set. The production team uses the model for the building process, ensuring that the final set replicates exactly the designer's original model.



Model Box from The Importance of Being Earnest.



Step 4. Scale Drawings

The designer then draws a ground plan of the model box to the scale of the theatre. This gives the carpenter the exact dimensions to work from.

An example scale drawing from The Importance of Being Earnest.

Step 5. Building The Set

The carpenter then starts to make the set. At The Watermill the set is built off-site in a large barn in Coventry and then brought to the theatre and constructed during the weekend before the show opens.

Step 6. The Final Set The final set is fitted into the theatre. During the fit-up the designer will work with the production team to ensure that all the final details are perfected on the set before the show opens.



Model Box from The Importance of Being Earnest.



The Importance of Being Earnest full set and costume

Costume Designs

1. The costume designer, Amy Jane Cook, begins by researching the time period, trends in fashion and location that the play is set in. This gives the designer inspiration for their costumes. They will then create drawings, colour charts and descriptions to give to the wardrobe department.

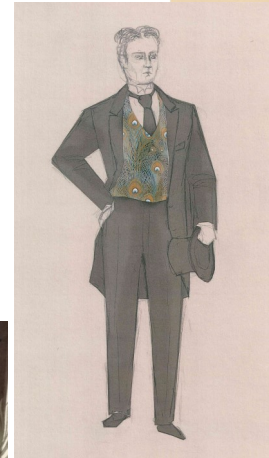
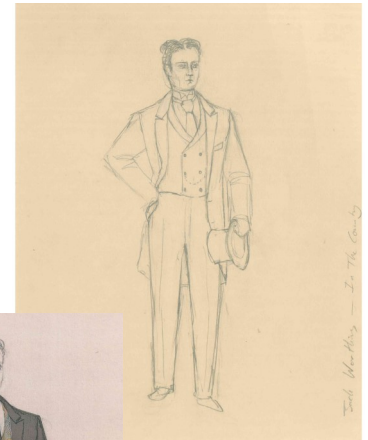
The images below are Amy Jane Cook's references for The Importance of Being Earnest.



2. These drawings are given to the wardrobe department at The Watermill. They begin to source, buy, hire and create the costumes.

3. During the rehearsal process the actors will be called for costume fittings. These sessions are to check that the costumes fit the actor well and also gives the designer a chance to see their creations in a physical form. The wardrobe department will then make adjustments and additional embellishments to the costumes.

4. Throughout the show's run, costumes come under day-to-day usage and this sometimes means that they get dirty or damaged. It is the job of the wardrobe department to maintain, repair and clean all of the costumes.



An original sketch of Jack's costume from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, followed by the more detailed watercolour drawing given to the wardrobe department .



The Importance of Being Earnest:

Classroom exercises

Earnest has its roots in the Restoration Theatre of the 17th and 18th Century. As a lead in to an exploration of the text, themes and characters, it would be useful to explore of Restoration Comedy to ensure students have a strong baseline knowledge to build on.

Stock character statues

One key element of restoration comedies is the presence of stock characters; characters who are instantly recognisable to the audience.

With the group spread around the room, ask students to create a statue of the following characters as you describe them.

MEN-

The Rake - posh, charming, liked by the ladies

The Cuck – older rich man, married to the Coquette, jealous but ignorant of wife's flirting

The Fop – effeminate and vain but attractive to women

The Country father – bumbling old man

WOMEN-

The Coquette – married to the Cuck but younger and attractive and very flirty

The Old Crone – older lady thinks she is attractive but not really successful, gossip

The Country daughter – happy go lucky, nice young lady, Rake is after her

Using these characters, students can create a number of short scenes in which these characters interact. Ask students to look for opportunities of comedy. This may be in interactions where personalities or characters may stand in contrast to one another or where they may be too similar.

Example of devised scenes

- The Coquette and The Rake flirting, whilst The Cuck remains oblivious.
- The Old Crones Gossiping.
- The Country Father trying to match the upper class behaviours of The Fop.

If you are planning to explore the text of *The Importance of Being Earnest* or have already done so, you may wish to lead a discussion with the group in which you look for the stock characters within the play.

Character names

Explain to the students that restoration comedies are inhabited by characters whose names suggest something of their habits and personalities.

Collect names from restoration comedies, put each name on a slip of paper and place them into a hat. Then ask the students to take one each. One by one they must enter the space, acting as their name dictates and improving interactions with any other actor who joins them in the space. You can give them a set scenario if you wish: a job interview, or trying to hail a horse and trap, depending on how much you wish to keep the exercise in the period. The audience must then guess their name.

Here are some suggested names for starters:

Mr Pinchwife, Sir Jealous, Captain Absolute, Lydia Languish, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Lady Sneerwell, Sir Benjamin Bachbite, Snake, Dainty Fidget, Mrs Squeamish, Sir Fopling Flutter, Mrs Loveit, Mr Smirk, Lady Townley, Busy, Lady Ogle.

You may then wish to allow students to create their own character names to add to the hat. (It may be worth checking them before they go in...) To give them inspiration they might use some of the following:

Verbs that's suggest character habits: Poke, Whisper, Shuffle, Polish, Snigger.

Nouns that suggest a personality or job: Fox, Scabbard, Mop, Whip, Swan, Bottle.

Adjectives that describe a character's behaviour: Careless, Perfect, Wiley, Meddling, Pompous.

The aim of this exercise is to bring an awareness of the character types of restoration theatre and to consider the character names in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Lady Frizzle's Feather

Almost every restoration comedy relies on gossip being passed from servant to mistress, round the houses and back.

Now it's your turn. Ask everyone to stand in a circle, the first player stage whispers "Lady Frizzle's Feather..." to their neighbour. This passes all the way around the circle. See how much energy and intrigue you can get out of the gossipy tones of this simple phrase. Is the feather something scandalous? Seductive? Outrageous? Hilarious?

When the phrase has gone round once, extend the sentence by adding, "Lady Frizzle's Feather had it's..." and go round again, with everyone playing on the joy of the extra snippet of gossip and the anticipation of what's to come.

Once this phrase has done a lap, complete the line "Lady Frizzle's feather had it's top knocked off". Encourage players to share the line as if it's the most meaningful piece of gossip they have ever been trusted with.

Then, pass the gossip line around the circle again, but this time each person changes a word. So it might go round something like this:

'Lady Frizzle's feather had it's top knocked off!'

'Lady Frizzle's fellah had his top knocked off!'

'Lady Teazle's fellah had his top knocked off!'

'Lady Teazle's fellah had his head chopped off!'

If you like, you could improvise a chorus of 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the rest of the group to keep them engaged. Once the gossip reached a conclusion, bring the game to an end and explore how far the rumour has changed.

The aim of this game is to become familiar with the gossiping, back-biting world of restoration comedy.

Following this exploration of the world of restoration comedy, you may wish to build a scheme of work around:

The themes of 'The Importance of being Earnest'

Comedy of Manners

Farce

Satire

Other useful resources:

Jessica Swale: Drama Games for Rehearsals or Drama Games for Classrooms and Workshops.

Credits



The Importance of Being Earnest

By Oscar Wilde

Director Kate Budgen

Designer Amy Jane Cook

Lighting Designer Sally Ferguson

Sound Designer Jon McLeod

Movement Director Lucy Cullingford

Cast List in alphabetical order:

Charlotte Beaumont Cecily

Peter Bray Algernon

Jim Creighton Dr Chasuble

Claudia Jolly Gwendolen

Wendy Nottingham Miss Prism

Morgan Philpott Lane / Merriman

Benedict Salter Jack

Connie Walker Lady Bracknell

Production Manager Lawrence T. Doyle

Company Stage Manager Kerrie Driscoll

Assistant Production Manager Harry Armytage

Deputy Stage Manager Sara Sandalls

Assistant Stage Managers Sarah Marsland, Alice Loizel

Wardrobe Supervisor Emily Barratt

Wardrobe Assistant Louisa Patey

Audio Description Bill Clancy

Set Construction DSH Carpentry and Design

Production Photographer Philip Tull

National Press and Publicity Jan Ferrer