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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



The Importance of
Being Earnest
Oscar Wilde

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Act I

1. Algernon admits to lacking musical talent, but he claims that a passion for music is his gift. Write a one-page journal entry about a hobby or activity that you enjoy. What skills are involved, and how do you rate yourself in skill? Do you believe that doing it well is important, or is the pleasure from simply doing what you like all that matters. Why or why not?
2. Lane ridicules marriage when he comments on the poor quality of champagne found in the households of married couples. His comment signifies an underlying theme of the play: the lack of reverence for marriage.

Compose a list of eight advantages and disadvantages of marriage. When your list is complete, write a brief summary paragraph on whether you believe that marriage is a positive or negative venture.

3. Algernon insinuates that the upper class is immoral and that the lower class makes up the moral composition of society. In your opinion, is this an accurate depiction? Write a letter to a friend discussing how money affects an individual's moral values. Do you believe, for instance, that money changes a person? Relate an example from a book, movie, or real life to support your point of view.

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12. The fictional character, Bunbury, provides an easy excuse for Algernon to avoid his family. Relate a funny story from a movie or television show in which a character frantically tried to avoid someone but failed. What efforts did the character make, and what was the outcome?

13. Algernon dines with his family once a week, which he considers to be more than enough time. Think about your relationship with your family, and choose one of the following exercises to complete:
 - A. Write a letter to a relative with whom you are close. In the letter, express how this person makes you feel and how he or she influences your life.

 - B. Write a journal entry about a tradition that your family practices. The practice may relate to a special event, such as a holiday, or a daily routine. Explain why this tradition is special to you.

14. Remarks are made about the rising amount of public affection shown by married couples, and how these displays are “scandalous.” How do you feel about public displays of affection? Is it relevant whether or not the couple is married? Provide your opinion in a paragraph. If possible, include an example of something you witnessed that supports your point of view.

15. Algernon is cynical about many things, especially marriage. Think about a cynical character from your personal life, or from a book, television show, or movie, and write a letter to this character about his or her attitude. Convey whether or not you agree with the character’s outlook, and why.

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30. Jack is stunned to learn that Algernon is pretending to be Ernest and insists that his friend leave immediately, but Algernon replies, “I certainly won’t leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose.” Isn’t this what friends are supposed to do for one another if one is hurting? Write a short recollection of the best thing a friend ever did for you, or the best thing you ever did for a friend.
31. Cecily shows Algernon the love letters that she forged in his name. Algernon is surprised to learn that, although he and Cecily have just met, their engagement has been established for some time. At one point, Cecily even broke off the relationship for a week because of a fictional disagreement. Choose one of the following scenarios to complete:
- A. Compose one of the three fictional letters that Algernon wrote to Cecily after their engagement was broken. In the letter, have Algernon mention the reason for the break-up, how he feels, and why he wants to mend their relationship. Remember, though, to use the name *Ernest* instead of *Algernon*.
- B. Compose the letter that Cecily wrote to Algernon to end their engagement. In the letter, explain Cecily’s reason for the break-up and how she now feels about Algernon. Discuss any possibilities for mending the relationship.

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38. In anger, Cecily makes an obvious attempt to be rude by serving Gwendolen the opposite of what she requests. In response, Gwendolen warns Cecily that she may have gone too far. Imagine that you are one of the two women. Write a letter to an advice columnist like Dear Abby explaining your view of the situation. Then answer the letter.
39. Jack admits to Cecily and Gwendolen that he has been deceiving them, and the women refuse to talk to him. Jack's deception possibly caused him to lose his fiancé. Choose one of the following activities to complete:
- A. Write about a time when you or someone you know lied about something seemingly minor, and the lie developed into a larger problem. Explain the lie, including the reason it was made. How did the situation get out of hand? If given a chance to do things over again, how should they be done differently?
 - B. Write about a time when a friend or relative lied to you or someone you know. Describe the situation, including how it felt to be lied to and what was said to the liar. Was the situation resolved, and, if so, how?
40. Algernon calmly eats muffins while he and Jack argue. Jack, who is agitated, demands that Algernon stop eating his muffins. Algernon replies, "When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me." Create a list of ten ways, other than eating, to deal with stress.