

Text selected by student for assessment: Critical analysis essay

### Learning outcomes in focus

#### Students should be able to:

**OL1.** Know and use the conventions of oral language interaction, in a variety of contexts, including class groups, for a range of purposes, such as asking for information, stating an opinion, listening to others, informing, explaining, arguing, persuading, criticising, commentating, narrating, imagining, speculating.

**R4.** Use an appropriate critical vocabulary while responding to literary texts.

**W3.** Write for a variety of purposes, for example to analyse, evaluate, imagine, explore, engage amuse, narrate, inform, explain, argue, persuade, criticise, comment on what they have heard, viewed and read.

**W8.** Write about the effectiveness of key moments from their texts commenting on characters, key scenes, favourite images from a film, poem, a drama, a chapter, a media or web based event.

### Teaching and learning context

Students studied *The Importance of Being Earnest*, with a focus on enhancing their speaking and critical thinking skills by analysing and discussing characters, setting, key scenes and plot. Students then planned an essay exploring their thoughts, criticisms and concerns about either characters or setting/ social class and the impact that these elements have on forming the main character/s.

Some students wrote about the type of actor / actress they would select to play the main characters, justifying their selection by reference to character traits they had identified. Others, including this student, chose to write about the impact of setting and social class on the main characters and how their behaviour might have been different if they lived in a different time, place and/or social class.

### Task

Write an essay which argues that the characters in 'The Importance of Being Ernest' would behave differently if they grew up in a different time, place and/or social class.

### Features of Quality

Genre awareness and control/creativity

Writing competence and word choices

Awareness of and shaping for receiver/audience

\* Students choose two texts from their collection to submit for assessment.

The play that I have studied is 'The Importance of Being Earnest' by Oscar Wilde. The play was written in the late 1800's. This period of history is known as the Victorian era of Britain. During this time that Queen Victoria reigned, strict morals were followed. As a result of these harsh rules, appearance and public behaviour became the population's priority. A rigid social class system was in place and the lower classes were viewed as outsiders because of their simple lack in wealth: "They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility." The upper classes however, lead a luxurious and complacent life that valued social conduct, but lacked in excitement and entertainment. Wilde portrays the upper class in a negative aspect to make their lives seem pretentious and overrated. Algernon, Jack, Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen and Cecily are examples of Victorian aristocratic characters in the play. I agree that if the characters were in a contrasting age and class, that they would be interpreted differently. I've decided to set the chosen characters in rural Ireland in the 1830-1840's to show how they would behave without the influence of the prosperity and undeserved wealth that circles them in the play.

The characters in the play

are distinctly characterized as the elite of society. If they were raised in a different manner without the unjust privileges that they have, I believe that their lives would be the complete antithesis of their entitled every day routines.

In the remote countryside of Ireland, in the late nineteenth century, life was considered simple but limited. Large families relied on the potatoes crop in order to survive. In comparison, the characters in the play who are based in the urban capital of England are indulgent and greedy. They feast excessively on large portions of opulent meals and costly snacks, such as afternoon tea of muffins, crumpets, tea cakes and cucumber sandwiches. "Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left." If Algernon was brought up in the impoverished non-urban Ireland, he would not be selfish about food or wealth, or hedonistic. Himself and Jack would most likely be married and their main focus would centre paying the landlord and feeding their many children. They wouldn't dream about the luxury of "muffins" or even their disliked "teacakes." Their meals would consist of potatoes, milk and herring.

In the play, Wilde portrays the lives of the upper class as boring and dull. The characters are always looking for a form of entertainment. Algernon and Jack use 'bunburying' as a way to escape their listless life. Cecily and Gwendolen use their imaginations to invent pretend lovers, as a break from their 'tedious' reality. But in the time of

the Great Famine in Ireland, there would be no time to ponder about fantasy worlds as the actuality of the crop-failure would be time-consuming. The women would be worried about their young children and the men would attempt to find a source of food. This would give Jack, Algernon, Gwendolen & Cecily an undiscovered trait: selflessness.

In the countryside, Lady Bracknell would be considered weak and fragile because of her age. In her society, she is viewed as a popular public figure as wealth and her social reputation hold her up in her community. If she was placed in an opposite situation such as a lower class in Famine Ireland, she would be treated how she treats the plebeians in her own world. I believe that she would still have the same arrogant and negative attitude but without the snobbish, and self-centred focus that she has on herself. She definitely would not be protecting Gwendolen, as Gwendolen would have her basic path of life laid ahead of her already. There would be fewer choices to be made in life for the women as cooking, farming and minding the young <sup>would</sup> busy them.

In conclusion, I believe that social status and wealth heavily influence the character's personalities in the play. Without the affluent backdrop that they possess, the characters behave and act in a different manner.

### Features of quality - teacher annotations and level of achievement

#### Teacher annotations:

##### **FQ1.** Genre awareness and control/creativity

This student demonstrates a clear understanding of this genre. An ability to analyse a society is apparent in a well-constructed critical analysis essay, which also incorporates imaginative and original ideas.

##### **FQ2.** Writing competence and word choices

A wide range of vocabulary and a well-executed argument demonstrates the student's competence when commenting and speculating on a character's social class. The student's ability to compare and contrast societies to draw logical conclusions is particularly impressive. Language is persuasive as the student confidently and coherently argues their point of view with sufficient support from 'The Importance of Being Ernest'.

##### **FQ3.** Awareness of and shaping for receiver/audience

The student is aware of the formality of the task and structures the essay accordingly. It is clear that the student drew on prior learning and/or research to sufficiently prove the points being made. There are few errors and the minor mistakes that occur do not detract from the overall standard of this piece.

#### Level of achievement:

##### **Best fit on balance judgement =**



Exceptional

This example represents one text from the student's Collection of Texts. The student selected this and one other text to submit for assessment. Looking at a number of examples, teachers will see a variety of different text types, in a variety of genres.

More examples will be added over time at [curriculumonline.ie](http://curriculumonline.ie)

#### Features of Quality:

##### **Exceptional**

The student's text shows creativity and command of the chosen genre.  
The writing is highly competent, marked by original ideas, and imaginative word choices are perfectly suited to the purpose of the text.  
The work is fully shaped for its intended receiver/audience.

##### **Above expectations**

The student's text shows very good control of the chosen genre.  
The writing is consistently competent, and effective word choices are very well matched to the purpose of the text.  
The work is clearly shaped with the receiver/audience in mind.

##### **In line with expectations**

The student's text shows good awareness of the chosen genre.  
The writing is generally competent, and word choices match the purpose of the text well.  
Content and development of ideas reveal consistent awareness of the receiver/audience.

##### **Yet to meet expectations**

The student's text shows little awareness of the chosen genre.  
The writing lacks competence, and word choices may be inappropriate to the intended purpose of the text.  
Content and development of ideas reveal little awareness of a receiver/audience.

The annotations capture observations by the student's teacher, using the features of quality, with a view to establishing the level of achievement this text reflects. The annotations and judgement were confirmed by the Quality Assurance group, consisting of practicing English teachers and representatives of the Inspectorate, the SEC and JCT.