Assignment #1

Act I
1. At the beginning of the play, who is Algernon expecting a visit from, and how does he prepare for the visit?
2. What reason does Jack give for why he has come to Algernon’s flat for tea?
3. Why does Algernon believe marriage proposals are unromantic?
4. Why does Algernon think Jack and Gwendolen will not marry?
5. What is the inscription on the cigarette case?
6. Why does Algernon believe that the cigarette case does not belong to Jack?
7. What is a “Bunburyist,” and how was that label created?
8. Who is Cecily Cardew, and how is she connected to Jack?
9. Why did Jack create Ernest, his alter ego?
10. Why does Gwendolen say she was “far from indifferent” to Jack before she met him?
11. Why, specifically, does Gwendolen like the name Ernest?
12. Why is Gwendolen critical of Jack’s marriage proposal?
13. How do Lady Bracknell’s views on marriage differ from Gwendolen’s?
14. When Lady Bracknell interviews Jack as a potential fiancé for her daughter, what additional information is learned about his character?
15. How did Jack come to live with Mr. Thomas Cardew and his family?
16. How does Lady Bracknell respond to Jack’s story of his adoption?
17. How does Jack plan to get rid of his fictitious brother Ernest?
18. When Gwendolen returns to Algernon’s flat, what does she say regarding Jack’s conversation with Lady Bracknell?
19. How does Algernon acquire Jack’s country address?
20. At the end of Act I, where does Algernon say he is going?

Assignment #2

Act II
1. What is Cecily’s opinion of her uncle at the beginning of Act II?
2. What does Cecily wish Jack would do about his brother Ernest, and why does Miss Prism think it is a bad idea?
3. According to Cecily, what is the main difference between events that are recorded in a diary and those recorded in memory?
4. Why was Miss Prism’s novel never published?
5. Who arrives when Miss Prism goes for a walk with Dr. Chasuble? Why is Cecily frightened to meet him?
6. What reason does Miss Prism give for why unmarried men lead “weaker vessels astray”?
7. Why does Jack arrive at his country house dressed in all black?
8. What favor does Jack ask of Dr. Chasuble?
9. How long does Algernon plan to stay at Jack’s country house?
10. Why does Cecily keep a diary?
11. What does Cecily mean when she says that she and Ernest have been engaged for three months?
12. What does Cecily say that is similar to an idea expressed by Gwendolen in Act I?
13. Who arrives when Ernest leaves to speak to Dr. Chasuble?
14. How does Gwendolen respond when she learns that Cecily is Jack’s ward?
15. What is the cause of the confusion between Gwendolen and Cecily?
16. How do Gwendolen and Cecily attempt to prove who is engaged to Ernest?
17. How do Cecily and Gwendolen show their resentment toward each other?
18. How is the conflict between Gwendolen and Cecily resolved?
19. What do Algernon and Jack do after the women leave the room?
20. What reasons do Algernon and Jack present for why the other person should not be christened Ernest?
Assignment #3
Act III
1. How do Cecily and Gwendolen come to forgive their fiancés?
2. How did Lady Bracknell discover her daughter’s location? Where did Gwendolen tell her father she was going?
3. How does Lady Bracknell respond to Algernon’s news of Bunbury’s death?
4. What does Jack say that prompts Lady Bracknell to approve of Algernon’s engagement to Cecily?
5. Why does Lady Bracknell disapprove of long engagements?
6. Why does Jack disapprove of the engagement between Algernon and Cecily? What examples does he present that justify the reason for his disapproval?
7. How does Lady Bracknell know Miss Prism? What is their history?
8. What was the unfortunate switch that Miss Prism made? What was the result?
9. Who is the baby that Miss Prism lost? How is this fact proven?
10. What is revealed to be the relationship between Algernon and Jack?
11. What is Jack’s real name, and how is that fact revealed?

Assignment Key
Assignment #1
Act I
1. At the beginning of the play, who is Algernon expecting a visit from, and how does he prepare for the visit? Algernon is expecting his Aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell) and his cousin Gwendolen to join him for afternoon tea. He has asked his servant to make cucumber sandwiches for the occasion.
2. What reason does Jack give for why he has come to Algernon’s flat for tea? Jack knows that Gwendolen will be coming to tea. He is in love with her and intends to propose.
3. Why does Algernon believe marriage proposals are unromantic? Algernon feels that love is romantic only when it is uncertain. Once the proposal is accepted, the excitement is over. Love ceases to be uncertain and, therefore, becomes unromantic.
4. Why does Algernon think Jack and Gwendolen will not marry? Algernon believes that girls never marry the men with whom they flirt. According to Algernon’s belief, since Gwendolen and Jack flirt frequently, they will not marry. Furthermore, Algernon refuses to give his consent to the marriage until Jack tells him who Cecily is.
5. What is the inscription on the cigarette case? The inscription reads, “From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.”
6. Why does Algernon believe that the cigarette case does not belong to Jack? Jack has never mentioned Cecily before, and Algernon does not believe Jack is acquainted with anyone by that name. Additionally, Algernon refuses to believe Jack’s story that Cecily is his aunt, especially since the person who wrote the inscription describes herself as “little” and addresses him as “Uncle Jack.” Finally, Jack had Algernon convinced that his name is Ernest. Jack later explains that he goes by the name Jack in the country and Ernest in the city.
7. What is a “Bunburyist,” and how was that label created? A Bunburyist is an individual who creates a fictitious relative or friend who requires constant care and attention. An individual may pretend to visit the friend or relative at a moment’s notice, thereby having an excuse to avoid other engagements. The term “Bunburyist” is derived from the name of Algernon’s fictitious friend, Mr. Bunbury, a sickly invalid whom Algernon visits in the country.
8. Who is Cecily Cardew, and how is she connected to Jack? Cecily Cardew is Jack’s ward. She lives at Jack’s country house with a governess, Miss Prism. Cecily’s grandfather, Thomas Cardew, adopted Jack when he was a boy and, later, made Jack Cecily’s legal guardian. Even though she is not related to Jack, Cecily respectfully calls him uncle.
9. Why did Jack create Ernest, his alter ego? Ever since Jack became Cecily’s guardian, he has been forced to act morally in order to set a good example for her. However, Jack is not moral and upright by nature, and he feels that he needs to escape from home to be himself. For this reason, he has told his friends in the country that he has a younger brother named Ernest in the Albany, who is always getting into trouble. When Jack goes to “visit” Ernest, he actually goes to the city.
Assignment #2
Act II
1. What is Cecily’s opinion of her uncle at the beginning of Act II?
Cecily thinks that Jack is a very serious person and that he does not enjoy her and Miss Prism’s company. According to Cecily, “he often looks a little bored when [they] are together.”
2. What does Cecily wish Jack would do about his brother Ernest, and why does Miss Prism think it is a bad idea?
Cecily wishes that Jack would invite his brother to visit them in the country. She thinks that she and Miss Prism could have a positive influence on Ernest’s life. However, Miss Prism does not believe that she and Cecily could reform Ernest. Furthermore, she is not sure that it would be right to do so. Miss Prism believes that “as a man sows so let him reap,” or that people should be responsible for their actions.
3. According to Cecily, what is the main difference between events that are recorded in a diary and those recorded in memory?
The events that are recorded in a diary are truthful and accurate; those that are recorded in memory are fictitious, just like those in novels.
4. Why was Miss Prism’s novel never published?
Miss Prism’s novel was lost, and, as a result, it could not be published.
5. Who arrives when Miss Prism goes for a walk with Dr. Chasuble? Why is Cecily frightened to meet him?
When Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble are out, Algernon arrives, pretending to be Jack’s brother Ernest. Cecily is frightened to meet him, not because of his reputed immoral behavior, but because she is afraid that he will look like everyone else.
6. What reason does Miss Prism give for why unmarried men lead “weaker vessels astray”?
Unmarried men are very attractive and tempting to women. Married men, on the other hand, are attractive only to their wives.
7. Why does Jack arrive at his country house dressed in all black?
Jack is dressed in black because he wants his friends in the country to believe that he is in mourning. Jack is carrying out his plan to eliminate his imaginary brother Ernest. He tells Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble that he received a telegram the previous evening from the manager of the Grand Hotel in Paris; Ernest had died of a severe chill, and his body is going to be buried in Paris.
8. What favor does Jack ask of Dr. Chasuble?
Jack asks Dr. Chasuble to christen him at half-past five that afternoon.
9. How long does Algernon plan to stay at Jack’s country house?
Algernon plans to stay for a week.
10. Why does Cecily keep a diary?
Cecily keeps a diary to record her thoughts and impressions. She hopes to eventually have it published.
11. What does Cecily mean when she says that she and Ernest have been engaged for three months?
Cecily fell in love with Ernest after hearing Jack talk about him and his bad behavior. She imagined that he proposed to her under the old tree on February 14th. She bought herself a ring from Ernest, and she started wearing a bracelet with a lover’s knot that she promised to never take off. In addition, Cecily wrote letters to herself from Ernest. She broke off the imaginary engagement on March 22nd, because she believes that all serious engagements have to be broken off at least once. By the following week, however, the engagement was resumed.
12. What does Cecily say that is similar to an idea expressed by Gwendolen in Act I?
Cecily says that she thinks she could love only a man named Ernest.
13. Who arrives when Ernest leaves to speak to Dr. Chasuble?
Gwendolen arrives, wanting to speak to Jack.
14. How does Gwendolen respond when she learns that Cecily is Jack’s ward?
Gwendolen appears to be very fond of Cecily and is delighted to know her; however, she says that she wishes Cecily were older and less attractive. Gwendolen is a bit concerned that Cecily will tempt “Ernest” into being unfaithful.
15. What is the cause of the confusion between Gwendolen and Cecily?
Gwendolen and Cecily are both engaged to Ernest, even though he does not exist. In reality, Gwendolen is engaged to Jack Worthing, who calls himself Ernest in the city, and Cecily is engaged to Algernon Moncrieff, who is pretending to be Jack’s fictitious brother Ernest.
16. How do Gwendolen and Cecily attempt to prove who is engaged to Ernest?
Each woman argues that her engagement is valid because it will soon be published in the local newspaper. Additionally, each has written about the proposal in her diary. Ernest’s proposal to Cecily took place ten minutes prior to her conversation with Gwendolen, and his proposal to Gwendolen took place at 5:30 p.m. the previous day.

17. How do Cecily and Gwendolen show their resentment toward each other?
Gwendolen accuses Cecily of being unfashionable. She makes the satiric remark that she has never seen a spade before, calls the country boring, and indicates that sugar and cake are both unfashionable at afternoon tea.
Cecily attempts to expose Gwendolen as a hypocrite by pointing out that it is foolish for a person who hates crowds to live in a city. Furthermore, she intentionally gives Gwendolen tea with sugar and cake just to make her angry.

18. How is the conflict between Gwendolen and Cecily resolved?
Cecily reveals that the man Gwendolen is engaged to is really her guardian, Jack Worthing. Gwendolen, in a similar fashion, says that Cecily’s fiancé is her cousin, Algernon Moncrieff. Once the two women discover that they have been deceived, they unite and turn against the men.

19. What do Algernon and Jack do after the women leave the room?
When Cecily and Gwendolen leave, the two men argue while eating muffins.

20. What reasons do Algernon and Jack present for why the other person should not be christened Ernest?
Jack says that Algernon should not be christened because he has already had a christening. Algernon says that Jack should not be christened because Jack’s imaginary brother Ernest apparently died from a severe chill, and a chill may be hereditary.

Assignment #3

Act III

1. How do Cecily and Gwendolen come to forgive their fiancés?
Cecily and Gwendolen feel as though their fiancés’ reasons for deceiving them are just. Algernon says that he pretended to be Ernest so that he could meet Cecily. Jack agrees that he pretended to be Ernest so he could frequently go to town and visit Gwendolen. The women also think that Jack and Algernon are making a great sacrifice to be christened that afternoon and named Ernest.

2. How did Lady Bracknell discover her daughter’s location? Where did Gwendolen tell her father she was going?
Lady Bracknell bribed Gwendolen’s maid to tell her where Gwendolen went. Gwendolen had lied and said that she was attending a lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a Permanent Income on Thought.

3. How does Lady Bracknell respond to Algernon’s news of Bunbury’s death?
Lady Bracknell is happy that Bunbury is dead. She is glad that he finally “made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action.”

4. What does Jack say that prompts Lady Bracknell to approve of Algernon’s engagement to Cecily?
Jack tells Lady Bracknell that Cecily is the daughter of Mr. Thomas Cardew. He then provides her with Cardew’s three addresses. Additionally, Jack tells Lady Bracknell that the family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby, a fact that she finds satisfying. Finally, he tells her that Cecily has a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in funds.

5. Why does Lady Bracknell disapprove of long engagements?
According to Lady Bracknell, long engagements allow the betrothed to learn about each other’s character, which she views as a bad idea.

6. Why does Jack disapprove of the engagement between Algernon and Cecily? What examples does he present that justify the reason for his disapproval?
Jack does not approve of Algernon’s marriage to Cecily because he does not think Algernon has a strong moral character. Jack says that Algernon entered his home uninvited, pretending to be his brother Ernest, drank an entire bottle of wine that Jack was saving for himself; made Cecily fall in love with him, stayed to tea (even though he was not wanted), and ate all the muffins.

7. How does Lady Bracknell know Miss Prism? What is their history?
Miss Prism used to work for Lord and Lady Bracknell. She left the house with a baby in a carriage, but never returned home. Weeks later, the carriage was found in Bayswater, but it contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel instead of the infant. Miss Prism and the baby could not be found.
8. What was the unfortunate switch that Miss Prism made? What was the result?
Miss Prism accidentally put the baby she was watching in her hand-bag and her manuscript in the baby carriage. Miss Prism then accidentally left the hand-bag in the cloak-room of Victoria Station.

9. Who is the baby that Miss Prism lost? How is this fact proven?
Jack is the baby whom Miss Prism lost. This fact is proven when he shows Miss Prism with the handbag, which she identifies as her own.

10. What is revealed to be the relationship between Algernon and Jack?
Jack and Algernon are brothers.

11. What is Jack’s real name, and how is that fact revealed?
Jack’s real name is Ernest. His father was a General, and his name could be found in the Army List. When Jack looks up the name, he discovers that his father’s name was Ernest. Because Jack is the eldest son, he is named after his father.