Story Grammar

Story: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Plot: A play based on the decadence of the Victorian aristocracy in late 19th century London

Themes: Decadence, marriage, society, morality, honesty

Episode:

**Setting:** London 1895; first a bachelor flat in the city and then a manor house in the country

**Characters:** John “Jack” Worthing (friend of Algernon, lover of Gwendolyn, guardian of Cecily; known as Jack in the country and Ernest in the city), Algernon Moncrieff (friend of Jack/Ernest, cousin of Gwendolyn, lover of Cecily; pretends to be Ernest in the country), Gwendolyn Fairfax (daughter of Lady Bracknell), Lady Bracknell (aristocrat), Cecily Cardew (ward of Jack), Miss Prism (Cecily’s governess), Reverend Chasuble (pastor in the country; flirts with Miss Prism), Lane (Algernon’s butler), Merriman (manservant in Jack’s country manor)

Chain of Events:

Jack comes to visit Algernon (who calls Jack Ernest) at his flat in London. Through an inscription on a cigarette case, Algernon learns of his true identity. Algernon’s aunt, Lady Bracknell, also stops by to visit, bringing along her daughter, Gwendolyn, with whom Jack has fallen in love. Gwendolyn confesses her longtime desire to marry a man named Ernest and they become engaged, but Lady Bracknell learns that Jack has no parents and terminates their plans for marriage.

In the mean time, Algernon has learned of Jack’s young, attractive ward in the country, and decides to go visit her under the name of Ernest, pretending to be Jack’s nonexistent brother. He falls in love with Cecily immediately. She confesses that she has always wanted to marry a man named Ernest and that she has in fact considered herself engaged to him since she first learned that her guardian had a naughty brother in the city named Ernest.

Jack returns home earlier than Algernon expected, wearing black and claiming to have just received word that his brother has died in Paris. Miss Prism and Reverend Chasuble express sympathies until they discover that “Ernest” is actually there with Cecily right at that moment. Rather than admitting their deceptions, Jack simply insists that “Ernest” has to leave immediately. Both men have already made appointments with Reverend Chasuble to be christened Ernest.

However, while Algernon is packing to leave, Gwendolyn suddenly arrives. Before seeing either Jack or Algernon she is introduced to Cecily and the two discover that they are both engaged to Ernest. Soon the misunderstanding is cleared up, but then Lady Bracknell arrives as well, reminding Jack that his unknown parentage still prevents him from marrying Gwendolyn.

The resolution comes when Lady Bracknell recognizes Miss Prism as being the governess who lost Lady Bracknell’s sister’s baby. It turns out that Jack is that baby—Algernon’s older brother, actually—and his real name is in fact Ernest.