Writing Prompts: Act 1

Directions: Respond to one of the following writing prompts.

1. Algernon has invented a system of Bunburying to allow him to escape from unwanted social obligations. He has a rather highly developed system and has even given it a name in order to make it more believable. Many people often want to evade or escape responsibilities but are only able to devise a rather feeble excuse.

Write an informal letter to your closest friend in which you delightedly inform your friend about your new system for getting out of doing what you do not want to do. Tell your friend why you invented the system, and give specific details about it, including a name. Give your friend advice on the benefits of developing such a system for personal use.

2. Algernon says to Jack, “I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.”

Jack says, “My dear fellow there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all . . . When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It’s one’s duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one’s health or one’s happiness, in order to get up to town, I have always pretended to have a younger brother . . . who . . . gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.”

From your observation of the antics of Jack and Algernon in the first act, write an essay that explains the possibilities and the problems caused by the use of false identities. Is it possible for a person to get away with this kind of fraud in today’s society?

3. Oscar Wilde uses his characters to capture a certain response from his audience of viewers or readers. In act 1 Lady Bracknell states, “Education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.”

Evaluate the validity of her statement. Consider the time and place in which this play was written. Decide whether you agree or disagree. In a letter to Oscar Wilde, express your views on this quotation. Support your judgment. Remember that you are writing to a respected playwright.