

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

BY OSCAR WILDE
DIRECTOR LEZLIE WADE

GRADE RECOMMENDATION

Suitable for Grades 10–12

CONTENT ADVISORY FOR STUDENTS

Contains some mature themes

STUDENT MATINÉE DATES

May 14, 16, 18, 22, 29; June 5, 8, 12, 20, 27; September 6, 7, 11, 13, 19, 25; October 4, 9, 18, 23, 26

ABOUT THE PLAY

Part comedy, part drama, *An Ideal Husband* was written in London in 1894 by Irish playwright Oscar Wilde and staged in 1895 just before his classic comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The play is often called a “social comedy” because it deals with the serious subjects of political corruption, blackmail and honour along with witty banter and quotable one-liners. Also called a romantic melodrama and a farce, it satirizes Victorian morals.

SYNOPSIS

Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern enjoy a matrimonial bliss based on her belief that he is the only pure and noble man in politics. When a party guest at their home brings a friend newly arrived from Vienna, Lady Chiltern recognizes the woman as a girl she disliked in school, but Mrs. Cheveley turns out to be even more sinister than Lady Chiltern knew. She blackmails Sir Robert with the secret he has kept from his wife all these years: he made his career and fortune by selling a state secret to a friend when he was young.

Lord Goring saves the day with some blackmail of his own, having caught Mrs. Cheveley in the theft of a brooch he gave to his cousin. Lady Chiltern learns to lower her unrealistic standards, and Lord Goring puts an end to his father’s badgering by proposing to Sir Robert’s pretty sister.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

1. **All grades:** Language/English (listening to understand, speaking to communicate, reading for meaning)
2. **All grades:** Drama, Music, Visual Art
3. **Grades 10–12:** Health and PE (interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, harassment, bullying, leadership)



4. **Grade 10:** Civics [Politics] (civic awareness)
5. **Grade 11:** Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology (socialization)
6. **Grade 11:** Gender Studies (the social construction of gender, power relations, sex and gender)
7. **Grade 11:** Politics in Action: Making Change (personal action on a political issue)
8. **Grades 11–12:** Philosophy (ethics, aesthetics)
9. **Grade 12:** World History Since the Fifteenth Century (social, economic and political context)
10. **Grade 12:** Adventures in World History (politics and conflict)
11. **Grade 12:** Canadian and International Politics (influence, power and decision-making)

THEMES AND MOTIFS

- Marriage and romance
- Politics, corruption and scandal
- Respect and reputation
- Love
- Modernity
- Morality and ethics
- Compassion and forgiveness
- Memory and the past
- Women and their role in society
- Aestheticism

- The trivial and the serious
- Wit and contrariness
- The ideal
- Truth and lies
- Melodrama

CLASSROOM WARM-UP

Divide the class into three or four groups and give the students the quotes listed below. Have them write a short scene interweaving the quotes. The scene is a London society party to which various important dignitaries and guests have been invited. It's all about delivering witty banter and one-liners.

- "Oh, I love London Society! I think it has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics. Just what Society should be."
- "Oh! I am not at all romantic. I am not old enough. I leave romance to my seniors."
- "I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about."
- "I like looking at geniuses, and listening to beautiful people."
- "Ah! I prefer a gentlemanly fool any day. There is more to be said for stupidity than people imagine."
- "In fact, I usually say what I really think. A great mistake nowadays. It makes one so liable to be misunderstood."
- "When Tommy wants to be romantic he talks to one just like a doctor."
- "And falsehoods [are] the truths of other people."

Let the students know they are free to add their own witty one-liners as well.

Upon completion, have them do a dramatic reading or even stage it and perform it for the rest of the class.

NOTE: Do this exercise before they come and see the show so they can have fun comparing their scene with what Oscar Wilde has written.

ENRICHMENT

Workshops and post-show chats may be arranged by calling the Education Department at 519.271.4040, ext. 2354.

Festival Theatre and Costume Warehouse tours may be arranged by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Online

You can order your group tickets online at any time right from your desk. You can even select your seats! To start planning your trip, go to stratfordfestival.ca/schools.

Email

groups@stratfordfestival.ca

Phone

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