

**Harmony Tree International Speech Festival (HTISF)**  
2024-2025 Set Pieces for Asia Division

**Dramatic Duologue**  
*Born in 2006-2008*

**Choice A**  
**Time Limit:**  
**5 minutes**

## **An Ideal Husband**

*By Oscar Wilde*

*(The play is set in the Grosvenor Square home of Sir Robert Chiltern, respected politician and Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. He and Lady Chiltern are entertaining guests. One of these guests is the fascinating but unscrupulous Mrs Cheveley. During the evening Mrs Cheveley contrives to speak to Sir Robert privately. She has a large investment in the Argentine Canal scheme, which Sir Robert has publicly denounced as a swindle. She informs him that it will be in his interest to reconsider his opinion and withdraw his report on the matter. If he refuses, she has information in her possession that will ruin him. The following morning Mrs Cheveley receives a note from Sir Robert refusing to accede to her demands, and in this scene she confronts Lady Chiltern.)*

**CHEVELEY:** Wonderful woman, Lady Markey, isn't she? Talks more and says less than anybody I ever met. She is made to be a public speaker. Much more so than her husband, though he is a typical Englishman, always dull and usually violent.

*(Lady Chiltern makes no answer, but remains standing. There is a pause. Then the eyes of the two women meet. Lady Chiltern looks stern and pale. Mrs Cheveley seems rather amused).*

**CHILTERN:** Mrs Cheveley, I think it is right to tell you quite frankly that, had I known who you really were, I should not have invited you to my house last night.

**CHEVELEY:** *(with an impertinent smile)* Really?

**CHILTERN:** I could not have done so.

**CHEVELEY:** I see that after all these years you have not changed a bit, Gertrude.

**CHILTERN:** I never change.

**CHEVELEY:** *(Elevating her eyebrows)* Then life has taught you nothing?

**CHILTERN:** It has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned.

**CHEVELEY:** Would you apply that rule to everyone?

**CHILTERN:** Yes, to everyone, without exception.

**CHEVELEY:** Then I am sorry for you, Gertrude, very sorry for you.

**CHILTERN:** You see now, I am sure, that for many reasons any further acquaintance between us during your stay in London is quite impossible?

**CHEVELEY:** *(Leaning back in her chair)* Do you know, Gertrude, I don't mind you talking morality a bit. Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike. You dislike me. I am quite aware of that. And I have always detested you. And yet I have come here to do you a service.

**CHILTERN:** Like the service you wished to render my husband last night, I suppose. Thank heaven, I saved him from that.

**CHEVELEY:** It was you who made him write that insolent letter to me?  
It was you who made him break his promise?

**CHILTERN:** Yes.

**CHEVELEY:** Then you must make him keep it. I give you till tomorrow morning - no more. If by that time your husband does not solemnly bind himself to help me in this great scheme in which I am interested —

**CHILTERN:** This fraudulent speculation —

**CHEVELEY:** Call it what you choose. I hold your husband in the hollow of my hand, and if you are wise you will make him do what I tell him.

**CHILTERN:** *(Rising and going towards her)* You are impertinent. What has my husband to do with you? With a woman like you?

**CHEVELEY:** *(With a bitter laugh)* In this world like meets with like. It is because your husband is himself fraudulent and dishonest that we pair so well together. Between you and him there are chasms. He and I are closer than friends. We are enemies linked together. The same sin binds us.

**CHILTERN:** How dare you class my husband with yourself? How dare you threaten him or me? Leave my house. You are unfit to enter it.

*(Sir Robert enters. He hears his wife's last words, and sees to whom they are addressed. He grows deadly pale.)*

**CHEVELEY:** Your house! A house bought with the price of dishonour. A house, everything in which has been paid for by what the origin of his fortune is! Get him to tell you how he sold to a stockbroker a Cabinet secret. Learn from him to what you owe your position.

**CHILTERN:** It is not true! Robert! It is not true!

**CHEVELEY:** *(Pointing at him with outstretched finger)* Look at him! Can he deny it? Does he dare to?

- The End-

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## **Pride and Prejudice**

*By Jane Austen (Adapted for stage by Sue Pomeroy)*

*(When a young, single man of large fortune comes to live in the neighbourhood, Mrs Bennet is determined that he shall marry one of her daughters, in spite of her husband's apparent indifference to such matters. Set in Regency England, in the Hertfordshire village of Longhorn, this opening scene takes place in Mr Bennet's sanctuary, his library. Lost in his reading, he is suddenly interrupted by his wife bursting in with news of such vital importance to her that it cannot wait.)*

- MRS BENNET:** Mr Bennet! Such news! I cannot wait a moment longer.  
*(As he attempts to ignore her)* No sir — I must interrupt you.
- MR BENNET:** Ever of an impetuous nature my dear.
- MRS BENNET:** Netherfield Park is let at last! Mrs Long has told me all about it!
- MR BENNET:** Ah! *(Replaces a book in the shelves)*
- MRS BENNET:** Do you not want to know who has taken it?
- MR BENNET:** If you must tell me, my dear. I have no objection to listening.
- MRS BENNET:** *(Conspiratorially)* Netherfield has been taken by a young man, and with a large fortune. He is to take possession by the end of the month!
- MR BENNET:** What is his name?
- MRS BENNET:** Bingley.
- MR BENNET:** Is he married or single?
- MRS BENNET:** Single of course! A single man, with four or five thousand a year!  
What a fine thing for our girls!
- MR BENNET:** Indeed? *(Takes out book and inspects it.)*
- MRS BENNET:** My dear Mr Bennet. How can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of him marrying one of them.
- MR BENNET:** *(pause)* Is that his design in settling here?
- MRS BENNET:** What nonsense, what makes you talk so! There is every reason to expect that he will fall in love at least with one of them. My dear, you must go and pay our respects to Mr Bingley as soon as he is moved in.
- MR BENNET:** I see no occasion for that. But you go with the girls — certainly you are as

handsome as they - indeed Mr Bingley may like you the best of the party.

**MRS BENNET:** You flatter me Mr Bennet. I have once been considered something of a beauty, but alas I no longer turn heads as once I used to. No, time and duty are a woman's greatest enemies. A woman with five grown up daughters must forsake thinking of her own beauty.

**MR BENNET:** Indeed in such a case a woman has often not much beauty left to think of.

**MRS BENNET:** (*Ignoring him and returning to the main matter*) No, it will be impossible for us to visit Mr Bingley if you do not.

**MR BENNET:** I have a better idea - I will write him a letter, which you may present to him on his arrival, to assure him he has my hearty consent to marry whichever of my daughters he chooses.

**MRS BENNET:** How can you be so whimsical Mr Bennet? You surely know as well as I how all depends on a good match for our girls. Mr Bingley will be the principal Batchelor in the neighbourhood and I am by no means the first to think it. What will happen if you will not bestir yourself? Your daughters will be beaten to any prospects of rich husbands, we all shall be destitute, and poverty will be your only legacy.

**MR BENNET:** My dear, could I have tried harder to secure our future by obtaining a male heir for the estate? I have bestirred myself often enough I believe, and have been provided with a daughter on each occasion. However, if you are of a mind that providence will smile upon us this time, I have not forgot the way to your chamber and will bestir myself again.

**MRS BENNET:** Mr Bennet, you take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.

**MR BENNET:** On the contrary my dear. I have a healthy respect for your nerves. They have been my constant companions for the past twenty years.

**MRS BENNET:** You have no idea what I go through!

**MR BENNET:** Perhaps not my dear, but I am sure you will get over it and live to see many young men of such good prospects move into the neighbourhood.

**MRS BENNET:** And much good may that do us, if you will not visit any of them (*exits.*)

**MR BENNET:** (*tetchily*) In a household of six women, I do make it a rule to have peace in my library.

- The End-