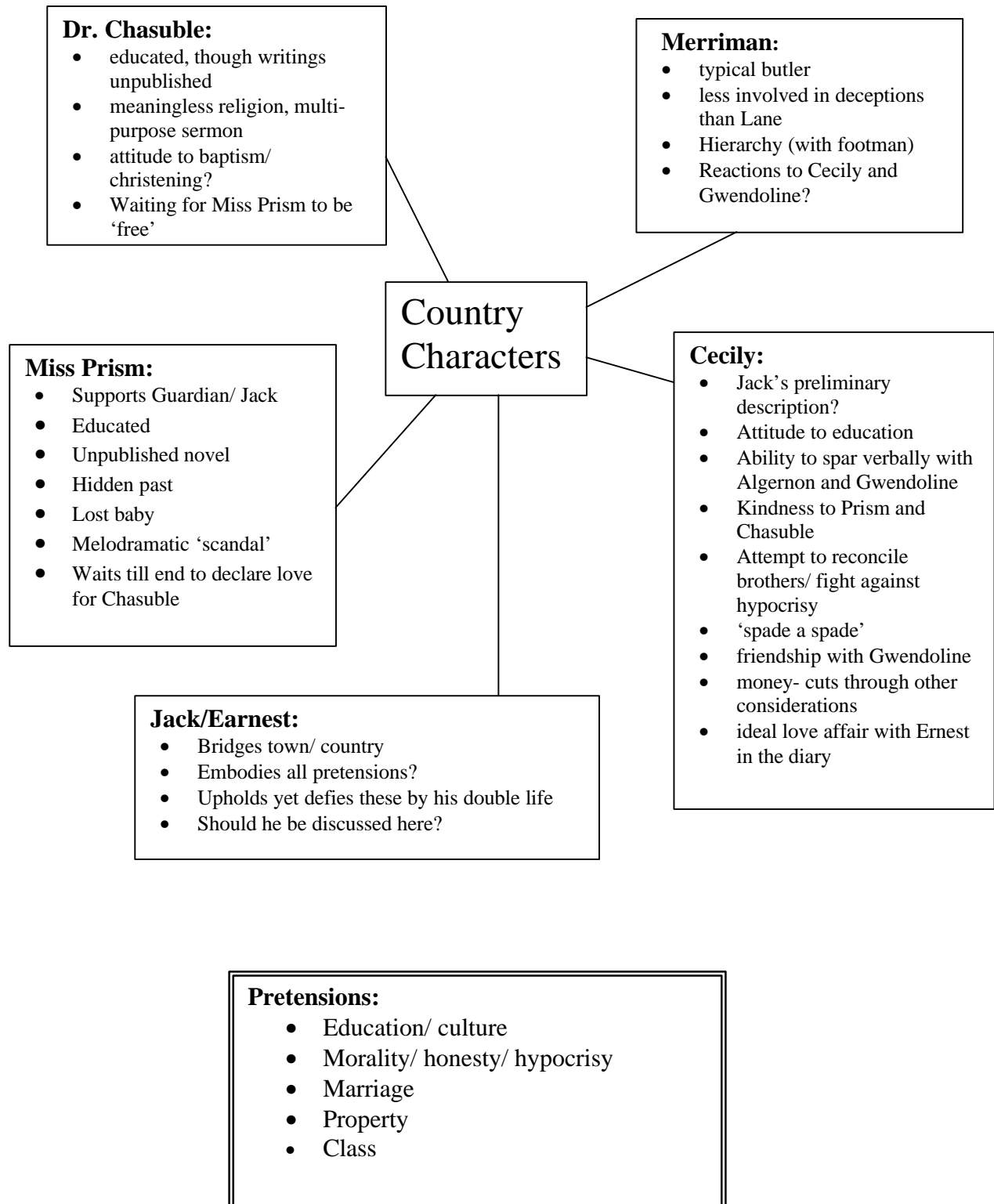


How do the 'country characters' cast light on the pretensions of society as exposed in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

Brainstorm ideas: look at the following ideas and decide what should be expanded, what should be left out. Can you think of other ideas to add? How would you order points within the essay structure?



How do the ‘country characters’ cast light on the pretensions of society as exposed in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

Possible introductions

Read these three introductions and decide on the merits and weaknesses of each one. Which one would you choose? Write one of your own, taking into account your discussions. Try to continue the essay from one of them.

- a) The country characters are Cecily, Miss Prism, Doctor Chasuble and Merriman, and in this essay I will explore the way they cast light on the pretensions of society in the play.

- b) The social world of Victorian England was built on set values, concerning culture, morality, marriage, property and class. In this essay I will consider ways in which Cecily, Miss Prism, Chasuble and Merriman cast light on these pretensions.

- c) When Cecily declares to Gwendoline in Act 2 that ‘when I see a spade I call it a spade,’ she is doing more than being assertive: she is in effect showing the way country characters are less bound by the ‘shallow mask of manner’ so important to the social world of London. However, she is perfectly capable of adopting the shallow mask herself, and the country characters generally (Miss Prism, Cecily, Chasuble and Merriman) are not without their own pretensions.