

**Lesson:**  
**“On Saying Please” – By A.G.  
Gardiner**

**Classroom & Student Notes**

**Prepared By:**  
Dr. Noojilla Srinivas

**Course:**  
General English – Semester I

**Institution:**  
**Government College (Autonomous),  
Rajahmundry**

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**Author:** Dr. Noojilla Srinivas

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**Contact Details:**

**Dr. Noojilla Srinivas**

**Lecturer in English**

**Government College (Autonomous),**

**Rajahmundry.**

**Email:** [noojillasrinivas@gmail.com](mailto:noojillasrinivas@gmail.com); [noojillasrinivas@gcrjy.ac.in](mailto:noojillasrinivas@gcrjy.ac.in)

**Blog:** <https://englishnotessummary.blogspot.com/>

**Youtube Channel:**

<https://www.youtube.com/@NOOJILLASEGLISHWORLD>

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## **ON SAYING PLEASE – Essay – By A.G. Gardiner**

### **1. Introduction**

Language is not only a tool for communication but also a reflection of one's character and culture. A civilised society depends not merely on laws and rules, but also on mutual respect, kindness, and good manners. The essay **"On Saying Please"** by A. G. Gardiner is a timeless reflection on the value of politeness in everyday life.

This lesson teaches students that words such as **"please," "thank you," and "sorry"** are not small or meaningless expressions. They are signs of refinement, emotional maturity, and social responsibility. The essay remains highly relevant in modern life, where communication is becoming faster but often less courteous.

### **2. Learning Objectives**

After studying this lesson, students will be able to:

- understand the central idea of the essay
- explain the importance of politeness in personal and social life
- distinguish between law and moral behaviour
- analyse the examples used by the author
- appreciate the value of courtesy in everyday communication
- apply polite expressions in real-life situations
- develop soft skills such as empathy, respect, and self-control

### **3. About the Author**

#### **A. G. Gardiner (1865–1946)**

Alfred George Gardiner was a well-known English journalist, editor, and essayist. He wrote many essays on social life, human behaviour, ethics, and values. He often published under the pen name **"Alpha of the Plough."**

#### **Important Features of His Writing**

- simple and elegant language
- reflection on everyday incidents
- moral and social observation
- gentle humour and practical wisdom

#### **Importance as an Essayist**

Gardiner's essays are valuable because they deal with ordinary life and reveal extraordinary truths. He explains social values in a manner that is simple, humane, and persuasive.

#### 4. Introduction to the Essay

“On Saying Please” is a reflective and didactic essay. It discusses the importance of courtesy in social life. The essay is based on the simple idea that a polite word can improve relationships, reduce tension, and make life pleasant for all.

The author points out that law may punish crimes, but law cannot force a person to be polite. Good manners come from within. They reflect character, culture, and humanity.

#### 5. Background and Relevance

The essay is based on a small incident involving a lift-man or conductor and a rude passenger. From that ordinary incident, Gardiner develops a larger social principle: **civilisation depends as much on manners as on law.**

##### Why this lesson is relevant today

- social media communication often lacks courtesy
- stress and impatience increase rude behaviour
- public spaces require mutual respect
- soft skills are important in education and employment

Thus, the essay is not merely moral instruction; it is practical guidance for modern life.

#### 6. Detailed Summary

The essay begins with the distinction between legal offences and social offences. A person may not break any law by failing to say “please,” but such behaviour causes discomfort and displeasure in society. Gardiner argues that law cannot compel politeness, but civilisation certainly depends on it.

He gives the example of a polite bus conductor whose gentle manners create a pleasant atmosphere for passengers. In contrast, rude behaviour creates bitterness, tension, and conflict. Words like “please” and “thank you” are small, but they perform an important social function.

The author explains that politeness is like oil in the machinery of society. It reduces friction and makes human relationships smooth. Good manners do not cost money, but they bring great value. In conclusion, the essay emphasises that courtesy is a mark of true culture and should be cultivated by everyone.

#### 7. Deep Explanation of the Essay

##### A. Law and Good Manners

Gardiner first explains that there is a difference between what is punishable by law and what is morally wrong. A rude person may not be punished by court, but his behaviour may still damage social harmony.

## **Core idea**

- law governs external conduct
- manners govern human relationships

This distinction is very important. Society cannot function by law alone. It also requires kindness and mutual respect.

## **B. The Value of “Please”**

The word “please” may look small, but it carries deep meaning. It suggests:

- humility
- consideration
- recognition of the other person
- respect in communication

When we say “please,” we make our request softer and more human.

## **C. The Example of the Bus Conductor**

The polite conductor becomes a symbol of ideal behaviour. He is cheerful, considerate, and well-mannered. He does not merely do his duty; he performs it with grace.

### **What this example teaches**

- work becomes noble when done with courtesy
- public life improves through kind behaviour
- one person’s attitude influences others

The conductor represents service with dignity.

## **D. Rudeness and Its Effects**

Gardiner shows that rudeness causes unnecessary bitterness. A rude word can spoil the mood of another person. In public life, such behaviour creates avoidable friction.

### **Effects of rude behaviour**

- emotional hurt
- social discomfort
- lack of cooperation
- spread of negativity

Thus, courtesy is not superficial. It has psychological and social importance.

## **E. Politeness as “Social Oil”**

This is one of the finest ideas in the essay. Society is compared to a machine. Just as oil reduces friction in a machine, politeness reduces friction in social interaction.

### **Meaning of the metaphor**

- social life involves daily contact among people
- without courtesy, relationships become rough
- politeness smoothens communication

This metaphor shows that manners are not ornamental extras; they are essential for social functioning.

### **F. Courtesy Costs Nothing**

A very practical point in the essay is that politeness requires no wealth, no power, and no education in the formal sense. Anyone can practise it.

#### **What it gives**

- goodwill
- cooperation
- respect
- better atmosphere

A person loses nothing by being polite but gains much.

## **8. Major Themes**

### **1. Importance of Politeness**

The primary theme of the essay is that politeness is essential for civilised life.

### **2. Law and Morality**

The essay distinguishes between legal control and moral self-discipline.

### **3. Social Harmony**

Courtesy helps maintain peace and comfort in society.

### **4. Respect for Others**

Politeness is ultimately a way of acknowledging the dignity of another person.

### **5. Value of Small Gestures**

Small expressions can have large emotional and social effects.

## **9. Character / Example Analysis**

### **The Polite Conductor**

Though not a major literary character in the traditional sense, the conductor functions as the central example in the essay.

#### **Qualities**

- cheerful
- patient
- respectful
- socially responsible
- emotionally mature

### **Significance**

He represents ideal human behaviour in public life. He shows that true refinement lies not in status but in conduct.

## 10. Moral and Social Values

The essay promotes the following values:

- politeness
- empathy
- self-control
- humility
- respect
- soft communication
- social responsibility

### Indian value connection

The essay connects beautifully with Indian ethical thought.

**“मृदुवचनं हि भूषणम्”**

Gentle speech is an ornament.

**“विद्या ददाति विनयम्”**

True learning gives humility.

These ideas deepen the moral relevance of the lesson.

## 11. Style and Language

A. G. Gardiner’s style in this essay is:

- simple
- conversational
- persuasive
- reflective
- moral without being heavy

He uses:

- real-life examples
- contrast between politeness and rudeness
- metaphor (“social oil”)
- logical progression of thought

His style makes the lesson easy to understand and memorable.



## 12. Important Quotations and Meanings

### 1. “Please” and “Thank you”

These represent the culture of courtesy and mutual respect.

### 2. “Politeness is like oil to social machinery.”

Meaning: Courtesy makes society function smoothly.

### 3. Law cannot compel good manners

Meaning: Manners come from inner values, not external punishment.

## 13. Glossary

| Word       | Meaning                        |
|------------|--------------------------------|
| Courtesy   | Polite behaviour               |
| Rudeness   | Harsh or impolite behaviour    |
| Civil      | Polite and respectful          |
| Obligation | Duty or responsibility         |
| Harmony    | Peaceful relationship          |
| Conduct    | Behaviour                      |
| Friction   | Conflict or tension            |
| Empathy    | Understanding others' feelings |
| Refinement | Good manners and culture       |
| Dignity    | Self-respect and worth         |

## 14. Classroom Activities

### Activity 1: Discussion

Discuss in pairs:

- Why are polite words important?
- Can a rude person be educated?

### Activity 2: Role Play

Perform two short conversations:

- one rude
- one polite

Then compare the effect.

### Activity 3: Reflection Writing

Write five sentences on:

**“One polite habit I will develop from today.”**

### Activity 4: Observation Task

Observe behaviour in a bus stop, office, or market and note examples of:

- politeness
- rudeness

### Activity 5: Sentence Improvement

Convert rude statements into polite ones:

- Give me water.
- Open the door.
- Move aside.

## 15. Model Questions and Answers

### A. 1 MARK QUESTIONS (WITH ANSWERS)

1. Who is the author of the essay *On Saying Please*?  
A. G. Gardiner
2. What is the central theme of the essay?  
Importance of politeness
3. What does the word “please” represent?  
Courtesy
4. Can law enforce politeness?  
No
5. What example is used in the essay?  
Bus conductor
6. What is meant by “social oil”?  
Politeness
7. What type of essay is this?  
Reflective essay
8. What quality is highlighted in the essay?  
Good manners
9. What happens due to rude behaviour?  
Social discomfort
10. What improves human relationships?  
Politeness

### B. Four-Mark Questions

#### 1. Explain the central idea of the essay “On Saying Please”.

The essay “On Saying Please” highlights the importance of politeness in human life. A. G. Gardiner explains that while laws can control actions, they cannot enforce good manners. Politeness, expressed through simple words like “please” and “thank you,” plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony in society. The essay shows that courteous behaviour creates positive relationships and makes social life smooth and pleasant.

## **2. Explain the role of the bus conductor in the essay.**

The bus conductor in the essay is presented as an example of polite behaviour. He treats passengers with kindness and respect, using polite words and gestures. His behaviour creates a pleasant atmosphere and shows how one individual can positively influence society. Through this example, the author emphasizes that politeness is a valuable quality that improves social interaction.

## **3. What is the difference between law and politeness?**

The essay explains that law and politeness are different in nature. Law is a set of rules enforced by authority, and it can punish wrong actions. However, politeness is a moral quality that cannot be enforced by law. A person may behave rudely without breaking any law, but such behaviour affects social harmony. Therefore, politeness depends on personal values and self-discipline.

### **C. Six-Mark Questions**

#### **1. Discuss the importance of politeness in society as presented in the essay.**

Politeness is an essential quality for maintaining harmony in society. In the essay “On Saying Please,” A. G. Gardiner explains that polite behaviour helps build positive relationships and creates a peaceful environment. Simple expressions like “please,” “thank you,” and “sorry” have a powerful impact on human interaction. Politeness reduces conflicts and promotes mutual respect. It does not cost anything but gives great benefits. Therefore, politeness is necessary for a civilised society.

#### **2. Explain the metaphor “politeness is like social oil”.**

In the essay, politeness is compared to oil in a machine. Just as oil reduces friction and helps machines run smoothly, politeness reduces conflicts and helps society function harmoniously. Without politeness, interactions become harsh and unpleasant. This metaphor clearly shows that polite behaviour is essential for maintaining smooth social relationships. It highlights the importance of courtesy in everyday life.

#### **3. Analyse the message of the essay “On Saying Please”.**

The essay conveys a strong message about the importance of good manners in society. It teaches that politeness is not enforced by law but is a personal choice that reflects one’s character. The author emphasises that courteous behaviour improves relationships and creates a positive environment. The essay encourages individuals to practise politeness in their daily life. It ultimately highlights that a civilised society depends on respectful communication and behaviour.

## **16. Learning Suggestions**

For effective classroom learning, the student may:

- Learn and observe common polite expressions used in daily life
- compare rude and polite speech
- connect the essay with soft skills and employability
- observe real-life examples
- use polite expressions make the lesson practical

This lesson should be studied not only as literature but also as **life education**.

## **17. Conclusion**

“On Saying Please” is a small essay with a big social message. It reminds us that civilisation is not measured only by technology, wealth, or law, but also by the way human beings speak to one another. Courtesy is a simple virtue, but it has the power to transform social life.

The lesson is especially valuable for students because it combines language learning with character building. It teaches that polite communication is not weakness; it is refinement, strength, and humanity.

## **18. References**

- Prescribed General English textbook
- Selected essays of A. G. Gardiner
- Classroom teaching materials
- Soft skills and communication sources used for pedagogy

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