

# PYGMALION

by Bernard Shaw



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# Shaw FESTIVAL

PRESENTS

# Pygmalion

by Bernard Shaw

This study guide for *Pygmalion* contains background information for the play, suggested themes and topics for discussion, and curriculum-based lessons that are designed by educators and theatre professionals.

The lessons and themes for discussion are organized in modules that can be used independently or interdependently according to your class's level and time availability.

The general information is on white paper and the lessons are on green.

THIS GUIDE WAS WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY DENIS JOHNSTON, DEBRA McLAUCHLAN, AND JOHN SWEENEY. ADDITIONAL MATERIALS WERE PROVIDED BY BARBARA WORTHY, JACKIE MAXWELL, AND SUE LEPAGE

## Pygmalion

Previews April 8

Opens May 6

Closes November 27

For a calendar of performances check:

[www.shawfest.com](http://www.shawfest.com)

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# The Players

Clara Eynsford Hill..... Catherine McGregor  
Mrs Eynsford Hill..... Jillian Cook  
Freddy Eynsford Hill..... Adam Brazier  
Eliza Doolittle ..... Tara Rosling  
Colonel Pickering..... Lorne Kennedy  
Henry Higgins ..... Jim Mezon  
Mrs Pearce ..... Nora McLellan  
Alfred Doolittle..... Simon Bradbury  
Mrs Higgins ..... Patricia Hamilton  
Parlourmaid ..... Shannon McCaig  
Nepommuck..... Neil Barclay  
Londoners..... Anthony Bekenn, Richard Farrell, Elodie Gillett, Mark  
Harapiak, Lisa Horner, Evert Houston, Patty Jamieson, Al Kozlik,  
Joanne Mendioro, Micheal Querin, Kiera Sangster, Ashley Taylor

Directed by ..... Jackie Maxwell  
Designed by ..... Sue LePage  
Lighting designed by..... Kevin Lamotte  
Original music and sound designed by ..... Marc Desormeaux

## Running Time

**APPROX. 2HRS. 45 MINS INCLUDING ONE INTERMISSION**

## Production History

The first production of *Pygmalion* in English was at His Majesty's Theatre, London, in April 1914, in a production starring Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Mrs Patrick Campbell as Higgins and Eliza. The North American premiere was later the same year, in New York. It featured Mrs Patrick Campbell once again, in what was regarded as her most enduring role. The same production reached Toronto in April 1915, and played at the Princess Theatre.

A famous film version appeared in 1938, starring Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller with Bernard Shaw winning an Acad-

emy Award for the screenplay. Perhaps the most famous adaptation though has been the musical *My Fair Lady*. It premiered on Broadway in 1956, starring Rex Harrison and an obscure singer named Julie Andrews, and ran for over six years. The film version of *My Fair Lady* appeared in 1964, starring Rex Harrison and Audrey Hepburn. It won eight Oscars including best picture and best actor for Rex Harrison.

This is the play's fifth appearance at the Shaw Festival, following productions in 1965, 1975, 1982 and 1992.

# THE AUTHOR

George Bernard Shaw 1856 - 1950

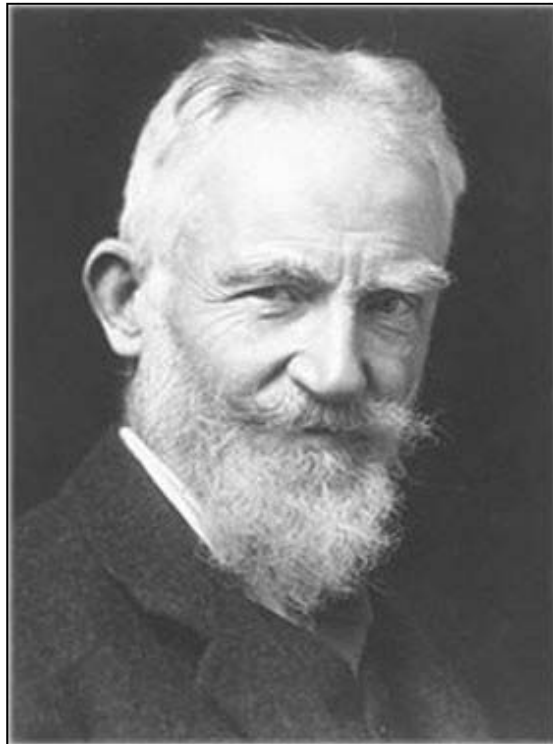
George Bernard Shaw, born in Dublin in 1856, began his writing career as a novelist and journalist, but gained his great fame as a playwright. Most people consider Shaw the second-greatest playwright in the English language, after only Shakespeare.

Growing up in Dublin, Shaw developed a wide knowledge of music, art and literature under the influence of his mother, a singer and vocal music teacher. At age 20 he moved to London, where he spent his afternoons in the British Museum and his evenings pursuing his informal education by attending lectures and debates. He declared himself a socialist in 1882 and joined the new "Fabian Society" in 1884. Soon he distinguished himself as an effective public speaker, and an incisive and irreverent critic of music, art and drama.

As a critic, he grew weary of the fashionable but intellectually barren melodramas of the 19th century. His admiration for the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (about whom he wrote influential essays) encouraged Shaw to reshape the English stage with sophisticated comedies that presented what he considered important social issues.

Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses*, was produced at a private theatre club in 1892. It was followed by *The Philanderer* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*. These three plays were published as *Plays Unpleasant* (1898). More palatable, though still rich with challenges to conventional middle-class values, were his *Plays Pleasant* published the same year: this volume included the

plays *Arms and The Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell*. In 1897 Shaw attained his first commercial success with the American premiere of *The Devil's Disciple*, the income from which enabled him to quit his job as a drama critic and to make his living solely as a playwright.



In 1898 he married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress whom he had met through his Fabian friends Beatrice and Sidney Webb.

Although Shaw's plays were not popular initially, in the period 1904-07 he began to reach a larger audience through an influential series of productions at London's Royal Court Theatre. His plays became known for their brilliant arguments, their wit, and their unrelenting challenges to the conventional morality of his time. His best-known play, *Pygmalion*, was first performed in 1913. Two generations later, it attained even greater fame as the musical *My Fair Lady*.

During World War I, Shaw's anti-war speeches and a controversial pamphlet entitled *Common Sense About the War* made him very unpopular as a public figure. In *Heartbreak House* (performed 1920) Shaw exposed, in a country-house setting, the spiritual bankruptcy of the generation responsible for the carnage. Next came *Back to Methuselah* (1922) and *Saint Joan* (1923), acclaim for which led to his receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1925.

Shaw continued to write plays and essays until his death in 1950 at the age of 94.

# THE CHARACTERS

**Professor Henry Higgins:** The man of the future in the play, Higgins has his mythological roots in the Greek story of Pygmalion, a sculptor who can't find a woman who is up to his standards and so creates one from stone. As a reward for services rendered, the gods then bring his work to life. Pygmalion and his living statue Galatea marry and live happily ever after. In a more modern context, Shaw found his roots for Higgins in the explosion of scientific development, and primarily in the science of language. Before World War One Oxford and Cambridge universities were full of the new science of linguistics and its high priests of phonetic analysis. These movements, in line with the discoveries of Darwin and Freud, were shattering the Victorian grip on human expression and class restrictions. We also find in Higgins a reflection of Sherlock Holmes - the one a criminologist, the other a Professor of Phonetics. Another influence was Mary Shelley's "Dr Frankenstein" who played God in creating and improving upon life through science. And perhaps there is a hint of a similarity in Higgins' relationship with his student to the relationship that Shaw's mother had with her live-in singing teacher, George Vandeleo.

## Colonel Pickering:

A "Watson" to Higgins' "Sherlock" and a gentle remnant from the colonial past, Pickering has returned from India where he has been studying speech patterns of the natives. He is a gentleman who holds doors for ladies, who treats all with respect, and yet who really doesn't believe that Higgins



and Science can create a duchess from a flower girl. As Eliza reminds Higgins, the phonetics teaches her how to sound like a lady, but she only becomes one when she's treated as such.

*Above: Costume sketch for Colonel Pickering by Sue LePage*

**Eliza Doolittle:** A young Cockney flower girl whose goal in life is to leave her life on the streets and run her own shop. Smart enough to realize she needs to upgrade her image, and determined enough to succeed in fooling royalty, Eliza broke new ground in 1914 in the wake of the suffragette movement - a strong young woman moving towards financial and emotional independence. And as the play progresses, Eliza develops into an articulate and worthy representative of her generation, and a feisty opponent to the bullying Higgins. Strongly influenced by Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, this play has echoes of Nora's door slamming shut on Torvald, when Shaw has Eliza stride through a similar door.



*Costume sketch for Eliza by Sue LePage*

**Alfred Doolittle:** Eliza's father, he is a dustman by trade but the irony of his name is not lost on those around him. Shaw makes him an articulate spokesperson for a number of causes including middle-class morality, absent fatherhood, and the simple Cockney virtues of an enjoyment of life's pleasures.

**Mrs Pearce:** The perfect foil for Eliza's father, she is a virtuous and hard-working housekeeper to Higgins. She continually reminds him of the rules of common courtesy and polite society that he is ironically attempting to teach Eliza, and the only woman, by the end of the play, who still picks up after him.

**Mrs Higgins:** Professor Higgins' mother, a strong, stately yet kind matriarch, keenly aware of the childish eccentricities of her one and only son.

**The Eynsford Hills:** Freddy, Clara, and their mother are faded gentry, no longer rich and the children are pretentious and needy. Freddy, naïve and somewhat foolish, is helplessly in love with the charismatic Eliza. Does she marry him? The play leaves the question unanswered.

# The Narrative of Shaw's Pygmalion

by John Sweeney

In the final weeks before the outbreak of World War One, a surprised audience empties out of a concert into the pouring rain of Covent Garden, and patrons scatter in search of taxis into the London night. In the confusion, a flower girl is knocked over, picks herself up, and continues to push her wares on the trapped and dripping. As the rain falls, and the cabs fail to appear, a bystander notices and reveals to the flower girl, that there is a man writing down everything the girl is saying. Believing him to be with the police, she pleads her innocence in very loud and disturbing Cockney tones to all those assembled.

We learn that the note taker is in fact a professor of phonetics who can pinpoint anyone's place of birth and social standing by simply listening to them speak for a few seconds. He's accurate within blocks! The damp bystanders are impressed that he can accurately identify their

histories, and they determine that they are coincidentally in the company of another famous linguist, a Colonel Pickering. Higgins invites Pickering to stay with him while in London, and as the clock strikes the hour, repentantly throws the flower girl a handful of coins to momentarily compensate for her mistreatment and fright. Using some of these coins to hail the first taxi of her life, Eliza Doolittle returns to her little room where she collapses, wrapped in her scattered clothing, after a long day's labour.

The second act shifts to the following day in Higgins' fash-

ionable flat in Wimpole Street where Higgins and Pickering are interrupted by the flower girl who has appeared, unannounced, to engage Higgins as a speech coach. She has dreams of getting a job in a flower shop, but realizes that to do so, she must first lose her Cockney accent and learn to speak like a lady. Taking on the challenge of accomplishing this transformation within six months, Higgins has her taken upstairs for her first bath, while elsewhere her flower-girl clothes are set afire.

Soon Higgins and Pickering are interrupted by the appearance of Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, who has shown up demanding money in exchange for his daughter's continued stay at Higgins' flat. Doolittle asks for five pounds, but refuses the responsibility that goes with increased wealth and "middle class morality". Sweeping out

of the room to get to a pub, Doolittle almost brushes by his daughter without recognizing her in her new attire.

We see Higgins drilling Eliza in proper speech and manners. When he thinks she is ready for presentation into polite society, he brings her to one of his mother's afternoon teas. Though the young and smitten Freddy finds Eliza's speech highly attractive, her delivery is still stiff and she is far from convincing to the others as a lady of proper upbringing.

So it's "back to the drawing board" for Higgins, Pickering and Eliza, as they get closer to the six-month deadline and a



Flowerseller in Regent Street, London

# The Narrative, continued

huge state ball where she will have her biggest test. Higgins continues to push and Eliza continues to improve, until finally the night of the ball arrives. Eliza looks and sounds wonderful throughout the evening and is so convincing that a European linguistics expert mistakes her for a Hungarian princess!

Higgins and Pickering arrive back at their flat after the ball in a celebratory mood and feeling very self-congratulatory. Higgins is particularly insensitive to the fact that Eliza deserves some credit for the masquerade and an argument develops. Eliza feels she has been undervalued and taken for granted; feeling hurt and insulted, she impetuously tosses away a ring that Higgins had given her. The next day at Mrs Higgins' flat, in the final climactic scene of the play, Eliza is able to keep up with Higgins in a battle of words and wits in which Eliza establishes herself as truly transformed and independent of

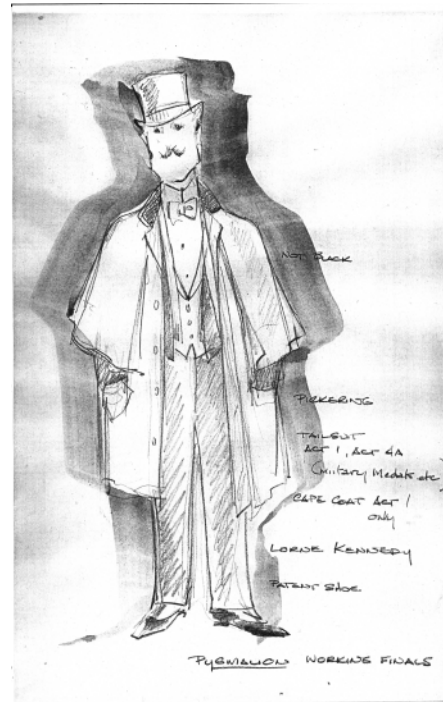
thought. She reveals that Freddy is in love with her and that she might even marry him. The knockout punch in their final battle of wits is Eliza's assertion that it was much more Pickering who transformed her through his attitude of respect, than Higgins through his bullying phonetics lessons. Eliza steps proudly out the front door of Mrs Higgins home into a shaky but meaningful future.

Shaw's long afterword to the play details a possible future for Eliza that includes marriage to Freddy, her own flower shop, and an ongoing platonic relationship with Higgins and Pickering. GBS makes it very clear that Eliza Doolittle should not be played as a woman who eventually falls for Higgins and submits to his boyish whims and his self-centred bullying.

*John Sweeney teaches Drama at Ridley College, St Catharines, Ontario.*



*Costume sketch for Clara Eynsford Hill by Sue LePage*



*Costume sketch for Colonel Pickering by Sue LePage*

# THE WEST END GOSSIP SHEET

*(overheard by John Sweeney)*



## **Facts and tidbits about *Pygmalion* for Monday morning lessons, the bus trip to the Shaw Festival, or simply schmoozing in the lobby.**

First production done in Vienna and Berlin in October 1913. The London premiere the next April featured the charismatic Mrs Patrick Campbell as Eliza, who was a single mother and reputedly had a fling with G.B.S.

Fights between the stars plagued rehearsals, and Beerbom Tree, the actor-manager playing Higgins, would often show up late, leave rehearsals to chat with friends in his office or simply refuse to work with Mrs Campbell.

When Eliza blurted out “not bloody likely” on opening night, it caused a national scandal in Great Britain. Church groups and scholars tried to have the line censored and the show shut down. It never happened and the show went on to become Shaw’s most popular play, running for months in the West End and touring the United States and Europe.

A flower-girl named Eliza was invited to attend the first production. She sat in the front row and thought that the language of the play was too rude for a real flower-girl.

In the final moment of the play’s first production, Beerbohm Tree as Higgins ended the play by throwing Eliza a bunch of flowers as she stood in the doorway to say good-bye. Shaw himself hated the gesture. It was not in the script and he felt it falsely suggested a future romance between Eliza and Higgins.

It has often been said, but not proven, that GBS sent Sir Winston Churchill two tickets for opening night with a note: “Here are two tickets, so you can bring a friend - if you have one.” Churchill replied, “Thanks for the tickets, but I can’t make it for opening night. I’ll come the second night - if you have one.”

Mrs Patrick Campbell refused the offer to play Mrs. Higgins in the 1938 film with Leslie Howard. She had loved the play and had toured it around the world, but by this time however, she had no interest in leaving Paris (or her beloved dog) to go to London. The film went on to win two Oscars including one for Best Screenplay, which Shaw himself had written under the supervision of the producers. Shaw fought the happy ending made by the film’s producers, but they went ahead anyway.

*My Fair Lady*, the musical adaptation of the play, which premiered on Broadway in 1956, went on to make more money for the Shaw estate than all of the profits from his many other plays put together.

In his landmark biography *Bernard Shaw*, Michael Holroyd describes the play as “an ingeniously constructed work of art, integrating Faustian legend with Cinderella fairy tale, a comedy of manners with a parable of socialism.” But Shaw still worried about the play’s tremendous popularity: “There must be something radically wrong with the play if it pleases everyone,” he protested, “but at the moment I cannot find what it is.”



# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

by Jackie Maxwell

Two quotes have become touchstones for me as I prepared for this production. One is from the nineteenth-century American poet James Russell Lowell (quoted in Peter Ackroyd's wonderful book *London: A Biography*) which says so much about the world – the very *real* world – of this play:

I confess that I never think of London, which I love, without thinking of that palace David built for Bathsheba, sitting in hearing of one hundred streams – streams of thought, of intelligence, of activity. One other thing about London impresses me beyond any other sound I have ever heard, and that is the low, unceasing roar one hears always in the air; it is not a mere accident, like a tempest or a cataract, but it is impressive, because it always indicates human will, and impulse, and conscious movement; and I confess that when I hear it I almost feel as if I were listening to the roaring loom of time.

The other comes from the conclusion to Shaw's epilogue to the published play, which he wrote to defend his "controversial" ending against those who wanted a more conventionally romantic one:

[Eliza has a sense that Higgins'] indifference is deeper than the Infatuation of commoner souls. She is immensely interested in him. She has even mischievous moments in which she wishes she could get him alone, on a desert island, away from all ties and with nobody else in the world to consider, and just drag him off his pedestal and see him making love like any common man. We all have private imaginations of that sort. But when it comes to business, to the life that she really leads as distinguished from the life of dreams and fancies, she likes Freddy and she likes the Colonel; and she does not like Higgins and Mr Doolittle. Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable.



# Theme 1

## THE MYTH OF PYGMALION

### THE MYTH OF PYGMALION

*This story was told by the Roman poet Ovid in a book called Metamorphoses.*

Pygmalion was a prince of Cyprus, a hater of women, and a very talented sculptor. Resolving that he would never marry, Pygmalion created a marble statue of a woman so beautiful that no living woman approached her allure. Pygmalion called his statue Galatea, which means “sleeping love”. Infatuated with his own creation, he clothed the statue and gave it gifts of jewels and flowers. He kept it on a bed of the softest blankets and pillows, where it looked so alive that he could hardly believe it wasn’t human.

The festival of Aphrodite, goddess of love, was approaching. This festival was highly celebrated in Cyprus, and Pygmalion decided to visit the altar of the goddess and make a request. He brought gifts to please Aphrodite and asked her to give him a wife who was just like his statue. In response, Aphrodite caused the flame on the altar to flare up three times into the air.

After Pygmalion left the altar, Aphrodite decided to visit Galatea. She went to Pygmalion’s home, and was very pleased to discover that Galatea resembled herself. To reward Pygmalion for his creation, she brought Galatea to life. When Pygmalion discovered that Galatea was alive, he decided to marry her. Their marriage was blessed with a daughter, Paphos. Pygmalion and Galatea brought gifts to the altar of Aphrodite every year. They were rewarded with a long and happy marriage.



## ACTIVITY

In groups of approximately 4, select one of the following topics: Pygmalion the ruler, Pygmalion the artist, Pygmalion the lover, and Pygmalion the worshipper. The task for each group is to dramatize an enlarged version of the Pygmalion myth through narration, action, and dialogue. Information not provided in the original myth will come from your imaginations.

\* **Questions for Pygmalion the ruler**

1. How did you become ruler of Cyprus?
2. What are your living conditions?
3. Who are your most trusted advisers? What do they do for you?
4. Who are your enemies? What problems do they pose?
5. How do you govern your people?
6. What are your most skilful qualities as a ruler?
7. What aspects of your job are fulfilling to you?
8. What areas of your life are not fulfilled through your work?

\* **Questions for Pygmalion the artist**

1. At what age did you begin sculpting? What were the circumstances? What was the first creation you ever made?
2. Over the years, how did your skill as a sculptor develop? Did you have teachers? Did you copy from other artists? Did you use models?
3. Where do you sculpt currently? What does the location look like? Do you like to be alone when you work, or do you have assistants with you?
4. How much time do you spend sculpting? Do you have a regular routine for your art, or do you sculpt whenever you get a spare moment?
5. How do you choose a subject?
6. What do you do if you make a mistake? How do you know when you are satisfied with your work?
7. What do you do with your work when it is finished?
8. What was different about your creation of Galatea from other works you have produced? How did you know that she was unlike other statues?



## ACTIVITY

\* **Questions for Pygmalion the lover**

1. What happened that caused you to hate women? Was there one incident or a series of events?
2. What is your relationship with your mother?
3. Do you have sisters? If so, what is your relationship with them?
4. What prompted you to create a statue of a beautiful woman?
5. What qualities of Galatea made you fall in love with her?
6. Through what process did you fall in love with her? Was it love at first sight, or did it take time for you to realize you were in love?

\* **Questions for Pygmalion the worshipper**

1. What preparations did you make to visit the temple of Aphrodite?
2. What gifts did you bring?
3. What did you do and say when you made your appeal to the goddess?
4. How did the goddess react to your plea?
5. What happened when you got home that day?
6. How did your story end?



## DISCUSSION & RESEARCH

- \* In several examples, literature has examined the notion of humans creating artificial life. Research this topic, beginning with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. What common themes emerge from your investigation?
- \* Compare and contrast creation stories from various religions.

## Theme 2

# THE FAIRY TALE OF CINDERELLA

The story of **Eliza Doolittle** in *Pygmalion* shares certain aspects of the Cinderella fairy tale. Versions of Cinderella exist across cultures. Elements of the story are also common in modern movies, such as *Pretty Woman* with Julia Roberts and *Maid in America* with Jennifer Lopez. In 1960, the comedian Jerry Lewis starred in a comedy called *Cinderfella*, a twist on the Cinderella theme in which a man plays the lead character. A musical called *Mr Cinders*, which has the same gender-reversal premise, was produced at the Shaw Festival in 1996. The 1990s television series, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, starring Will Smith, also incorporated elements of the Cinderella story.

- \* What are the major themes of the Cinderella fairy tale? Why does it have universal appeal?
- \* Why does the character Cinderella need help from a powerful source? Why can't she change the circumstances of her life on her own?
- \* Why do you think Cinderella is considered a feminine role? Why are *Cinderfella*, *Mr Cinders* and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* almost certain to be comedies?
- \* After watching *Pygmalion*, compare themes of the play to the Cinderella story.

## DISCUSSION



### Transformations/Solo

- \* Working alone, freeze in the posture and activity of the kind of person you never want to become.
- \* Now freeze in the posture and activity of the kind of person you do want to become in your adult future.
- \* Practise moving from one freeze to the other. The trick is to move only one part of your body at a time so that the transformation is distinct and gradual. In the middle of the transformation, you should be half one character and half the other.
- \* After showing examples of the transformations to the class, discuss the effectiveness of the gradual change in character.

## ACTIVITY



# ACTIVITY

## Transformations/Group

- \* In groups of approximately 5, create a tableau of Cinderella's circumstances at the beginning of the fairy tale.
- \* With the same group, create a tableau of Cinderella's circumstances at the end of the fairy tale. (Some people might decide to change character in the second tableau.)
- \* Determine the same number of moves for each person in your group to transform from the first tableau to the second.
- \* Practise the transformation so that everyone in your group moves at exactly the same time through each stage of the transformation.

## Transformations/Place

This exercise is based on the actions of **Eliza Doolittle** in *Pygmalion*, first in her Angel Court lodgings, and second in the home of Professor Higgins.

- \* Imagine you are a street vendor in Toronto. What do you sell? Where do you set yourself up for business? What hours do you work? What normally happens during your working hours?
- \* Now imagine the street vendor's living quarters. Imagine that he or she lives alone. Where do you live? What possessions do you own? What does your bedroom look like? Create a detailed mental impression.
- \* Imagine the street vendor has just come home from work. How does the street vendor get home?
- \* Decide what the street vendor would do upon arriving home. What objects would be involved?
- \* In mime, depict a scene of approximately one minute to demonstrate the street vendor arriving home and interacting with objects in his or her room.
- \* Now imagine that the street vendor has won a lottery and decides to stay in a five-star hotel on a vacation. Create a detailed mental impression of the hotel room.
- \* Imagine the street vendor entering the room for the first time. What would the street vendor do? What objects would be involved?
- \* In mime, depict a scene of approximately one minute to demonstrate the street vendor's initial activities after entering the hotel room.

## Theme 3

### THE STUDY OF PHONETICS

In a preface to *Pygmalion*, Bernard Shaw wrote: “The English have no respect for their language and will not teach their children to speak it...The reformer we need most today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast: that is why I have made such a one the hero of a popular play.” This hero, **Professor Higgins**, devotes his life to the study and training of human dialects and speech patterns. The story of *Pygmalion* is based on a bet made by **Professor Higgins** to pass off a lower-class woman as a duchess after a few months of speech training.



### DISCUSSION

- \* What value do we place in today's society on proper grammar and pronunciation?
- \* **Professor Higgins** claimed that **Eliza** would never be able to “leave the gutter” unless she learned to speak properly. Does improper speech have the same effect in modern times?
- \* How have email and internet chat rooms changed the way we “speak” to each other?
- \* In addition to speech, what further alterations would be necessary to convince people that a common street vendor was a duchess?
- \* Actors spend considerable time on speech training, and several books have been written on the subject. Find either books or chapters from books on actor training, and practise some vocal warm-ups and exercises.

## Theme 4

### ATMOSPHERE THROUGH ACTION



#### ACTIVITY

*Pygmalion* opens on a busy London street that is crowded with people from all social classes who are there for various reasons. It is raining and some characters are trying to hail a cab. Some live in the neighbourhood. Some are working and some are not. Rather than identifying the characters by name, Shaw has labeled them as follows: *The Daughter*, *The Mother*, *A Bystander*, *The Flower Girl*, *The Gentleman*, *The Sarcastic Bystander* and *The Note-taker*.

- \* In groups of approximately 7, your task is to create a scene of about 2 minutes that shows the characters listed above interacting on the sidewalk of a busy city street in the middle of a downpour of rain.
- \* Decide on each character's purpose for being there.
- \* Decide how each character reacts to the weather.
- \* Decide where characters should be situated in relation to each other.
- \* Decide which character will interact with which other characters.
- \* Decide what the characters will be doing/saying.
- \* Decide how to shift the focus of the audience from one part of the action or dialogue to another part. (If everyone is talking and moving at once, the audience won't know what to watch or listen to.)
- \* Practice your scene several times until you have memorized every aspect of it.
- \* Show the scenes to the class.
- \* Compare your scenes to the opening scene of *Pygmalion*

#### DISCUSSION

- \* What problems did you encounter in creating a scene involving several characters who are strangers to each other?
- \* Did a storyline develop in your scene?
- \* Did any characters become the major focus of your scene?



## Theme 5

# THE CHALLENGE OF SET DESIGN

Designing *Pygmalion* is a very daunting task. Challenges include:

- \* Portraying a scene that occurs outdoors at 11:30 pm in the pouring rain with horse-drawn taxicabs passing by;
- \* Delivering a character by taxicab from a crowded street up a small alleyway to her tiny apartment;
- \* Changing rapidly from the small apartment to a well-appointed voice laboratory;
- \* Moving from the laboratory up two flights of stairs to a bathroom without interrupting the action;
- \* Returning to the laboratory, again without interrupting the action;
- \* Moving to the residence of a rich and fashionable woman;
- \* Moving to a grand ballroom with an elaborate entranceway;
- \* Returning to the laboratory; and
- \* Returning to the residence of the rich and fashionable woman.



### ACTIVITY

- \* In groups, brainstorm solutions to the set design problems listed above.
- \* Research architecture and furniture that would be appropriate to London, England, in 1914.
- \* What equipment would be available in 1914 for audio recording and playback? This equipment would be required for **Professor Higgins'** vocal laboratory.
- \* Draw a design for one or more of the settings identified above.
- \* Create a diorama for one or more of the settings identified above.

**After attending *Pygmalion*, the class should be able to examine theatrical techniques and ideas introduced by the play.**

**Theme 6**  
**FLOWER GIRLS**  
**AND**  
**LADIES**

According to **Eliza**, “the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she’s treated.”



- \* Compare **Eliza’s** treatment by **Clara** and the taxi drivers at the beginning and then later in the play. Do you agree with her statement about the difference between a lady and a flower girl?
- \* Do people today make assumptions about strangers based on appearance and manner of speaking?
- \* Do teenagers face prejudice based on either appearance or manner of speaking?



## ACTIVITIES

### You are being served.

- \* Select a location where people serve other people. Examples include a store, a bank, a restaurant, and others of your choice.
- \* In groups of 3 - 4, use the location you've chosen to create a depiction of prejudice based on appearance and/or manner of speaking.
- \* Give your scene an ending that reveals the prejudice as an inaccurate impression.
- \* Now play the scene again, this time with an ending that reveals the prejudice as an accurate impression.
- \* Which scene is more satisfying to play? To watch? Why?



## ACTIVITIES

### Creating subtext for characters from *Pygmalion*

- \* Imagine you are either **Clara** or the **Taxi Driver** in *Pygmalion*.
- \* Your task is to use the information given below to write two short soliloquies for your character. A soliloquy is a spoken representation of a character's inner thoughts, meant for only the audience to hear, but not any other character in the play.
- \* **Information for Clara's first soliloquy:** it is late at night and raining. You have just been at the theatre with your mother and brother, where you felt ignored by everyone important. You are annoyed because your brother hasn't been able to hail a taxicab. You wish your family had more money. You fear that your mother will make you take the bus home in front of everyone on the street. A flower girl wants your mother to pay for the violets your brother knocked out of her basket. You are angry when your mother responds kindly to the girl and angrier still when she asks you for money to pay her. When your mother pays the girl and asks her to keep the change, you retreat behind a pillar in disgust. You speak your soliloquy from behind the pillar where no one can hear you.

*(continued on next page)*



## ACTIVITIES

### Creating subtext for characters from *Pygmalion* - continued

- \* **Information for Clara's second soliloquy:** You, your mother, and brother are making a round of visits to the open houses of various society ladies. You assume your best manners and most vivacious conversation at these events, hoping to attract attention that will boost your standing in society. You are introduced to a beautiful young woman of about your age. You sit close to her, hoping to befriend her. You are surprised by her conversation, in which she curses and describes her family as drunkards and thieves. Her manner of speech is so cultivated, however, that you believe she is engaging in the latest version of "small talk". You get annoyed at your mother's prudish reaction to her. You decide to copy the new "small talk" when you make your next visit of the evening. You speak your soliloquy outside the door.
- \* **Information for the Taxi Driver's first soliloquy:** It's late at night and you've been very busy. It was pouring with rain for a while, and you've had several fares. When you return to the corner where you pick up customers, a poor flower girl tries to enter your cab. You hold the door shut to keep her out. She shows you money and you decide to let her in. You charge her extra for the flower basket she brings with her. When she tells you to take her to Buckingham Palace, you wonder what business she has there. When she directs you to a poor part of town, you drive her without question. When you drop her off, she questions you about the price. Realizing she's never been in a cab before, you laugh at her and tell her to keep her money. You speak your soliloquy after she leaves, recalling your experience with her.
- \* **Information for the Taxi Driver's second soliloquy:** It's late at night and you haven't been very busy. The streets are almost empty and the weather is fine. You are driving around town, seeking customers. You see a young man and woman embracing on the street. You find their behaviour inappropriate, but because they look wealthy, you stop and ask if they need a ride. The young man has no money, so the young woman pays. You hear her say that they plan to ride around all night. She also mentions something about avoiding the police. You take them to a fashionable part of town. You speak your soliloquy in the front seat of the cab, with your passengers in the back.

## Theme 7

### HIGGINS THE BULLY

From the beginning of the play, **Professor Higgins** bullies **Eliza** quite aggressively. After he insults her on their first meeting, she appears at his house to ask for elocution lessons. When he agrees to teach her, he threatens physical abuse if she refuses to obey him. Whenever she is in the room, he talks about her to others as if she weren't there.



### DISCUSSION

- \* Why is **Higgins** abusive to **Eliza**?
- \* Why does **Eliza** stay with him?
- \* Is the threat of physical harm an act of abuse even if it is never acted upon?



### Insults

- \* The names that **Higgins** calls **Eliza** during the play include: bilious pigeon, cabbage leaf, baggage, draggletailed guttersnipe, ungrateful wicked girl, unfortunate animal, and presumptuous insect.
- \* Practise saying these words for their quality of sound, and not their meaning.
- \* In groups of 3, practice saying these words again, in the following order:
  - \* Person #1: bilious pigeon
  - \* Person #2: cabbage leaf
  - \* Person #3: baggage
  - \* Person #1: draggletailed guttersnipe
  - \* Person #2: ungrateful wicked girl
  - \* Person #3: unfortunate animal
  - \* All: presumptuous insect
- \* With your partners, decide on an attitude to convey with these words that has no relation to their meaning. For example, you might say the words as if speaking to royalty, or to someone you are infatuated with. In your group, practise saying the words to convey this attitude.
- \* In your group, practise saying the words as the vilest insults you can imagine. How do you use the sound of the words to reinforce their meaning?



## ACTIVITY

### Making Sense of a Bully

At different times during the play, **Higgins** threatens to hit **Eliza** with a broom, lock her in the dustbin, drag her around by the hair, and throw her in the gutter.

Whenever **Higgins** is called a bully in the play, he denies the accusation.

**Higgins** tells **Colonel Pickering** that he can't understand **Mrs Pearce's** opinion of him: "Here I am, a shy, diffident sort of man. I've never been able to feel really grown-up and tremendous, like other chaps. And yet she's firmly persuaded that I'm an overbearing bossing kind of person. I can't account for it."

- \* Pretend you are the actor playing **Higgins**. How would you interpret his attitude so that you might understand his character? Is it possible for characters to behave a certain way and not see the behaviour in themselves? Does this contradiction ever occur in real life?
- \* Did you find **Higgins** a likeable character in the play? Why or why not?
- \* Is **Higgins** an effective teacher? Why or why not?
- \* Imagine that Liza brought a charge of abuse against **Higgins** at the end of the play. What evidence would she list in the charge? Write a speech for **Higgins** to present to a jury in his own defence.



## ACTIVITY

### Role on the Wall

- \* "Role on the wall" is a method of examining a character by identifying qualities of both inner personality and outer circumstances.
- \* Draw a silhouette of **Higgins** on the blackboard. Have students suggest a list of inner qualities to write inside the silhouette and a list of external life circumstances to write outside the silhouette.
- \* Is the character you have described a simple or complex one?

## IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION

\* Explain the title of the play.

\* *Pygmalion* explores the importance of money and fashionable street addresses in the class structure of society. The beginning of the play makes several references to British money (shilling, ha-pence, penny, sixpence, tanner, half-crown, sovereign, tuppence) and districts (Selsay, Lisson Grove, Park Lane, Hoxton, Earls Court, Epsom, Wimpole Street). Does our North American ignorance of these monetary values and locations detract from our understanding of the play?

\* When **Higgins** transforms **Eliza** from “a flower girl to a duchess” what changes does she undergo? What stays the same? Why does she enter the grand ballroom feeling as if she’s “in a dream,” and leave saying: “I don’t think I can bear much more... Nothing can make me the same as these people.”? Why does she feel that now, she belongs nowhere?

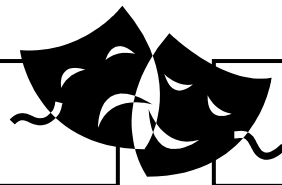
\* The relationship between **Higgins** and **Eliza** is complex. Although it appears throughout most of the play that **Higgins** is in control, the end reveals that **Eliza** has power as well. What is her power over **Higgins**?

\* Bernard Shaw wrote an afterword to *Pygmalion*, in which **Eliza** marries **Freddy** but keeps close contact with **Higgins** and **Pickering**. In 1956, *Pygmalion* was recreated as a musical, *My Fair Lady*, starring Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison. The film version appeared in 1964, starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison. The end of this adaptation has **Eliza** returning to **Higgins**, with the hint that she will marry him and not **Freddy**. This version also ignores Shaw’s depiction of **Higgins** as physically awkward. Why do you think these changes were made? Do modern writers have the right to change the ending of the story?



London map, circa 1900, with Regent Street flower sellers.





**BLOCKING:** The actor's movement on stage is known as "blocking". The Stage Manager writes the blocking notation into the Prompt Script.

**COSTUME:** Anything that an actor wears on stage is referred to as a costume. The Wardrobe department (the department responsible for creating costumes) provides clothes, shoes, hats, and any personal accessories such as umbrellas, purses and eyeglasses.

**DROP:** A drop is a large piece of painted canvas that is "flown in" by the flyman (see FLYMAN).

**GREEN ROOM:** The green room, usually near the entrance to the stage, is where the actors and crew sit while waiting for their turn to go on stage. One possible explanation of how the green room got its name is that actors used to wait for their entrances at the back of the theatre in an area where the scenery was stored. Perhaps the scenery was green, or the name "scene room" evolved into "green room".

**ORCHESTRA PIT:** The orchestra pit is the place where the musicians perform during a musical. Usually the orchestra pit is between the front row of the audience and the stage.

**PROPS:** A property or "prop" is anything that the audience sees that is not worn by an actor and is not a structural part of the set. Some examples are: tables, chairs, couches, carpets, pictures, lamps, weapons, food eaten during a play, dishes, cutlery, briefcases, books, newspapers, pens, telephones, curtains and anything else you can imagine.

**PROSCENIUM:** A term describing the physical characteristics of a theatre. A proscenium theatre is one in which the audience and the actors are separated by a picture-frame opening that the audience looks through to see the actors. Surrounding this opening is the PROSCENIUM ARCH. If there is an acting area on the audience side of the proscenium arch, it is referred to as the APRON or FORESTAGE.

**SCRIM:** A scrim is a piece of gauze that is painted and used as part of the scenery. When a scrim is lit from in front it is opaque - you cannot see through it. When a scrim is lit from behind it is transparent - you can see through it. This allows for many different visual effects to be created by the lighting and set designers.

**THRUST STAGE:** A thrust stage is a stage that is surrounded on three sides by the audience.

**DIRECTOR:** The person who guides the actors during the rehearsal period. The director decides what the important messages of the play are and how they will be conveyed to the audience.

**DESIGNERS:** The people who work with the director to decide what the production will look like. Designers must choose the colour, shape and texture of everything you see on the stage. There are several areas that need to have designers: costumes, set, lighting and sometimes sound. The designers work very closely with the director to create the environment in which the play will take place.

**DYER:** The person who dyes fabrics for the Wardrobe department.

**FLYMAN:** The person responsible for the manipulation of the scenery which is in the fly gallery (the space above the stage). The scenery is manipulated by ropes attached to a counterweight system.

**MILLINER:** The person who makes the hats which the actors wear on stage.

**PROPS BUYER:** The person who buys items that will be used or adapted to become props. Props buyers also purchase the raw material used to build props.

**SCENIC ARTISTS:** The people who are responsible for painting and decorating the surfaces of the set. Some of the techniques they use include: wood graining, stenciling, marbling and brickwork. They also paint the drops and scrims that are flown in.

**STAGE CARPENTER:** The person who ensures that everything runs smoothly on stage during a performance. The stage carpenter and stage crew are responsible for changing the sets between scenes and acts.

**STAGE MANAGER:** The person who makes sure that all rehearsals and performances run smoothly. During a performance the stage manager also makes sure that all of the technical elements (e.g. lights, sound, curtains flying in and out) happen at exactly the right time.

**TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:** The person who is responsible for coordinating all of the technical elements of a production. Technical directors work with the people who build the sets, props, costumes, wigs and special effects to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

**Pygmalion**  
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Did you make use of the following elements of this Study Guide? If so, please make any comments you feel might be useful:

- The Players:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- Running Time:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- The Author:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- The Characters:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- The Story:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- Programme Essay:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- Lessons before the play:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_
- Lessons after the play:** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Please feel free to make any other comments or suggestions:**

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