My Fair Lady

Based on Pygmalion by BERNARD SHAW
Adaptation and lyrics by ALAN JAY LERNER
Music by FREDERICK LOEWE
THE SHAW STORY

MANDATE
The Shaw Festival produces and presents the work of George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and playwrights writing anywhere in the world during, or about, the era of Shaw’s lifetime.

VALUES
• The Shaw Festival chooses works for presentation that are challenging, provocative and intelligent.
• Productions engage audiences with clever, insightful, and delightful portraits of the human condition.
• The works chosen often resonate with the wit, social commentary, and topical relevance for which G.B. Shaw himself was well known.
• The Shaw Festival is dedicated to excellence, consistency, and integrity in all its creative and administrative practices.
• The Shaw Festival operates within a fiscally responsible and accountable framework.

THE SHAW FESTIVAL ATTRIBUTES ITS SUCCESS TO:
The Ensemble - their talent, continuity, generosity, and collegiality fuel all of the Festival’s efforts
The Company - their singular sense of purpose fosters mutual trust, respect, and dedication to the Festival
The Repertory - the alternating schedule of performance serves the audience and inspires the company
The Mandate - 1856-1950 offers a wealth of material to fascinate and delight, liberating the ensemble to explore complex questions from the safety of the not too distant past while encouraging audiences to re-discover themselves through the lens of historical perspective

The Shaw Festival is a crucible of progressive and provocative ideas inspired by the brilliance, bravery, humanity, and humour of George Bernard Shaw.

OUR THEATRES
The Shaw Festival presents plays in four distinctive theatres. The Festival Theatre with 869 seats is The Shaw’s flagship theatre; the historic Court House where The Shaw first began performing, seats 327; and the Royal George Theatre, modeled after an Edwardian opera house, holds 328. Our new Studio Theatre has flexible seating and can accommodate approximately 200 seats.

THE SHAW’S COAT OF ARMS
In 1987, on the occasion of our 25th Anniversary, the Shaw Festival became the second theatre company in the world to be granted a Coat of Arms by the College of Heralds. A large painted sculpture of our Coat of Arms adorns the lobby of the Festival Theatre.
CONNECTIONS
Study Guide

A practical, hands-on resource for the classroom which contains background information for the play, as well as suggested themes for classroom discussions.

My Fair Lady is recommended for students in grades 3 and higher.

This guide was written and compiled by Amanda Tripp. Additional materials were provided by Suzanne Merriam, Molly Smith, Paul Sportelli, Ken MacDonald, Judith Bowden, Joanna Falck, Carly Commerford and Leonard Conolly.

Cover: Deborah Hay. Photo by: Shin Sugino.

Previews: April 13
Opens: May 28
Closes: October 30

THE PLAYERS

Eliza Doolittle    DEBORAH HAY
Freddy Eynsford-Hill    MARK UHRE
Mrs Eynsford-Hill / Cockney    GABRIELLE JONES
Colonel Pickering    PATRICK GALLIGAN
Jamie    BILLY LAKE
Busker / Lady Boxington    KIERA SANGSTER
Bootsblack / Charles / Policeman    COLIN LEPAGE
Cockney Quartet / Butler /    KELLY WONG
Dr Themistocles Stephanos    BENEDICT CAMPBELL
Henry Higgins    LOUIE ROSSETTI
Cockney Quartet / Footman /    JEFF IRVING
Sir Reginald Tarrington    ANTHONY MALARKY
Cockney Quartet / Consort /    NEIL BARCLAY
Zoltan Karpathy    KYLE BLAIR
George / Footman    MELANIE PHILLIPSON (until June 1)
Alfred Doolittle    MELANIE JANZEN (after June 1)
Harry / Lord Boxington    DEVON TULLOCK
Tart / Embassy Guest / Maid    PATTY JAMIESON
Busker / Angry Man    ROBIN EVAN WILLIS
Mrs Pearce / Queen of Transylvania    SACCHA DENNIS
Tart / Maid / Lady Tarrington    SHARRY FLETT
Flower Girl / Maid    HEATHER McGUIGAN
Mrs Higgins    KATIE MURPHY
Street Sweep / Maid    JACQUELINE THAIR
Flower Girl / Swing    KELLAN ZIFFLE
Flower Girl    ALEXANDRE BRILLOM
Cockney / Swing    CELESTE BRILLOM
Buskers    AIDAN TYE

THE ARTISTIC TEAM

Director    MOLLY SMITH
Musical Director    PAUL SPORTELLI
Choreographer    DANNY PELZIG
Set Designer    KEN MACDONALD
Costume Designer    JUDITH BOWDEN
Lighting Designer    JOCK MUNRO
Projection Designer    ADAM LARSEN
Sound Designer    JOHN LOTT
MY FAIR LADY is a story about...

...the transformation of Eliza Doolittle from a dirty, uncouth Cockney flower seller into an elegant, well-spoken lady.

Professor Henry Higgins, a speech scientist can place any person by their accent to within two streets of where they were born. One night, outside the Royal Opera House in London, Professor Higgins and a fellow speech expert, Colonel Pickering, hear the ear-splitting howls of a flower seller whose basket of flowers has been knocked to the ground. Higgins is horrified by her language and speech and tells Colonel Pickering that if Eliza could simply learn to speak proper English, he could pass her off as a duchess at an Embassy ball within six months. While Higgins says it jokingly, Eliza hears this proposition and seizes her chance. The next day, she arrives at Higgins' home and says she'll pay for lessons to learn proper English so she can work in a flower shop. Pickering then challenges Higgins to deliver on his boast and Higgins accepts claiming, "I'll make a duchess of this draggle-tailed guttersnipe!" Eliza moves in and the transformation - both inside and out - for both Eliza and Higgins begins.

Higgins puts Eliza through a series of exhausting and degrading exercises to improve her speech. Eliza's spirit is almost broken by his heartless attitude towards her, and her first public test of her skills, as the Ascot Racecourse, nearly ends in disaster as she slips back into her uncouth manner of speech.

However, with the encouragement of Pickering and Mrs Higgins, Eliza's next presentation to high society is a complete success. At the Embassy Ball, her manners are impeccable, her speech is proper, and everyone at the Ball is completely convinced by her performance. Afterwards, Higgins celebrates “his” success at winning the bet, but continues his lack of recognition for Eliza - she has served her purpose, and he seemingly is now done with her.

Eliza, who has learned self-respect from Mrs Higgins and Colonel Pickering, walks out on Higgins, and it is at that moment he realizes that he has come to care deeply for her. As he contemplates life without Eliza, the play ends with her return and they meet as equals - both having undergone transformations.
OO'S OO?  
(WHO'S WHO?)

My Fair Lady

ELIZA DOOLITTLE
A Cockney flower girl with an appalling accent and an ambition to become a sales-lady in a florist shop. She asks the famous phonetician Henry Higgins to teach her to talk and act like a lady so that she can improve her station in life.

HENRY HIGGINS
An upper class bachelor and phonetics expert who wagers that in six months he could pass Eliza off as a duchess at an Embassy ball or get her a place as a lady’s maid or shop assistant.

COLONEL PICKERING
An expert on Indian dialects visiting London to meet Henry Higgins. He assists in Eliza’s transformation.

MRS EYNSFORD-HILL
Friends with Mrs Higgins and mother of Freddy.

ALFRED DOOLITTLE
Eliza’s father. He is a proud member of the ‘undeserving poor’, a layabout and a heavy drinker. He visits Higgins to collect payment for the possession of his daughter.

MRS HIGGINS
Henry’s mother. She is the first to test Eliza as a lady.

MRS PEARCE
Henry Higgins’ housekeeper

FREDDY EYNSFORD-HILL
An upper class but penniless young man who falls desperately in love with Eliza Doolittle after she is transformed from a flower girl into a lady.
SHAW THE BOY
“I may add that I was incorrigibly idle and worthless as a schoolboy, and am proud of the fact.”
But his bedtime reading consisted of the entire works of Dickens and Shakespeare.

SHAW THE VEGETARIAN
“Meat is poison to the system. No one should live on dead things.”
He believed this to be the reason he stayed mentally and physically fit into his 90s.

SHAW THE REBEL
“Do not do unto others as you expect they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same.”
Shaw championed equity for those who had no voice in society - the underprivileged and women.

SHAW THE SOCIALIST
“Socialism is ... the economist’s hatred of waste and disorder, the aesthete's hatred of ugliness and dirt, the lawyer’s hatred of injustice, the doctor's hatred of disease, the saint's hatred of the seven deadly sins.”
Shaw believed in activism. Intellect and words were his weapons.

SHAW THE LOVER
GBS loved women. He had life-long affairs with many, in letters, poetry, and prose but rarely of the flesh. He was a major supporter of women’s emancipation.
“She is the slave of duty.”

SHAW THE SUPERMAN
Shaw was interested in everything, had an opinion on everything, and criticized everything. No thought went unrecorded or unexpressed. The personal letters he wrote in his lifetime compose five large volumes. He wrote reviews, articles, essays, 55 plays and introduced a new adjective into the English language - Shavian - a term used to describe all his brilliant qualities.
MOLLY SMITH talks about directing *My Fair Lady*

There are only a few Gold Standard Musicals. *South Pacific, Oklahoma!, West Side Story, Gypsy* and *My Fair Lady* are so brilliantly written and composed that they cry out to be interpreted over and over again.

Inspired by Ovid’s classical myth of transformation in which the sculptor Pygmalion creates a beautiful ivory statue of a woman called Galatea and then falls in love with her, our story is about the transformation of a human being through language, manners, mind and dress. It is a double-headed transformation because both Eliza and Higgins transform each other. He tames her - and she tames him. This is a story about deep emancipation, not just about Eliza but also about Higgins as he moves into his own humanness.

The other story is about class and the rigid social structures which confine us. In a world increasingly blown apart by the dynamics of the very rich and the very poor, this musical hits the sweet spot of our contemporary awareness of class: What class were you born into? Have you changed classes in your lifetime? How difficult was this to accomplish? *My Fair Lady* asks the great question: how does language define us? How do we judge others immediately through their language, manners and dress? How does our own class, lower, middle or upper, confine and define us? Higgins and Eliza embark on a journey as treacherous and dangerous as anyone can ever take - the transformation of a human being, both through the mind and through the heart.

Rarely has a musical been so suited to a particular theatre company. Working with this company, who are the pre-eminent experts on Shaw’s language and ideas, on a musical about language and ideas, has been a deep pleasure. May it also be so for all of you.

**FUN FACT**

Shaw had a champion in the original actor who played Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady* on Broadway (and the film version), Rex Harrison. During rehearsals for the Broadway production, he carried an edition of Shaw’s original play *Pygmalion* in his back pocket and whenever he felt the play slipping too far away from Shaw’s text into ‘American-isms’, he would pull out his Shaw and argue with the director to maintain Shaw’s original sharply comic writing. And much of it does remain, which is what makes *My Fair Lady* such a rich musical.
Everyone writing a musical based on pre-existing material should have a good reason why that material will benefit from musical treatment before they proceed. Lerner and Loewe grappled long and hard over this while writing *My Fair Lady*. Rodgers and Hammerstein had struggled with the very same issue and had concluded that it couldn't be done. But Lerner and Loewe found a way of using music to enlarge our understanding of Shaw's original *Pygmalion* characters and story.

Music has a way of striking at the core of an emotion in a way that is different from words, and is often more able than words to capture a sense of the indescribable. Although there is a lot said in the text -- how could there not be in something based on Shaw?! -- there remains a lot that is unsaid. There is much these characters know, but a lot they don't know. Lerner captures this sense of the unknown or indescribable in key lyrics, like Eliza's “I'll never know what made it so exciting” and Higgins' “I've grown accustomed to the trace of something in the air.” What is it Eliza thinks she'll never know? What is in the air that Higgins can't pinpoint? The answer is never given through text, but the music gives us strong clues.

Observe the brilliance of how Lerner and Loewe use Higgins' music to show character development: Higgins always sings up-tempos, but with *I've Grown Accustomed to her Face*, he sings a ballad: a ballad he continues to wrestle his way out of with up-tempo interludes, but a ballad to which he can't help returning. That musical treatment gives us dramatic information in a way that words alone never could. And I love that the writers trusted music and movement alone -- with no words -- to end Act I. Music and movement tell the story and create a perfect sense of “what will happen?” in a way that words cannot.

The writers are also smart in choosing the appropriate musical boundaries for Eliza and Higgins who never sing a duet. They do sing together (*The Rain in Spain*), but Pickering is there singing as well. The only time they sing alone together is in the penultimate scene, when his singing interrupts hers and she walks out.

While rehearsing this production, we've enjoyed the lyrics -- especially immersing ourselves in all the dialects and realizing how much that informs the music-making! We've also enjoyed the music, but most of all, that marriage of words and music. Or as Lerner aptly called it, “the wings.”
KEN MacDONALD talks about designing the set for *MY FAIR LADY*

Where did you get your ideas for the set design for *My Fair Lady*? When I read *My Fair Lady* I was struck by the many references to birds that came up. This inspired me to base the set design on Victorian silhouettes of birdcages for; Professor Higgins house, the Ascot horse race, the Embassy ball room, and Mrs Higgins’ garden. The bird cage metaphor is used to represent social classes. Each of the upper and lower classes have their own particular 'cage' and this reality drives the story. The various characters attempt to escape their individual bird cages and the only way to get out of their social class is to fight, then fly.

What is your process when designing a set? First of all, I read the play – in this case I read both *My Fair Lady* and Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. Then I have many conversations with the director and other designers and together we choose a direction for visually representing and supporting the story and characters. In my many discussions with the director, the costume, lighting and projection designers for *My Fair Lady*, we all agreed that we wanted the world of the musical to be grounded in 1912 England with the correct silhouette but modern at the same time.

How might set design help tell the story of the play? The audience can tell a lot about the world of the play by the set and the way the characters relate to the set. For example, the set under the bridge where the street people live is very grimy with rust and rivets representing the ugly, dirty dangerous world in which Eliza lives. On the opposite end, the set for the Embassy Ball consists of a blue curtain rising to reveal a 17' glittering, brass bird-cage gazebo through which guests enter into the ball room. The two worlds of lower and upper class contrast in design, texture and colour.
How do you begin the process of designing costumes?
In my original discussions with Molly (the director) and Ken (the set designer), we talked about how we might add a modern twist to this musical while remaining true to the portrayal of real characters and story. We wanted to show the world where Eliza comes from as aggressive and violent so we can understand why Eliza is so desperate to get out. So, for the costumes for the people living in the streets I looked to steam punk for ideas.

What is steam punk?
Steam punk is a fashion style that was popular in early 1980s and 1990s. This fashion style takes Victorian and Edwardian visuals and gives it a modern twist. For the characters who live in the streets of London, steam punk was a useful stylistic tool giving a visual edginess to the characters forced to survive in the streets.

Where did you get your ideas for the costumes for My Fair Lady?
All costume design begins with reading the play/musical and learning about the characters and their world. For example, at the beginning of the play, Eliza lives on the streets in 1912 – so her costume must reflect the hard, tough life of that time. Her next costumes are clothes that have been chosen for her by men. By the end of the play, her dress reflects the influence of other women, (especially Mrs Higgins and Mrs Pearce), as well as her own choice. I drew from the set designer’s bird imagery for the costumes of the upper class characters. During the Ascot scene, I have designed the costumes so the women look like exotic birds.
MY FAIR LADY: from play to musical

Shaw had always resisted a musical adaptation of *Pygmalion*, but after his death, (in 1950), Alan Jay Lerner (book and lyrics) and Frederick Loewe (music) wrote *My Fair Lady*, which premiered on Broadway at the Mark Hellinger Theatre on March 15, 1956. The role of Higgins was initially offered to Noël Coward, who declined it but suggested Rex Harrison, who accepted. The role of Eliza was offered to Mary Martin. When she declined, it was offered to Julie Andrews after her successful Broadway debut in *The Boy Friend*. Directed by Moss Hart, *My Fair Lady* ran for 2,717 performances, a record at the time. The production won six Tony Awards. There have been several Broadway revivals, the last in 1993 when Richard Chamberlain played Higgins opposite Melissa Errico’s Eliza. Former Shaw Festival Artistic Director Paxton Whitehead played Colonel Pickering in that production.

The London premiere was at Drury Lane Theatre on April 30, 1958, still with Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews in the lead roles. It ran for 2,281 performances. A 2001 National Theatre production directed by Trevor Nunn, with Jonathan Pryce as Higgins and Martine McCutcheon as Eliza, subsequently transferred to Drury Lane Theatre where it enjoyed another long run prior to UK and US tours (with a different cast).

The Canadian premiere was a Moss Hart touring production with Diane Todd as Eliza and Michael Evans as Higgins. It opened at Her Majesty’s Theatre in Montreal on September 26, 1960.

The 1964 film version, directed by George Cukor, starred Rex Harrison as Higgins, but Audrey Hepburn, judged to be a greater attraction than Julie Andrews, was cast as Eliza. The problem of Hepburn’s inadequate singing voice was solved by having her voice dubbed by Marni Nixon. Harrison was allowed to continue to talk his way through the songs. The film won eight Oscars. (Hepburn missed out, but in the same ceremony Julie Andrews won an Oscar for best actress in *Mary Poppins* - and Audrey Hepburn presented a best actor award to Rex Harrison.)
FROM METAMORPHOSES TO MY FAIR LADY

My Fair Lady is an adaptation of Gabriel Pascal’s motion picture Pygmalion, which is in turn an adaptation of Shaw’s play Pygmalion, which is based on a classical myth, Pygmalion and Galatea, a story told by the Roman poet Ovid in a book called Metamorphoses. The Myth of Pygmalion is about a sculptor who falls in love with a statue he creates.

THE MYTH

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.

THE PLAY

In Shaw’s play, Pygmalion, Henry Higgins, a linguistics expert, undertakes a bet that given six months he can transform Eliza, a Cockney flower girl, into a duchess. He succeeds, but finds that the new Eliza resents the change. Her education leaves her unfit to return to her former life and unprepared for high society.

Discuss

Read the Greek myth of the sculptor Pygmalion. Draw comparisons to the Cinderella fairy tale. Discuss how Shaw’s choice of protagonists changes the story. Ask students how the story might change once again if someone rewrote Pygmalion today.

ACTIVITY

Create a modern day film version of My Fair Lady.

Brainstorm a list of potential contemporary protagonists for this new film version.

- How would the protagonists change to portray today’s society?
- How would their language and relationship reflect that change?

Decide:

- Setting
- Characters
- Music
- Who would you cast in the major roles?
THE MUSICAL
The transformation of Eliza Doolittle from a flower girl to a lady is almost as amazing as the transformation of Shaw’s *Pygmalion* into the beloved musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady*. After Shaw’s death, Gabriel Pascal, who produced a film version of *Pygmalion* approached Lerner and Loewe about adapting the play into a musical. Others (such as Oscar Hammerstein) had already tried and failed to adapt the play because it did not fit the conventions of a musical at the time. Lerner and Loewe also struggled with musicalizing the play – as it had neither the comic subplot or chorus that was typical of musicals at the time. They put the project aside.

As years went by, the musical format changed and realism changed the way that stories could be told; the circumstances were now right for Lerner and Loewe to return to the adaptation of Shaw’s *Pygmalion* into *My Fair Lady*. Music became the means for characters to give voice to emotions that were not voiced in Shaw’s play. And of course, famously, the ending was altered so that Shaw’s unromantic notion of Higgins’ and Eliza’s relationship became more of a musical theatre ending, with hero and heroine together.

SHAW AND ROMANTICISM
What Henry Higgins and Ovid’s Pygmalion have in common is that they both ‘mold’ a perfect woman out of coarse material, so to speak. But Shaw’s intention was to write a social commentary; not a romance. As a playwright, Shaw’s mission was to educate the audience about social and political issues: feminism, classism, and the unequal distribution of wealth. In fact, he often parodied romance and melodrama in his plays.

In Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (on which *My Fair Lady* is based), Eliza walks out on Higgins and into a new life with Freddy Eynsford-Hill. This ending has always been a problem for audiences, who yearned to see Higgins and Eliza marry. Shaw adamantly insisted on Higgins’ bachelordom. and maintained that for Higgins, Eliza Doolittle was a social and scientific experiment – and nothing more. Shaw said that a marriage between Higgins and Eliza “would have been a revolting tragedy; and that the marriage with Freddy is the natural and happy ending to the story.”

Against Shaw’s wishes, the 1938 film version of *Pygmalion* (and *My Fair Lady*) gave audiences what they wanted – romance between Eliza and Higgins. Shaw’s play was turned into the very sort of romance he spent all his energies trying to steer away from.

While viewing the performance what decision did you suspect Eliza would make upon the end of the play? Was this ending satisfying to you? Do you think she made the right choice? Why or why not? What might have happened to Eliza and Higgins had she not returned?

WHAT WOULD SHAW THINK?
Shaw had been repeatedly approached about setting *Pygmalion* to music. In response to a 1948 request by a serviceman in the Royal Air Force named E.A. Prentice, Shaw replied, “I absolutely forbid any such outrage.” When he received a similar request later that year, Shaw told the inquirer to “Stop cabling crazy nonsense.”

Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, the creators of *My Fair Lady*, speculated about what Shaw would say if he ever saw their adaptation of his work. “They hoped that he would be pleased, though Lerner confessed in the Broadway Playbill ‘I should hate to think that I might also have to contend with an irate Shaw standing at the gate [of eternity] waiting for me ...’”

Shaw “absolutely forbid” both that *Pygmalion* be turned into a musical and that the ending be altered so that Higgins and Eliza end up romantically involved. Lerner and Loewe defied both of these wishes with their adaptation of *My Fair Lady*, justifying their fears of meeting Shaw in the afterlife.

Do you feel people have the right to take what an artist has created and change it to make something new?
"London is the heart of your commercial system... It is at once the centre of wealth and the sink of misery." — Robert Southey

**THEME: CLASS**

**EDWARDIAN ENGLAND**

*My Fair Lady* is set in the Edwardian era, which roughly corresponds to the reign of King Edward VII, who ruled England from 1901–1910. The early 20th century was a time of tremendous technological and social change. Between 1841 and 1901 four million workers left the countryside hoping to find better work and wages in London, the world’s largest centre for industry, which was brimming with innovations in rail, gasworks and manufacturing.

Industrial success widened the gap between rich and poor. The wealth of factory owners grew substantially while wages for workers were low. The wealthy enjoyed large country estates, exclusive parties, twelve course meals and extravagant fashion. Upper class Edwardian women flaunted the newly invented corset, along with frilly skirts, and wide brim hats embellished with ribbons, embroidery and jewels. The few people that fell into this group represented the greatest concentration of personal wealth in the world.

In contrast, many lower class families lived in one room in the slums, located in surprisingly close proximity to their rich counterparts. The rookeries were feared and considered breeding grounds for crime and disease. Inhabitants were nicknamed the ‘Great Unwashed’ as clean water was scarce and soap was an expensive luxury.

*My Fair Lady* captures the polarity of these two classes; showing how the lives of the very wealthy and the desperately poor intersect on the streets of London.

**WORKING CLASS**

Roughly one-third of the population lived below any humane level of subsistence. They were overworked, underpaid, and crowded into insanitary slum properties. There were many members of high society who believed that the lower class created their own misery through idleness and drink, however, the poor would have likely pointed out that long work days, unhealthy working conditions, unsatisfactory pay and bad housing were the real problems.

**HIGH SOCIETY**

High society insisted on social discipline; upon a certain level of behavior. The low wages and long working hours that kept the working class poor benefitted the upper class for whom they were working. They were rich, educated and fixed on entertaining themselves.

**MIDDLE CLASS**

Most people were members of the middle class, a term that captures a wide range of incomes and styles of life. It could be further divided into upper and lower middle classes. On the upper end: doctors, manufacturers, merchants, and property owners. On the lower end: teachers, shopkeepers, small business owners and craftsmen.

**SOCIAL MOBILITY**

A term that refers to the movement of a person from one social class to another. *My Fair Lady* is concerned with the challenges of social mobility and how they might be overcome.

Photos: A primrose seller, 1905; Fashionable ladies at Ascot, 1905
WOMEN’S WORK
In the preface to Shaw’s play, *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, Shaw explains that society is organized in such a way that ‘the only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her.’ Shaw believed that society should ‘organize itself in such a fashion as to make it possible for all men and all women to maintain themselves in reasonable comfort by their industry without selling their affections and their convictions. At present we not only condemn women as a sex to attach themselves to breadwinners, licitly or illicitly, on pain of heavy privation and disadvantage.’

In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza’s education with Higgins comes at the cost of her independence. She is provided with many luxuries during her stay with Higgins, but in exchange must adopt “the manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living”. Upper class ladies did not work—or at least—did not work in a formal work setting. Their ‘job’ was to marry and to run a household. When Eliza approaches the end of her education with Higgins and asks him what will become of her now that she has successfully been transformed into a lady, he suggests that she marry. Eliza replies that in her previous life “I sold flowers. I didn’t sell myself. Now you’ve made a lady of me I’m not fit to sell anything else.” Clearly, she is not wholly pleased with this trade-off.

This critique of the capitalist system of social organization is a recurring theme in Shaw’s plays. His aim: to educate people about the limiting nature and injustice of this organization – while thoroughly entertaining them.

**DISCUSS**
Does Eliza have more independence as a street girl or a lady?
Discuss the pros and cons of Eliza’s life as a street girl and as a society lady?
Does Shaw succeed in edu-taining about the unjust organization of society?
What do you think?

**ACTIVITY**
Overcoming Obstacles
Each character in *My Fair Lady* has a specific objective. For each character listed below, answer the following questions:

- What are their objectives?
- What is getting in the way of achieving the objective?
- Does the character achieve their objective?
- How did they achieve objectives? How did they overcome the obstacles?

ELIZA DOOLITTLE
MRS EYNSFORD-HILL
COLONEL PICKERING
HENRY HIGGINS
ALFRED DOOLITTLE
MRS PEARCE
MRS HIGGINS

The central character in *My Fair Lady* is Eliza. For the characters listed above, also define their relationship to Eliza and how each character ‘transforms’ because of Eliza’s growth and change.
### THEME: CLASS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>What class does she belong to?</th>
<th>What role does she play in London society?</th>
<th>In what way is she oppressed by either another character or societal pressures?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eliza Doolittle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Eynsford-Hill</td>
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<td>Mrs Pearce</td>
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<td>Mrs Higgins</td>
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THEME: CLASS

COLONEL PICKERING
What class does he belong to? ________________________________

How does he view women?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

In what way is he oppressed by either another character or societal pressures?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

HENRY HIGGINS
What class does he belong to? ________________________________

How does he view women?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

In what way is he oppressed by either another character or societal pressures?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

ALFRED DOOLITTLE
What class does he belong to? ________________________________

How does he view women?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

In what way is he oppressed by either another character or societal pressures?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions:

1. Are there any characters that are not oppressed? Please explain.
2. Are there any characters that do not oppress others in any way?
3. Review your previous two answers. Why do you think that is the case?
The World of the Play

THEME: LANGUAGE

SHAW’S BOLD BAD WORD
The first night of Shaw’s *Pygmalion* in 1914 became a cultural milestone in the history of swearing in England entirely through Eliza’s exclamation “Not bloody likely!” The popular press completely sensationalized the use of the word. The Daily Sketch gave it the following buildup:

“One word in Shaw’s new play will cause sensation. Mr. Shaw introduces a certain forbidden word. WILL MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL SPEAK IT? It was alluded to by the press as “SHAW’S BOLD BAD WORD,” “the unprintable Swearword,” “the Word” and so on. The play’s first audience was stunned into silence then laughter at Shaw’s juxtaposition of style (proper accent) and content (inappropriate language). “Bloody” became the catchword of the season!

IS IT WHAT YOU SAY OR HOW YOU SAY IT?
J.B. Priestley, a prominent 20th century playwright and a contemporary of Shaw’s said “The division [of class] by accent, style of speech, which Shaw used so effectively in *Pygmalion* … was – perhaps still is – part of English snobbish imbecility. It has nothing to do with speaking the language properly. There are downright bad accents – more in evidence now, I think, than they used to be – that offend the ear because they are careless, slovenly, ugly, almost as if whole sentences were being vomited out … Such accents seem to me detestable, but then so do certain varieties of upper-class English speech, often painfully acquired by men wanting to rise to the top. It would be impossible to read poetry properly in these upper-class accents; they have such a wretched poverty of vowel sounds … It is the speech of lazy condescension, and all too often it has been the voice of official Britain.”

*My Fair Lady* presents a few different points of view on the role that language plays in determining one’s position in society.

Higgins’ point of view seems to be that it is not so much what you say, but how you say it— that is, until Eliza is tested at the horseraces at Ascot and proves that what you say can be very revealing! She was able to shed her accent, but not her street vocabulary – shocking the ladies & gentlemen at Ascot. Certain expressions of speech and topics of conversation can give away your social standing, no matter how properly you pronounce the words.

ACTIVITY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Friends often talk using unique vocabulary and expressions. Re-write the following lines from the play using the expressions you would use in conversation with your friends. Read it to the class.

ELIZA: My aunt died of influenza, so they said. But it’s my belief they done the old woman in.

MRS HIGGINS: Done her in?

ELIZA: Yes, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza when she come through diphtheria right enough the year before? Fairly blue with it she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father, he kept ladling gin down her throat. Then she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon.

MRS HIGGINS: Dear me!

ELIZA: Now, what call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza, and what become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it. And what I say is, them as pinched it, done her in.

*(My Fair Lady Act I: Scene 7)*
Cockney Rhyming Slang is perhaps the best-known of all the British slang. It is a complicated, insider type of language. It is said that the slang was originally developed by the thieves of London so that they could communicate without the police understanding what they were saying. It does, indeed, leave outsiders scratching their heads and wondering.

In Cockney Rhyming Slang, a word is represented by a phrase that ends in a rhyme. For example, the word ‘mate’ rhymes with ‘china plate’. So the phrase ‘china plate’ represents ‘mate’. In spoken slang, only the beginning of the phrase would be used. So the word ‘china’ means ‘mate’.

So, a phrase such as “What’s up, mate?”
Would then be “What’s up, china plate?” or “What’s up, china?”

Get it?

Here are some other examples of Cockney Rhyming Slang.
Use the slang terms in a sentence as illustrated in example #1

1. Adam and Eve = believe
   Sentence: Would you Adam and Eve it?

2. Apples and Pears = stairs
   Sentence: ________________________________

3. Bricks and Mortar = daughter
   Sentence: ________________________________

4. Britney Spears = beer
   Sentence: ________________________________

5. China plate = mate/friend
   Sentence: ________________________________

6. Dicky Bird = word
   Sentence: ________________________________

7. Dog and Bone = telephone
   Sentence: ________________________________

8. Pork Pies = lies
   Sentence: ________________________________

9. Whistle and Flute = suit
   Sentence: ________________________________

Now, create your own rhyming slang ...
Come up with a rhyming phrase for the following words and use your new phrase in a sentence:

1. know = __________
   Sentence: ________________________________

2. cell = __________
   Sentence: ________________________________

3. msn = __________
   Sentence: ________________________________
THEME: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ACTIVITY

ROLE ON THE WALL

1. Place a silhouette up on the wall, representing a character from My Fair Lady (Eliza Doolittle, Henry Higgins, Colonel Pickering, Alfred Doolittle, Mrs Pearce, Mrs Doolittle, Freddy Eynsford-Hill, Mrs Eynsford-Hill)
2. Fill in the silhouette’s exterior describing the character’s appearance.
3. Fill the silhouette’s interior describing the character’s personality and inner qualities.
4. Return to the silhouette’s exterior and fill in information about circumstances outside the character’s control that have influenced their appearance and personality.

ACTIVITY

VOICES IN THE HEAD

In role (choose from one of the highlighted roles below), each student thinks of a sentence or two to describe the character’s thoughts and feelings as they contemplate a decision. Examples:

- Friends of Eliza upon learning that Eliza has gone to live with Higgins.
- Friends of Eliza upon seeing her (as a lady) after her transformation.
- Servants in Higgins’ house upon learning that a flower girl will be taking up residence there.
- Mrs Higgins’ friends upon learning that a young girl has moved in to Higgins’ home.
- Friends of Doolittle’s when they learn that he has come into money.

As the teacher calls on the student, they voice the sentence aloud. Discuss what was voiced by the characters and how we judge situations or people based on snippets of information.

Do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements from My Fair Lady? Prepare to discuss and defend your answer!

Higgins:
Why can’t a woman be more like a man?

Higgins:
You see, the great secret, Eliza, is not a question of good manners or bad manners, or any particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls. The question is not whether I treat you rudely, but whether you’ve ever heard me treat anyone else better.

Higgins:
You mean to say you’d sell your daughter for fifty pounds?
Colonel Pickering: Have you no morals, man?
Doolittle:
Nah. Nah, can’t afford ‘em, guv’nor. Neither could you, if you was as poor as me.

Higgins:
A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live.

Eliza:
The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated.
GLOSSARY

Appalling  – Horrifying and astonishing

Barbarous  – Uncivilized; uncultured; not classical or pure

Croon  – To hum or sing softly in a sentimental manner

Diphtheria  – A highly infectious disease of the upper respiratory tract characterized by a sore throat, fever, and difficulty breathing

Farthing  – Former British unit of currency worth one-quarter of an old penny

Incidentally  – In an incidental manner; not of critical or central importance; by chance, in an unplanned way

Indispensable  – Absolutely necessary or requisite; that one cannot do without

Patronage  – Customers collectively; clientele; business

Presumptuous  – Going beyond what is right or proper because of an excess of self-confidence or arrogance

Prudery  – Of excess propriety; easily offended or shocked, especially by sensitive matters

Rhetoric  – The art of using language, especially public speaking, as a means to persuade; meaningless language with an exaggerated style intended to impress

Ruddy  – Reddish in colour, especially of the face, fire, or sky

Tec  – detective

Trod  – walked heavily or laboriously; plodded

Tyrannical  – Tending to act bossy and domineering; act of giving orders and directions to others, especially when unwarranted

Wallop  – A heavy blow or punch; an emotional impact or a psychological force
**BOOKS & ARTICLES**

**WEBSITES**

**Children’s Lives and Activities**
- http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-sources.htm and http://www.1900s.org.uk/1900s-streetgames.htm (*A Child at the Time*—first-hand account of childhood in Edwardian Britain)
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/ (BBC website – primary history; lots of interactive-photos, videos, research, quizzes, activities, teachers’ resource section)
- http://www.vam.ac.uk/moc/childrens_lives/edwardian_lives/index.html (Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood site; information and images about children’s lives in Victorian Britain)
- http://www.vam.ac.uk/moc/kids_pages/things_to_make/index.html (Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood site; crafts ie “Make your own Victorian village,” silhouettes, toys, etc.)

**Clothing/Fashion**
- http://costumes.org (The Costumer’s Manifesto-wide variety of information on different eras)
- http://www.fashion-era.com/la_belle_epoque_1890-1914_fashion.htm (part of the fashion-era.com website – also includes other eras; information on clothing, hair, accessories, etc.)

**Inspiration**
- http://www.mccarter.org/education/myfairlady/index.html (McCarter Theatre)
- http://www.repstl.org/studyguides/ (The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis)

**North American Perspective**

**Victorian and Edwardian Britain**
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/london/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8680000/8680305.stm (BBC production on the history of suffragettes in London)
- http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/early-20th-century.htm (British National Archives site 1901-1918; lesson plans on a variety of topics ie suffragettes, education, the Titanic, changes in British society, etc.; “create your own website” about suffragettes or British society)
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/ (Britain 1901-1918)
- http://www.victorianweb.org/ (Scholarly articles on a diversity of topics; links to outside resources ie Victorian nursery rhymes, magic lantern shows, music, theatre, etc.)
- http://www.victoriaspast.com/
- http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/victorians.html (School webpage; contains information on Victorian social history, including a section on children’s lives)