**Pymalion Study Guide**

**Before your reading**

* **The title**

1. **Pygmalion:** In Ovid's Metamophosis,Pygmalion is a sculptor who is not interested in women.  Pygmalion, however, finds himself in love with his sculpture, Galatea, and he caresses her and offers her with all the gifts women like.  At the end, Venus realizes his wish and turn Galatea into a real woman.  (Two paintings: Pygmalion And Galatea; [Pygmalion](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/English_Literature/shaw/pymalion_painting.htm))
2. **A Romance:** Putting the Pymalion myth together with the idea of a romance, we can also think of the Cinderella fairy-tale (whose modern versions are Working Girl and Pretty Woman).  This, however, is exactly what Shaw wants to critique.  **What you should find out in the play, then, is what kind of transformation happens in the play, and whether there is a romance as we expect it.**
3. **Shavian (Shaw's) Style:** It will help if you have a general undersanding of Shaw's style.
   1. **stage direction** --economical exposition and suggestive of social background;
   2. **prefatory essay**--used to express his doctrines;
   3. **discussion in the play**.  Sometimes Shaw calls his own plays Problem Play, Discussion Drama, Play of Ideas.  He also claims that "[p]rimarily, [his plays] are not plays: they are tracts in dramatic forms."  He regards **social criticism** as the most important function of all art. (A Guide to Bernard Shaw, Edward Wagenknecht, 1929, reissued 1971 pp. 3, 5, 16, 17; [George Bernard Shaw Page](http://www.gis.net/~edwardg/shaw.html))

**Guiding questions for Act I**

1. **Setting and Stage Directions: The stage directions** at the beginning of act I, discuss the **setting**.
   1. What is the setting?  This setting brings together what two places?  Are these two places symbolic?
   2. What issues about money, class and spirituality are raised in this act?
2. **\*note:** [**Picture of St Paul's church**](http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwengl/17thcentury/ij.html)**, Covent Gardens (**The setting of Act 1) & the architect Inigo Jones.
3. In what ways are the **lighting** and **sounds** important in this act?  (e.g. p. 12, when Eliza Doolittle enters the scene, and p. 21, when Henry Higgins remembers to give money to her.)  Keeping in mind the mythic allusion of the title, can you make more of the setting?
4. **Eliza's room:** How does this room, like her appearance and the way she sleeps, reflect Eliza's social background and her personality?

**Characters--***Act I offers an overview of the major characters in the play, or a microcosm of London society*

1. How would you
   1. characterize the traits and relationship of the mother (Mrs Eynsford Hill ), daughter(Clara Eynsford Hill), and son (Freddy Eynsford Hill)?
   2. compare and contrast them with the flower girl (Eliza Doolittle)?
   3. In other words, which of them strike you as being independant and active?
2. How would you describe the gentleman (Pickering)? How does he compare and contrast with the note-taker (Higgins)?  Pay attention to their different treatments of the flower girl.
3. Why is Higgins so upset by Eliza's dialect?  (e.g. p. 20)

**Theme**

1. How:
   1. do the divisions of social classes become an issue in this act?
   2. are class differences embodied in the people's different treatments of the flower girl?
   3. is language related to class divisions?
2. In what ways are the issue of **appearance and reality** raised?

**Guiding questions for Act II**

**Setting and Stage Directions**

1. Describe the setting in Act II.  How is Higgins' room a contrast to Eliza's, which we see at the end of Act I?  What does the room as well as its decorations suggest about Higgins' personality and life?  How does the stage direction characterize Higgins on pp. 26 & 27?

**note:** "Piranesis" (from the first stage direction) -- Piranesi, Giovanni Battista (1720-1778), "Italian graphic artist, famous for his engravings and etchings. . . .   Piranesi's collection of engravings entitled **Carceri d'Invenzione (Imaginary Prisons, 1745)** greatly influenced 19th-century romanticism and also played a role in the development of  20th-century surrealism. (from [Ecarta bio](http://encarta.msn.com/EncartaHome.asp?z=1&pg=2&ti=01174000&))

example of Piranesi's work: [*Imaginary Prison* & *Perspectives on Rome*](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/English_Literature/shaw/piranesi.htm)

1. Explain how the clothes worn by Higgins and the flowergirl reflect them. Does Eliza's change of costume suggest something about her change of life?

**Characters:** *Act II shows two verbal encounter (or fights) between the play's major characters (first Higgins and Eliza, and then Higgins and Mr. Doolittle), who use different tactics to get what they want.  Pay attention to their different value standards (esp. in terms of money), their language and changes of tone, and enjoy it!*

1. In the dialogue between Higgins and Eliza, what more do we find about the two's personalities?  What does Eliza want to achieve?  And how about Higgins?
2. In the dialogue among Higgins, Pickerin, Eliza and Mrs. Pearce, what kind of cautions do Pickerin and Mrs. Pearce give to Higgins respectively?  And how does Higgins respond to them?  Pay special attention to the way he changes his voice from "storming" to one with "professional exquisiteness of modulation" to "beautiful low tone" on pp. 32-33.
3. How would you describe **Mrs. Pearce's** relationship with Eliza?  Consider the suggestions she gives to Eliza, as well as the way she bathes her.
4. What role does Mrs. Pearce play in serving as a housekeeper for Higgins?  Higgins says after their dialogue that Mrs. Pearce thinks him "overbearing" while he is actually "shy," "diffident," and never feeling grown-up.  Which of these two is a closer description of Higgins, or both?
5. Describe **Eliza's father, Mr. Doolittle**. Why does he come to Higgins' home?  What does he want from Higgins?  What is his view of the different social classes? Why does he prefer "undeserving poverty"(p. 49)?  What will he do with the money from Higgins? Why does he refuse ten pounds?  What is his view of **marriage**?  Higgins finds his argument irresistible (p. 50), how about you?

**Themes**

1. Like Act I, **money** and **religion** are brought up again several times in this act.  How do the characters (Higgins, Eliza and Mr. Doolittle) of different classes express different views about money?  Religion, likewise, is mentioned to reveal the characters' sense of value.  For instance, why does Higgins think of his pupils as "sacred" ("teaching would be impossible unless pupils were sacred" 41) at the same time he calls Eliza as "that thing," as well as "insect" and "squashed cabbage leave"?  What does Mr. Doolittle think about clergymen as a  career , when Higgins thinks that the former has the eloquence of a priest or a politician?
2. This is a play about **education**, and more specifically, **learning English and learning to be a lady**.   What are Eliza's lessons like?  In their first lesson what is Higgins like as a teacher?  Is Eliza as a student?  In terms of learning to be a lady, what does she feel about being a lady in this act (e.g. being clean, having fashionable dresses)?

**Guiding questions for Act III**

**Setting and Stage Directions**

1. The beginning of Act III is set in the home of Mrs. Higgins, Professor Higgins's mother. How does the setting, as it is described on pages 56-7, contrast with Professor Higgins's home? What does this setting reveal about Mrs. Higgins? Judging just from the setting, how does she differ from her son?

**Note:** Examples of [William Morris's wallpaper and carpet](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/English_Literature/shaw/morris.htm), [Edward Burne-Jones' paintings](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/English_Literature/shaw/jones.htm) and [Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/crit.97/Rossetti/Rossetti.htm); more about Morris and Edward Burne-Jones

**Characters:** *Act III is composed of the two tests of the results of Eliza's education in the two upper-class party scenes--Mrs. Higgins' at-home and the ambassador's garden party.  Pay attention to the social norms and manners shown in these two parties, and how the uppe-class guests in these parties are targets of Shaw's critique.*

**At-Home**

1. **Higgins:**Describe the relationship between Mrs. Higgins and her son.  Do you agree with her assessment of her son's social skills? How would you describe his manners and EQ during the "at-home"?
2. Higgins is described by his mother as being "cynical" whe he makes his "we're all savages" speech (61).  This should remind you of his other statement about life's being "a series of inspired follies" (31).  Do you also think that he is too cynical?
3. As **Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering** are discussing Eliza with Mrs. Higgins, how would you characterize their treatment of Eliza?  Do they understand the implications of their "experiment"?  In what ways is their discussion of Eliza alarming? Is Mrs. Higgins's right when she says that the two men treat Eliza as a "live doll" (page 68)?
4. **Eliza:** When Eliza arrives at the "at-home," she is wearing a new dress. In what ways does this change of costume once again suggest a "new" Eliza?
5. How would you describe and characterize Eliza's behavior and "performance" during the "at-home"?  Higgins says that she is limited to talking only about health and weather.   Does she follow the limitations?   What aspects of her speech reveal that she is not yet a lady?  The use of slang or the violation of social conventions?  How does her behavior compare and contrast with Professor Higgins's behavior?
6. The Eynsford Hills (**Mrs.  Eynsford Hill, Clara and Freddy**):  What new information and impressions do you have about the mother, daughter, and son that you met at the beginning of ACT I?   How would you describe their manners and social position?  What does their use of language (e.g. Clara's use of "bloody")  suggest about them?

**The Party at the Embassy**

1. In what ways in **Eliza** changing?  Is it only her pronunciation that is changing?  Are her values and self-identity also changing? How would you describe Eliza during her appearance at the ambassador's party? Why do you think Shaw writes "¡K she walks like a somnambulist in a desert" (page 74)?
2. **Nepommuck:** What is so "important" about his whiskers?   Being an interpreter, Nepommuck is also a language specialist.  In what ways is he different from Higgins?  How does he use his knowledge?

**Themes**

1. What ideas about **love, marriage, and social position** do you find in this act? How would you describe the expectations of women and their role in the family and society?
2. **Language and class differences:** This Act ends with two surprises: 1) Nepommuck's revelation of Liza's being a "fraud", and 2) Liza's saying at the end that "nothing can make [her] the same as these people" (76).   What do these two surprises say about the relationship between language (manners) and class?  Who are the target of irony here?  In other words, what does it mean to be a lady?  Having good pronunciation, good manners, or a lot of money?  What has Eliza learned so far about being a lady?  What kind of lady does she fail to be?

**Guiding questions for Act IV**

*Act IV takes place later in the night of the ambassador's party, when Higgins, Pickering, and Eliza return to Higgins' home.*

1. **Higgins & Pickering:** What do the two men do when they get home?  What do they talk about?  Are they responsive to Eliza and her feelings?
2. **Eliza:** [*read the stage direction closely.*]Why does Eliza get Higgins' slipper?  Does he expect her to?  How does he respond after he finds the slippers?  Why is it appropriate that she later throws the slippers at him?
3. How does Eliza feel?  Why is she upset?   What does she want?  Why does she think getting married is like "selling herself" (82-83)?   Is her idea of buying and selling changed from those she expressed in Acts 1 & II?
4. How would you compare and contrast Eliza as a "lady" in Act IV with Eliza as a flowergirl in Acts I and II?   Has her education made her superior?  Changed her?
5. Higgins says to Eliza, "Now you are free and can do what you like" (82).  Is that true?  In what ways is Eliza NOT free?
6. What does Eliza say to "shock and hurt" Higgins(83)?   Is there a symbolic meaning to Eliza returning to Higgins the ring he gave her?  What do you think the ring meant to Higgins when he gave it to her?  What did it mean to Eliza?
7. Toward the end of this act Eliza has another costume change.  Does this change also suggest a change in Eliza?
8. How would you characterize Eliza's relationship with Freddy at the end of this act?  How does her relationship with Freddy differ from her relationship with Higgins?  Does Freddy provide something that Higgins does not?  What does Freddy not have?

**Guiding questions for Act V**

1. This act begins on the morning after the events presented in Act III. How do Higgins and Pickering respond to Eliza's departure the night before?  How does Mrs. Higgins feel about it? After Mrs. Higgins explains Eliza's behavior to the two men, they each react quite differently.  How does Higgins respond?  How does Pickering respond?
2. What has happened to Alfred Doolittle since Act II?  In what ways does his change in social class and position mirror Eliza's? How does Eliza feel about her own social change? How does her father's response differ from Eliza's?
3. This play has had much to say about marriage. What does Doolittle mean when he says that marriage is not "the natural way" (101)? Would Pickering agree with him? Would Eliza agree?
4. When Eliza talks with Higgins and Pickering, she presents her view of being a lady, including the idea that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how's she's treated" (98).  Do you agree with her?  After reading the play, what do you think **a lady** is?
5. Has Higgins learned something new when he says to Eliza, "I cant turn your soul on. Leave me those feelings; and you can take away the voice and the face. They are not you" (103-4)? How does this differ from his response to Eliza in Acts I and II?
6. How would you characterize the relationship between Eliza and Higgins in Act V?  They seem to have different goals for life. What does Higgins view as meaningful in life? What does Eliza want in her life?  Can you see positive values in both Eliza's and Higgins' views?
7. Like the sculptor Pygmalion, Higgins claims "By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have" (108-9). How, though, does this play offer a revised version of the original Pygmalion myth?
8. Why does Eliza turn around as she is leaving Mrs. Higgins' house and offer advice to Higgins'¦ about his gloves, ties, cheese, and ham? What does this suggest about their relationship?
9. What does this play suggest as possible results of education? Do teachers and students alike need to be concerned about those results? What does the play suggest about the differences between social classes? What does it suggest about marriage and family?

**About the postscript**

**[A Note** on H.G. Wells (1866-1946): "a man with humble origins who had had to struggle against much adversity to make his name as a writer, though when breakthrough came, he achieved rapid celebrity.  . . .Throughout a long career as a writer Wells was very conscious of the power of physical science to transform life, either for the worse. .  .or for the better.  . . . [His*The Time Machine* (1895) explores ]  the remote future . . . set in the year 802701, when evolutionary development has divided humanity into two distinct species; one descended from the 19th-century bourgeoise, the other from the proletariat, who live underground and prey on the former"  (*An Outline of English Literature* 364).   For more info, please go to [H.G. Wells](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8169/index.htm) site **]**

1. **Endings** –
   1. Do you prefer the more open ending of Act V or the endings Shaw presents in the postscript?
   2. At the end of Act V we see Eliza's self-contradictory attitudes toward Higgins.  Do you see similar contradictions in this postscript?
   3. How do you explain the various amorous implications (e.g. Eilza's jealousy of other women; her secret wish to be alone on a "desert island" with Higgins)?
2. **Romance --**
   1. How does Shaw define romance here, to be distinguished from the current trend of sentimental melodrama?
   2. What are the reasons (about Eliza's freedom, Mr. Higgins' love for his mother and his “unchangeability”, and about the strong's need of the weak) he offers here to justify Eliza's marrying Freddy?  Are you convinced?
   3. Does Eliza live "happily ever after" with Freddy? Justify from the text
3. **Education --** Of all the characters Clara Einsford-Hills seems to be the most snobbish as well as pitiable.  How is she changed in this the postscript?  How does Life "start to move with her"? (pp. 118-20)

**The Play as a Whole**

1. **The structure of the play:**The usual structure of Shaw's Discussion play is: exposition, complication and discussion.  Do you find this structure in the play?
2. **The theme of Education/Creation:**
   1. The five acts of the play can be divided into three parts: **Act 1**--a general introduction, **Acts 2-3** -- the bet and its fulfillment, and **Acts 4-5** --  Eliza's "independence" from Higgins.  What does Eliza achieve at each stage?
   2. How do the other characters (except Mrs. Higgins and Pickering) get educated in the play?  How is Mr. Doolittle's similar to and different from Eliza's?
3. **Social Structure and Class Differences** -- This play has characters mostly from the working class  and the upper class (except that Mr. Doolittle, at the end, takes on "middle-class morality").  How are these two classes presented?  Be specific about the differences in the people of the same class: for instance, between Mr. Doolittle, Mrs. Pearce and Eilza, and between the poor genteel (the Eynsford-Hills) and the rich (Mrs. Pearce) and the rich intellectual (Higgins and Pickering).
4. **The title of the play**: After finishing the play, you must know that Pymalion is very different from the original myth.  How are the functions of using this myth, then?  In other words, why  does the play want us to remember mythic, fairy-tale and legendary figures such as Pygmalion, Cinderella and Frankenstein's monster?
5. **The discussions in the play:** what do you think about the discussions in the play?  Are they boring or witty and enlightening?  Do they come naturally out of the development of  the plot, or are they distracting and digressive?