

2013 Suggestions for Teaching *My Fair Lady*, Book and Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, Music by Frederick Loewe

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Read the story of Pygmalion and Galatea from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Why does the hero reject mortal women? In Pygmalion's estimation, what makes the statue better than a living woman? What makes him wish for a living woman? Who grants his wish and why? These and other websites provide texts:
<http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/Classics/OvidPygmalion.htm>
<http://www.bluemorning.org/pygmalion/stories/ovid1.htm>
2. Read Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (including the epilogue), the play on which *My Fair Lady* is based. These and other websites provide texts:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3825/3825-h/3825-h.htm>
<http://www.literaturepage.com/read/pygmalion.html>
3. Read Shaw's epilogue to *Pygmalion* (to be found in the texts listed above). According to Shaw, what does the future hold for Professor Higgins, Eliza, Freddy and Colonel Pickering?
4. Research the Edwardian period in England (1901–1910) during which *My Fair Lady* is set. Describe the class system, relations between the classes, relations between genders, the possibilities for upward mobility and attitudes towards courtship and marriage. These and other websites provide information:
http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Edwardian_period.html
<http://www.freewebs.com/phillpottdebian/edwet11.htm>
5. What does the term “phonetics” mean and what is a phonetician? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/phonetics>
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/phonetician>

6. Define the word, “cockney.” Listen to an example of a cockney accent. These and other websites provide information:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockney>
<http://pointpark.libguides.com/content.php?pid=209576&sid=1746431>
7. Research Covent Garden. This and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covent_Garden
8. Research the Ascot races. Where do they take place? Who attends? What makes this an event socially important? These and other websites provide information:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascot_Racecourse
http://www.ascot.co.uk/?page=About:_History&type=StandaloneTemplate
9. Research the history of *My Fair Lady*, from its Broadway opening in 1956 to the present. These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Fair_Lady
<http://www.tams-witmark.com/musicals/myfairlady.html#brief>
<http://collegatariat.hubpages.com/hub/The-Evolution-of-a-Classic-From-Myth-to-Pygmalion-to-My-Fair-Lady>

Film and DVD Resources:

Pygmalion (1938) (complete)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmdPj_XbF3o

My Fair Lady (1964) (complete)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=da5Md6OzUPo&feature=related>

Broadway: The American Musical (2004)

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on Ovid’s story about Pygmalion and Galatea and on Shaw’s play *Pygmalion*. Which elements of *Pygmalion* have parallels in the myth? When does Shaw stray from Ovid and for what purpose? To what extent does Eliza regard Higgins as above mere humanity, the way Galatea does Pygmalion, and why? What events bring her opinion of him back down to Earth?

2. Compare *Pygmalion* to *My Fair Lady*. Find specific instances when Lerner and Loewe's version of the tale differs from Shaw's. In each case, what did they accomplish through their variations? Why do you think they chose to tell the story differently at these moments? Consider the ending of *My Fair Lady* with the ending outlined in Shaw's epilogue. Why or why not is one ending more satisfactory than the other?
3. What about the play *Pygmalion* lends itself particularly well to being a musical? How do the lyrics and songs emphasize themes found within the story?
4. Refer to your research on class relations in Edwardian society. To which social classes do the principal characters in *My Fair Lady* belong? What factors define their class differences? How do these differences influence their actions and their interactions?
5. Based on your research, what about Covent Garden makes it an appropriate location to begin a play whose two main characters are from such different social strata? What relationship does Eliza have with it and the flower market it contains, and how does that relationship shift over the course of the play?
6. What was the status of a flower girl in Edwardian London? What were her prospects? How could she expect to be treated? What is at stake for Eliza in mastering how to speak properly? What opportunities will improving how she speaks bring? What does the importance placed on her accent and grammar reveal about the society in which she lives?
7. Give examples of how character's identities in *My Fair Lady* are determined by how they speak. How is the way in which a character talks a true depiction of who she or he is? How is it a false depiction? Today, is how one speaks still an indication of a person's identity? Give examples of why or why not this might be so.
8. Refer to your research on relations between the sexes in Edwardian society. Cite instances of when these "proper" relations are observed in *My Fair Lady*, as well as instances when propriety is ignored. In every case, what is the outcome?

9. What aspects of Henry Higgins's personality are revealed in the first two scenes of the play? Of Eliza's? What aspects of both their characters are subsequently revealed, and how do they confirm or contradict your initial impressions?
10. How is Eliza regarded by Professor Higgins? Colonel Pickering? Alfred P. Doolittle? Freddy Eynsford-Hill? What aspects of her personality does each view accurately? What errors does each make in his judgment of Eliza? How does each influence her behavior? How does she influence the behavior of each? Answer the same questions for the way the women in the play relate to Eliza: Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. Higgins and Mrs. Eynsford-Hill.
11. Compare and contrast the ways that Higgins deals with the women in his life: Mrs. Pearce, Eliza and his mother. How does his relationship change with each of them throughout the play?
12. What is tongue-in-cheek about the lyrics of "Poor Professor Higgins," sung by Higgins' servants? What does it reveal about Higgins? What does it reveal about the servants? What does it reveal about Edwardian views concerning status and the head of the household? Why might Lerner and Loewe have included this song in *My Fair Lady*?
13. Describe Alfred P. Doolittle. What does his name reveal? What does he say about himself? Why does he intrigue Higgins? Citing examples from the play, argue whether or not you feel he is a good father to Eliza.
14. From what and to what does Henry intend to transform Eliza? How does he plan to accomplish this? What are his motives?
15. What external changes does Eliza undergo? What inner changes? Which changes did Higgins intend, and which ones were not intentional? How does he respond to these changes in Eliza?
16. Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering congratulate themselves on Eliza's triumph at the Embassy Ball. In what ways are they justified in taking credit for her success and in what ways are they not? How does their celebrating affect Eliza and the household staff, and what repercussions do they suffer because of it?

17. Eliza observes, "...the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated." Argue whether or not you believe this statement to be true using examples from the play to support your opinion.
18. Higgins tells Eliza, "The great secret is not having bad manners or good manners... but having the same manner for all human souls. The question is not whether I treat you rudely, but whether you ever heard me treat anyone else better." In what ways are Pickering and Higgins different in how they treat Eliza? In what ways are they similar? In what ways do their philosophies of equality towards how they treat people make them different from other members of their class?
19. What are the essential lessons Eliza learns from Higgins? From Pickering? How does each lesson change her? For which is she grateful and for which ungrateful?
20. Compare Eliza's songs from the beginning of the play to its end; what, in terms of tempo, tone and lyrics have changed? What does this reveal about Eliza's journey – are the dreams she had earlier on in the story the dreams she has by the musical's end? Why or why not would, "a room somewhere" be enough to satisfy her by the play's conclusion?
21. What options are open to Eliza at the play's beginning compared to those at its end? Using examples from the play, decide which world, her father's or Higgins', Eliza most belongs to at the play's conclusion. Why or why not is Eliza better off for being able to speak better than she was before? Discuss where else Eliza might have gone, and to do what, had she not chosen to return to Higgins' house.
22. What ultimately causes Eliza to reject Freddy? What is it that he is unable to give her? In what ways does Freddy reveal the shortcomings of language and of words in general?
23. Is *My Fair Lady* a love story? Why or why not? Argue that Eliza and Higgins' relationship is platonic in nature, based on the friendship between teacher and pupil. Argue that their relationship is romantic in nature. What do you foresee will happen moments after the last line of the play is heard? What future do you predict in the

long run for Eliza and Higgins, and on what assumptions and evidence is that prediction based?

24. What is revealing about Professor Higgins being left alone towards the end of the play; what has driven Pickering and Eliza to leave him? What is symbolic about the slippers in regard to his relationship with Eliza?
25. What is ironic in Higgins's determination to teach Eliza manners? What other instances of irony can be found within the musical? What instances of hypocrisy?
26. Find the moments in the play when Higgins speaks from his heart. What causes him to do so? What does he talk about? When he does, what impact does he have on others, particularly Eliza?
27. While the story would appear to be about the transformation of Eliza Doolittle, who else is transformed? From what to what? By what individuals and events?
28. What do the different groups of people in *My Fair Lady* (the upper-class people at Ascot, the servants in Higgins house, the lower-class colleagues of Alfred P. Doolittle) summarize about the social systems inherent in Edwardian society? How does the OSF production use the ensemble members playing these groups of people to emphasize the themes of transformation found within the musical?
29. Transformations figure largely in the plays of OSF's 2013 season. If you're attending any other plays, identify instances of transformation. Which characters are transformed, by whom and/or what, for what purpose and with what results?
30. If you are seeing *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Taming of the Shrew*, compare the daughters in the plays with Eliza. How is each daughter valued and by whom? How much power does each daughter have? Which daughters find power by defying the societal expectations of their role as women? Which by conforming? How much choice does each have about whom she will marry?
31. If you are seeing *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Taming of the Shrew*, compare the relationship between love and marriage in the plays with *My*

Fair Lady. On what factors do the fathers decide who will marry their daughters? How much influence do the daughters' wishes have? What attributes other than love do the fathers value?

32. If you are seeing *The Taming of the Shrew*, compare Katherine's "taming" with Eliza's transformation. What techniques does Petruchio use to tame Katherine? What techniques does Higgins use to transform Eliza? What does Katherine gain by the play's end and what does she lose? What does Eliza gain by the play's end and what does she lose?
33. If you are seeing *The Taming of the Shrew*, compare Katherine's last lines of the play, "...for it is no boot/and place your hands below your husband's foot," to Higgins' last line in *My Fair Lady*, "Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?" What are these lines, aside from their literal meanings, meant to communicate to the people (Petruchio, Eliza) they are said to? How do they sum up the journeys these two different couples have undergone together?

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