

SOUTHWEST

SHAKESPEARE

COMPANY

Pygmalion

by George Bernard Shaw



a teacher guide for studying the play and attending Southwest Shakespeare Company's performance

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April 2008

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Dear Educator:

Welcome to Southwest Shakespeare Company's 14th season! We are thrilled to continue to provide quality matinee productions to Arizona's students, and we are excited that you have chosen to bring your students to our performance of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the final show in our season of "Unlikely Couples."

Considering his own dislike of formalized schooling (perhaps because all of his instructors were similar to Professor Higgins), George Bernard Shaw most likely would have found it highly ironic that teachers are guiding students through the study of his satirical play, *Pygmalion*. And the irony continues in that one of his best-known plays involves a teacher, Henry Higgins, and a student, poor flower girl Eliza Doolittle. Perhaps after witnessing Professor Higgins teaching methods, your students will better appreciate your efforts to bring learning alive to them! We at Southwest Shakespeare Company most definitely admire and applaud your efforts to keep the learning process memorable and meaningful for your students.

We hope you find the enclosed information, activities, and resources helpful and entertaining. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in this study guide, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at angee@mosaic-edu.com or by phone at 480.510.3808. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite your students (and you!) about live theatre.

Happy teaching!

Angee Lewandowski, Board Member
Southwest Shakespeare Company
Education Committee Chair

Meeting AZ State Standards

By viewing Southwest Shakespeare Company's production of *Pygmalion*, students can meet several of Arizona State Arts Standards. In addition, the activities included in this teacher's guide, when implemented in the classroom along with other teacher-assigned reading and writing activities, will allow students to meet various Arizona State Standards in Writing, Reading, and Listening and Speaking.

Writing Standards – Strand 3: Writing Applications

Concept 5: Literary Response

Literary response is the writer's reaction to a literary selection. The response includes the writer's interpretation, analysis, opinion, and/or feelings about the piece of literature and selected elements within it (Concept Map, page 8; Art Imitating Art?, pages 9-10; Who's Really the Student?, page 11; Writing Topics, page 13).

Reading Standards – Strand 1: Reading Process

Concept 6: Comprehension Strategies

Employ strategies to comprehend text (Concept Map, page 8; Who's Really the Student?, page 11).

Reading Standards – Strand 2: Comprehending Literary Text

Concept 1: Elements of Literature

Identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the structure and elements of literature (Art Imitating Art?, pages 9-10; Who's Really the Student?, page 11; A Romance in Five Acts, page 12).

Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature

Recognize and apply knowledge of the historical and cultural aspects of American, British, and world literature (Art Imitating Art?, pages 9-10).

Listening and Speaking Standards

Standard 3: Students effectively listen and speak in situations that serve different purposes and involve a variety of audiences (Role Playing, page 7).

Arts Standards – Theatre

Strand 3: Evaluate

Students describe physical and vocal attributes appropriate to the characters in the play in class and professional performances (**attending and discussing Southwest Shakespeare Company's performance of *Pygmalion***).

Students justify the perception of a performance and critique its production elements (**attending and discussing Southwest Shakespeare Company's performance of *Pygmalion***).

Audience Discussion Questions

It is very important for students to understand the difference between going to the movies and going to see a live play performance. Ask them to consider the following questions to help them become aware of theatre etiquette as well as get them thinking about all of the elements that come together to bring a play to life for an audience.

Before seeing the play:

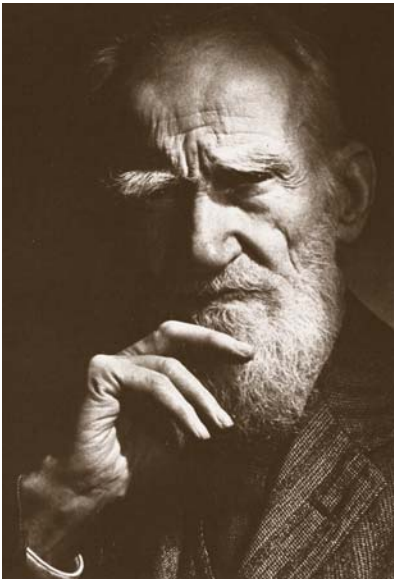
- What is the role of the audience in a live performance? What is its role in a movie? Why can't you eat popcorn or drink soda at a live theatre performance? Why can't you talk? What can happen during a live play performance that cannot happen in a movie theater?
- Actors in a live performance are very aware of their audience and are interested in the audience's reactions to the play. Why is an audience just as an important part of the play as the actors, director, and stage crew?
- Discuss the elements that go into producing a live play performance: the lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the "behind the scenes" elements of the theatre are working backstage as the play is being performed for the audience. Be aware of this as you watch the show. Observe the lighting and sound cues. How do these add or distract from the over all affect the play?



After seeing the play:

- Did your views about the play or any of the characters change after seeing the live production? If so, how? Try to be specific about moments in the action that affected you.
- Did the production look like what you imagined as you read the play? How was it similar? How was it different?
- Which actor best portrayed his/her character? Why?
- How was the production different from the written play? What decisions did the director make about staging? Were these effective decisions? Why or why not?
- What did you think of the production values (sets, costumes, lighting)? Did they help you to better understand the plot of the play?
- If you would like to share your opinions or ask questions of the director, crew, or actors of the play, send your letters to:
Southwest Shakespeare Company
Education Committee
P.O. Box 30595
Mesa, AZ, 85275-0595

Shaw and Pygmalion



George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was born in Ireland to a civil servant father and a professional singer mother. Shaw's education was irregular, due to his extreme dislike of school (and probably why he penned the ridiculous phrase "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach" – much to the dismay of teachers ever since). When he was 15, his mother left his father and moved to London with her voice teacher. Shaw remained in Dublin with his father to finish his schooling and to work as a clerk for an estate office (both of which he hated immensely).

Thus, it is not surprising that Shaw's plays, including *Pygmalion*, are filled with problematic parent-child relationships (Mr. Doolittle's willingness to use Eliza to get money from Higgins is obviously not based on a loving father-child relationship). Written in 1912, *Pygmalion* is a witty study of middle-class morality and class distinction, and it proved to be one of Shaw's greatest stage successes.

In 1876, Shaw left Dublin for London, where he moved in with his mother and his sister who supported him financially while he pursued a career in journalism and writing. Shaw became actively involved in progressive politics; the energetic and aggressive speaking style he developed at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park is evident in the dialogue of his plays. Shaw also established himself as a leading music and theatre critic and eventually moved on to writing his own novels and plays. Known for his biting satirical wit, Shaw's plays turned the stage into a forum of ideas; he ignored theatrical conventions and created "discussion" plays in which characters would set forth the author's ideals and beliefs.

Shaw lived out the rest of his life as an international celebrity, traveling the world, constantly involved in local and international politics, all while continuing to write. Shaw is the only person to have won both a Nobel Prize and an Oscar (some believe that former Vice-President and Nobel Prize recipient Al Gore also earned this honor; however, although *An Inconvenient Truth* won an Oscar for Best Documentary, the award actually went to the director of the film, Davis Guggenheim). Shaw won a Nobel Prize in Literature (1925) and an Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay (1938) for the film version of *Pygmalion*.

Loosely based on the myth "The Story of Pygmalion and the Statue" from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shaw's *Pygmalion* is Professor Henry Higgins, who, instead of sculpting an idealized woman out of ivory, creates the perfect lady out of lowly flower girl Eliza Doolittle by teaching her manners and language. However, unlike the myth, the creator and the created are not destined to be together (at least not in the romantic sense). Higgins does not idolize Eliza, and Eliza certainly does not idealize Higgins. So, who really transforms whom: Higgins or Eliza? Shaw humanizes the mythical archetypes in his satirical comedy and creates characters that are relevant and recognizable to today's audiences.

"There must be something radically wrong with the play if it pleases everybody, but at the moment, I cannot find what it is."

—G. Bernard Shaw, after *Pygmalion's* acclaimed premier in 1913

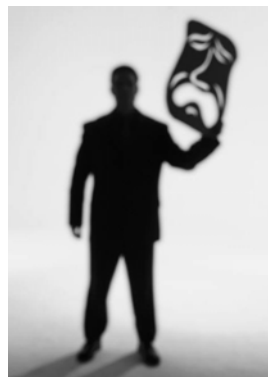
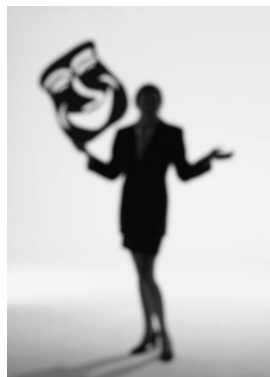
Role Playing

With a partner or a small group, develop a role-play based upon one of the scenarios below. All of the scenarios are related to issues in *Pygmalion*.

The purpose of this activity is to get you thinking about these issues before reading the play so you can relate to what the characters are going through, or after reading the play so that you can put yourself in similar, modern-day situations.

After you role-play, stay in the role so that your classmates and teachers can ask you questions. Construct a scene based upon the following situations:

1. Imagine that one of your friends has been invited to the Inaugural Ball at the White House. What would you say to your friend so that he/she would be able to speak and act appropriately?
2. One of your friends is a know-it-all. He/she is always correcting other people, acting superior to everyone around him/her, and does not seem to care if he/she offends others with what he/she says or does. One time after your friend is particularly rude to someone, what would you say or do to your friend to get him/her to see the error of his/her ways?
3. You have just received the amazing news that you will receive \$100,000 a year for the rest of your life. How would your life be different? How would it be the same? Show the before-and-after scenarios of your life.
4. Someone at your school is in desperate need of a makeover, not just in appearance, but also in the way he/she behaves and speaks. You think this person has the potential to be well liked and popular, but your friend thinks it is totally hopeless. You really want to help, but your friend bets you that you cannot get this person to change. What do you say to your friend's challenge?



Concept Map

BEFORE/DURING READING: Circle one of the concepts in the middle box and complete the graphic organizer. Add information to your concept map if your opinions develop or change as you read *Pygmalion*.

DEFINE IT	GIVE EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE IT
LANGUAGE CULTURE MANNERS CLASS IDENTITY	
CONSEQUENCES (GOOD/BAD) ASSOCIATED WITH IT	OTHER CONNECTIONS YOU CAN MAKE TO IT

AFTER READING: What role did this concept play in *Pygmalion*? Which character exemplified this concept? Cite specific examples from the play to support your opinion.

Art Imitating ... Art?

George Bernard Shaw loosely based his play *Pygmalion* on the myth “The Story of Pygmalion and the Statue” from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Read the following prose translation of Ovid’s poem by Thomas Bulfinch. Then complete the Venn diagram, comparing the similarities and differences between the myth and Shaw’s version of *Pygmalion*.

“Pygmalion saw so much to blame in women that he came at last to abhor the sex, and resolved to live unmarried. He was a sculptor, and had made with wonderful skill a statue of ivory so beautiful that no living woman came anywhere near it. It was indeed the perfect semblance of a maiden that seemed to be alive, and only prevented from moving by modesty. His art was so perfect that it concealed itself and its product looked like the workmanship of nature.

“Pygmalion admired his own work, and at last fell in love with the counterfeit creation. Oftentimes he laid his hand upon it as if to assure himself whether it were living or not, and could not even then believe that it was only ivory. He caressed it, and gave it presents such as young girls love—bright shells and polished stones, little birds and flowers of various hues, beads and amber. He put raiment on its limbs, and jewels on its fingers, and a necklace about its neck. To the ears he hung earrings, and strings of pearls upon the breast. Her dress became her, and she looked not less charming than when unattired. He laid her on a couch spread with cloths of Tyrian dye, and called her his wife, and put her head upon a pillow of the softest feathers, as if she could enjoy the softness.

“The festival of Venus was at hand—a festival celebrated with great pomp at Cyprus. Victims were offered, the altars smoked, and odor of incense filled the air. When Pygmalion had performed his part in the solemnities, he stood before the altar and timidly said, ‘Ye gods, who can do all things, give me, I pray you, for my wife’—he dared not say ‘my ivory virgin,’ but said instead—‘one *like* my ivory virgin.’ Venus, who was present at the festival, heard him and knew the thought he would have uttered; and as an omen of her favor, caused the flame on the altar to shoot up thrice in a fiery point into the air.

“When he returned home, he went to see his statue, and leaning over the couch, gave a kiss to the mouth. It seemed to be warm. He pressed its lips again, he laid his hand upon the limbs; the ivory felt soft to his touch and yielded to his fingers like the wax of Hymettus. While he stands astonished and glad, though doubting, and fears he may be mistaken, again and again with a lover’s ardor he touches the object of his hopes. It was indeed alive! The veins when pressed yielded to the finger and again resumed their roundness. Then at last the votary of Venus found words to thank the goddess, and pressed his lips upon lips as real as his own. The virgin felt the kisses and blushed, and opening her timid eyes to the light, fixed them at the same moment on her lover. Venus blessed the nuptials she had formed, and from this union Paphos was born, from whom the city, sacred to Venus, received its name.”

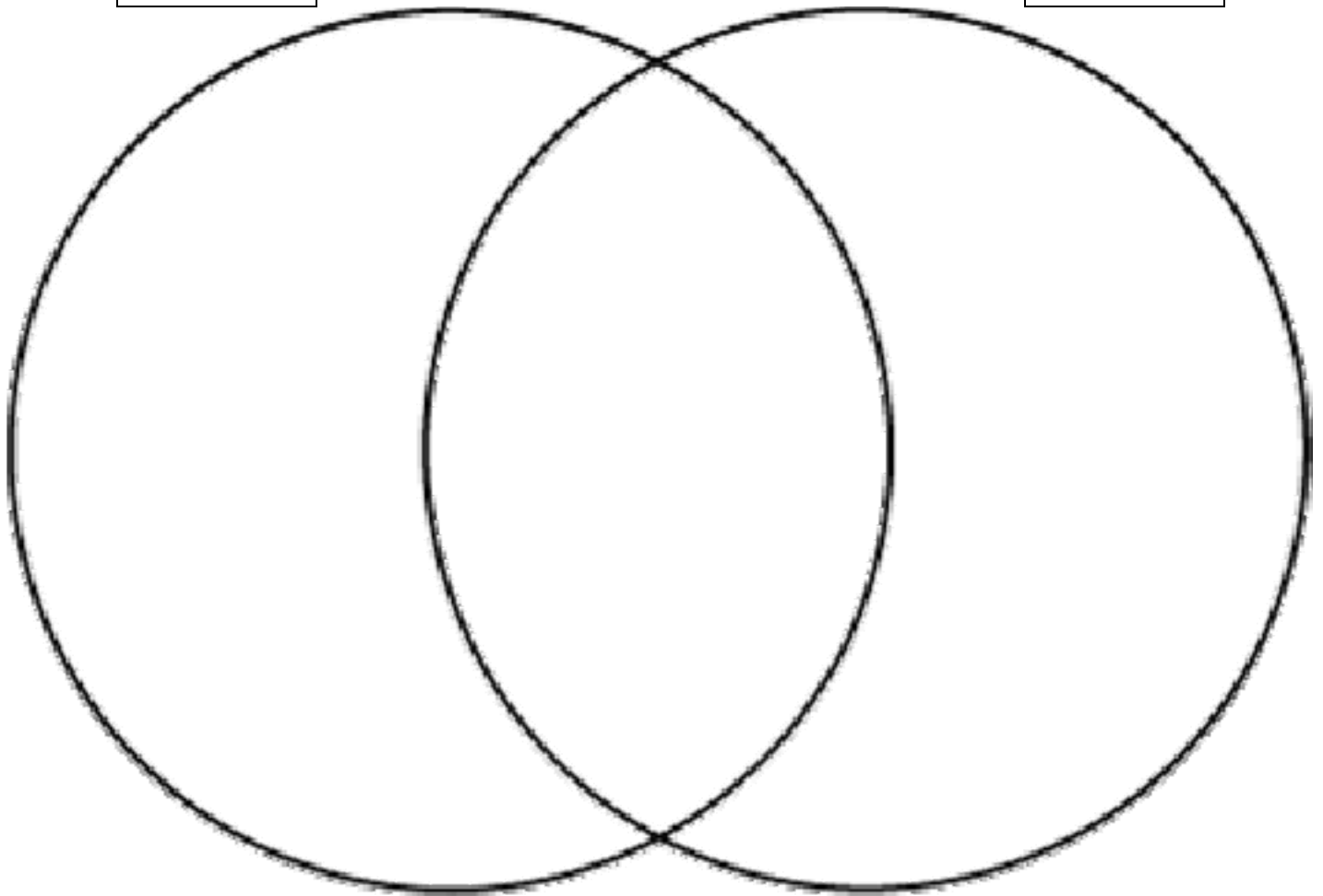
from Bulfinch’s Mythology Age of Fable Volumes 1 & 2: Stories of Gods and Heroes

Art Imitating ... Art?

MYTH

BOTH

PLAY



Can you think of any other stories, books, plays, movies, etc. that are based on the myth? How are they similar to the original plot of the myth? How are they different?

Who's Really the Student?

After reading *Pygmalion*, some questions that come to mind are: who is the teacher and who is the student? Who breathes life into whom? On the surface, it seems that Henry Higgins is the teacher, and Eliza Doolittle is his student. However, by the end of the play, it seems that the tables have turned, and Eliza is now Higgin's teacher.

In the first column of the t-chart below, list examples from the play in which Higgins transforms Eliza; in the second column, list examples in which Eliza transforms the professor.

Higgins transforms Eliza	Eliza transforms Higgins

Is Eliza's success due to her own natural abilities, or is it because of Higgin's infallible belief that she will succeed? Who do you think learned the most? Eliza or Higgins? Why do you think this?

A Romance in Five Acts

After reading or seeing *Pygmalion*, you may be surprised that the original title page of Shaw's play included the subtitle "A Romance in Five Acts," when the play is actually a satire. However, the playwright does use elements from both romantic comedy and satire. Using the definitions listed below, find examples from the play that fit the definition of romantic comedy and the definition of satire.

Romantic Comedy A type of comedy in which two sympathetic and well-matched lovers are united or reconciled. The two lovers tend to be young, likeable, and apparently meant for each other, yet they are kept apart by some complicating circumstance (e.g., class differences, parental interference, a previous girlfriend or boyfriend) until, surmounting all obstacles, they are finally allowed to be together.	Satire A type of comedy that uses wit, irony, and exaggeration to expose individual and institutional folly, vice, and stupidity. It may be gentle, humorous, and urbane; it may also be biting and sarcastic.

Based on your evidence from the play and what you know about the author, why do you think Shaw used "A Romance in Five Acts" as a subtitle for *Pygmalion*?

Writing Topics

1. In both the myth and the play, the idea of a “perfect woman” is explored. What do you think is the definition of perfection in modern society? How is this definition created and perpetuated by our culture? Does this desire for perfection have a positive or negative impact on people?
2. After reading the play and the myth, it is quite obvious that Shaw based his play *very* loosely on the original myth. What ideas does he take from the myth and use in the play? What changes does he make? Since the play is so very different from the myth, why do you think Shaw decided to use the same name for the title of his play?
3. The divisions of the social classes are very distinct and clear in *Pygmalion* through behavior, appearance, and language. Do you think we have social classes in our culture? How is it similar or different to the world of the play?
4. How is the topic of appearance and reality addressed in the play? How does this topic influence you in your daily life?
5. *Pygmalion* is about education, and more specifically, learning English and learning proper behavior. Getting this education does make a significant difference in Eliza’s life. Do you think getting an education, learning how to speak, and learning how to act appropriately are as important in modern society as it was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?
6. Higgins tells Eliza, “The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.” Do you think this attitude is admirable of Higgins since he lives in a society where social standing is everything, or do you think it gives Higgins the excuse to simply be rude to everyone? Find examples in the play to support your opinion.
7. Compare and contrast the parental and child relationships of Higgins and his mother to Eliza and her father. Did their relationships with their parents influence their behavior?
8. What ideas about love, marriage, and social position do you find in the play? How would you describe the expectations of women and their role in the family and society?
9. Write a “Act VI” to *Pygmalion*. Use information that you know about the characters to write the final act. You may want to read Shaw’s “What Happened Afterwards” to shape your act, or reject it all together and create an ending based on what you want to happen to these characters.
10. Modern movies based on the play *Pygmalion* include *Pretty Woman*, *Overboard*, and *She’s All That*, just to name a few. In each of these movies, women are given some type of “makeover” by a man. What does this say about modern society and its view of women? Has our culture’s view of women’s roles really changed all that much in regards to how women were viewed in the setting of *Pygmalion* (Victorian England)?

Educator Comments

Please help us to improve. We invite you to share your thoughts about this production. Please **return this form** to any Southwest Shakespeare Company volunteer as you leave, **OR mail** it to us at P.O. Box 30595, Mesa, AZ 85275, **OR fax** it to 480.924.4310. Thank you for completing this form, for coming to our performance, and for introducing your students to the wonders of live theatre!

Please feel free to use the back of this form to include any additional comments.

Name of Play: _____ Performance Date: _____

Did the confirmation packet provide you with the information you needed? Why/why not? _____

Did you find the Teacher Guide helpful? What did you particularly like/dislike? _____

Did you enjoy the performance? Why/why not? _____

Could you understand it? _____

Could you hear it? _____

What did you think of it visually? _____

Would you recommend Southwest Shakespeare to other educators? Why/why not? _____

Your name and school (optional) _____

E-mail address (optional) _____