George Bernard Shaw’s

Pygmalion

Resource Guide

This resource guide serves as an educational starting point to understanding and enjoying George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion. With this in mind, please note that the interpretations of the theatrical work may differ from the original source content.
Directed by Bradley A. Nies

Technical Theatre Direction by Kevin Patrick

Costume, Makeup, and Hair Design by Jennifer Patrick

Produced by Special Arrangement with Samuel French, Inc. 2014 Texas Community College Speech and Theatre Association Play Festival Entry

Public Performances

February 20 - 22 .........................7 p.m.
February 23 .............................2 p.m.

High School Preview Performances

February 20 & 21 ...........................1 p.m.
Dr. W.W. O’Donnell Performing Arts Center Auditorium
Brenham, Texas

Tickets can be purchased in advance online at www.blinn.edu/BoxOffice, by calling 979-830-4024, or by emailing BoxOffice@blinn.edu
The Playwright

George Bernard Shaw was born on July 26, 1856. During his career, Shaw wrote more than 60 plays. Most of his works touched upon prevailing social issues for the time, such as education, marriage, religion, and class privileges. In addition, Shaw used his talents to work for such causes as equal rights for men and women, alleviating the abuse of the working class, and promoting healthy lifestyles. Shaw was active in local politics, having served briefly on the London County Council. In 1898, Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, and the two settled in a house which is now called Shaw's Corner. Shaw died in his home on November 2, 1950 from chronic problems exacerbated by injuries he incurred by falling from a ladder. Shaw was awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925 for his contributions to the literary world, as well as an Oscar in 1938 for his work on the film adaptation of his play Pygmalion.

The Characters

Mrs. Eynsford Hill, a lady from a wealthy background.
Miss Clara Eynsford Hill, her daughter. A trendy young woman.
Mr. Freddy Eynsford Hill, her son. A young man who has fallen in love with Eliza.
Miss Eliza Doolittle, a poor girl who is turned into a lady of society.
Colonel Pickering, a likable gentleman who is an expert in Sanskrit.
Professor Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics.
Mrs. Pierce, Professor Higgins’ Housekeeper.
Mrs. Higgins, Professor Higgins’ Mother.
A Parlor-Maid, of Mrs. Higgins’ employ.
Pedestrians, of London.
The History

Shaw wrote his play in 1912, after which he read it to the famed actress Stella Patrick Campbell. While she was interested in playing the role of Eliza Doolittle, she incurred an unexpected illness that unfortunately delayed the play’s London opening. As Campbell was recuperating, Shaw premiered Pygmalion in Vienna in October of 1913 and in New York in March of 1914.

The Themes

Social Class:
Shaw includes characters in his plays from all social classes. In Pygmalion, he includes the lowest class (Eliza), the servant class (Mrs. Pearce), the genteel poor (Mrs. Eynsford Hill), and the upper class (Mrs. Higgins).

Manners:
At this time, manners were mostly associated with the upper class. Professor Higgins, who was raised among the upper class, is shown to be ill-mannered, even to the point of embarrassing.

Language:
In British society, language is closely tied with social class. A person’s accent can give away their socioeconomic background. Professor Higgins’s studies were radical for the time period, as they allowed for greater social communication.

Gender Loyalties:
In his play, Shaw makes a point of highlighting gender loyalties. Mrs. Higgins is sympathetic to Eliza’s situation, as is Mrs. Pierce. In addition, Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering pair up in making Eliza their project, both ignoring Eliza’s feelings towards the end.
The Myth

The Greek myth of Pygmalion was recorded in the narrative poem Metamorphoses. Pygmalion was a sculptor who carved a woman out of ivory and named her Galatea. Finding the statue to be the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, he fell in love with it. The gods heard of his passion for the statue, and they changed Galatea into a real woman. Under the blessing of the goddess Aphrodite, Pygmalion and Galatea were married and had a son and, in some versions of the myth, a daughter. Shaw used this myth as the basis for his story of a man who takes a lowly flower-girl and turns her into a beautiful woman of society.

The Adaptations

For the Stage
My Fair Lady (1956): The Broadway musical based on the 1938 film. This production starred Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins and Julie Andrews as Eliza Doolittle.

For Film
Pygmalion (1938): A film adaptation starring Leslie Howard as Henry Higgins and Wendy Hiller as Eliza Doolittle.

My Fair Lady (1964): The film version of the musical starring Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins and Audrey Hepburn as Eliza Doolittle.

She's All That (1999): A film showing a teenage approach to Shaw's play.

For Television
Pygmalion (1963): A Hallmark Hall of Fame production starring James Donald as Henry Higgins and Julie Harris as Eliza Doolittle.

The Festival

This production will be the Blinn College-Brenham entry to the Texas Community College Speech and Theatre Association Play Festival. The philosophy of this theatre festival is to promote educational theatre at the community college level. The concept of a “festival” is that each production is to be evaluated on its own merits to the standards of quality educational theatre. This is not a competitive contest where productions are ranked and rated in comparison to one another. In the festival environment, each play has the potential to be rated “Superior” or each play has the potential to not receive an award of merit.

The Etiquette

Did you know that men and women had strict rules of etiquette during the Victorian times? Here are just a few of them:

- A lady had a duty to her husband to look beautiful at all times.
- A lady always wore her hair up. The only exception was when she went to bed.
- If a gentleman escorted a lady to a public event, he must remain seated with her during the entire event and avoid talking while the event was taking place.
- In conversation, a gentleman was not allowed to speak about himself. In addition, he could only speak with others on subjects that they are interested in.

While it's easy to scoff at these rules of the past, we can't deny that there seems to be a shift away from politeness in today's society. We don't have to take etiquette to the extreme, but having manners is a sign of self-respect for ourselves, as well as for others.
Definitions

What does Exacerbated mean?
To make a bad problem or situation worse.

What is Sanskrit?
The primary liturgical language of Hinduism that holds a prominent position in Indo-European studies.

What are Phonetics?
A branch of linguistics that includes the study of the sounds of human speech.

Who was Aphrodite?
The Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation.

What is Broadway?
Theatrical performances presented in one of the 40 professional theatres in the Theatre District of New York City.

What is the Hallmark Hall of Fame?
An anthology program on American television sponsored by Hallmark Greeting Cards.

What is the BBC?
The British Broadcasting Corporation; a British public service broadcasting corporation in the United Kingdom.

What is Etiquette?
A code of behavior that delineates expectations for a society, social class, or group.
Hey Teachers!

Check out these great online resources for teaching George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion.

Internet Source, www.bookrags.com, Pygmalion Summary and Study Guide- Includes comprehensive information and analysis to better understand the play!

Internet Source, www.enotes.com, Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw- Summary, themes, critical essays, and more!

Internet Source, www.gradesaver.com, Pygmalion Study Guide- Contains a biography of George Bernard Shaw, literature essays, a complete e-text, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis!

Internet Source, www.pinkmonkey.com, Free Study Guide for Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw- Includes chapter synopsizes, study questions, and more!
Sources


Internet Source, www.gradesaver.com, Pygmalion Themes.


Internet Source, www.oscholars.com, "A Dramatist For All Seasons: George Bernard Shaw In Vienna" by Barbara Pfeifer.

