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Pygmalion
George Bernard Shaw



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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Pygmalion

Pre-Reading

1. George Bernard Shaw was a political activist. He was born in 1856, and lived to be almost 100 years old. He was a vegetarian who felt that it was wrong to use animals for food. Shaw was a feminist during a time when it was unthinkable that women should be educated, let alone be able to vote in elections. He was also a dedicated socialist.

Although his political viewpoints were controversial, people did not hold them against Shaw because they loved his plays so much. Do you think that celebrities' political views are as important as their work? Would you stop supporting someone's plays, books, movies, music, etc. just because that person has different political views from your own?

Write an email to the head of the Screen Actors Guild, an organization of television and movie actors, telling him or her whether an actor's personal political viewpoints would prevent you from watching that actor's work. Make sure you use plenty of examples to support your opinion.

2. The play *Pygmalion* is based on a Greek myth about a sculptor named Pygmalion who created a statue of a beautiful woman. Pygmalion named the statue, which was his ideal of the female form, Galatea. After he created his masterpiece, Pygmalion prayed to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, to bring his sculpture to life. When Aphrodite granted his wish, Pygmalion and Galatea married.

As you read *Pygmalion*, make a list of ways in which Shaw's version of *Pygmalion* is similar to and different from the Greek myth.

Pygmalion

Act I

5. The play opens with a scene in which Freddy, The Daughter, and The Mother are out on a rainy evening. Freddy has been walking for blocks, trying unsuccessfully to hail a cab. Although Freddy has tried his best, and is soaked and exasperated, The Daughter becomes angry with him for failing. Considering the situation, The Daughter's angry response is unreasonable and inappropriate.

As an anger management specialist who witnesses this scene, write a note to give to The Daughter, advising her to calm down, explaining why her anger is not justified, and offering her suggestions about how to better deal with the situation.

6. When Freddy, in his haste, runs into The Flower Girl, there is a blinding flash of light and a huge peal of thunder. These effects are intended to draw attention to the encounter. Consider the reasons why Shaw wanted to highlight this moment in such a dramatic way.

After drawing your conclusion, write a letter to Shaw in which you explain your theory.

7. The Flower Girl speaks so poorly that it is difficult to understand what she's saying. For example, when Freddy bumps into her, she says, "Te-oo banches of voylets trod into the mad." At first glance, it is hard to decipher the words, but they mimic a British cockney accent. What the Flower Girl is saying is, "Two bunches of violets [were] trod into the mud."

Likewise, her response to The Mother, when The Mother indicates that Freddy is her son is "Ow, eez ye-ooa san is e? Wal fewd dan y' de-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy athaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them?"

Write a section for a study guide for *Pygmalion*, translating The Flower Girl's response above into clear and easy-to-understand English and explaining why Shaw might have chosen to write The Flower Girl's responses phonetically when the other characters' lines are not written that way.

Pygmalion

Act II

13. Stage direction is an important element in a play. Some playwrights, like Shaw, are very detailed in their descriptions of setting and character activity. Others offer only minimal stage direction.

If you were an actor in a play, would you prefer detailed directions, such as those that Shaw provides, or would you prefer a minimal amount of directions from the playwright? Write a cover letter for a petition about stage management from an actor's perspective, explaining the benefits and drawbacks of detailed stage directions.

14. Henry Higgins is a man who is obsessed with what can be proven scientifically, and he couldn't care less about anyone's feelings (e.g., his treatment of The Flower Girl). She is truly upset when she discovers that he is copying down her every word. Instead of comforting her, Higgins censures her for being so emotional.

Write a letter to Higgins, telling him why it is important conduct his research with respect and consideration for his subjects. Provide him with examples of how changing his approach will enhance his research.

15. Liza comes to Higgins only to learn to speak properly. Because of an off-hand remark from Colonel Pickering, though, Higgins undertakes to transform Liza into an upper class lady. He will see that she's bathed, has new clothes, and he will all but hold her captive until she behaves and speaks like a lady.

In the play, this sounds like Henry Higgins having a good laugh. In real life, this could be seen as a violation of Liza's civil rights. As a lawyer, write a legal document that spells out how Higgins's plans for Liza violate her civil rights.

16. Mrs. Pearce, Higgins's housekeeper, stands up for Liza, telling him that he has no right to treat the girl as an object. After all, Liza has a family. She may even be married, for all that Higgins knows. Higgins scoffs at this, though, implying that no one should marry someone of such a low class as Liza.

Pygmalion

Act III

28. Although his mother thinks that Henry should have a young girlfriend, he refuses to even consider it. He says that his idea of a “loveable woman” is his mother.

As Mrs. Higgins, write a letter to an advice columnist, asking how to get your adult son to start dating. Then, as the advice columnist, write a response to Mrs. Higgins’s letter.

29. Higgins and Pickering have a bet. Higgins thinks that he can get Liza to speak and act like a duchess in six months. Pickering, however, disagrees. He thinks that this cannot be accomplished, under any circumstances.

Write a document between Higgins and Pickering that will serve as the formal terms of their bet. Be sure to include the details of the bet and what will happen to the winner and the loser. What does the winner get if he wins?

30. In his notes for this act, Shaw says that Mrs. Eynsford Hill and her daughter are guests at Mrs. Higgins’s home, and that Mrs. Eynsford Hill “has the habitual anxiety of straitened means.” Although she presents herself as being wealthy and of high social standing, she actually has very little money. The need to continually act as someone other than who she really is makes Mrs. Eynsford Hill feel anxious.

As a psychiatrist, write a medical evaluation of Mrs. Eynsford Hill, explaining why she has anxiety and giving at least three ideas about what she can do to overcome it.

31. For someone so concerned with manners and speaking properly, Henry Higgins is rude. When he is introduced to the Eynsford Hills, for instance, Higgins’s mother has to continually correct his behavior because he is so nasty. He even curses in front of the ladies.

Rewrite the scene in which Higgins meets the Eynsford Hills, this time with Higgins being polite to his mother’s guests.