

my fair lady



A CRITIC FOR A DAY

Now that you have seen *My Fair Lady*, write the kind of review that might go into a newspaper. Try looking in a few of the Sunday newspapers to get ideas about how they are written.

Make sure you cover:

1. In which theatre you saw the musical
2. A brief account of the plot (don't give too much away)
3. The cast - who played whom?
4. Staging - the set
- special effects
- costumes etc.

How impressive was the staging?

5. The acting - was it believable?
- who stood out?
6. The singing
Who was the most memorable?
7. The choreography
Which bits made you gasp?
8. How did they keep your interest?
9. How did they keep up the pace?
10. Were there any special bits? For example, comedy, dramatic moments, pathos.
11. And finally, the most important thing - would you recommend the show?

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THE ORIGINS OF MY FAIR LADY

1. Pygmalion, in Greek mythology, was a sculptor who created a beautiful ivory statue he called Galatea, with whom he fell in love. The goddess Aphrodite brought Galatea to life, and Pygmalion married her.

Research the story of Pygmalion more thoroughly. Write your own version of it.

2. Bernard Shaw used that Greek myth as the basis for his own play, *Pygmalion*. Henry Higgins is the new Pygmalion figure, who 'moulds', almost like a sculptor, a Cockney flower girl into his 'Galatea', making her most desirable. But Bernard Shaw changed the ending. He did not have Higgins marry Eliza. Instead, she marries Freddy Eynsford-Hill.

Research Bernard Shaw and his play, *Pygmalion* and write a synopsis (brief outline of the plot).

3. *My Fair Lady* is based very closely on Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, but again changes the ending.
Do musical theatregoers need a 'happy ending'?
4. Compare *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* more closely.
How are they alike?
How are they different?
Why did Lerner and Loewe change what they did?
Do you think they were right to do so?

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CHARACTER STUDIES

The central character in *My Fair Lady* is, perhaps, Eliza, rather than Higgins, as everything revolves around the relationships of others to her. On the next page try to write a summary of that relationship for each character.



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CHARACTER STUDIES

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Henry Higgins:

An eccentric professor of phonetics.
At first he sees Eliza as just a challenge, a way to win a bet.
But, gradually, he learns to see her as a person.

Colonel Pickering:

Alfred Doolittle:

Mrs Higgins:

Freddy Eynsford-Hill:

Mrs Pearce:

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‘BY GEORGE, SHE’S GOT IT!’

Remember how Higgins, as a professor of phonetics, could place people he heard speak just by their accents, and how he had to change Eliza’s accent before she could be accepted by the upper class.

1. Discuss the importance of accents today.
Are they less important than they were?
On what occasions are they still important?

Which accents are particularly strong?

In what situations might someone wish to change his/her accent?

2. In pairs, write a scene – a piece of dialogue – which reverses the scene in which Higgins teaches Eliza.

One character should coach another in posing a ‘posh’ accent – how to drop aitches and mis-use grammar – in order to fit in.

Instead of “The rain in Spain...” choose a more appropriate sentence.

End the scene with an alternative to “By George, s/he’s got it!”.

3. Rehearse your pieces to show to the class.

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PARODIES

A parody is an imitation of an author's work and style, a story, poem, lyric, etc. It is often intended to ridicule, but can be light-hearted, even affectionate.

Take one of the songs from *My Fair Lady* and write a parody of the song.

It might be 'Wouldn't It Be Lovely' beginning "All I want is a job somewhere" or "All I want is a meal somewhere" or perhaps a cry for help from someone who has not done their homework – 'Get me to the School on time' beginning "I'm having English in the morning, Get me to the School on time".

Explore ideas, have fun, but try to keep the flow of the original – the rhythm and tempo. If you get it right, you should be able to sing your version to the tune of the original.

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EMPATHETIC WRITING

We tend to see story lines through the eyes of main characters. But the lives of many others are changed by the action.

The arrival of Eliza Doolittle changes the routine, and life, of Professor Higgins. But what of Colonel Pickering, set in his ways and happy in his relationship with fellow confirmed bachelor and friend, Higgins, a relationship disturbed by Eliza. Or Mrs Pearce, whose duties as housekeeper to Higgins are turned upside down by Eliza's arrival.

Choose one of these two characters and tell their story.
Try to catch their style and mode of speech.

Begin:



COLONEL PICKERING

'I'll never forget the day my visit to Higgins' house was interrupted...'



MRS PEARCE

'What a kerfuffle we had when Miss Doolittle first arrived, badly in need of a bath...'

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IMAGINATIVE WRITING

In the original Greek myth, Pygmalion married Galatea.

In Bernard Shaw's play, Higgins does not marry Eliza.

Bernard Shaw explained why:

- Higgins was twenty years older than Eliza.
- Higgins' mother set too high a standard of womanly excellence for him, and Eliza realised that she could never come between Higgins and his mother.
- Eliza could not face the prospect of coming secondary to phonetics and Milton, so Eliza married Freddy Eynsford-Hill.

In *My Fair Lady*, Lerner and Loewe revert to the original ending, and Eliza returns to Higgins.

Imagine that they had kept to Bernard Shaw's ending.

Write a different scene to end the musical.

Perhaps one where Eliza and Freddy meet, declare their love and leave together; or one where Higgins and Pickering discuss Eliza's marriage to Freddy.

What will they say?

Will Higgins show remorse at his loss?

You might even write the lyrics for a new final song – Eliza and Freddy's love duet or Higgins' sad song of loss.

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CLASS DEBATE

My Fair Lady, as well as being a fast-moving and enjoyable experience, contains elements and themes that can form the basis for debate.

As a group, organise a formal debate on a theme raised by the musical.

You will need:

A Chairperson
(to control the debate)

A Proposer
And a Seconder
(to propose the motion)

An Opposer
And a Seconder
(to oppose the motion)

Topics for debate:

1. The basis of the play, class distinctions, is not relevant today.
2. Doolittle is right: "Morality is a luxury".
3. Eliza is right: "The difference between a flower girl and a duchess is not how she behaves, but how she is treated".

And think up some others of your own.