

# PYGMALION

Upper Secondary  
School  
Teacher's guide





## BEFORE GOING TO THE THEATRE

### 1. SYNOPSIS

Read the plot of Pygmalion.

*Eliza Doolittle is a poor cockney speaking "flower girl" who dreams of a better life. One day in the market, she runs into Professor Henry Higgins, a grumpy famous linguist who makes fun of the way she talks. The professor makes a bet with Colonel Pickering (another renowned phonetics expert): he will make the florist look like a duchess by teaching her good manners and proper English pronunciation.*

**a ) The summary is written in present simple. Rewrite it in past simple.**

Eliza Doolittle was a poor cockney speaking "flower girl" who dreamed/dreamt of a better life. One day in the market, she ran into Professor Henry Higgins, a grumpy famous linguist who made fun of the way she talked. The professor made a bet with Colonel Pickering (another renowned phonetics expert): he would make the florist look like a duchess by teaching her good manners and proper English pronunciation.

**b ) Find all the adjectives and write a sentence with each one.**

*Example: "Usain Bolt is very fast"*

Adjectives in the text: poor, famous, grumpy, renowned, good



## 2. THE LEGEND BEHIND THE MYTH

The name of the play, *Pygmalion*, is based on a legendary figure that appears in the narrative poem “*Metamorphoses*” from the Roman poet Ovid. Read the following passage:

*Pygmalion saw these women waste their lives  
in wretched shame, and critical of faults  
which nature had so deeply planted through  
their female hearts, he lived in preference,  
for many years unmarried.—But while he  
was single, with consummate skill, he carved  
a statue out of snow-white ivory,  
and gave to it exquisite beauty, which  
no woman of the world has ever equalled:  
she was so beautiful, he fell in love  
with his creation. It appeared in truth  
a perfect virgin with the grace of life,  
but in the expression of such modesty  
all motion was restrained—and so his art  
concealed his art. Pygmalion gazed, inflamed  
with love and admiration for the form,  
in semblance of a woman, he had carved.*



**a)** Look up the whole story on the Internet. Who was Pygmalion?

He was a Cypriot sculptor who carved ivory statues.

**b)** Why was he feeling lonely?

He wanted a wife but he thought women had an undesirable nature. The women he was referring to were the Propoetides (daughters of Propoetus), who denied that Venus was a goddess and were the first to prostitute their bodies and their reputations in public.

**c)** What made him create the statue?

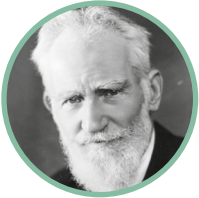
He was determined to create a woman suitable for him.

**d)** How does the story end?

Pygmalion asks Aphrodite for a bride that looks like his statue. He returns home and kisses his ivory sculpture. The statue becomes a woman and they get married and have children.



### 3. THE AUTHOR



*Pygmalion (the play) was written by George Bernard Shaw. He was a famous playwright of the 20th Century who wrote more than sixty plays and won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.*

Do you know him? Look him up on the Internet and answer the following questions:

**a )** When and where was he born?

26 July 1856 in Portobello, Dublin (Ireland).

**b )** Are these topics still controversial nowadays? Give your opinion about:

**a) Vegetarianism:** .....

**b) Socialism:** .....

**c) Abortion:** .....

**d) Women rights:** .....

**e) Wealth gap:** .....

**c )** Besides this play, can you name three other works by the author?

For example: Saint Joan, Heartbreak House, Candida, Man and Superman, Major Barbara, Widowers' Houses, Arms and the Man, Caesar and Cleopatra.

**d )** During his life, G.B. Shaw won different awards. Make a list with the names and explain why did he get them.

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.....



### 4. THE MAIN CHARACTERS

**Read the description of each character.**

**Eliza Doolittle** is a poor girl who sells flowers on the street. Her dreams of a better life (and huge amounts of chocolate) will be the main motivation for her to decide to take pronunciation lessons under the tutelage of Professor Higgins.

**Henry Higgins** is an academic with vast knowledge of phonetics, a branch of linguistics that allows him to deduce people's origins by the way they speak within six miles. He is not very nice or kind, but accepts the bet of turning Eliza into a duchess.

**Colonel Pickering** is a linguist from the same social stable as Higgins himself. He has travelled to London to meet Higgins, because he admires his reputation and his studies of speech. His intrepid personality will lead him to bet with the teacher something that he considers impossible: to turn a flower seller into a duchess.

### 5. MY FAIR LADY

The story of Pygmalion inspired a famous musical and a movie called My Fair Lady. The actress who played the character of Eliza Doolittle in the acclaimed film was portrayed by Audrey Hepburn.

How much do you know about Audrey Hepburn?



Do you think the play will be a comedy or a tragedy? Why?



What do you think the sets and costumes will look like?



Can you name other famous musical shows? Discuss with your class the plot of these shows.





## 6. VOCABULARY

a) Look up in the dictionary the meaning of 'slang' and find five examples.

**Oxford Dictionary:** A type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people.

**Examples:**

**Mate** → Used to refer to someone in an affectionate way. American equivalents would be buddy, pal or dude.

**Posh** → Upper or high class.

**Ace** → Brilliant or excellent.

**Bloody** → Expression of anger or to emphasize a comment. Often followed but "hell" when angry.

**Cheerio** → Saying goodbye in a friendly way.

**Hunky-Dory** → A situation is ok or normal. Similar to "Okey-dokey".





b) Look at the list of words below. If there are some you do not understand, look up the meaning in the dictionary or ask the teacher.

<b>Pence</b>	<b>Bucket</b>	<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Phonetics</b>	<b>Duchess</b>	<b>Dialects</b>	<b>Gentleman</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>Poison</b>	<b>Polite</b>	<b>Weather</b>	<b>Races</b>	<b>Ambassador</b>	<b>Stubborn</b>
<b>Ball</b>	<b>Bet</b>	<b>Riff-Raff</b>	<b>Stunning</b>	<b>Gossip</b>	<b>Achievement</b>	<b>Slippers</b>

Fill in the gaps with the words from the previous exercise.

1. There are 100 **Pence** in one pound.
2. Eliza was carrying a **Buket** of flowers.
3. I learned the names of the colours in my first English **Lesson**.
4. My profession is **Phonetics**, the science of speech.
5. I could teach her how to speak properly, and in six months I could pass her off as a **Duchess** at an Embassy Ball.
6. I am interested in the different ways of speaking in India. I, myself, am a student of Indian **Dialects**.
7. A lady I know pays 18 pence to a French **Gentlemen** for teaching her French.
8. Eliza spends half her **Income** on food.
9. Eliza was afraid that Higgins wanted to kill her. But the chocolate was not **Poison**.
10. The Queen is very **Polite**. She smiles and treats people nicely.
11. The **Weather** in London is always cloudy and rainy.
12. Horses and hounds are the most common animals participating at the **Races**.
13. The **Ambassador** works at the embassy.
14. Professor Higgins is very **Stubborn**. He is willing to do whatever it takes to win.
15. Eliza was invited to the **Ball**. It was a great party with music and food.
16. I wouldn't **Bet** against that horse. He is very fast
17. If you go out with that man you will get in trouble. He is **riff-Raff**.
18. Eliza was **Stunning** the night of the ball. She looked very beautiful.
19. My grandfather loves **Gossip**. He likes to know personal things about people on TV (if they are married, if they have children, etc.).
20. They discover a cure for a strange disease. It was a great **Archivement**.
21. I would never leave my house in **Slippers**.





## 7. TONGUE TWISTERS GAME!

Do you remember this sentence of the play?

*"In Hertford, Hereford, and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly ever happen."*

In every language, you can find playful sentences that are difficult to pronounce. In pairs, try to read these tongue twisters out loud without making a mistake. Bring a watch or your phone and time how long it takes for each one to say it properly. The fastest wins!

***"Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked;  
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?"***

PLAYER 1. Seconds:

PLAYER 2. Seconds:

***"There was a young fisher named Fischer  
Who fished for a fish in a fissure.  
The fish with a grin,  
Pulled the fisherman in;  
Now they're fishing the fissure for Fischer."***

PLAYER 1. Seconds:

PLAYER 2. Seconds:

***"How many berries could a bare berry carry,  
if a bare berry could carry berries?  
Well they can't carry berries  
(which could make you very wary)  
but a bare berry carried is more scary!"***

PLAYER 1. Seconds:

PLAYER 2. Seconds:



## 6. LISTENING

Listen to tracks 1 and 2 and answer the following questions:

### a ) Track 1

We are in a market in the middle of London. What is Eliza trying to sell?

***She's trying to sell flowers..***

Why does Eliza get angry?

***Because Higgins is watching her and taking notes about the way she talks..***

What is Henry's hobby?

***Phonetics, the science of speech. It's also his job.***

Where has Colonel Pickering travelled from?

***Colonel Pickering has come from India to meet Henry Higgins..***

### a ) Track 2

What are Higgins and Pickering doing before the bell rings?

***They are studying different vowel sounds..***

How many vowels is the professor pronouncing?

**130**

How much does Eliza offer to pay for each class?

***One shilling.***

How long does Higgins say it will take him to pass Eliza for a duchess?

***Six months. Three if she is good enough...***



## 9. PHRASAL VERBS

Complete the sentences using these phrasal verbs in the correct form:

Let Go

Find out

Get back

Pass off

Give up

1. If the king **finds out** you are not a lady, the police will take you to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off.
2. She will look like a duchess. In six months... in three, if she is good enough, I will take her anywhere and I will **pass her off** as anything.
3. Hold on tight and don't **let go**!
4. You know I am winning, that is why you want to call off the bet. Well, I am not **giving up**.
5. I want to **get her back**, but I don't know what to do.

## 10. SPEAKING:

In the play, Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins represent people from two groups of social stratification. Imagine your partner is a rich person and you are a journalist. Ask him/her questions about his/her life, habits, hobbies... Then change roles.





## AFTER GOING TO THE THEATRE

### 1. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SHOW

Did you enjoy the show? Explain why.

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Who was your favourite character and why? Who was your least favourite character and why?

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Do you think Professor Higgins was polite at the beginning of the story? What happened afterwards?

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Do you remember the ending you wrote before going to the theatre? Was it similar to the actual one? Explain the differences and similarities between both endings.

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### 2. THE PLOT

**Put the following scenes in order. Then share your answer in groups of four or five.**

- 8 Eliza is introduced to a gentleman who is amazed by her manners. Everything goes well until the moment she looks at the races and starts to curse and shout embarrassing things.
- 12 Colonel Pickering condemns Higgins' attitude to Eliza. They eventually realise the Professor has grown fond of her, and that he will miss her.
- 3 Colonel Pickering bets Higgins can't teach her well enough to make her pass for a Duchess. After some negotiations, Henry accepts the bet.
- 9 Back at home, Higgins is disappointed but he doesn't give up. When Pickering is told about what happened at the races, he wants to call off the bet to avoid further embarrassment for Eliza. But Higgins is stubborn and wants to keep trying, so they get ready to go to the ball.
- 7 Higgins decides to take Eliza to the races. Eliza is put to the test, dressed as an upper class woman and speaking politely. Higgins warns her to avoid some subjects, so she sticks to small talk.
- 6 Eliza is getting frustrated and starts to believe that she will not be able to succeed. When Higgins is about to abandon the bet, she finally says a phrase properly and from there, she starts to say everything correctly.
- 13 Higgins is sad, listening to some recordings of Eliza's voice. She comes back and sees the scene.
- 2 Higgins invites Pickering to stay at his home. Next day, Eliza shows up at Higgin's home asking for English lessons.
- 5 After some days, Eliza is trying to pronounce vowels properly, doing exercises, without success. Higgins says she is a lost cause and that she will never learn.
- 10 Professor Higgins takes Eliza to the ball for her final test. The gentleman of the races appears and dances with Eliza. The night goes perfectly.
- 4 Pickering offers to pay for the experiment –which will last about 6 months –and warns Higgins to behave properly with Eliza, and not to take advantage of his position. Higgins replies that he doesn't want a woman in his life.
- 11 Back from the ball, Higgins and Pickering celebrate the success, congratulating each other and ignoring Eliza's effort. She is very upset and starts to cry. After an argument between Higgins and Eliza, she leaves the house.
- 14 Higgins tells Eliza that he wants her to stay, and she agrees, on condition he changes his manners.
- 1 Eliza Doolittle is trying to sell flowers and sings how she wishes she could have a better life. Professor Henry Higgins mocks Eliza's accent. Colonel Pickering tries to defend her, but then the two men recognize each other and become friends.



### 3. REPORTED SPEECH

Put these quotes from the play into reported speech. Remember to change people (I said = she said) and tenses (I work = I worked).

For example: **VERONICA: I don't love Peter.** → **Veronica said that she didn't love Peter.**

HIGGINS: I am not a detective.

**Higgins said he was not a detective.**

PICKERING (to Eliza): Why are you working so hard?

**Pickering asked Eliza why she was working so hard.**

ELIZA (to a man): Won't ya buy me a bucket?

**Eliza asked if he wouldn't buy her a bucket.**

PICKERING: I think I counted 24.

**Pickering said that he thought he had counted 24.**

ELIZA (to a man): You're really good.

**Eliza said that he was really good.**

PICKERING: Today has been an immense achievement.

**Pickering said that day had been an immense achievement.**

HIGGINS: There is nothing more I can do.

**Higgins said that there was nothing more he could do.**



### 4. WRITING

Eliza dreams about living in a big house and eating a lot of chocolate. She is amazed by the lifestyle of the rich and the famous. What would you do if you could have everything you wanted to? Would you travel around the globe?

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### 5. ROLECHANGE!

Work in pairs. Henry Higgins is a phonetics professor who teaches people how to speak properly. Imagine one of you is a teacher and your partner is a student. The teacher must pick his/her favourite hobby and explain its curiosities to the student. Make up a dialogue.



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