MODULE C: TEXTS AND SOCIETY

DESCRIPTION OF ELECTIVE: Exploring Transitions
In this elective, students explore and analyse a variety of texts that portray the ways in which individuals experience transitions into new phases of life and social contexts. These transitions may be challenging, confronting, exciting or transformative and may result in growth, change and a range of consequences for the individual and others. Through exploring their prescribed text and other related texts of their own choosing, students consider how transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas, shifts in attitudes and beliefs, and a deepened understanding of the self and others. Students respond to and compose a range of texts that expand our understanding of the experience of venturing into new worlds.

TEXT: EDUCATING RITA (DRAMA) by Willy Russell

RELATED TEXTS: Own choosing

TRANITIONS (What do you know?)
Respond to the following questions. (You will need to have read Educating Rita).

What is a transition?

How will you relate your definition to your study of texts in this module?

List 5 synonyms that could be used in place of the word transition?

Read the above elective description. What do you assume will be the focus of your study of texts which explore transitions?

Write 3 paragraphs to explain the subject matter of the play Educating Rita? Don’t retell the story, simply explain how the play explores transitions. Below, is an modelled response you could use to assist you.

- Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah tells the story of two Afghan Australian Muslim women from different generations and the tension that arises between them over Shafana’s decision to wear the headscarf.
- The play presents a poignant and at times humorous portrait of the relationship between a young woman and her favourite aunt. Both are articulate, clever, highly educated, motivated and devout; each in her own way is searching for security and reassurance and attempting to assert a sense of personal, cultural and spiritual identity.
- The play challenges negative attitudes towards Islam that are presented in the media and reinforced in the public imagination, particularly the stereotyped characterisation of Muslim women as voiceless, repressed and submissive.
In what ways are the characters Frank & Rita, experiencing transitions from one stage of life to another? Provide 2 examples for each character.

Are the transitions experienced by the protagonists transformative?

Which of the two characters experiences the most growth? Support your answer with examples from the text.
Overview

This elective examines how various texts explore similar concerns and reveal insights about how individuals experience transitions into new phases of life and social contexts. Dissatisfaction is endemic in our society but the motivation for sustained endeavour to transform one's self and social context is often difficult to sustain for a variety of reasons. The decision to transition or change your circumstances will often take you out of your comfort zone by alienating you from your former social context. The core text in this elective will often explore the idea that transitions can lead to greater freedom, choice and self worth. A shift in attitudes and beliefs can be a transformative experience that leads to personal growth.

Standard module C: Texts and society (Elective 2: Exploring transitions)

Elective 2: Exploring transitions

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Analysis of the rubric for key ideas and concepts
The rubric suggests the following core contributing questions, which represent Deep Learning for students:

1. How do we experience transitions into new phases of life and social contexts?
2. How can transitions be challenging, confronting, exciting and/or transformative?
3. How do transitions result in growth, change and consequences for self and others?
4. How can transitions result in new knowledge and ideas, shifts in attitudes and beliefs?
5. How can transitions lead to a deepened understanding of self and others?
6. What does it mean to venture into a new world?

Other useful ideas presented in the rubric include:

- Transitions usually involve an element of risk.
- Transitions can occur when we open our minds to new ways of thinking.
- We are the masters of our own destiny and can choose to change our social context.
- There are many ways to transition from one situation to another.

Rationale for the approach used in this unit of work

In order to engage our students in critical thinking and deep learning about the elective Exploring Transitions, a focus on understanding key terms and concepts is essential. Deep understanding of ideas should be evident before the core text, Educating Rita, is introduced. Students should be encouraged to seek other related texts that are both engaging and relevant.

This approach should prepare our students for the extended response required in the HSC examination. We would encourage them to commit their understanding of course content to writing as early (and as often) as possible. Through exposure to a range of ideas around transitions, students can approach the full range of potential HSC examination questions with more confidence.

Understanding the text within the context of the elective, Exploring Transitions

The core text, Willy Russell’s play, Educating Rita, explores the relationship between Rita and her teacher, Frank. Rita sees formal education as a way of transforming her life. Her deep sense of dissatisfaction stems from her perceived limitations of her working class background. Rita actively and successfully pursues an education as a means of transitioning into a new social context. Ironically, although the title signals Rita’s education’, Frank also experiences a transition when he is forced to leave the university and his bourgeois existence to begin a new life in Australia. Rita and Frank both ‘...leave a place that’s just finishing for one that’s just beginning’ but whereas Rita now has choice, Frank has been forced to confront his shortcomings and has been given a second chance to reinvent himself with a new life in Australia. Although the deep sense of optimism at the end of the play suggests that both Rita and Frank are venturing into new worlds where their new knowledge has led to a greater understanding of self, the uncertainty of their futures is a reflection of the ongoing nature of transition.
EDUCATING RITA
BY WILLY RUSSELL

Introduction to the text

About the playwright

William Russell, born 23 August 1947 in Whiston, Merseyside, is a British playwright, screenwriter, author, lyricist, and composer. His best-known works are Educating Rita, Shirley Valentine, and Blood Brothers.

Educating Rita was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, premiered at The Warehouse in London in June 1980 and starred Julie Walters and Mark Kingston. Mike Ockrent directed the play.

In 1983, Russell adapted the play for the screen. The film starred Michael Caine and Julie Walters and was highly successful.

Type of text

Educating Rita is a play.

Context

The context of the period—Rita and Frank’s values and attitudes are a reflection of the context in which they live. England has a strong ‘class’ system that prescribes particular attitudes and beliefs to different social groups, or levels. Rita is twenty-six and has grown up in a working-class British environment that has a negative attitude towards the value of education. She feels restricted by her name, family history, lack of education and the confines made on women by her social class. Frank, on the other hand, represents a higher or ‘upper’ class and is highly educated. His values are represented in the play by the type of alcohol he consumes, his preference for the BBC and healthier, ‘pebble-dashed’ (p. 11), wholegrain bread.

The context of the setting—although set within a particular educational context, Russell wanted to present themes and ideas that would be accessible to a varied audience. As he said, ‘I wanted to make a play which engaged and was relevant to those who considered themselves uneducated, those whose daily language is not the language of the university or the theatre. I wanted to write a play which would attract, and be as valid for, the Rita in the audience as the Franks’. His comments can be found at http://www.willyrussell.com/rita.html.

The impact of the context on the content and setting—Russell uses an educational context to explore the transitions and changes that occur in Rita and Frank.

These transitions are revealed through the individual values and attitudes of the two protagonists as seen by their contrasting attitudes towards, and experiences of, class, level of education, social expectations, culture and value systems.

Audience

The play’s universal themes of self-realisation and personal development allow for a wide and varied audience that transcends its original context.

Purpose

The play explores the relationship between student and tutor, and issues related to class and choice.

Reading the play

An examination of the setting, characters and plot will assist in understanding a play. To further your understanding of a play:

- Consider the title, which often has significant meaning in relation to the text.
- Read the introduction before and after you read the play. If you have a critical edition, also read the essays about the play.
- Look at the historical background of the play. Have any famous works of literature influenced the play and has the play inspired or influenced later works?
- Read the lines aloud if there are parts that you do not understand. A play is intended for performance, so imagine what the lines would sound like and what an actor would look like speaking the lines.
- Consider the stage directions. Although they are included to provide instructions for actors, they also allow the reader to visualise physical details of the set as well as characterisation. How detailed is the staging? Do the directions give you a sense of what the play is about and what is happening?

Key concepts and definitions

Anton Chekhov—a Russian playwright concerned with the inner psychology of his characters.

Canon—a list of traditional authors and texts that are prescribed for study at a school or university.


Ferlinghetti—an American poet and publisher.
Ibsen—a Norwegian playwright concerned with realist drama.

Invigilator—a person who oversees students doing an exam.

Isabel Archer—the female protagonist in Henry James’s novel Portrait of a Lady.

Liverpudlian—a term used to refer to inhabitants of Liverpool in the UK.

Focus on the syllabus

Details of the text

♦ Plot summary

University lecturer Frank needs to earn some extra money, so he agrees to tutor an Open University student. He is assigned Rita, a hairdresser who has a basic education and is searching for ways to break free of the class boundaries that restrict her.

Act One, Scene One—the audience is introduced to Frank, who is searching for a bottle of whisky. He makes disapproving comments about some ‘silly woman’ (p. 2) he is waiting for. Rita bursts into his room and tells Frank she wants to learn ‘everything’ (p. 6). He responds by telling her he knows absolutely nothing and will refer her to another tutor. Rita is insistent that she wants him and will return next week with some scissors in order to cut his hair.

Act One, Scene Two—Rita admires Frank’s study and asks about the ‘proper’ students at the university. They discuss literary criticism and why Rita's comments on Rubyfruit Jungle are too subjective. Rita is cognitive of the social pressure she is under and expresses how difficult it is for her to think and behave outside the restraints of her social class. The conversation shifts to Rita questioning Frank about his marital situation and Frank flirts with her.

Act One, Scene Three—Rita learns the differences between literature and more everyday texts. She is frustrated by Forster and by what she perceives as his ignoring of the issues of the poor.

Act One, Scene Four—Frank discusses Rita’s Peer Gynt essay, which she has responded to in one line. They move on to a wider discussion of life and Rita provides some information on her culture as she sees it. Frank enables her to make a literary connection within a text of Forster’s.

Act One, Scene Five—Rita provides more information on the state of her relationship with her husband Denny. He has burnt her essay and resents her attempts to educate herself. Rita convinces Frank to go to the theatre with her. Her energy influences him, although he is uncertain of the quality of the amateur production.

Act One, Scene Six—Rita is excited, as she has seen a professional theatre production of Macbeth. Frank engages her in a discussion of literary tragedy, which she tries to apply to a hairdressing situation. She invites Frank to the art gallery with her and he in return asks her to dinner at his house, an invitation which makes her anxious.

Act One, Scene Seven—Rita arrives for her lesson and it becomes evident that she did not turn up for the dinner party. Rita explains the real and imagined problems with her attending the dinner: caught the wrong bus, bought the wrong wine, fought with Denny, worry about her literary knowledge. She wants to be able to be considered serious and ‘civilised’ (p. 45) but she feels more like a ‘half-caste’ (p. 45), uncertain of where she belongs and fits in.

Act One, Scene Eight—Rita is given an ultimatum by Denny and she moves out. She wants to write a ‘proper’ (p. 48) exam response and is still highly motivated to achieve academically. Frank tells her honestly that in order to change she needs to suppress her originality and fresh perspective.

Act Two, Scene One—Rita returns after a week’s summer school in London. She is excited about what she has experienced and is learning to ‘talk the talk’. Frank offers her the poet, Blake, but she has ‘done’ (p. 55) him at summer school. There is a shifting balance of power between them.

Act Two, Scene Two—Rita begins by talking in a strange way in an attempt to lose her working-class accent. She has been spending time with other students who have invited her to France, and Frank says her essay would not look out of place with the others, which she takes as a compliment.

Act Two, Scene Three—Frank arrives drunk and it appears his career is unraveling. Rita gets angry with him and tells him she doesn’t need him as much as when she first arrived as she now knows how to identify ‘good’ (p. 62) authors.

Act Two, Scene Four—Rita arrives late and seems anxious to leave as she has university friends waiting. She is irritated with Frank and behaves as if he is no longer of use to her. Frank gives her some of his poetry.
A last and desperate attempt to make a connection with her.

Act Two, Scene Five—Rita arrives unexpectedly and is filled with praise for Frank's poetry, which he enjoys hearing. However, their meeting deteriorates when Frank suggests he has created a monster in Rita. He tells her that his work is rubbish and rips it up. She retaliates by accusing and attacking him. The scene concludes with Frank calling her 'Rita' to which she replies it is not her name any longer. He asks her if she has adopted the name of other literary figures to replace her name.

Act Two, Scene Six—the scene is concerned with Frank trying to locate Rita, and he uses her exam details as an excuse to call her place of employment and home.

Act Two, Scene Seven—Rita arrives as Frank is packing his things to relocate to Australia. They engage in social chit-chat until Frank asks her why she has returned. She lets him know that she thinks he is a good teacher and it is revealed that she received a good mark in her exams. Frank invites her to Australia but she does not commit to following him. He presents her with a dress for an educated woman (p. 73) and the play concludes with Rita finally sitting Frank down and cutting his hair as she threatened to do in the first scene.

Links to 'Exploring Transitions'
This elective explores ideas about growing up, new transitions and coping with change and maturation. Educating Rita examines both the individual characters of Frank and Rita as well as their relationships with each other and with those around them. A process of change and adjustment occurs in both the character of Frank with transitioning into new phases of life, marked primarily by experience of each other's lives. Themes surrounding personal growth and self-awareness are central to the text as the two main characters deal with their new experiences in their unique and individual ways.

How relationships shape meaning

Relationships within the text
Rita and Frank both widen their education within the text, in both formal learning and social contexts. The text explores how personal growth and change can transform individuals within relationships and widen understanding of different worlds. These transitions may be challenging, confronting, exciting or transformative and may result in growth, change and a range of consequences for the individual and others.

Rita and Frank both learn a great deal about themselves through their relationship with each other. Frank is influenced to reduce the amount of alcohol he consumes and it is Rita's originality and freshness that causes him to reflect upon aspects of his own life, reigniting his academic purpose.

Despite their cultural differences, Rita and Frank are united by other commonalities. Both experience relationship failures, and some love interest is hinted between them during the play, but they are ultimately confined by their teacher-student relationship: 'I care for you Frank ... but you've to-to leave me alone a bit' (p. 63).

The power balance in their relationship oscillates as Rita gains social and educational knowledge and confidence. This creates tension between them as Frank has enjoyed and grown comfortable in his role as mentor and enlightener: 'I've got what you got Frank, and you don't like it' (p. 68).

By the end of the play it is Frank who is experiencing difficulty in letting go of Rita. This is simply and emphatically expressed by Rita's statement 'I've got choice now' (p. 72) which reflects her growing awareness of the possibilities life holds for her. Rita now views Frank more realistically and sees him for who he really is. Rita and Frank's relationship is left deliberately open at the end of the text, allowing the responder to imagine what ultimate path the characters will take.

Responsive relationship with the text
The responder is invited to consider and engage with characters from varied cultural and social backgrounds and contexts. In doing so, the responder's perception of the world and of differing values and attitudes is widened and challenged. These ideas are revealed through the British location of the play, the working-class Liverpudlian values juxtaposed with those of the British 'educated' class, and the 1980s setting.

Language forms, features and structures

Dramatic techniques
Dramatic techniques in the text communicate ideas about the theme of exploring transitions. The title is ironic and has meaning on different levels as both characters have their understanding of their contexts widened and challenged. On one hand, it can be interpreted in reference to Rita, who desires an education but ends up learning more than she bargained for. The second interpretation relates to Frank, whose experience of the world is widened through his contact with Rita and who ends up being educated as well.

The first act of the text reveals Rita's initial experiences with educating herself and her struggles as her view is widened and her attitudes challenged: 'I'm dead ignorant, y'know' (p. 25). Frank's role as mentor deteriorates as Rita gains in strength and confidence. The second act exposes the effects of education on Rita and reveals how both characters now have entered different phases of their contexts have altered dramatically: 'Nobody calls me Rita but you. I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was' (p. 69).
Settings

The settings have dramatic functions within the text and reflect that transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas for Rita and Frank.

Frank's study represents the academic world that Rita wants to break into but it ironically restricts her movements, which are energetic and enthusiastic and in direct contrast to Frank's stuffy and stagnant attitude. This setting impresses Rita but in contrast Frank is cynical and weary, hiding his whimsy behind the books. However, he does feel the same reverence for the symbols of education and academia that Rita does.

Rita's workplace represents the blending of her two realities and worlds. In it, she is able to chat to customers about what she is learning and experiencing, free from the disapproval of her husband and family. However, it is a world that she would ultimately like to leave, as hairdressing is unfulfilling and holds no value or currency for her.

The pub is a world both characters inhabit, although it means something different to each of them. For Rita, it is an unhappy place where she is forced to drink and sing, as her husband and family feel this is appropriate behaviour for her class. For Frank, the pub represents a world where he can escape the restrictions that academia places on him. He drowns his woes in alcohol and feels an unburdening of his suffocating university persona.

Stage directions

Stage directions are intended as instructions for the actors but also reveal ideas about the characters and their worlds. The directions in the first scene reveal that Frank is a man who drinks a lot and at work: 'He manages a gulp at the whiskey ... and although his speech is not slurred, we should recognise the voice of a man who shifts a lot of booze' (p. 1).

The stage directions at the start of Act One, Scene Eight are significant as they reveal a change in Rita's behaviour: 'Rita enters slowly, carrying a suitcase' (p. 46). This marks a change in mood and is contrasted with Rita's usually bubbly and energetic attitude towards study.

Rita's actions in Act Two, Scene One are a physical indication of her changing social behaviour and attitudes: 'She takes off her shawl and hands it to Frank who hangs it on the hook by the door' (p. 49). Rita is attempting to act in what she perceives is a more ladylike fashion.

Language techniques

Language techniques in the text communicate ideas about 'Exploring Transitions'.

Dialogue is used to communicate the changing attitudes of characters who are transitioning into new phases of life and social contexts. Language allows Frank and Rita to blend their understanding of the world. As Frank shares and teaches his academic jargon with Rita, she influences him to drop some of the stiffness of his expression and manner. Rita's habit of using the term 'dead' as an intensifier is transferred to Frank, marking the merging of their worlds: 'Dead serious' (p. 8), 'dead affected' (p. 12), and 'completely off my cake' (p. 60).

Other language features include rhetorical questions, which are often used by the characters to express their frustrations as well as to highlight problems and issues. Frank often uses them when he is questioning Rita's motives for educating herself: 'Have you come all this way for so very, very little?' (p. 69).

An ellipsis is often used to show pauses or hesitations in conversation. Frank is often taken aback by Rita's forwardness, and language and ellipsis illustrates this uncertainty: 'Look at those tits ... I suppose ... erm—probably' (p. 3).

Vocabulary and grammar are used at the start of the play to immediately establish Rita as being from a different world to Frank. Her language reflects her working-class background, and her attitude and vividness are juxtaposed with Frank's proper civility: '... bleedin' handle' (p. 2), '... poor sod' (p. 2) and 'I know I take the piss' (p. 11). In contrast, Frank's language is a product of his education and social background: 'This is getting ... a bit wearisome' (p. 32) and 'acquired a certain patina' (p. 15).

The humour of witty banter highlights the very different attitudes and experiences of the two main characters. When Frank refers to Eliot, he means the poet TS, although Rita thinks immediately of the policeman Eliot Ness. When asked to write an essay on the staging difficulties of Peer Gynt, Rita responds with pithiness: 'Do it on the radio' (p. 31).

The humour can at times be crude and coarse, which acts to highlight the differences in the two characters' worlds and reveal ideas about their social backgrounds. In Rita's world, foul-mouthed language is common and expected: 'Howard's End ... it sounds filthy, doesn't it?' (p. 5).

Humour is often generated by the lack of understanding the characters have for each other's contexts:

RITA: I hate that hole [Formby], don't you?
FRANK: Yes.
RITA: Where do you live?
FRANK: Formby. (p. 12)

Literary allusion is often used to create humour in the play and again highlights the stark educational and social differences between Frank and Rita. Frank asks Rita if she's seen Chekhov in the theatre, implying if she's seen one of his plays, but she replies 'No. Does he go?' (p. 36).
A range of textual features

The process of change and transition results in experience, self-realisation, insight and understanding. The experience of transition is a unique and individual experience for both Frank and Rita.

Change affects Rita in both positive and negative ways. Education influences her to overcome the negative aspects of her life and create some balance within her life. Frank not only acts as a teacher to Rita, but learns from her as well.

Rita begins the play as a bold character, albeit awkward and uncertain. Her real name is Susan but she laughably renames herself 'Rita' after Rita Mae Brown, the author of the dubiously titled Rubyfruit Jungle, a lesbian-themed novel that Rita mistakes for 'literature'.

Rita is frustrated and feels confined by the boundaries created by English attitudes to class. She perceives an education as a means of improving her life situation and escaping the attitudes and expectations of those around her in order to redirect her prospects, though she risks alienating her own social class in the process. She is naive initially in thinking that books and clothes will signal a change in her social status and allow her to become accepted in academic circles.

The opening scene reveals Rita to be nervous and anxious during her first meeting with Frank. Her words and actions are loud and react and reveal how difficult it is for her to behave appropriately in a formal interview situation. She is confused by Frank's formal manner, and the awkwardness of the situation is presented humorously by the playwright: 'You are? ... What am I?' (p. 3).

Although uncomfortable with being working class, Rita binds herself to class through her insecurity and defeatism. Her attitude towards the university courses is humorously alliterative—'Degrees for Dishwashers' (p.4)—which ironically undermines their quality and usefulness, as she is desperate to identify herself with the academic world. Rita uses hyperbole to express her frustration at the confines of her world: 'I should have had a baby by now, everyone expects it' (p. 12).

As her 'education' progresses she transitions into the other students around her—she stops smoking, wears different 'bohemian'-style clothes and attempts to speak in a 'posh' voice. Her language in Act Two, Scene Two is oddly colourless as she tries to adopt the language of those students she aspires to emulate: 'I'm terribly sorry. It was unavoidable' (p. 56).

Rita becomes increasingly superior and over-confident. She now approaches other students arrogantly and is becoming removed from Frank, marked by her growing independence. When she returns from summer school, she surprises Frank with her growing knowledge of the poetry of Blake and increasing literary knowledge:

This tutor came up to me ... an' he said 'Are you fond of Ferlinghetti?' It was right on the tip of me tongue, to say, 'Only when it's served with parmesan cheese', but, Frank, I didn't! (p. 50)

The transformation does not come without an enormous personal cost:

'I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with anymore. An' I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday or them out there because I can't learn the language. (p. 45)

This conflict of worlds is further reinforced by Rita's metaphor of 'I'm a half-caste' (p. 45).

This superficial transformation is ultimately unsatisfying to her and she learns that the sacrifice of her individuality and loss of recognition of who she is will not earn her happiness or intelligence. By the last scene, Rita is markedly altered from the opening scene. She acts with more sophistication and her accent has been toned down. As well, her maturity and growth is evident by her ability to see through people's pretentiousness:

I thought she was so cool an' together ... she spends half her life eatin' wholefoods an' health foods to make her live longer, an' the other half tryin' to kill herself. (p. 72)

This is also revealed by her language choices, which show that her world has widened and been transformed: 'All I've ever done is take from you. I've never given anything' (p. 73).

Frank is presented initially as a cynical and world-weary teacher. His telephone conversation with his partner, Julia, reveals he is already regretting agreeing to tutor an Open University student but he is motivated by money. This 'silly woman' (p. 2) who is going to try to get into the minds of great writers is already irritating him.

However, Frank is surprised by Rita's freshness and vivacity. Although intellectually challenging and antagonistic, her attitudes and values reawaken in Frank his appreciation of beauty in literature and life: 'I think you're the first breath of air that's been in this room for years' (p. 11).

Frank begins the process of transforming and educating Rita and he begins to really enjoy her company and the challenge of teaching her, although he realises that her education will come at the expense of her individuality. He teaches her that she will need to be more discerning and selective about what she reads. He also begins to cut down on the amount of alcohol he is consuming.

He and Rita engage in discussions about their lives and relationships. Frank's relationship with an old student seems cold and loveless and he spends much time in the evening at the pub. Rita also draws Frank out with personal questions about his poetry writing. He admits
that he had been writing to impress others and that there was nothing genuine or heartfelt about the process for him. Frank is disgusted with himself and it is this that contributes to his sense of worthlessness and hollow emptiness: 'This clever, pyrotechnical pile of self-conscious allusion is worthless, talentless ...' (p. 68).

Act Two begins with Frank returning again to writing poetry, signalling his desire to experience growth and change, as well as enter a new phase with a transformed attitude and consciousness, at the hand of his positive experiences of Rita. This transformation is subtle and gradual, and Frank is appalled by Rita's attempt to get him to leave the safety of his study to sit on the grass outside. He is also drinking less, but is not completely reformed: 'What do I do when, in appalling sobriety, I watch you walk away and disappear, my influence gone forever?' (p. 54). At the conclusion of the play, where their separation becomes imminent, the exchanging of gifts is poignant and symbolises the education that they have received from each other.

Understanding of the relationships among texts

Related text—Muriel's Wedding by PJ Hogan

♦ Type of text

*Muriel's Wedding* is a feature film written and directed by PJ Hogan and released in 1994.

♦ Summary

Muriel Heslop (played by Toni Collette) is socially unskilled, overweight and immature. Muriel is constantly mocked by her 'friends'—girls she looks up to and sees as more sophisticated than herself, but who are in reality narrow and ignorant. She has two obsessions: the music of ABBA and to have a glamorous wedding. Muriel believes marriage to any man will help her overcome her personal limitations and release her from her dreary life in Porpoise Spit where her life is ruled by her father Bill (played by Bill Hunter). Bill is a corrupt local politician who blames his personal and professional shortcomings on his downtrodden wife, Betty, and their lazy children.

Muriel's life changes when she runs into Rhonda Epinstalk (played by Rachel Griffiths), a former school friend. They run away to Sydney to discover a wider world of relationships and responsibilities but fate keeps intervening to drag them back to the hated Porpoise Spit. When cancer threatens Rhonda's freedom, they make a promise to stay together and never go back.

*Muriel's Wedding* satirised an Australian family in a way that audiences found extremely poignant, as well as very funny. Composer PJ Hogan's portrayal of a battler family from an unlikeable north coast town is uncompromising but also enormously sympathetic.

♦ Links to 'Exploring Transitions'

This film is an excellent choice for the elective 'Exploring Transitions' as it is a text that reflects the processes involved in transitioning from one stage of life to another. The main character Muriel's different stages of development are structured through three key sections within the film. This film relates to *Educating Rita* because both Muriel and Rita:

- experience significant changes in their lives.
- make transitions into new phases of life and social contexts, although Rita is more socially confident than Muriel.
- live in worlds marked by unique and contrasting contextual details such as age, location, culture and socio-economic status.
- make moral self-realisations and action positive transformations as they move into different realms of experience and understanding.

In Muriel's Wedding we see how the social context of individuals' interactions can affect our perceptions of ourselves, others, relationships and society. Details of Muriel's family life and relationships are revealed early on in the film. In Part One—The Bouquet, the responder is invited to share Muriel's experiences of her domineering father during a meal at the local Chinese restaurant. Camera techniques including over the shoulder-shots and subjective camera shots heighten the discomfort and humiliation of the scene. The scene shows Bill Heslop and family plus Victor, a Japanese property developer, and his interpreter in a Chinese restaurant. Bill brags of his power and political disappointments before turning on daughter Muriel, contrasting her unnecessarily with Victor, who was a millionaire at age nineteen. While her mother congratulates Muriel on getting a job interview as an apprentice locksmith, Bill widens his criticisms to all of his children, tagging them as 'useless no-hoppers'.

Bill portrays an ugly side to being Australian and is domineering, arrogant and culturally tactless. He patronises his Japanese guests, introduces them as Chinese, and refers to the Chinese owner of the restaurant not by his own name but as Charlie Chan. This scene highlights the ignorance and limitations of the Heslop family, who have not transitioned far. This is further reinforced by Deirdre Chamber's offensive statement that 'Your wives are probably geishas'. This black humour allows Hogan to keep his audience closely identified so that he or she may see him or herself reflected in the values and attitudes exposed by the characters.

Transitions may be challenging, confronting, exciting or transformative and may result in growth, change and a
range of consequences for the individual and others. In Part Two-Sydney: City of Brides, Muriel escapes her family to start a new life in Sydney. Her development is communicated using farcical humour when Muriel and her boyfriend Bryce (played by Matt Day) enter her living room after an evening out, sit on a beanbag and watch television. Muriel’s father appears on the television pleading for news from her.

The scene descends rapidly into ridiculousness. Bryce’s licentious resolve is balanced by Muriel’s girlish silliness. In a desperate attempt to change channels from the news item about her in which her father pleads for her return, Muriel switches the channel randomly to a soft-porn dance program, which further excites Bryce. Having unzipped the beanbag rather than Muriel’s trousers, Bryce, in his attempt to take them off, knocks a birdcage, which smashes through the window and which sends Rhonda’s guests, the American servicemen, running naked into the living room. The comic fiasco in the apartment ends suddenly and dramatically with Rhonda suddenly and inexplicably paralysed and being rushed to hospital where Muriel waits anxiously to hear her prognosis.

In this scene Muriel is dealing with new social experiences. The juxtaposition of the comedy with Rhonda’s health issues exposes Muriel’s gradual transformation into a responsible friend and an independent young woman who can survive outside the narrow world of Porpoise Spit. To assist this transformation on the screen the composer makes gradual changes to Muriel’s hair, clothes, speech, stance and expressions as the film progresses, charting Muriel’s self-realisations and changes as she transitions into new phases of life and social contexts.
Introduction to Module C

Module C is designed to study texts that reveal a variety of contexts, including specific social contexts and/or societies. The aspects you should focus on include the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs held by individuals and groups in these contexts and/or societies. You must analyse the techniques used by the composers to create meaning in these texts and how they reveal the different aspects of specific situations and/or societies. This module is divided into two electives: Exploring Interactions and Exploring Transitions.

Effective Exploring Transitions

The elective Exploring Transitions focuses on the portrayal of the ways in which individuals transition into new phases of life and social contexts. The word transition refers to the evolution, development, or movement from one stage or place to another. A transition into a new phase of life or social context can be challenging, confronting, exciting or transformative and may result in growth, change and a range of consequences for the individual and others. Extended responses must show a detailed understanding of the many benefits of transitioning into a new phase of life or social context. These may include new knowledge and ideas, shifts in attitudes and beliefs, and a deepening understanding of the self and others. You must also demonstrate that engaging with your prescribed and related texts has expanded your understanding of the experience of venturing into new worlds. You need to demonstrate your understanding of these concepts through a thorough examination of how they are portrayed in one prescribed text and at least two related texts.

Choosing related texts

It is important that your choice of related text is relevant to both the module and the elective. It must be a text that effectively demonstrates the ways in which language is used to reflect the different aspects of specific situations and/or societies. It should also demonstrate an effective use of its language form and features to create specific situations and/or societies. Finally, when choosing your related texts you should ensure that they link to your prescribed text either through the key ideas being explored about individuals' interactions with others within a range of social contexts or through the ways in which the composer has used the features of language specific to his or her chosen form to further your understanding of the impact that interactions have on the perceptions of ourselves and others, relationships and society. It is often a good idea to select related texts that take a different form from your prescribed text as this demonstrates your ability to analyse a range of textual forms and features.

HSC Standard English syllabus outcomes

The syllabus outcomes listed below are directly covered in the chapters of this module/elective:

1. You must demonstrate understanding of how relationships between composer, responder, text and context shape meaning.
2. You must demonstrate understanding of the relationships among texts.
3. You must describe and analyse the ways that language forms and features, and structures of texts, shape meaning and influence responses.
4. You must analyse the effect of technology and medium on meaning.
5. You must engage with the details of the text in order to respond critically and personally.

However, you must also demonstrate the following syllabus outcomes in your extended responses:

6. You must develop language relevant to the study of English.
7. You must adapt and synthesise a range of textual features to explore and communicate information, ideas and values for a variety of purposes, audiences and contexts.
8. You must articulate and represent your own ideas in critical, interpretive and imaginative texts from a range of perspectives.
9. You must assess the appropriateness of a range of processes and technologies in the investigation and organisation of information and ideas.
10. You must analyse and synthesise information and ideas into sustained and logical argument for a range of purposes and audiences.
11. You must draw upon the imagination to transform experience and ideas into text demonstrating control of language.
12. You must reflect on your own processes of responding and composing.
### Making links between texts

Use this table as a useful way of making notes about your chosen related text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Text details</strong> (title, composer, publication details)</th>
<th><em>To Her Door</em> written and performed by Paul Kelly from the 1992 album <em>Live.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Song lyric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text summary (1-2 sentences)</strong></td>
<td>This song is an undeniable Australian classic. It tells the story of a young working-class couple whose marriage falls apart due to unemployment and alcohol abuse. After the husband goes to rehab the family reunite in the end. The ending is optimistic but ambiguous.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **What ideas about *Exploring Transitions* are suggested by the text?** | - Transitions can open new ‘doors’ in our lives  
- Crisis points in our lives such as the breakdown of a marriage and possible reconciliation can lead to transitions  
- We sometimes need to take active steps to transition to a better life (overcoming addiction through rehabilitation)  
- A physical transition can help the individual overcome adversity |
| **How are these ideas represented?** | **Technique**  
1. Repetition to represent the door motif  
2. One central idea per verse  
3. Travelling / overcoming adversity motif  
**Example**  
1. Song Title  
- ‘Out the door’  
- ‘To her door’  
2. Verse 1 – Break-up  
Verse 2 – Rehab or making new starts  
Verse 3 – Hope / Reconciliation  
- Australian iconic brands – The Buttery, Olympic and Silvertop  
- Alliteration – *shaking in his seat, driving through the streets, in a silvertop*  
**Effect (linked to *Exploring Transitions*)**  
1. The door is presented as either a barrier or as an opportunity for transition.  
2. The ideas in the verse mirror the journey taken by both husband and wife  
3. The husband attempted to seek help to overcome addiction and was instrumental in beginning a transition |
| **How do these *Exploring Transitions* ideas link to the *Exploring Transitions* ideas in your prescribed text?** | The door is both a barrier and an opportunity in *To Her Door* and *Educating Rita*. Where the persona in the song is desperately seeking to rekindle his relationship with his partner by travelling to ‘her door’, Rita actively pursues transition by ‘oiling’ the door. Both Rita and the persona in the song have had to overcome significant challenges but Rita has made more progress in her journey to transition. Similarly, Rita and “Jack” are trapped in unhappy marriages and must travel away and undergo education/rehabilitation to make transitions into a better life. |
| **What is your response to these ideas?** | This classic “everyman” song explores transitional experiences to which most people can relate. The locations and names of the family are unspecified but the brand names (*The Buttery – Rehabilitation Clinic, Olympic Buses and Silvertop Taxi’s*) are part of the Australian lexicon. This song tackles an unspoken part of Australian culture – alcoholism within men and the impact on individuals and relationships. The ballad style makes it easy for the listener to empathise with the characters.  
Successful transitions occur when the individual embraces a new way of thinking or new lifestyle. Whilst transitions are never impossible, sometimes our personal growth can be inhibited by factors that are beyond our control. People who are able to pursue transition are not only highly motivated but also fortunate enough to have the opportunity to embrace change. Unfortunately, there are some people for whom significant obstacles can limit the potential for successful transitions to a better situation in life. Therefore, due to a range of factors certain challenges are too difficult to overcome. |
REFERENCING THE TEXT

Introduce text.


Subject matter: Specific statements relating to the text's thematic concerns and social implications,

The consequences of transition.

The core text, Willy Russell's play *Educating Rita* explores the relationship between Rita and her teacher, Frank. Both protagonists of this dramatic comedy are grappling with the tensions and complexities of uncertainty and change in their lives. The notion that education empowers social mobility is embodied through the character of Rita who sees formal education as a way of transforming her life. Her deep sense of dissatisfaction stems from her perceived limitations of her working class background.

Rita actively and successfully pursues an education as a means of transitioning into a new social context. Ironically, (although the title signals Rita's 'education'), Frank also experiences a transition when he is forced to leave the university and his bourgeois existence to begin a new life in Australia.

Rita and Frank both "...leave a place that's just finishing for one that's just beginning" but whereas Rita now has choice, Frank has been forced to confront his shortcomings and has been given a second chance to reinvent himself with a new life in Australia.

Although the deep sense of optimism at the end of the play suggests that both Rita and Frank are venturing into new worlds where their new knowledge has led to a greater understanding of self, the uncertainty of their futures is a reflection of the ongoing and serendipitous nature of transition.

Key ideas and concepts

The rubric suggests the following core contributing questions, which represent 'deep' learning for students.

1. How do we experience transitions into new phases of life and social contexts?
2. How can transitions be challenging, confronting, exciting and/or transformative?
3. How do transitions result in growth, change and consequences for self and others?
4. How can transitions result in new knowledge and ideas, shifts in attitudes and beliefs?
5. How can transitions lead to a deepened understanding of self and others?
6. What does it mean to venture into a new world?

Thesis ideas to be considered and developed

- Transitions usually involve an element of risk.
- Transitions can occur when we open our minds to new ways of thinking.
- We are the masters of our own destiny and can choose to change our social context.
- There are many ways to transition from one situation to another.
- Add to these ideas as you explore the text.

Hints for choosing Related Texts:

- Choose a text you love. You may not like your teacher's choice of set text, but this is your chance to make the topic relevant to you.
- Choose different types of texts. E.g. if you're studying a film, choose a documentary, novel/short story, poem, website, song or play, not another film. The point of related texts is to show the marker you've read and viewed widely.
- You should also pick related texts that both reinforce and contradict the ideas in your prescribed text. This shows the marker you have read and viewed widely, not placed the first things you found.
- Choose texts about different aspects of transition. This shows the marker that you've investigated different concepts of transition (e.g. both positive and negative effects of transition, or physical vs psychological transitions) as well as the transitions in the prescribed text.
- If you're good at essay writing, try using a non-fiction text to develop and structure your argument about the other texts. This helps you interweave your ideas.
- Blewes Slide share (http://www.slide.com/blewes/monet-into-the-world) is not about Tom Blueness but the questions asked about the poems can apply to any related text you choose.

Some random websites recommending texts are:
MODULE C: TEXTS & SOCIETY

EXPLORING TRANSITIONS

RELATED TEXTS

1. Reference the text's title, composer and textual form. What is the subject matter of the text and what ideas are explored about the process of transitioning into new phases of life or social contexts? (1 paragraph)

2. How does the composer use textual form, features and structures to convey characters' experiences of transitioning into new phases of life and social contexts?

   Provide 2 examples: (PEEL)

3. Analyse how two key moments in the text explore the notion that transitions can be challenging, confronting, exciting and/or transformative?

   Provide 2 examples: (PEEL)

4. Discuss how the characters' journeys into new contexts result in consequences and/or personal growth?

   Provide 2 examples: (PEEL)

5. Explain how the composer uses textual features and language to portray characters' shifts in attitudes and beliefs OR a sense of enlightenment and new knowledge?

   Provide 2 examples: (PEEL)

6. Find 2 examples of how the characters' transitions into new worlds or contexts led to a deepened understanding of self and others? (PEEL)

7. What specific idea or aspect of this text has resonated with you regarding how people negotiate change into new social contexts or phases of life? (1 paragraph)

NB: A PEEL analysis requires the student to:

- State a point or idea,
- Elaborate on the specific reference or moment from the text being discussed
Support this idea or example with detailed reference to the text and analysis of the language used to shape the idea.

Link this idea to a forthcoming idea or comparison/contrast to a previous example.

The skill of analysis is the cornerstone to good English essays. Students should draft, edit and re-draft these paragraphs.
Educatin Rita By Willy Russell and The Social, Historical And Cultural Context Of Britain In The L

Rate This Paper:
Length: 1626 words (4.7 double-spaced pages)
Rating: Red (FREE)

"Educatin Rita" By Willy Russell and The Social, Historical And Cultural Context Of Britain In The Late 1970's

'Educatin Rita' by Willy Russell relates to the social, historical and cultural context of Britain in the late 1970's throughout the play and this extremely strong and believable reference to these three subjects contribute to a good piece of drama.

Willy Russell makes these references in everything, from the smallest detail, Rita's hair colour to the extreme stereotyping of each of the two classes. These experiences are based on 'Russell's own life and the character of 'Rita' is a mirror of him, because of this it is a strong and realistic account of the 1970's. 'Rita' has shared the same experiences as 'Russell' in both school and work, they were both under peer pressure not to do well and school and would be singled out if they studied.

Rita: "But studyin' was just for wimps, wasn't it? See, if I'd started takin' school seriously I would have become different from me mates, an' that's not allowed."

Because of this attitude to school, or the attitude school gave them, both 'Rita' and 'Russell' ended up in a dead end hairdressing job, but both of them decided they would change their life and both began to break away. I think that because so much reference is realistic due to the above, an audience of 1979 or 1980 when they play was shown would have been able to relate so well to the characters, especially people in there twenties or forties now because they would be able to remember what it was like for them when they went to school or university and they would be filled with past memories and emotions, a skip of good drama, something that can evoke emotions.

During the play the characters of 'Rita' and 'Frank' are the biggest demonstration of cultural difference. Rita represents the working class culture and stands for what they were, a class who strived to escape their dead end jobs and make a better life for themselves, Frank, on the other hand is the representation of the working class. Although some might say he is a disgrace to his culture he is a perfect example of the middle classes, someone who has it handed to them on a plate and they take it for granted.

These differences are first noticed at the beginning of the play, in 'Rita's opening scenes. She misses the ends off of her sentences that are usually grammatically in correct; she speaks in restricted code. Frank, the middle class man speaks in grammatically correct sentences and also uses, elaborate code.

Rita: "It's terrible these days, the money, isn't it? With the inflation an' that. You work for the ordinary university don't you? With the real students. The open university's different isn't it?"

Frank: "It's supposed to embrace a more comprehensive studentship yes."

http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=102617
8/03/2015
"Russell" uses this as a to portray the different classes, "Rita's" speech is used to represent the uneducated working class, this is achieved through the half words, we would say don't you, and that but "Rita uses "don't y'" "'at that". Conversely "Frank" uses a more sophisticated sentence and is grammatically correct. He uses more interesting words and has a more extensive vocabulary than "Rita".

"Russell" uses this speech difference to bring humour to the play; he does this about three or four lines into the play when "Frank" tries to ask "Rita" her name.

Frank: "You are?"

Rita: "What am I?"

The conversation continues in the same manner and it is the speaking at cross-purposes that brings humour to the conversation. "Rita" takes "Frank"s question literally and begins asking what she is so "Frank" becomes confused and starts asking what she is, so a simple question of what's your name but in elaborate code confuses "Rita" and if an audience in the theatre didn't laugh then there is something wrong because this line made me laugh! And it is the small snippets of humour combined with other elements that earned "Educating Rita" the best comedy award in 1980.

A huge part of the social issues in the play is to do with working class woman's roles. As a girl left school she was expected to marry young and have children soon after, that was the goal of life, but "Rita" wants more and many things which happened at the time of the play would have "Rita" to do what she did and give choice to women.

The main one of these was the contraceptive pill, which was made available to women at the beginning of the 70's. This gave a choice of when to have children and "Rita" uses this to stop "Denny" from getting her pregnant, because she wants a life of her own.

Rita: "I told him I'd only have a baby when I had a choice."

"Russell" almost uses "Rita" to promote the idea to young girls that they could have a life and make choices, this is also a good dramatic technique because many young ladies/girls in the audience at the play could have been thinking about what "Rita" had achieved and think to themselves that they could do that. Also all the boys knew that as soon as they left school they were off to work in the factories day in day out for the rest of their lives, so maybe the play could have served as inspiration to men watching it as well.

Both "Frank" and "Rita" are extremely stereotypical of each other as well they both expect each other to act in a certain way. "Frank" seems to believe that the working classes are content with their boring and predictable lives so "Rita" sets him straight.

"Rita": "I just see everyone pleased or on the valium, tryin' to get from one day to the next. Y' know say that round our way like cause they're proud."

"Rita" explains to "Frank" that just because he might be able to walk past a pub and hear everyone singing it doesn't mean that they are happy, it probably means they're too drunk to care and they only do it because it's the only way to get through the day and go on with life.

"Frank" comes back with a stereotypical and purely ignorant line.

Frank: "Yes but there's nothing wrong with that, if they're content with it!"

"Frank" has completely missed the point and is still so naive as to believe that, the only goal and aim of a working class man is to get
as drunk as possible. He does not realise that this is just a show put on to cover up the true feelings. So again ‘Rita’ explains that its not all they want.

‘Rita: ’But they’re not. Cause there’s no meanin’,”

‘Rita’ has to repeat herself just to get the message across to ‘Frank’ that their life has no meaning and that the only time that they ever had a meaning was during the war when material property and money didn’t matter and everyone was united.

This is ‘Frank’s’ interpretation of the working class and what’s worse is that ‘Rita’ sees the middle class as an amazing life, just because they are educated. ‘Rita’ thinks that gaining an education will gain her respect and a better life but what her and ‘Frank’ are both ignorant of is that how similar the two of them are and that they both want to escape their social hierarchy and be happy with themselves and their life’s. ‘Frank’ sees the working class life as an escape route; down the pub all the time and the hardest choice of his life are which lager to drink. He thinks he would fit in perfectly. I think he would as well and he sees ‘Rita’ as the key, much in the same way that ‘Rita’ sees ‘Frank’ as her key to dinner parties, wine drinking and intellectual conversations, something ‘Rita’ dreams of.

This dependence on each other leads to interesting and quality drama and situations in the play, for example right at the beginning ‘Rita’ depends on ‘Frank’ for everything and her language and essays make for some hilarious answers and lines. For example the “do it on the radio” answer is blatant, coarse humour and if you don’t find this funny, you should donate your funny bone to the hospital! It’s called an essay for a reason! But when ‘Rita’ gains in confidence we see a different side to ‘Frank’ because he is needed less and less and when he finally cracks we hear what he really thinks.

Frank: “You know, Rita, I think that like you I shall change my name!”
Mary Shelty”

Rita: “What?”

Frank: “She wrote a little gothic number called Frankenstein.”

This is a clever statement by ‘Frank’ and is explaining that he has created a monster in ‘Rita’; he only thinks this because he has begun to loose ‘Rita’. This is a big twist on the plot and brings the audience to an interesting question, what happens now?

All in all it is my opinion that the play ‘Educating Rita’ is a great insight into 1970’s Britain and is extremely enjoyable and excellent play for a stage production. Not just because it is good drama and that ‘Willy Russell’ has created a comedy with serious underlying choices but also due to the low budget of producing it, it only has two characters an done set, simple but genius. The two hander style works exceptionally well and by the end of the play I felt that I knew ‘Frank’ and ‘Rita’ extremely well and the single set creates a cosy “patina” and gives the audience an entertaining and enriched experience, so ‘Educating Rita’ doesn’t make good drama. It makes exceptional drama.

How to Cite this Page

MLA Citation:
About the Author

Please answer the following questions about playwright Willy Russell after reading “The writer on writing” (pages iv to viii in the front of the text.)

1. Where was Willy Russell born?

2. Briefly describe his family background.

3. Briefly describe his experiences at school.

4. When and how did he come to decide that he would like to be a writer?

5. “Most of the kids with whom I visited that place accepted that it was their lot to end up in that place.” (p. vi) What does this mean?

6. Describe Willy’s experiences as a hairdresser.

7. Why did he take up the job cleaning girders? What happened?

8. Can you name any other plays that he has written?
Educating Rita: Society, Education and Self-Reflection

Usa Padgate

Abstract

Educating Rita is a play written by Willy Russell, an English playwright from Liverpool. It was voted ‘Best Comedy of the Year’ when performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1980. By 1983 it had risen to be the fourth most popular play on the British stage. In the same year it was transformed into a film and won the BAFTA Best Film Award as well as Academy Award nominations, proving its appeal and popularity on both sides of the Atlantic.

This paper aims at introducing Willy Russell’s work to fresh audience, especially students who are looking for reasons to acquaint themselves with English literature and teachers whose interests lie in finding materials that will help answer their students why we need such liberal education as literature.

The study gives an overview analysis of the interplay between society and literature exposed in the story of Rita’s education. It also explores the possibilities of adapting the literary allusions in the play into real-life education, with the all-presumptive assertion that ‘if Rita can do it, so can we.’ The exploration looks first into Rita’s working-class background and its effects on her education and then into means by which Rita’s ways of education, liberal education, can benefit students of all social backgrounds.

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Forewords

_Educating Rita_ is a two-character play written by Willy Russell, an English playwright from Liverpool. It was voted 'Best Comedy of the Year' when performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1980. By 1983 it had risen to be the fourth most popular play on the British stage. In the same year it was transformed into a film and won the BAFTA Best Film Award as well as Academy Award nominations, proving its appeal and popularity on both sides of the Atlantic.

Willy Russell records that when making _Educating Rita_, he 'tried very hard to write a love story'. The play, however, exhibits more than just a romantic agenda. In its multi-layers, it takes into account the heavy social issues of gender convention, class system, and education from which array aspects of sophistication, personal growth and relationships.

In all the multitude made possible for in-depth discussions by the richness of Russell's text, this essay chooses to explore the idea of liberal education projected from different, and opposing, views and how liberal education may consequently effect mass education. The exploration is carried out under the all-presumptive assertion that 'If Rita can do it, so can we,' assuming that Rita's social conditions and constraints are also faced by million others around the world disregarding the obvious cultural and geographical differences.

_Educating Rita_: The Story

Rita, or Mrs. Susan White, is a free-spirited 26-year-old hairdresser from Liverpool. She is married with no child and deeply dissatisfied with the kind of life she leads. Being born and bred working-class, she is sickened by the limited choice in life available to

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her class. The only way out, she realises, is to seek education and try to better her
social status through it. She then decides, after a lifetime of taking school for granted, to
enroll in an Open University literature programme with the hope to ‘find meself’ before
indulging her husband by forcing babies into the world.

Her husband, Denny, disapproves of her resolution to acquire options in life. His
‘choices’ are limited to the different beers he can freely choose in a local pub. He burns
her books when he finds out that she is taking the pill. Rita’s determination to pursue
with the study costs her the marriage when Denny eventually leaves her.

Frank, Rita’s tutor at the university is a cynical, self-destructive, burnt-out professor – a
perpetual stupor who seems to be unable to maintain relationships and whose
frustrations in life show in his pronounced drunkenness and inability to write the kind of
poetry he wishes to produce. Nonetheless, he is an experienced, intelligent teacher,
and so unconventional that Rita finds him an equal match for her irrepressible desire to
study and will not be shaken off by his suggestion that she gets another tutor in his
place.

And so the tutorials start and continue. In time, Frank proves himself a much better
teacher than he thought he was. Rita’s unpretentious enthusiasm revitalises her tutor’s
dying passion for what he teaches. However, with Rita’s growing confidence as she
becomes ‘educated’, Frank feels ironically more and more insecure. And when Rita
acquires for herself other ‘teachers’, i.e. her tutors in the summer school and her classy
flatmate Trish, Frank is obviously shaken by her divided devotion. He finds solace in
bottles of whisky and gets himself expelled to teaching in Australia after about of
quarrelsome drunkenness.
As Rita progresses academically, she loses the naturalness and spontaneity she once possessed. Instead she learns and adopts the necessary things that enable her to 'talk about things that matter'—calculated and pretentious things that a cynical yet somewhat realistic person like her tutor disdains. Frank witnesses Rita's transformation in sad abhorrence. In the process of becoming educated, Rita has lost the uniqueness that Frank most admires. In the end, Frank asks Rita to go to Australia with him, thus suggesting a fresh beginning for both of them: 'It'd be good for us to leave a place that's just finishing for one that's just beginning.' Rita, nonetheless, is evasive about starting life anew with Frank. She is now educated. She has choice. And she will choose: 'I might go to France. I might go to my mother's. I might even have a baby. I dunno. I'll make a decision, I'll chose. I dunno.'

Literature and Society

Traditionally, literature is believed to reflect society and its people; a belief that stresses that literature is closely connected to society. Realistically, however, literature has been said to be of very little practical use to the people who make the society. This way of perception probably derives from the fact that the majority of the people who run the wheels of the society have very little contact, if at all, with literature. Those who do are looked at as a passive group of people—the ones who does not do any real 'physical' work. Literature, or simply the act of reading, is, and has been, regarded as a genteel habit of those who are provided for, thus able to spend time reading about life instead of living it. Therefore, it is no surprise that the society at large does not care much about the study of literature. If needs be for an education of some sort, it is done more often than not in professional schools. Liberal studies, the study of art for art sake, do not give a practical and instant reward that professional trainings offer.

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Thematically, ‘Rita’ represents the lower class – the mass – whose culture influences the operations of the society. As a working-class woman, Rita is socially as well as sexually confined. Her social backgrounds limit her choice of work as well as of all other things in life – circles of friends, language, romance, etc. Moreover, her gender subjects her to the domination of her husband, whose social backdrops demand constant display of masculinity, which results in occasional domestic violence. The first time Denny is presented on screen, he is seen ‘demolishing the house’ while Rita tries unsuccessfully to write an essay on Peer Gynt, thus suggesting his objection to her study as well as chauvinistic dominance that is prone to physical violence. This is confirmed when Denny burns Rita’s book and sides with Rita’s father, his male ally, during a father-daughter row. However, Rita is extraordinarily exceptional in that she refuses to submit to the limitations forced upon her by her birth and upbringing. She rebels against the convention of her class and bravely breaks away from it. Instead of having babies and settling down as her culture dictates, Rita decides to get an education, not just to get a better job or more pay, but to live a totally different kind of life.

On the other hand, Frank and his likes – Brian (Frank’s colleague), Julia (Frank’s girlfriend), Trish (Rita’s flatmate) – represent literature. Their academic formality masks their social pretense, as opposed to Rita’s natural vivacity that dominates her representation of the lower class. Frank’s contempt for the academic shows in the many bottles of whisky hidden just behind endless rows of literary masterpieces in his office – a place that so intimidates Rita on her first visit. The play starts with Frank browsing frantically through these classics profaning names of famous writers with his swearing words: “Where the hell ...? Eliot? No. ‘E’, ‘E’, ‘e’, ‘e’ ... Dickens.” He then takes a book out of a shelf to reveal a half-empty bottle of whisky on which he promptly indulges himself. Julia and Brian, Frank’s girlfriend and best friend, cuckold him using their respected status as university staff to further their romantic advances. Trish,

3 Educating Rita, p.1.
Rita's classy flatmate, horrifies Rita by her suicide attempt. Up until then, Rita has looked up to Trish as her model of a self-contained, intellectual woman. When her flatmate tries to 'top herself', Rita's illusion of the intellectual is shattered, and she comes to understand Frank's cynical contempt for what, up to the moment, she has held most valuable - literature.

*Educating Rita*, as the title suggests, chiefly concerns the education of the female lead. As the story develops, Rita is given guidance on literary theories and conventional critical thinking. She learns to question and approach literature objectively and critically. The acquired ability to question provides a broader view of her options in life and gives her what she has set out to look for - choices in life. The story, however, goes beyond just Rita's education. The meeting of Rita and Frank brings out not only mutual friendship, but also mutual intellectual support. Frank learns as much from Rita as she learns from him. While Rita gains self-confidence from the knowledge that her options are no longer limited by the choice of detergents in a supermarket, Frank regains self-esteem via Rita's respect for him. He finally learns to respect and believe in himself - that he can be a good teacher, and that he deserves much higher self-esteem. Furthermore, he learns to respect his students as he comes to realise that one's ability to learn is limitless, and that not all students can be as appalling as he may have thought.

In all, *Educating Rita* stresses the importance of critical thinking and self-respect as a gate to self-esteem and social acceptance. It appeals to both the Ritas and the Franks - those who desire to assimilate into the world of the intellectual as well as those who is weary of it and longs to get out.

*Educating the Mass: If Rita can do it, so can we!*

True as it is, it does sound self-consciously snobbish to say that literary allusion is a ticket to social acceptance. Willy Russell demonstrates this belief in Frank's cynical
dismissal of his own poetry: "this clever, pyrotechnical pile of self-conscious allusion is worthless, talentless, shit and could be recognised as such by anyone with a shred of common sense." It is, nevertheless, facile to devalue literary allusions to mere worthless pretense. Surely the ability to interrelate the meanings and significance of different texts and give a new outlook to the referred objects without altering their essence shows the ability to think critically – to relate, adapt and adjust ideas – that is essential to any form of education. Take Educating Rita for instance, the play would not yield the same textual and thematic appeals without the conscious allusions to George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion and Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein.

Unknowingly embracing the technique of allusion, Rita unofficially changes her Christian name Susan to Rita after Rita May Brown, an American writer she admires. It is obvious that in renaming herself, Rita wishes to feel the qualities of the writer transferred to her (although the fact that Rita May Brown writes sexually explicit novels may help intensify the allusion in a way Rita may not have intended). Frank, in spite of his view against self-conscious allusion, is himself a master of this literary technique. He calls himself ‘Mary’ alluding his creation of the educated Rita to Mary Shelly’s creation of Frankenstein, thus expressing his regret in having created a monster – Rita. In addition, he pointedly assumes the names of famous female literary figures for Rita as a sarcastic response to her new-found pretense: “What is it now then? Virginia? ... Or Charlotte? Or Jane? Or Emily?” It is doubtful if the profundity of this statement would be reached without the audience’s schematic background of the names Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, and Emily Bronte. The practice of allusion is, therefore, integrated more deeply into real, and realistic, situations than it may seem to be at first glance. The fact that the method considered to be handled exclusively among literary people is indeed engaged in everyday circumstances proves somehow that basic literary skills are socially

4 ibid. p.68.
5 ibid. p.69.
integrated and evident. Therefore, to educate the mass by means of literature is to encourage the learners to develop skills not at all alien to them. Yet, as is the case with all skills, it needs to be mastered by practice, which is conventionally provided in the higher education system.

Liberal Education as a Path to Self-Realisation

As in the practical usefulness of allusion, higher education may not be so exclusively upper-class as traditionally regarded. In spite of Frank’s and Rita’s contrasting views of higher education, its essence as an origin of everyday critical judgment is pronounced, thus making a point that higher education is mandatory not only to the privileged Franks, but also to the underprivileged Ritas. In order to secure social improvement, the mass must learn to think and judge critically: “You’ve got to change from the inside,” as Rita herself puts it. And higher education, if anything, provides basic training in critical thinking.

In *Educating Rita*, the different views of higher education are projected through Rita and other characters. Rita, despite her initial frightful reverence for higher education, sees it as a means accessible to all to unlimited choices in life. Frank, as well as others of his class and lower, sees higher education as a privilege for a limited number of the population. Although disillusioned and disenchanted by the academic, Frank still perceives higher education as an exclusive treat not available to people of Rita’s background. Spending the evening drowning himself in a pub makes him feel less pointless than spending it introducing a disadvantaged student to the world of higher education. He illustrates this in his remark about Rita’s enrollment in an Open University literature programme: “Why a rawn adult wants to come to this place after putting in a hard day’s work is totally beyond me.”

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*Educating Rita* (1983), produced and directed by Lewis Gilbert, screenplay by Willy Russell.
Frank is not at all alone in thinking that the working class is not deserving of the kind of education he could give. Rita's working-class folks including her husband Denny alienate her because of her new-found education. Like Frank, Denny knows that higher education will change his wife in ways that will negatively affect their relationship. The more Rita finds herself through education, the more outcast she becomes at home. Her husband resents her adopting Frank's upper-class vocabulary – teasing her sarcastically when she says 'actually' – as it widens their marital gap. He burns Rita's books when he finds out that she is still taking contraceptive pills and not willing to have children. For Denny, Rita's education prevents them from forming a complete and satisfying family. He refuses Frank's invitation to a party at his place in preference to spending the evening in a pub with Rita's family because he does not feel that the world of the academic is his choice in life.

Although they share their belief in whom higher education is for, Frank and Denny differ in their contentment in life. Unlike Frank, Denny is content with his life. He is not highly educated, and so does not see that education could provide options that matter more than choices of beers in a pub or of detergents in a supermarket. His simple desire in life is to settle down with a wife and kids, and when this is denied by Rita's refusal to have children, Denny leaves her. Frank, on the other hand, is bitterly disillusioned by the pretense of the academic. He himself embodies its falsity and longs to get out, yet is firmly locked within its domain by his education and upper-middle class background. When he tries to break loose and acts less than what is expected of him, he gets into trouble with the university and is consequently transferred to Australia. Both characters, Denny and Frank, display the imbalance of education and self-contentment. Each has too much of the one and too little of the other. This results in their confined views of themselves and of others.
To be free from such confinement, therefore, becomes the goal of higher education. Since liberation derives from a balance between education and self-contentment, it is necessary to enable students to see options available in life through aspects other than social and environmental, and to feel free to choose what is best for them. The kind of education suitable to those who, like Rita, are still looking for balance is none other than a liberal education. By definition, 'liberal education' is “concerned mainly with general knowledge and experience, rather than with technical or professional training”\(^7\). In practice, liberal education, as the name suggests, gives freedom to make decisions based on the knowledge and experience conferred by education.

As a hairdresser, Rita does not need a university degree to progress on her profession. Yet, what she longs to achieve is not choices between being a good or a bad hairdresser, but opportunities to be something else not commonly attained by a hairdresser. Her professional training confines and suffocates her as it dictates the path she is to lead her life. Having neither proper schooling nor self-contentment, Rita finds herself completely 'out of step'. She realises that in order to find the missing balance, she needs to discover herself first, and liberal education comes into serious consideration as it is a kind of education that will expose her to a variety of choices in life, thus giving guidance to someone like herself who is still looking for directions.

Among the available selection of liberal subjects, Rita picks on literature supposedly out of her love for reading – or for “devouring pulp fiction,” as Frank once says. Her choice of study seems utterly unpractical to her family. Indeed, studying literature seems unrealistic to the mass, especially to those with a professional training background. They think of ‘literature’ as an end result of human creativity, not as a source of creation as literature can also be. They see literature as a form of entertainment with no connection to their daily struggle, not as a reflection of all kinds of human experiences in

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which their struggles are represented, occasionally satired, frequently analysed, appreciated and learned. They tend to overlook the fact that the creators of literature are in fact as human as any of them, and their experiences as real. Without the knowledge of these creators' literary achievements, the mass are likely to think of them as part of their unidentifiable crowds; Denny even thinks Anton Chekhov is Rita's secret foreign boyfriend! However, what sets these groups of people – the professionals and the liberals – apart is not their ability to get on in life, but their ability to question what is going on around and about them. While both groups may succeed in meeting their respective demands and requirements, the professionals, by nature of their training, conforms to social expectations and acceptance whereas the liberals defy expectations and try to break free from the norms by questioning what is going on and searching for alternative solutions. By so doing, the liberals may leap across social borders of class, sex, and identity, and secure for themselves options not conventionally available to them.

Accordingly, those who study literature, Rita for instance, see literature as a question for which they must seek an answer, not a formulated instant answer to all human dilemmas. This ability to question, conjured by the study of literature, is pivotal to human learning and developing process since it is the foundation of all successful studies. As Jorn Bramann points out in Educating Rita and Other Philosophical Movies, this way of thinking goes back to that of the time of Socrates who introduced to the West the idea that all basic assumptions need to be questioned, and that such questioning need to start with a humble admission of one’s own ignorance. "I know that I do not know" is central to Socrates wisdom, in contrast to the self-contained professional training in which clear-cut learning steps are respected and assumptions taken for granted.

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8 Bramann, Jorn, Educating Rita and Other Philosophical Movies. (http://www/frostburg.edu/dept/phil/Forum/PhilFilm4.htm)
9 "I know that I do not know" is effectively repeated by Frank in his first scene with Rita when he tells her that: "Everything I know – and you must listen to this – is that I know absolutely nothing." (Educating Rita, p.13)
Beneficial as it surely is, professional training induces people to become singularly conscious of their trained skills, thus casting them out of other learning possibilities that could be attained. This is not a problem with some exclusive, well-paid professions, i.e. medical training and engineering, but with the majority of the mass depending on other professional trainings much less privileged, many a Denny are finding themselves ignorantly imprisoned in their contented social conformity believing that what they have is all there is for them. Ironically, the first thing they need to learn in order to choose what is best for them is to learn to question what they have taken for granted. However, they cannot question what is missing in their lives if they are unaware of its existence, as no questioning is possible without some knowledge of the objects in question. This is where higher education comes in as an introduction to liberal decisions and eventually to self-discovery.

Afterwords

Rita, as a working-class hairdresser, represents the professionally trained mass. Her subsequent decision on a higher education and eventual academic achievement stand for individual opportunities accessible to all through liberal education. Hers is a prime example of how one’s mind could be improved upon and of the infinite possibility of human learning ability. If in the end the individual ‘decides’ against his education as Frank has done, it is done because they have a choice on which to make a decision. This is what it is worth – liberation from their own disbelief in their self-worth and a chance to choose what is best for them.
References


Educating Rita

Willy Russell

William Russell was raised in a working class family and actually worked as a female hairdresser. Many of his plays have a semi-autobiographical and elements of the playwright's personal experience are also evident in 'Educating Rita'. The play explores notions of personal growth and self-awareness through the transformation and process of change that occurs within the two markedly different protagonists. The playwright describes his play as being 'a love story' but the relationship that develops between Rita and Frank is also a deeper and transformational relationship between teaching and learning. This is represented through the juxtaposition of class, background, social expectations and values. In the play's introduction, Russell explains that he aimed to achieve this in a way that 'engaged' an audience and 'was relevant to those who considered themselves uneducated, those whose daily language is not the language of the university or the theatre.'

Fundamental notions about the social role of education are explored within the play as well as the personal motivations and dreams that inspire this particular student. Russell uses this educational context to explore the development of skills, attitudes, values and outlook that takes place in both his characters. Structurally, the play is a fifteen scene, 'two-hander' script with only two characters. Each scene depicts one of Rita's visits. She is a rebellious working-class hairdresser in her mid-twenties who sees education as an escape route from a crushingly preordained lifestyle. Frank, on the other hand is a middle class academic, nearly twice her age, who struggles with alcoholism, artistic mediocrity and a sense that he is a failure. The need for extra income is the only reason that he has considered extra tuition which results in their unlikely educational connection.

Both are flawed individuals from totally different social backgrounds but they are similar in that they shared jaded outlooks about their stultifying lifestyles which seem to offer no opportunities for personal advancement or opportunities. Over time the class barriers that differentiated them are narrowed by Rita's dogged determination to get the education she sees as the only escape route open to her. Both resent what they see as the crushing uniformity of their social existence but where Rita wants something other than marriage, motherhood and a hairdresser's salon, Frank has lost his ability to express feelings through his own poetry and sees his educational role as a shallow alternative. A Bildungsroman literary style is used to chart the transformation and role reversal that broadens their initial teach/student relationship. Stylistic conventions typically include a strong reflective and subjective tone. Perceptions of self and social identity are examined and as such the characterisation is psychologically complex and morally ambiguous.

The changes that occur are often motivated by a desire for self-improvement or self-fulfilment and can result after great struggle in the achievement of greater self-knowledge. These features are clearly seen in the altered outlooks both Rita and Frank exhibit by the end of their time together. As Rita's desire for self-improvement opens up new literary worlds for her, her confidence and self-awareness blossoms. Their relationship becomes more psychologically complex and morally ambiguous for initially, as she grows, she seems to be leaving her tutor further and further behind. Her determination prompts strong audience identification and admiration for what she has achieved. The audience is also encouraged to re-evaluate the social importance of literature, language and education. The play's underlying philosophical assertion is that anyone is capable of positive change if they want it hard enough and despite whatever obstacles may in their path.
Contextual Setting

A member of the middle class and the academic fraternity, Frank has shown some early literary promise but has sunk into a university position that offers no real challenge and even less personal satisfaction. He has lost youthful ambition and is fast sinking into morose middle age. The social and historical context in Britain was marked by tough economic times and the rise of trade unionism that were yearning to break down class divisions and so escape the underclass stigma that had treated the working class as socially inferior. The playwright's cultural focus is on the middle class rather than the aristocracy because the educational gaps between those two classes were sufficient to keep people like Rita largely in their socially disenfranchised place. It was the middle class academic movement that worked towards trying to remedy this situation by promoting movements like the Open University and the Keynesian Welfare State.

This was an attempt to ensure that knowledge, political power and the economy were areas run by the state and not by the aristocracy as they had been in the past. By the 1970's which is the period in which the play is set, class consciousness was therefore beginning to become an ideal that stirred social emotions about still entrenched social divisions. This juxtaposition of two disparate worlds is engagingly explored within the play. Frank's academic world is dominated by superficial appearances and although outwardly impressive, it seems to this cynical lecturer, ironically as suffocating to him as Rita's working class world is to her. He robotically goes through his duties and copes with low self-esteem and a sense of personal failure by remaining in an almost constant semi-alcoholic stupor.

His study is messily strewn papers and books, a visual inference that academia no longer holds and magic for him. It reflects the man he has become and when Rita asks about how one can 'make' a room like this, he gives a very revealing reply, 'I didn't make it. I just moved in. The rest sort of happened.'

He has become largely oblivious to his physical surroundings and does not value it in the same that Rita does. It is a stereotypical academic place of work, with book lined walls, a bay window and two desks. It is physically impressive and Rita is awe-struck, by his alphabetically arranged books which to Frank are just his tools of trade and a convenient place to hide his 'booze'. For him it is a place to retreat to whereas to Rita, it becomes a mecca of opportunity and the chance of a new life and future. Frank's study, Rita's place of work and the 'pub' highlight the social and educational differences between them.

The 'pub' also means something different to Frank and Rita. He can shed his middle class identity there and be rejuvenated after working with uninspiring students who offer no challenge. He has lost direction or purpose in his life and the 'pub' is a place to drown his feelings of inadequacy, telling his partner Julia over the phone, 'I probably shall go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to wash away the memory of some, silly woman's attempt to get into the mind of Henry James... What do you mean I am determined to go to the pub? I don't need determination to get me into a pub.'

Conversely, the same place has only negative connotations for Rita who sees it as another form of entrapment, a daily site for getting drunk and singing along to popular but inane Jukebox tunes. Her outlook is shared by her mother who never escaped and when asked by Rita why she was crying, answers bitterly, 'Because, because we could sing better songs than those'. Rita tells Frank, 'I should have had a baby by now, everyone expects it' but desperate to escape this fate, she takes steps to change her destiny. Metaphorically, the pub represents the depth of understanding they come to share when Frank tells her, 'you've found a different song to sing.'
Characterisation

Rita

Rita undergoes a massive transformation but it is questionable whether her reinvention of herself will prove to be beneficial or detrimental. Her motivations prompted her to undertake the enormous challenge that she has obviously thought about for some time as a way of avoiding the socially entrenched expectations that she would live her life as a clone of her mother and so many other working class women. She wants an education not just for pragmatic reasons but in the pragmatic belief that it will enable her to do and achieve things that would otherwise be denied to her. There is a much deeper desire to grow, to explore untapped personal potential, 'I wanna discover meself.' Audiences can easily connect with this and Russell’s wry humour and brilliant dialogue between his two protagonists prompts empathy with her desire and struggle to give herself other options in life. Rita says culture is a ‘way of living’ but because she wants to be ‘successful’ she sheds her culture like a skin.

Her longing for something more than domestic drudgery underpins the play for she knows that this will be her only real bid for freedom while there is still time. She already feels alienated from her peers, chaffed by family pressures to have children and accept her lot. By challenging all expectations in her current social sphere, including her marriage by studying for an English degree via the Open University Scheme, Rita not only wants to succeed, she must succeed if she is to escape her mother’s fate. The play’s social context gives timeless relevance to the issues raised about self, social identity and inequity. Her feeling of entrapment is clear when she tells Frank that her husband ‘thinks we have choice already, choice between Everton and Liverpool, choosing which washing powder.’ The idea that this will be her future fills her with dread, triggering her ultimatum, ‘I told him I’d only have a baby when I have choice.’ Educational success is the ‘way of achieving the choices’ she craves.

Russell’s audience chart her intellectual and emotional growth, witnessing the way insecurity and ignorance is shed as she gains confidence alongside academic insight and the jargon that goes with it. She can better articulate and assert her feelings and the choices she makes, telling Frank, ‘I didn’t want to come to your house to play the court jester. Some stupid woman who gives us all a laugh because she thinks she can learn, because she thinks that one day she’ll be like the rest of them, talking seriously, confidently-with knowledge, livin’ a civilised life-Well, she can’t be like that really but bring her in because she’s good for a laugh’. Many emotional insecurities are embedded in this revelation, hinting at personal doubts and insecurities she has had to battle with, highlighting the many difficulties associated with transitions into new phases of life.

She demands objective honesty in her tutor’s literary criticism of her work and feels empowered by his acknowledgment of her academic improvement and her ability to ‘talk now y’know, Frank’. She doggedly reaches her goals but realises she has become a different person in the process. Adopting her Susan persona shows recognition of her outsider ‘other’ status, ‘I’m a freak. I can’t talk to the people I live with any more. An’ I can’t talk to the likes of them on Saturday or them out there because I can’t learn the language. I’m a half-caste.’ She had wanted to move from one world to another but now finds that she lives in an in-between world, uncomfortable in both. Self-awareness makes her more conscious of the pretentiousness of others like Tiger and Trish, ‘I thought she was so cool an’ together... she spends half her life eatin’ whole foods an’ health foods to make her live longer, an’ the other half tryin’ to kill herself’. She can recognise what is ‘fucking rubbish and choose between ‘ballet or the opera or the telly’ as well as grasp that language empowers the educated but in the end, ‘See, the educated classes know it’s only words, don’t they?’
Frank

Frank is a disenchanted academic who is nearly twice Rita's age. This generational age difference impacts on the relationship that develops between them, for while it liberates Rita in many ways, there is never any real suggestion of a romantic attachment. Russell wanted more than just another representation of a typical Romeo and Juliet love story. Frank feels lost, adrift in a lifestyle that offers no challenges or personal satisfaction. His social existence is markedly different to the one that Rita experiences but in many ways they are both searching for ways to make their lives more meaningful and less restrictive and regimented. Both feel socially restrained but in completely different ways; Rita through education and Frank through cynicism and alcohol. They are characterised in many ways by antithetical differences. Whereas she is assertive and proactive, he has become complacent and submissive, lacking any real incentive to act. He muses about the possibility of fleeing the world of academia and turns to drink as a melancholic panacea to poetic failure.

He pessimistically regrets his decision to work as a tutor, predicting that after his pupil's visit he 'shall need to wash away the memory of some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James... Why did I take this on?' Audience's quickly gauge his outlook as one marked by mediocrity and cynicism. Rita however, immediately challenges his expectations, and totally ignores his warning that he is an 'appalling teacher' who will be unable to give her what she wants. She exudes a fresh, challenging and uncluttered way of thinking that dragging him out of his intellectual malaise. She acts as the impetus for his own re-evaluation of who he is and what he wants to change most about his life. She also challenges him, making him respond to her educational demands because she seeks real explanation rather than stock responses, demanding that he demystify learning which makes him become a learner again and a much better teacher.

Her confrontational manner refuses to be ignored, reawakening in its urgency for answers, his love of learning, making him observe in the opening scene, 'I think you're the first breath of air that's been in this room for years.' She metaphorically opens a new window in his life in the same way that he does for her. This reciprocal transformative motif underpins the play for she acts as the same psychological catalyst for his rebirth and enlightenment, as he does for her. Both undergo a process of educational and personal maturation. Introspection and personal reflection are forced on both of them as a result of their mentor/student bond, 'I like her enormously it's myself I'm not too fond of.' He becomes increasingly dismayed however, by signs that in her haste to adopt an educated mantle, she is prepared to jettison her individuality for academic conformity. He worries that her subjective perceptions have been squashed by the demands of the educational rank and file. Relishing the moment when he can introduce her to the poet Blake, she unexpectedly dismisses it out of hand because she has already 'done him.'

Irony is used to foreground the danger of merely replacing one form of conformity for another, Frank is disheartened because she has fallen into the trap of echoing the thoughts of others rather than voicing her own, 'Your views I still value. But, Rita, these aren't your views.' Her failure vicariously represents his, and he is upset by what she has become, 'Have you come all this way for so very, very little?' Matching insight with insight, she in retaliation targets his major flaw, 'It's little to you who squanders every opportunity and mocks and takes it for granted.' Both are flawed individuals but it is their relationship that enables them to truly appreciate their areas of weakness. They have shared much and it is appropriate that language is one of the benchmarks used to demonstrate it. She has assaulted his smugness and assumptions as well as his senses. His decision to go to Australia shows that he too has grown more self-assured by the association and while he would have loved Rita to accompany him, it would only have limited his future growth and hers.
Conceptual Focus

Education

The first Act focuses on Rita’s growth and development, while the second highlights Frank’s growing dissatisfaction with his personal life. Both are representative of their respective social milieu and the educational backgrounds that are signified. Their developing friendship becomes representative of social reconciliation, shifts in attitude and relationship reflected in Rita’s growing control over her personal life and improved academic grades. She sees education as an escape route, a means of fleeing societal restrictions as a working class woman. It offers the potential to grow and move into another world and a means of discovering another part of her own identity, ‘You know what I learn... about art an’ literature, it feeds me inside.’ She has left a lifestyle that made her feel stultified to embrace one that nurtures her. She learns how to express her ideas and attitudes with clarity and sophistication but in moments of stress or excitement, her working class heritage becomes evident.

What she has also learned however, is how to control it rather than it letting it control her. She tries to shed her dialect and many of the attitudes and values that had made her what she was, but not all the changes are for the better. Comedic elements such as visual gags and colloquial language, ‘oh sod it’ and ‘off me cake’, provide an amusing, satric subtext while reinforcing the fact that her language was a marker of social dismissal. Her sexually coarse language emphasises her working class background which means that it hoots her to her current social situation. As she becomes more educationally adept however, the banter between teacher and student becomes wittier, giving her a language with which she can literally ‘voice’ ideas that had been locked away. Another indicator of the social gulf between them is Rita’s ignorance of the many literary allusions in the opening act such as famous writers and poets. Her suggestion that they should ‘do it on the radio’ to a question asking her to find a way of resolving, ‘the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen’s Peer Gynt’ makes her lack of academic skills clear to the audience but in an endearing way.

Both undertake a personal odyssey of re-evaluation that broadens their outlook, values and attitudes. They benefit from mutual effort, reflection and co-operation. As an inspirational mentor, Frank tries to ‘discipline’ her mind, giving her the language needed to analyse literature in a less subjective way. He guides her through a foreign and challenging intellectual world, teaching the skills needed by a pupil demanding to be taught ‘Everything’. She feeds off his knowledge and gains the success she needs to continue but Russel uses their relationship to offer social criticism about how traditional schooling erodes a student’s love of learning. Frank shows this when he acknowledges that Rita’s appraisal of ‘Macbeth’ is heartfelt but educationally flawed, ‘that’s what we do, Rita we call it education.’ Her blunt response voices her determination, ‘I don’t want pity Frank. Was it rubbish?’ Frank tries to be diplomatic and not stifle her enthusiasm, ‘No, no. It’s not rubbish. It’s a totally honest, passionate account of your reaction to a play. It’s an unashamedly emotional statement about a certain experience.’

She accepts the challenges of entry into another world that is closed to those without a proper education and demands that Franks teaches her how to use the required metalanguage to ‘perform’ to the standards that will give her social mobility. Improvement brings confidence, poise and self-awareness but at the cost of spontaneity and effervescence. Frank believes he has created a monster one he can no longer control, making an allusion to Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’, ‘Oh I’ve done a fine job on you, haven’t I.’ Rita however values the educational transformation, ‘I’ve got what you have an’ you don’t like it because you’d rather see me as the peasant I once was.’ In truth, education has moulded both of them, influencing the way they see themselves and the world. She had adopted what she thought was a more sophisticated way of speaking without realising how unnatural and false it sounded.
Education has also brought pressure on her marriage because it has widened the gulf between them, 'He wants to take life away from me.' What she does now lies in her hands, 'I dunno... I might go to go mothers. I might even go to France. I might even have a baby. I'll make a decision. I'll choose.' Choice is a sign of the independence she has craved and education has been a means of achieving it. She had been literally unschooled but with a 'native wit'. She becomes a stronger, more resilient individual and make the move into the world she sought but Russell challenges his audience to ponder whether it will be as fundamentally 'honest' as the one she leaves behind. Frank has taught her the necessary the magical code, 'There is a way of answering examination questions that is expected. It's a sort of accepted ritual, it's a game, with rules. And you must observe those rules.'

When he quizzes her in the second half of the play about how she responded in the exam to the very same question he had set earlier, she jokingly replies that she could have given the same answer 'An' you'd have been proud of me if I'd done that an' rushed back to tell you wouldn't y'? But I chose not to. I had a choice. I did the exam.' She goes on to say, 'Because of what you'd given me I had a choice. I wanted to come back and tell y' that. That y'a good teacher.' Education has been Rita's passport out of mediocrity but in shedding her gritty working class identity, Frank worries that she has assumed in its place, the type of shallow pretentiousness that he despises. Transitions can offer many benefits but the gains they offer can also come at great personal cost.

Personal growth

Rita explodes onto the stage in the opening scene, showing a dynamic personality and a clear idea of what she wants and why. She admits she had not tried at school but like her peers, was concerned only with clothes, music and 'looking for a fella.' Her workplace customers have clarified that she must take her future into her own hands, 'These women, you see, they come to the hairdressers 'cos they wanna be changed. But if you want to change, y' have to do it from the inside, don't y'? Know like I'm doin'?... See, I wanna discover myself first.' She yearns for escape but has the intelligence to know she must change 'from the inside.' Added pressure comes from her husband not understanding her passion for change, or understanding the changes when she begins slipping away from him. She had told Frank, 'I wanna know' but her husband is confused about the changes in his wife, 'I see him looking at me sometimes and I know what he's thinking, he's wondering where the girl he married has gone to.'

Nearly every facet of her life is altered, including her name, attitudes, clothing, hair colour and voice. Act 1, Scene 4, evidences this change, 'I've begun to find me—and it's great y' know, it is Frank.' She has got rid of the old Rita 'an' I've taken her place.' Frank questions her transformation as pretentious but she is excited although in a later scene, echoes of an underlying lack of confidence can still be heard, 'An' all the time I'm trying to think of things I can say, what I can talk about.' Other influences become more obvious, 'As Trish says there is not a lot of point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice.' Rita quits the salon and begins working in a bistro in the belief it will offer her even more opportunities. In Act 2, Scene 4 she says, 'I can look after myself... I wanna read and understand without havin' to come running to you every five minutes.'

She no longer needs Frank as much as she once did but she has also shed some of the very personality traits that had made her so refreshingly unique. When she tells him his poetry is 'brilliant, witty, profound...' he replies sarcastically that she must have finished her education now, 'found a new song to sing have you, no you've found a different song to sing.' The growing gulf between them puts them at a cross-road, 'It struck me that there was a time when you told me everything' but she points out, 'You can't bear that I'm educated now. Don't you like that the little girl has grown up.' Education has brought mixed blessings.
Love and Transformation

The relationship between Rita and Frank teaches them both a great deal about themselves. He is fascinated by her and warns her of the dangers in her changing the way she writes in order to adhere to a required code of analysis: ‘You're going to have to suppress, perhaps even abandon your uniqueness. I'm going to have to change you.’ He does not want to do this because it is her very uniqueness that he is attracted by. In Rita’s eyes however, this would hold her back, ‘But don't you realise, I want to change!’ As she improves, she sees him more as an aging don and gravitates instead towards the company of younger people such as Tiger and Trish, ‘I find a lot of people I mix with fascinating they’re young, and they’re passionate about things that matter. They're not trapped—they're too young for that. And I like to be with them.’

The age-gap is compounded by his drinking which increases the distance between them. She challenges him about his drinking problem: ‘It'll kill ye, Frank’ but Frank objects to her attempts at reforming him, ‘Rita—if I repent and reform, what I do when your influence is no longer here?’ She is also still married and jokingly reveals Denny’s jealousy of her relationship with Frank, ‘Oh go way. You’re me teacher. I’ve told him... I've tried to explain to him how you give me room to breathe. Ye just, like feed me without expectin’ anythin’ in return’. Dramatic irony means that, unlike the audience, she remains unaware of how much she comes to mean to him. Frank tries to limit his drinking, looking forward to their lessons together, anticipating their future discussion of Blake’s poetry, only to find that she has already ‘done’ him at Summer school. He had told her she had to go but the increased confidence she has when she returns makes him realise she will soon ‘walk away and disappear’.

He tries to explain his fondness for his work, to share his pleasure, ‘they overcomplicated him, Rita, but you will understand—you'll love the man’. The transition has already meant that her previously unspoiled outlook has been tarnished by being reduced to something that is ‘quite acceptable in academic terms but lacking her innovative insight that he had hoped to share: ‘there’s nothing of you in there’. She can’t understand that part of his disappointment is that the Rita he loves is slipping away, ‘But you told me not to have a view. You told me to be objective, to consult recognised authorities. Well that’s what I have done.’ His disappointment is not in response to her literary ability but to her no longer being reliant on his judgement and assistance. His admission, ‘I care for you’ is only thinly disguised by the afterthought, ‘I want you to care for yourself.’

His awareness that he is losing her is shown when he asks her to analyse his own slim volume of poetry, demanding that he wants, ‘No sentimentality, no subjectivity. Just pure criticism. A critical assessment of a lesser-known English poet. Me’. He considers what she writes as a ‘heap of shit’ because it is stylised and not true to ‘real life’. He worries she has lost sight of the ‘things that matter’ and begins drinking more and even falling over during a lecture. She becomes more remote; ‘Tch (She goes right up to Frank) I-I care for you, Frank... But you’ve got to-to leave me alone a bit’ going on to say she does not need him to ‘hold her hand as much’. He has been a wonderful mentor but he can never become her lover. Both have failed relationships but differences in age and social background show there is never any chance of a romantic attachment. She has learned the ‘rules’ that enable her to say, ‘I’ve got what you got Frank’ and that now ‘I can do without you.’ Her rejection of his offer to follow him to Australia is realistic rather than callous for there can be no fairytale ending with her life opening up and his narrowing. He has wasted the privileges bestowed on him and she is determined not to waste the opportunities that his teaching has offered her.
Dramatic Techniques

‘Educating Rita’ has only two main characters, a Two Act structure as well as two main settings. This binary structure and dramatic form throws focus on the characterisation and conceptual ideas about growth, transition and education. Language is the key dramatic device that is used to emphasise the transformation that takes place in both protagonists. Rita’s entrance in the opening scene immediately defines many of her personality traits for the audience, the faulty door acting as a physical barrier. It becomes a recurring comic motif that stresses their changing relationship. Initially, she almost falls into Frank’s study after finally getting the door open; her language serving as a dramatic device to contrast their social backgrounds.

Whereas he speaks in a cultured and sophisticated manner, her language is common and full of expletives, ‘I’m comin’ in, aren’t I? It’s that stupid bleedin’ door. You wanna get it fixed!’ Loud, assertive and apparently unimpressed by meeting her university tutor, she launches into telling him what he should do. Her dynamic personality unsettles Frank as she seems to take charge; wandering around, inspecting and questioning everything. Her egalitarian, almost disrespectful manner is an effective dramatic role-reversal, casting the lowly hairdresser as the more confident of the two. He appears insecure and disoriented while she voices her attitude, her blunt questions met with embarrassed reluctance.

Her return from ‘Summer School’ in the opening scene of the second Act stresses the social and educational alteration she has undergone under Frank’s tutelage and how dramatically she has changed. Less feisty, assertive and bossy, she is now more composed and confident, shown by moving her chair so that she sits next to rather than opposite him as she had previously done. Her language has also drastically changed, causing him to quizzically ask ‘what’s wrong with your voice?’ Her reply shows the energy she has invested in reinventing herself, ‘Nothing is wrong with it, Frank. I have merely decided to talk properly. As Trish says, there is no point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice.’ The audience shares Frank’s concerns about the cost of this transformation as she talks of the fears, uncertainties and discomfort she felt when she first went there.

Heightened self-esteem and pride in her ability to voice her ideas implies that she has outgrown him, ‘I was askin’ questions all week, y’ couldn’t keep me down.’ She has also stopped smoking and swearing, shedding other trappings of the working class background she wants to leave behind her. Pride in what she has achieved energises her recount, ‘This tutor came up to me... an’ he said, “Are you fond of Ferlinghetti?” It was right on the tip of my tongue, to say, “Only when it’s served with parmesan cheese”, but, Frank, I didn’t!’ She enthusiastically tells Frank of other experiences she had had that simultaneously inform him and the audience, about how extensively she has changed. She has a new self-awareness, ‘after he’d finished his lecture this professor asked if anyone had a question, an’, Frank, I stood up! (She stands) Honest to God, I stood up, an’ everyone’s lookin’ at me. I don’t know what possessed me, I was gonna sit down again, but two thousand people had seen me stand up, so I did it, I asked him the question.’

Language is a mark of character, status and attitude, clearly showing how she has continued to grow and develop a new identity, ‘I’ve got choice now’. While Frank feels rejected and abandoned, she shows excitement at the possibilities now opening up before her. He is also concerned that he is losing touch with her. He has shared his literary jargon with her and taught her how to apply it while she has shown him how to express himself more openly. Her speech had previously been marked by the constant use of the term ‘dead’. She used it as a way of emphasising or intensifying what she was trying to say. She was, ‘dead surprised’, ‘dead serious’ or ‘dead narked’ while things or situations were described as ‘dead good’, ‘dead affected’ or ‘dead loud’.
As a linguistic sign of the learning they have shared, Frank in the last scene adopts this previous manner of speaking, declaring, 'dead honest'. This shared language becomes a dramatic motif for the almost fairytale metamorphosis they have both undergone. Rita is no longer restrained by family and social pressures. The play has shown a dramatic metamorphosis of almost fairy-tale proportions. Rita feels she has shed her ugly duckling trappings and achieved the status of a swan, able to fly unfettered by family and social pressures or restraints that previously kept her pinned to the ground. The closing scene is clouded in ambiguity because the final outcome is not certain. Rita's education has been completed and Frank has been forced to acknowledge this. Graduation is normally marked by celebration and gift giving. Both Frank and Rita exchange gifts which are symbolically significant.

Symbols also show the understanding that has been forged between them. The dress he offers as fitting 'an educated woman friend' is a physical sign that she is now qualified to move in his educated circles as 'one of them'. In exchange, she offers a haircut to ensure he is not perceived as a 'geriatric hippie'. Their gifts acknowledge what they have learnt from each other. The dress he offers is worth far more symbolically than her paper diploma, just as her haircut shows that the former bold and flamboyant Rita still exists. She forces him into his chair for one last time and he willingly submits. His outer appearance will also change just as hers has, and that, when armed with a pair of scissors, she is able to 'take ten years off' him as she had promised to do when she first came into his study. The final scene is a kind of reconciliation, but the outcome is left unresolved. Rita is now her own woman – Frank is off to Australia. She can now make her own decisions and will do so. Her education is complete in that sense. Frank has also learned something and been given the chance for a new start, but it remains unclear what will happen to either of them.
Educating Rita

What is being said?
1. What is achieved by the dramatic juxtaposition of Frank and Rita the opening scene?
2. In what ways could this working class woman be ‘like a breath of fresh air’ to this middle-aged academic?
3. What central ideas are developed throughout both acts of the play? How is the audience prompted to interpret the final scene?
4. In what ways is the audience’s interest engaged and maintained as they both undergo transformation and enter new phases of their lives?
5. Evaluate how Rita and Frank are both educated in different ways by their relationship.
6. In what ways does the play explore notions of growth, transition, maturation?
7. Evaluate what sacrifices Rita has made to move into an educated world and through appropriate textual reference, consider whether the benefits are worth the costs? Close textual reference is required to support your idea.

How is it being said?
1. The two-hander play form throws focus on both protagonists. How are their respective character personalities and attitudes revealed by what they do and their body language?
2. How are dialogue, humour and literary allusions used to delineate and develop the two protagonists?
3. Choose a scene where there is a pivotal moment of change and detail the nature of the change and how it is dramatically represented.
4. Discuss the irony of Frank having everything that Rita wants and yet ironically, feels unhappy because he sees little meaning in his life. What is the playwright suggesting by this situation?
5. Comedy and character juxtaposition help highlight the changing attitudes of Rita and Frank undergo as they prepare to explore new worlds of experience. Choose a key scene where such techniques are effectively used.
6. What is significant about the reciprocal gifts given in the final scene?
Analysing Dramatic Texts

When one deals with dramatic texts one has to bear in mind that drama differs considerably from poetry or narrative in that it is usually written for the purpose of being performed on stage. Although plays exist which were mainly written for a reading audience, dramatic texts are generally meant to be transformed into another mode of presentation or medium: the theatre. For this reason, dramatic texts even look different compared to poetic or narrative texts. One distinguishes between the primary text, i.e., the main body of the play spoken by the characters, and secondary texts, i.e., all the texts ‘surrounding’ or accompanying the main text: title, dramatis personae, scene descriptions, stage directions for acting and speaking, etc. Depending on whether one reads a play or watches it on stage, one has different kinds of access to dramatic texts. As a reader, one receives first-hand written information (if it is mentioned in the secondary text) on what the characters look like, how they act and react in certain situations, how they speak, what sort of setting forms the background to a scene, etc. However, one also has to make a cognitive effort to imagine all these features and interpret them for oneself. Stage performances, on the other hand, are more or less ready-made instantiations of all these details. In other words: at the theatre one is presented with a version of the play which has already been interpreted by the director, actors, costume designers, make-up artists and all the other members of theatre staff, who bring the play to life. The difference, then, lies in divergent forms of perception. While we can actually see and hear actors play certain characters on stage, we first decipher a text about them when reading a play script and then at best ‘see’ them in our mind’s eye and ‘hear’ their imaginary voices. Put another way, stage performances offer a multi-sensory access to plays and they can make use of multimedia elements such as music, sound effects, lighting, stage props, etc., while reading is limited to the visual perception and thus draws upon one primary medium: the play as text. This needs to be kept in mind in discussions of dramatic texts, and the following introduction to the analysis of drama is largely based on the idea that plays are first and foremost written for the stage. The main features one can look at when analysing drama are the following:

- space
- time
- characters
- types of utterance in drama

Space

Space is an important element in drama since the stage itself also represents a space where action is presented. One must of course not forget that types of stage have changed in the history of the theatre and that this has also influenced the way plays were performed. The analysis of places and settings in plays can help one get a better feel for characters and their behaviour but also for the overall atmosphere. Plays can differ significantly with regard to how space is presented and how much information about space is offered. The stage set quite literally ‘sets the scene’ for a play in that it already conveys a certain tone, e.g., one of desolation and poverty or mystery and secrecy. The fact that the description of the stage sets in the secondary text is sometimes very detailed and
sometimes hardly worth mentioning is another crucial starting point for further analysis since that can tell us something about more general functions of settings.

A more detailed stage set also aims at creating an illusion of realism, i.e., the scene presented on stage is meant to be as true to-life as possible and the audience is expected to succumb to that illusion. At the same time, a detailed set draws attention to problems of an individual’s milieu, for example, or background in general. This was particularly important in naturalist writing, which was premised on the idea that a person’s character and behaviour are largely determined by his or her social context.

Setting and Characterisation

The setting can be used as a means of indirect characterisation.

Symbolic Space

Another important factor to consider in this context is the interrelatedness of setting and plot. Obviously, the plot of a play is never presented in a vacuum but always against the background of specific scenery and often the setting corresponds with what is going on in the story world. One can say that rather than only functioning as a background or creating a certain atmosphere, these spaces become symbolic spaces as they point towards other levels of meaning in the text. The setting can thus support the expression of the world view current at a certain time or general philosophical, ethical or moral questions.

Time

Time in drama can be considered from a variety of angles. One can, for example, look at time as part of the play: How are references to time made in the characters’ speech, the setting, stage directions, etc.? What is the overall time span of the story? On the other hand, time is also a crucial factor in the performance of a play: How long does the performance actually take? Needless to say that the audiences’ perception of time can also vary. Another question one can ask in this context is: Which general concepts of time are expressed in and by a play?

Story Time and Discourse Time

Duration

Another important distinction one needs to be made when analysing time in drama, namely between fictive story time or played time and real playing time (see also story time and discourse time for narrative ch. 2.8.2.). While the played time or the time of the story in Osborne’s Look Back in Anger encompasses several months, the play’s actual playing time (time it takes to stage the play) is approximately two hours. The playing time of a piece of drama of course always depends on the speed at which actors perform individual scenes and can thus vary significantly from one performance to another. The fact that story time elapses from one scene to the next and from act to act is indicated by the fall of the curtain in Osborne’s play. Thus, quick curtains are used between scenes, while longer curtain pauses occur between acts. Significantly, the length of curtain time is correlated with the length of time that has been left out in the story: A quick curtain suggests a short
time span while normal breaks cover longer time spans of the played time. A gaps in the played time of a piece of drama is called ellipsis, i.e., one leaves out bits of the story and thus speeds up the plot. Considering that scenes usually present actions directly, one can assume that played time and playing time usually coincide in drama. In other words: if characters are presented talking to one another for, say, twenty minutes, then it will normally take about twenty minutes for actors to perform this ‘conversation’. Discrepancies between the duration of played time and playing time mostly concur with scenic breaks because it is difficult to present them convincingly in the middle of an interaction.

**Techniques of Characterisation**

Characters in drama are characterised using various techniques of characterisation. Generally speaking, one can distinguish between characterisations made by the author in the play’s secondary text (authorial) or by characters in the play (figural), and whether these characterisations are made directly (explicitly) or indirectly (implicitly). Another distinction can be made between self-characterisation and characterisation through others (see also characterisation techniques in narrative prose ch. 2.4.1.). The way these different forms of characterisation can be accomplished in plays can be schematised as follows: authorial figural explicit descriptions of characters in author commentary or stage directions; telling names characters’ descriptions of and comments on other characters; also self-characterisation implicit correspondences and contrasts; indirectly characterising names physical appearance, gesture and facial expressions (body language); masks and costumes; stage props, setting; behaviour; voice; language (style, register, dialect, etc.); topics one discusses Of course, the characterisation of figures usually works on several levels and combines a number of these techniques.

Dramatic language is another important means of indirect characterisation in plays. Characters are presented to the audience through what they say and how they say it, their verbal interactions with others and the discrepancies between their talk and their actions. In an actual performance, an actor’s voice and tone thus also play a major role for how the audience perceives the played character. This can also be seen in plays where dialect or specific sociolects are used. Dialect indicates what region or geographical area one comes from, while sociolect refers to linguistic features which give away one’s social status and membership in a social group.

Characters represent one of the most important analytical categories in drama since they carry the plot. In other words: there cannot be a play without characters. Characters’ interactions trigger and move the plot, and their various relationships to one another form the basis for conflicts and dynamic processes. A lot of the terms used for techniques of characterisation in narrative are also applicable in drama but one needs to be aware of fundamental differences related to the different medium. When we read a novel, for example, the narrator often describes characters which we then have to imagine and bring to life in our mind’s eye. While this exists in drama to the extent that we often find stage directions or introductory comments in the secondary text, characters in actual performances are always already interpretations of stage directors and actors who bring characters to life for us. Our view of characters in staged plays is thus inevitably influenced by the way an actor looks, how he speaks, how he acts out his role, etc. Other influential factors can be costumes and makeup, the overall setting in which a character is presented, etc.
Types of Comedy

Sometimes, scholars distinguish between high comedy, which appeals to the intellect (comedy of ideas) and has a serious purpose.

Types of Utterance in Drama

Dramatic language is modelled on real-life conversations among people, and yet, when one watches a play, one also has to consider the differences between real talk and drama talk. Dramatic language is ultimately always constructed or ‘made up’ and it often serves several purposes. On the level of the story-world of a play, language can of course assume all the pragmatic functions that can be found in real-life conversations, too: e.g., to ensure mutual understanding and to convey information, to persuade or influence someone, to relate one’s experiences or signal emotions, etc. However, dramatic language is often rhetorical and poetic, i.e., it uses language in ways which differ from standard usage in order to draw attention to its artistic nature. When analysing dramatic texts, one ought to have a closer look at the various forms of utterance available for drama.

In drama, in contrast to narrative, characters typically talk to one another and the entire plot is carried by and conveyed through their verbal interactions. Language in drama can generally be presented either as monologue or dialogue.

Turn Allocation, Stichomythia, Repartee

In comparison to monologues and asides, dialogue is by far the most frequently used type of speech in drama. In analysing dialogue, one can look at turn-taking and the allocation of turns to different speakers, e.g., how many lines is each character’s turn? Do some characters have longer turns than others and, if so, why? One can also analyse how often a character gets the chance to speak through the entire play and whether he or she is interrupted by others or not. A special type of turn allocation occurs when speaker’s alternating turns are of one line each. This is called stichomythia and is often, albeit not exclusively, used in contexts where characters compete or disagree with one another. In the following excerpt from Richard III, Richard tries to persuade Elizabeth to woo her daughter on his behalf: KING RICHARD Infer fair England’s peace by this alliance. ELIZABETH Which she shall purchase with still-lasting war. KING RICHARD Tell her the King, that may command, entreats. ELIZABETH That, at her hands, which the King’s King forbids. KING RICHARD Say she shall be a high and mighty queen. ELIZABETH To vail the title, as her mother doth. KING RICHARD Say I will love her everlastingly. ELIZABETH But how long shall that title ‘ever’ last? KING RICHARD Sweetly in force, until her fair life’s end. ELIZABETH But how long fairly shall her sweet life last? KING RICHARD As long as heaven and nature lengthens it. ELIZABETH As long as hell and Richard likes of it. KING RICHARD Say I, her sovereign, am her subject low. ELIZABETH But she, your subject, loathes such sovereignty. KING RICHARD Be eloquent in my behalf to her. Basics of English Studies, Version 03/04, Drama 125 ELIZABETH An honest tale speeds best being plainly told. KING RICHARD Then plainly to her tell my loving tale. ELIZABETH Plain and not honest is too harsh a style. KING RICHARD Your reasons are too shallow and too quick. [...] (Richard III, IV, 4: 343-361) This dialogue is marked by repartees, i.e., quick responses given in order to top remarks of another speaker or to use them to one’s own advantage. The repartees in this example express Elizabeth’s doubts and counterarguments. The fact that stichomythia is used here underlines the argumentative character of this conversation. In a sense, Richard and Elizabeth compete rhetorically: Richard in order to
persuade Elizabeth and Elizabeth in order to resist Richard’s persuasive devices. Through the quick turn-taking mechanism, the dialogue also appears livelier and in itself represents fast action. This is reinforced by a number of word plays and rhetorical figures which use the repetition of words and sounds and thus demonstrate how tightly connected the individual turns are and that each turn immediately responds to the previous one: “everlastingly” – “ever last” (349f); figura etymologica: “sweetly” – “sweet” (351f), “fair” – “fairly” (351f), “sovereign” – “sovereignty” (356f); parallelism: “As long as.../ As long as...” (353f); assonance: “low”, “loathes” (356f); chiasmus: “An honest tale speeds best being plainly told. / Then plainly to her tell my loving tale”.

The Significance of Wordplay in Drama

The play with language entertains spectators and at the same time attracts and sustains their attention. A special type of wordplay is the so-called pun, where words are used which are the same or at least similar in sound and spelling (homonyms) but differ in meaning. Another concept to be mentioned in the context of play with language is wit. The idea of wit, which combines humour and intellect, plays a significant role in the so-called comedy of manners.
Sample response: Drama
Prescribed text: Educating Rita, Willy Russell, 1980
Related text: Father and Son, Cat Stevens, 1970 (Song)

There are critical moments in a person’s life when the choice to move away from the known world into an unknown world arises. These moments can be a normal part of growing up or can come later in life with the realisation that something is missing. The move into the world is not, however, an easy one and, paradoxically, in order to achieve this individual freedom, there comes an understanding and acceptance that there will still be limitations to face. Two texts, the play Educating Rita and the song Father and Son, reflect the difficulties of transition into a new world and the struggle to assert individual needs while constantly feeling the pull of the old way of life.

Educating Rita was first performed in 1980; it reflects a previous decade of great change in Western thinking about the boundaries imposed by established institutions. Accepted practises were being challenged and exposed as controlling. Patriotism, martial roles, social divisions, assumptions about race, gender and sexuality all came under attack and led to new ways of being in the world. The song Father and Son first appeared in 1970, ten years before Educating Rita but, like the play, was about dissatisfaction with the expectations of society and a desire to be an individual and break the restrictions of family. Cat Stevens uses a conversation to show the growing generation gap while Willy Russell uses a two-hander play and his own personal experiences to show a woman breaking work, gender, cultural and social boundaries.

The setting for the play is a university college room, the office of Frank, an alcoholic failed poet who has taken on teaching an Open University student for financial reasons. His cynicism is in sharp contrast to the excitement of the garrulous woman who enters his room and his life, aware that she is “slightly out of step” and seeking to “see” and “discover” herself. She is aware of the limitations of life and understands the desire of the women who come to her hairdressing salon “cos they wanna be changed”. Unlike them, however, she realises that “if you want to change y’have to do it from the inside.” The analogy with hairdressing comes from the personal context of the author who, like Rita, struggled against being a hairdresser and studied to become a writer so he captures the longing for change and the vernacular of the working class woman effectively.

The song, Father and Son similarly comes from the same social background with the expectations being to “Find a girl, settle down, /If you want you can marry”. Both texts show people trying to break the expected pattern of life. Rita, like the son, is fighting against those around her and trying to find a new way forward while her husband “thinks we got choice because we can go into a pub that sells eight different kinds of lager”. She is fighting against peer pressure that controlled her at school and then in her adult life with people who “hate it when one of them tries to break away”.

The same pressure is applied in a different way in the song Father and Son starting with the calm reasoned voice of the Father, asking his son to “Calm down”, “think of everything you’ve got” and to look for what is proven in the
and his attitude is compared to the son’s attitude past and certain rather than what might be possible: “For you will still be here tomorrow, but your dreams may not”. The son, however, seeks to carve out his own pathway and feels his relationship with his father has been oppressive and that “from the moment I could talk I was ordered to listen”. The father offers himself as an example of happiness (“look at me, I am old but I’m happy”) in the first stanza which is accompanied by a soft and gentle melody of the chorus, showing contentment. In sharp contrast, the music and the singer’s voice rises in the next stanza capturing the voice of angry and rebellious youth but also unhappiness at “keeping all the things I know inside.” In an interesting play on the third person pronoun, the boy positions his father as part of a separate group asserting a point of view without understanding any other points of view. When he says “If they were right, I'd agree, but if it's them they know not me” he is demonstrating an inner struggle and an awareness that there are different ways of seeing the world that are unknown to many. In the acceptance of the group he sees a loss of individuality but, as his father says, he is taking a risk pursuing a dream.

Tracing the growth of Rita while showing the limits of the new world she enters Entry into a new world needs a lot of fortitude and demands focus. Apart from social and family expectations Rita has to overcome her own low self-esteem and negativity, feeling excluded from “the proper students”. The outcome may be individual growth but it also means losing everything she knows and embarking on the unknown. She has to remake herself completely, leave her husband, her friends, her family and even her locality. We see that immediately in the way she changes her name from Susan to Rita. It is in the end when she realises that her dream is approaching and she feels the strength of her self-identity that she returns to her own name. In the first scene she asks rhetorically with longing “what’s it like to be free?” but by the end we see that the freedom she yearns for is as limited as her past life and requires her to submit to a new set of rules. “An examination”, Frank tells her “is a sort of accepted ritual, it’s a game with rules. And you must observe those rules.” He reminds her that to pass an examination she has to “suppress, perhaps even abandon your uniqueness.”

Some close discussion on techniques to support the argument The change to the new rules is evident in the way she changes the language she uses, the books she reads, the clothes she wears and the company she keeps. Willy Russell captures the vernacular of the working class hairdresser with her expressions of “dead...”, and then shows her transition to an educated person with her discussion of Frank’s poetry as “More resonant than — purely contemporary poetry”. She has learnt to analyse but in so doing she has lost the quick wit and raw natural intelligence that produced original metaphors such as “pebble dashed” to describe healthy bread, and the response “Do it on the radio” to the difficulties of staging Peer Gynt. These comments and her refusal to accept Forster’s attitude when he says “We are not concerned with the poor” are all original and challenging ideas which she has to discard to change.

Final summary tying discussion to the question In both texts we see that individuals may not be satisfied with the world they live in but that the transition to new worlds is a struggle. That transition requires a loss of something — be it family or a part of the self. The dream of freedom is therefore not always about achieving limitless dreams but about accepting a new lot of boundaries.
Educating Rita: Key Quotations

1. “I’m comin in, aren’t I? It’s that stupid bleedin handle on the door. You wanna get it fixed!”

2. “Everything I know—and you must listen to this—is that I know absolutely nothing.”

3. “Do you think it’s erotic...Look at those tits!”

4. “God, what’s it like to be free?”

5. “See if I’d started taking school seriously I would have been different from my mates, and that’s not allowed.”

6. “My mind’s full of junk isn’t it? It needs a good clearing out.”

7. “I’ve been realizin’ for ages that I was, y’ know, slightly out of step. I’m twenty-six. I should have had a baby by now; everyone expects it. I’m sure me husband thinks I’m sterile. He was moanin’ all the time, y’ know, ‘Come off the pill, let’s have a baby.’ I told him I’d come off it, just to shut him up. But I’m still on it. See, I don’t wanna baby yet. I wanna discover myself first. Do you understand that?”

8. “Found a culture, have you, Rita? Found a better song to sing, have you? No—you have found a different song, that’s all. And on your lips it’s shrill and hollow and tuneless. Oh, Rita, Rita...”

9. “I can’t talk to the people I live with anymore. An’ I can’t talk to the likes of them [the academic crowd], because I can’t learn the language. I’m a half-caste.”

10. “Because I think your marvellous. Do you know you’re the first breath of fresh air that’s been in here for years.”

11. “I’d just play another record or buy another dress an’ stop worryin’

12. Frank symbolically puts her essay on the pile with the others because it would not look out of place. “It wouldn’t look out of place with these.”

13. “The great thing about the booze is that it makes one believe that under all the talk, one is actually saying something.”

14. “I don’t know that I want to teach you. What you have is already valuable.”

15. (Offering a haircut and perhaps more at the end of the play) - “I’m gonna take ten years off you.”

16. “He thinks we’ve got choice already: choice between Everton an’ Liverpool, choosin’ which washin’ powder...choosin’ between Stork an’ butter.”

17. “I don’t want to be funny ... I wanna talk seriously with the rest of you ... I don’t want to come to your house just to play the court jester.”
18. "...I asked her why. I said, 'Why are y' cryin', Mother?' She said, 'Because—because we could sing better songs than those.'

19. "Like what you've got to be into is music an' clothes an' lookin' for a feller, y'know the real qualities of life."

20. "I don't know if I want to teach you. What you already have is valuable."

21. "Denny gets dead narked if I work at home. He doesn't like me doing this."

22. "Denny found out I was on the pill again; it was my fault, I left my prescription out. He burnt all me books."

23. "...he's wondering where the girl he married has gone to...she's gone an' I've taken her place."

24. "This tutor came up to me... an' he said, "Are you fond of Ferlinghetti?" It was right on the tip of me tongue, to say, "Only when it's served with parmesan cheese", but, Frank, I didn't!"

25. "I heard one of the sayin' as a novel he preferred Lady Chatterley to Sons and Lovers. I thought , I can keep walkin' and ignore it, or I can put him straight. So I put him straight."

26. "For students they don't half come out with some rubbish you know."

27. "...you who squanders every opportunity and takes it for granted."

28. "I'll tell you what you can't bear, Mr. Self-Pitying Piss Artist. What you can't bear is that I am educated now. What's up, Frank, don't y' like me now that the little girl's grown up, now that y' can no longer bounce me on daddy's knee an' watch me stare back in wide-eyed wonder at everything he has to say? I'm educated, I've got what you have an' y' don't like it because you'd rather see me as the peasant I once was. ... I don't need you anymore. I've got a room full of books. I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read. I can do without you."

29. "Found a culture, have you, Rita? Found a better song to sing, have you? No--you have found a different song, that's all. And on your lips it's shrill and hollow and tuneless. Oh, Rita, Rita..."

30. '...I shall change my name; from now on I shall insist upon being known as Mary, Mary Shelley ...'

31. "I might go to France. I might go to my mother's. I might even have a baby. I dunno. I'll make a decision. I'll choose."

32. "I chose me. Because of what you'd given me I have a choice."
EDUCATING RITA REVISION

Literature A662
MODERN DRAMA
EDUCATING RITA

You will get ONE question on EDUCATING RITA. (45 minutes)

This will be EITHER passage based or an essay question. (40 marks)

POSSIBLE EXAM QUESTIONS:

ACT 1 Scene 5
Denny burns the books

KEY POINTS

Rita reveals that Denny has burned the books in anger
Frank gives Rita the opportunity to end the course
The audience is given a deeper insight into Frank's drink problem and his inability to write poetry any more.

SUMMARY
—Rita's problems at home are intensified when the audience learns that Denny has burned all her books after finding out she was taking contraceptive pills. She says that if is as if she was having an affair and all she was doing was 'findin' meself' (p33).
—She has changed and left Denny 'wonderin' where the girl he married has gone to' (p33)
—The audience senses that the turning point for Rita is when Frank asks her whether she wants to discontinue the course. 'No.No!' (p34) she says without hesitation. Rather than discussing her marriage problems, it is significant that she chooses to talk about Chekhov instead. It is literature she claims that gives her life.
—Frank tells Rita how his employers turn a blind eye to his drinking problems as long as he is discreet. His drinking has become heavier since he stopped writing poetry. He stopped because he 'hot it wrong' (p35) He has no inspiration and his poetry is devoid of real life. His writing is dry and intellectual.

What is the parallel between Frank's criticism of his writing and the way he attempts to educate Rita?
—Just as his poetry is emotionally barren so he is pushing Rita in the same direction. The more educated she becomes the less flamboyant she is in her language and behaviour. Instead of responding to texts naturally and with honesty from the heart, she learns to use her mind to analyse them in a rather cold and characterless fashion. W.R. shows that to succeed in the academic world, it is necessary for Rita to curb her lively ways and be transformed into a 'proper' student.
Act One

Scene one

In this initial scene, Russell’s characterisation of Frank is obvious through the use of the props in the stage setting such as the nude, religious painting and the hidden bottle of whiskey. His personality is further advanced with the addition of the incoming call from his partner and in the exasperated tone in which he responds to her: *Oh for God’s sake, what is it? ...Yes, well – leave it in the oven...Look if you’re trying to induce some sense of guilt in me...*”

Rita is characterised as being forthright and direct and her thirst for knowledge is evident in the dialogue between the professor and herself:

Frank: *why did you enrol in the first place?*
Rita: *Because I wanna know.*
Frank: *what do you want to know?***
Rita: *Everything*

Yet as the scene develops the audience understands that the confidence that Rita exudes masks an inherent nervousness towards those that she perceives to be in a different/higher class.

Rita: *Y ’know, someone who objected to swearin’,*
Frank: *How did you know I wouldn’t object?*
Rita: *I didn’t, I was just testing y’.*
Frank: *Yes, you’ve been doing rather a lot of that, aren’t you?*
Rita: *That’s what I do. Y’ know, when I’m nervous.*

Another quote to support her nervousness/ lack of confidence:

Rita: *I take the piss because, I’m not confident like, but I wanna be, honest.*

Rita associates education with freedom:

“*God, what is it like to be free?*” *(Inquisitive and longing tone)*

She has considered her transitioning in a philosophical way:

“*But if you want to change, y’have to do it from the inside, don’t y’? Now like I’m doin’,”*

*(Rhetorical question)*
Rita makes references to the cultural differences she perceives between the professor and herself:

"You wouldn't watch ITV, though would you? It's all BBC with you, isn't it? (Repetition of the pronoun "you" accentuates the divide)"

"...people like you who eat pebble-dashed bread..."

Her attitude towards the Open University courses is humorously alliterative:

"Degrees for Dishwashers" (p4).

This ironically undermines their quality and usefulness, as she is desperate to identify herself with the academic world.

As the initial interview progresses, Frank is refreshed by Rita's forthrightness and naturalness:

"I think you are marvellous. Do you know, I think you're the first breath of fresh air that's been in this room for years" (Appreciative high modality language)
EDUCATING RITA

ACT 1 SCENE 6

KEY POINTS
— Rita talks excitedly about her visit to the theatre
— During the scene she realises that she has left a customer under a hair dryer
— Rita finds it difficult to express her ideas: ‘wasn’t his wife a cow, eh?’ (p40)
— The audience sees her limitation at first hand when she discusses Macbeth with Frank.
— Rita shows lack of knowledge of literary concepts.
— Rita responds from the heart, she is involved and engaged.
— Frank is critical and detached.
— Rita shows lack of confidence when she is invited to dinner: ‘What shall I wear?’ (p42)
— She is not yet a confident, educated woman...
— There is a constant thread of humour running throughout the play. NOTE how Rita’s language is still source of comedy ...‘Christ—me customer. She only wanted a demi-wave—she will come out looking like a friggin’ muppet’ (p42)

ACT 1 SCENE 7

— Rita explains why she could not bring herself to attend the dinner party.
— Rita describes her Saturday evening in the pub with her family.
— Rita is unable to pluck up courage to cross over the threshold at Frank’s dinner party.
— One of her concerns was she might have brought the wrong type of wine
— HUMOUR – ‘it wouldn’t have mattered if you’d walked in with a bottle of Spanish plonk’ says Frank ...’it was Spanish’ Rita replies...
— She doesn’t want to be ‘myself’ (p45)
— She wants to become a different person and at this stage she is a ‘half-caste’ trapped between two worlds.
— Invitation to the dinner party was a SYMBOLIC act. To attend shows the acceptance in Frank’s social circle and yet Rita knows she is not ready.
— Frank describes Rita as ‘funny, delightful, charming’ yet Rita finds is patronising and wants to ‘talk seriously with the rest of you’ (p44)
— Rita’s metamorphosis (change) begins.
— At the pub when Rita’s mother says ‘we could sing better songs than those (p46), Rita understands the significance of this comment...she is determined to fulfill her life.
— When Denny gets Rita laughing again, it simply covers the pain

ACT 1 SCENE 8
— Rita arrives at Frank’s room with her suitcase
— Despite her problems, Rita wants to carry on as normal
— Frank and Rita discuss her essay on Macbeth.
— Rita is adamant she wants to change.
— She prepares to ‘start again’ with her essay (p48)
— NOTE Rita’s change in character: ‘Susan’ is left behind, end of her marriage is the last tie with her previous life.
EDUCATING RITA

—According to Frank, Rita now has to abandon her ‘uniqueness’
—Highly dramatic end to Act 1 where the audience is prepared for Rita’s metamorphosis.
—Rita tells of her time at summer school
—Frank tries to introduce a new poet to Rita but she has already ‘done’ William Blake.
—A significant amount of time has passed since Act 1
—Frank has started writing poetry

**How does Rita’s entrance at the start of Act 2 differ from her entrance in the opening scene?**
—When Rita enters, she is a different Rita, bursting through the door as usual but this time dressed in new second hand clothes which she displays for Frank in the form of a twirl.
—Rita is ‘...havin’ the time of her life (p51) - she is brimming with confidence, stopped smoking, moved in with her flat mate.

**THE NEW RITA**
—Successful at summer school
—Newly found self confidence (new clothes, the way she speaks and the new friends she has made)
—The confidence gives a boost of self-esteem

**A DIFFERENT FRANK**
—Frank’s own sense of importance begins to diminish
—When Rita’s says that she has already ‘done’ William Blake, it SYMBOLISES the shift in their relationship – Rita is no longer reliant of Frank for her learning
—Frank who had excitedly taken a volume of Blake’s poetry, returns to the shelf with an air of resignation.

—‘must only be used for poetry’ (p52) – Rita’s present of a pen is a reminder of his own creative failings. Rita tries to reform him
—‘Blake freak’ (p55) she recites a poem from memory and states she has ended up reading this although it wasn’t on the syllabus, because of her tutor.

**QUOTES (LANGUAGE)**
—Rita’s change in language is recognisable when she tell Frank about a conversation she had with her tutor about Ferlinghetti. Rita says how the old Rita would have said ‘only with Parmesan cheese’ (p50) but instead her reply is a carefully controlled, serious response: ‘Actually I’m not too familiar with the American poets’ (p50)
—She uses words like analogy, parody and tragedy with ease (a contrast with nor knowing about assonance at the beginning.)

**ACT 2 SCENE 2**
—Rita becomes a ‘proper’ student.
—Rita puts on an affected voice
—Rita tells of plucking up courage to sit on the grass with the ‘proper’ students.
—Frank learns that Rita has been invited to the South of France with some of the other students.
EDUCATING RITA

—Rita arrives late and speaks with an affected voice – she sees as ‘talking properly’ (p57)
—Trish has told her ‘there is not a lot of point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice’ – Trish is her role model
—Rita has also mixed with the ‘proper’ students – she wins her argument with other students about D.H Lawrence.
—She can hold her own academic circles
—Frank is jealous
—Rita’s essay ‘wouldn’t look out of place’ (p59)

ACT 2 SCENE 3
—Frank tells how his drinking has got him into trouble with the university authorities
—Rita and Frank argue.

—Lights come up on Rita
—Frank is drunk and this makes the scene dramatic with his clumsy entrance
—Frank is forced to take a sabbatical
—Frank reveals his feelings of discontent towards his students – ‘a crowd of mealy-mouthed pricks who wouldn’t know a poet if you beat them about the head with on’ (P60)

FRANK’S LANGUAGE
—Frank is lapsing into Rita’s language- using the phrase, ‘completely off my cake’ (p60). He also swears at the start of the scene, uses her original definitions of literary terms like assonance, and is even reading the books she read, reminiscent of Rita at the beginning of the play.
—IRONY – the more Rita grows in confidence, the less she is the girl who was a ‘breath of fresh air’ and its ironic that Denny had wondered where the ‘girl’ he married had gone to.
—The scene ends in a lighter tone where Frank states that he had read Ruby Fruit Jungle and liked it.
* Rita tells Frank that she finds the other students fascinating. To her, they are full of life
* Frank is jealous of Tiger. He feels in secured and like a school kid. Frank is ‘losing’ Rita. ‘perhaps you don’t want to waste your time coming her anymore?’ - audience feels sympathy.
* Alcohol plays a major part in highlighting Frank’s reactions as he drinks throughout the scene.
* Rita ‘doesn’t’ want to stop coming to Frank’s tutorials (p65)
* Frank asks Rita to criticise his poetry as ‘test’ to clarify whether Rita can still respond openly/honestly
* To Frank – Rita has become cold and subjective like the rest of his students that he despises.

ACT 2 SCENE 5

• Rita is full of praise for Frank’s poetry.
• Frank dismisses Rita and her opinions as worthless
• The relationship is breaking down
• Rita describes his poems as ‘brilliant’, ‘witty’ ‘profound’, ‘full of style’ (p 67)
• But, Frank’s view is ‘this clever, pyrotechnical pile of self-conscious allusion is worthless, talentless shit and should be recognised as such by anyone with a shred of common sense’ (p68)
• NOTE: Rita’s change - this is what the old Rita would have said.
• Frank believes like Mary Shelly of ‘Frankensteine’ he has created his ‘own monster’
• Rita – ‘breath of fresh air’ has gone forever. He describes his poems as ‘pretentious, characterless and without style’ he suggests that the new Rita who admires his poem also have those qualities.
• Rita leaves – she is now educated with a ‘room full of books’ (p68); she now knows ‘what clothes to wear’; ‘what wine to buy’; what plays to see.
• Rita leaves – she says that no on calls her ‘Rita’ anymore and she ‘dropped the name when she realised it was ‘pretentious crap’ (p69) – meaning that she was trying to be someone else but now accepts that she has found her true self
• Time has passed and Frank is calling Rita/Susan to remind her of the examination.
• Frank passes on details of examination to Trish over the phone.
• Frank is not used to calling her ‘Susan’ – ‘Erm, yes I’m a friend of Rita’s...Rita...I’m sorry Susan’ (p69) – Frank is still unable to accept the change of name which represents the change in her character

ACT 2 SCENE 7
• Frank is leaving for Australia
• A new, confident ‘Rita’ emerges
• Frank gives Rita the present of the dress

FINAL SCENE
• Opens with Rita smoking again and wearing a large winter coat to illustrate that time has moved on.
• Lighting a cigarette marks a partial return to Rita’s old ways
• Rita has matured into a confident and articulate woman/she is in ease with herself.
• Language: although less rough is more like her speech at the start of the play. She can be herself
• Willy Russell brings back some light hearted atmosphere when we see warmth in Frank’s character ‘Forster’s Lager they call it’ – here, Frank refers to Rita’s early error over spelling of E.M Forster’s name. (gentle teasing)
• Rita and Frank both move on
• End of the play – education has finally provided Rita with the ability to choose her own destiny, ‘I dunno, I might go to France...me mother’s ...might even have a baby....’ (72 – 73) - Rita is liberated.
• At the very end, Frank presents Rita with a dress remembering his words.
• There is distinct sexual overtone when Rita suggests there is one thing she can do for him ...‘I’m gonna take ten years of you.’ (p73) – this comical ending takes away all the earlier tension in the play. Also symbolic of Frank’s new life ...
EDUCATING RITA

NOTE: the short scenes at the end of the play increases a sense of pace. The shorter scenes reflect how time has elapsed in the build up towards Rita’s examination.
Just because ... (Deepening your understanding of the elective)

Complete these statements to help deepen your understanding of the elective. You must be able to make strong links to your prescribed text and related text(s) by composing sample sentences that you may be able to include in an extended response.

1. Transitions help us to enter into new phases of life because...
2. Transitions help us to change our social context because...
3. Transitions can be challenging because ...
4. Transitions can be confronting because ...
5. Transitions can be exciting because ...
6. Transitions can be transformative because ...
7. Transitions can result in growth because ...
8. Transitions can result in change because ...
9. Transitions can have a range of consequences for individuals because ...
10. Transitions can have a range of consequences because ...
11. Transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas because ...
12. Transitions can result in a shift in attitudes and beliefs because ...
13. Transitions can result in a deepened understanding of self because ...
14. Transitions can result in a deepened understanding of others because ...
15. Transitions involve venturing into new worlds because ...

Example
Statement 14
i) Transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas because ... it often involves a change in our attitudes and beliefs.
ii) Transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas because ... Rita now realizes that she has the freedom of choice to choose her own path in life.
Modelled Answers (Introductions)

Module C: Exploring Transitions

To what extent can the experience of transitions both limit and extend individual freedoms? In your response refer to your prescribed text and at least one related text of your own choosing.

**Option 1**

Transitions may be an inevitable aspect of life, but transformations are not. Involuntary transitions such as physiological changes present different challenges to those associated with conscious action to enact a substantive shift in attitudes, beliefs and understanding of self. If an individual actively seeks a transformation, such as the persona of Rita in Willy Russell's 1978 play Educating Rita, then the exploration can result in growth, change and a 'better song to sing', but at the potential cost of partial alienation from your place in the previous world. **(Related Text ... Similarly ...)** Exploring transitions offers considerable benefits, but there are considerable risks associated with such a journey. How the individual responds to the inevitable challenges will largely determine the extent to which the experience extends or limits individual freedoms.

**Option 2**

Transitions from one state to another inevitably involve challenges that tend to deter all but the most determined. A conscious decision to transition or change your social context will often take you out of your comfort zone by alienating you from your former place in the world. This needs to be weighed against the potential benefits of personal growth, new knowledge and ideas, and a deepened understanding of oneself and others. Willy Russell has positioned us through the persona of Rita (and to a lesser extent Frank) in his 1978 play, Educating Rita, to see that the individual's response to the challenges of transition will largely determine the extent to which the experience will extend or limit individual freedom. **(Related Text ... Similarly ...)** Transitioning from one social context to another can simply involve learning 'a different song' with all the associated limits to individual freedoms, but to master a 'better song' is to provide much greater choice, thus extending individual freedoms.
2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society  
Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: Educating Rita

Global Statement Activity

From the Syllabus: ...students consider how transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas, shifts in attitudes and beliefs, and a deepened understanding of the self and others.

Please read each global statement and complete the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Statement</th>
<th>What I believe</th>
<th>How it is presented in Educating Rita</th>
<th>Quote(s) from the play</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education will improve one's life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changing one's name can help to transform one's self image</td>
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<tr>
<td>One should move out of an occupation that one believes to be inferior and/or unsatisfying</td>
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# 2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society
## Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: *Educating Rita*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social class has a significant bearing on one's relationships with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men should be the dominant partners in relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular culture is inferior</td>
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<td>Ignorance is bliss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspiration sets us on the correct path</td>
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</table>
Cultural References Activity

Please match these cultural references with their definitions:

1) Open University
2) Roger McGough
3) Men's Only
4) Rita Mae Brown
5) Farrah Fawcett Majors
6) E.M. Forster
7) Frank Harris
8) Dylan Thomas
9) W.B. Yeats
10) Henry James
11) Elliot Ness
12) Oscar Wilde
13) T.S. Eliot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>Created in 1969 – a university created for adult students who study and work at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornographic magazine for men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>An American novelist 1843-1916 who lived in England and who wrote Portrait of a Lady.</td>
<td>Welsh poet 1914-1953 who wrote a poem about death called &quot;Do not go gentle into that good night.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemporary 1970's poet from Liverpool.</td>
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<tr>
<td>English novelist 1879-1970 who wrote Howard's End, A Room with a View, and Maurice.</td>
<td>A very important Irish poet 1865-1939. The title of Things Fall Apart is taken from his poem 'The Second Coming.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA author of Rubyfruit Jungle, a sexually explicit novel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Famous US actress who starred in the successful 1970s series Charlie's Angels about three women detectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Famous Irish playwright 1854-1900 who wrote The Importance of Being Earnest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903-1957 A famous U.S. prohibition agent who set out to arrest the infamous Chicago gangster Al Capone.</td>
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</table>
## 2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society

**Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: *Educating Rita***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English novelist 1856-1931 whose books were considered sexually daring and pornographic at the time they were written.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1888-1965 one of the most important poets of the 20th century. He wrote the poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society
Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: *Educating Rita*

**Act 1 – Summary and Symbolism Activity**

Copy out and fill in the following chart for each scene:

* In the second column write down what Frank is doing at the beginning of the scene.
* In the third column write down how Rita enters the scene.
* In the last column comment on what this information reveals about Frank and Rita’s moods and feelings. Comment also on symbolism that could be represented by the stage directions or the actions of the characters.

Some examples have been given to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>Rita</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>He is holding an empty mug. He goes and takes books from the shelves. He finds a bottle of whisky and pours himself a large slug. The telephone rings and he speaks to his wife.</td>
<td>She has difficulty getting into the room because of the door which is stuck.</td>
<td>The “empty mug” could reflect his empty life. We see he is unhappy as he needs to drink. The stuck door is a metaphor for the difficulty that Rita has entering his world, the world of education and a different social class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>Frank is standing in the centre of the room. He is looking at his watch. He sees the door handle moving and then he goes to the door and opens it.</td>
<td>Rita is standing there holding a small can of oil.</td>
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<td>Scene 3</td>
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<td>Scene 4</td>
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<td>Scene 5</td>
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<td>Scene 6</td>
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<td>Scene 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 8</td>
<td>Frank is reading her Macbeth essay.</td>
<td>Rita enters slowly, carrying a suitcase.</td>
<td>The suitcase could be a symbol of her moving on; leaving one social class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society
Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: Educating Rita

Act 2 – Summary and Symbolism Activity

Copy out and fill in the following chart for each scene:

- In the second column write down what Frank is doing at the beginning of the scene.
- In the third column write down how Rita enters the scene.
- In the last column comment on what this information reveals about Frank and Rita’s moods and feelings. Comment also on symbolism that could be represented by the stage directions or the actions of the characters.

Some examples have been given to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 2</th>
<th>Frank</th>
<th>Rita</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>He is sitting at his desk typing poetry. He is smoking a cigarette and drinking from a mug.</td>
<td>She bursts into the room in &quot;new, second-hand clothes.&quot; Rita is inspired and full of energy.</td>
<td>Rita’s influence on Frank is seen through his re-connection with writing poetry. Rita has mirrored her internal change with her outside outfit. She looks and feels like a &quot;real&quot; student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>He is sitting at his desk marking essays – maybe an attempt to act like a normal teacher.</td>
<td>She speaks in a new &quot;proper&quot; voice as per the instructions of Trish.</td>
<td>Frank despises Rita’s new voice. Rita sees it for what it really is—a pathetic attempt at becoming a different person. Symbolically, she is trying to physically emulate her new idol – Trish. Frank can be viewed as a jilted, former idol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene 4</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6</td>
<td>He is drunk on the telephone -- desperately trying to reach Rita. He alternates between calling her Rita and Susan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She is absent from this scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rita can be seen as leaving Frank and fulfilling his prophecy — her notable absence indicates this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frank has almost hit rock bottom — he is distraught without Rita's constant presence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society

Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: *Educating Rita*
2 Unit Standard English: Module C: Texts and Society
Elective 2: Exploring Transitions: *Educating Rita*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle section</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End Section</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

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HSC Prescriptions 2015-20 Project
### Rita’s transition throughout the play

**Please use the following table to document Rita’s transition throughout the play.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act / scene</th>
<th>Rita’s world</th>
<th>QUOTES</th>
<th>Language Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act 1: Beginning</td>
<td>Discuss social class, education, marital situation, age, job, expectations</td>
<td>Find quotes that illustrate the world she inhabits.</td>
<td>How is this world represented through language? Give examples (consider especially register: slang, vulgarisms, informal, formal language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>placed on her, ambition, friends, family, attitude towards Frank,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attitude towards her class</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Frank's Transition throughout the play

Please use the following table to document Frank's transition throughout the play.

| Act / scene | Frank's World  
Discuss social class, education, marital situation, age, job, expectations placed on him, ambition, friends, family, attitude towards Rita, attitude towards his class / background. | QUOTES  
Find quotes that illustrate the world he inhabits. | Language Techniques  
How is this world represented through language? Give examples (consider especially register: slang, vulgarisms, informal, formal language) | Dramatic Techniques  
Consider stage directions, props, symbols, costume, line delivery etc. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act 1: Beginning of play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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