Module C – Exploring Transitions

*Educating Rita* by Willy Russell

Act One

Act 1 Scene 1:

Act 1 Scene 2:

Act 1 Scene 3:

Act 1 Scene 4:

Act 1 Scene 5:

Act 1 Scene 6:

Act 1 Scene 7:

Act 1 Scene 8:
Act Two

Act 2 Scene 1:

Act 2 Scene 2:

Act 2 Scene 3:

Act 2 Scene 4:

Act 2 Scene 5:

Act 2 Scene 6:

Act 2 Scene 7:
Educating Rita – Exploring Transitions

Characterisation

There are only two characters in the play, but we also hear about other people.

Rita

What we know about Rita:

- she smokes
- her real name is Susan
- she is a hairdresser
- she is twenty six
- she is married and her husband, Denny, wants them to have a baby - she pretends that she has come off the pill, but he finds out
- Denny doesn't like her signing up for the Open University
- she chooses the Open University over her husband
- it is clear at the end of the play that she feels empowered to make her own decisions about her life

It is important to recognise the courage that it takes for Rita to start studying. She is turning against her husband and her way of life. She knows that she wants more.

At first Rita connects her understanding of the texts to her understanding of real life. She rejects Forster because he said he was not talking about the poor in Howard's End. For her, that meant that he couldn't be bothered with them, rather than that it was not his focus.

She has to learn the ideas behind literature. When she begins to do so, she annoys Frank by first spouting the conventional view about DH Lawrence and then seeming artificial in her almost obsessive pursuit of culture.

However, education changes Rita and by the end of the play she has a heightened awareness and knowledge but she has also regained her sense of perspective.

It is perhaps Trish's attempted suicide that has made the difference, but we like Rita and we suspect that she would have reached that point one way or another. Does she love Frank? That is not clear but it is clear that she cares about him – demonstrated, for instance, by her bringing the costly engraved pen back from London for him.
Frank

What we know about Frank:

- he is a university lecturer
- he is in his fifties
- he lives in Formby
- at the start of the play he is trying to give up smoking but accepts a cigarette from Rita
- he lectures in English Literature
- Rita is his first Open University student
- he is a heavy drinker
- he and his wife split up
- he lives with Julia, an ex-student. Towards the end of the play she walks out on him and then comes back
- at the end of the play, Frank is packing for a two year secondment to Australia - it was either that or be sacked for being drunk

Frank has become disillusioned with his world. However Rita both excites and amuses him.

He loves her delight in everything and her blunt honesty. He is shocked when she writes that Peer Gynt should be performed on the radio, with no arguments or evidence to support what she is trying to say. But he is impressed by her passion and the way that she recognises significant connections as she explores her own life.

As Rita gradually learns to justify her opinions, she seems to be spouting an establishment view. Frank is dismayed at what has happened to her. This is evident for example when she offers a more complex reading of The Blossom and when she argues about DH Lawrence with Tyson.

The changes in Rita have unsettled Frank. He says he is not drinking so much in Scene 3, but as the situation develops, he becomes even more dependent on drink. He is obviously drawn to her and yet she needs him less and less.

Does he love her? It is never really clear but he does ask her to go to Australia, albeit as an escape from the hypocrisy of their environment.

The more she enjoys the new cultural world she has acquired, the more he seems to doubt its worth. This is very evident when he condemns his own writing, but his sarcasm about Chekhov, for instance, is also relevant.

It is not just Rita who is changed in the play. Frank is forced to re-evaluate the whole basis of his existence.
Other Characters

Julia
Julia was an ex-student who now lives with Frank. They often argue, but she walked out on him over a row about him refusing to eat eggs. Obviously this will have been the last in a string of arguments rather than just the eggs, but it provides a funny sequence of lines for Frank and Rita, which leads to Frank finding out about Trish. Julia does come back after the eggs row, but she refuses to go to Australia with him.

Trish
Trish is Rita’s flatmate, who joins her after summer school. Trish has clearly got quite a lot of influence over the way that Rita behaves, most notably when Rita arrives at the beginning of Act 2 Scene 2, and annoys Frank by speaking strangely, in what she hopes is a posh voice.

Trish attempts suicide, which makes Rita re-evaluate the role of culture as an answer to everything.

Tyson
Tyson is nicknamed Tiger. He is one of the full-time English students at the university where Frank teaches. It is Tyson who argues with Rita in Act 2 Scene 2 about the relative merits of Lady Chatterley’s Lover and Sons and Lovers. Rita has been invited to join Tyson and his friends for a trip to France at the end of the play and she is certainly considering the possibility.

Denny
Denny is Rita’s husband. He clearly has a strong sense of how he believes life should be. As Rita is his wife and now twenty-six, he thinks she should want children and shouldn’t be wasting her time on education, so late in life. When he finds out that Rita has lied about coming off the pill, he burns her Open University books. Later he gives her an ultimatum to give up the course or get out, and she leaves him.

Rita’s mother
There is a poignant mention of Rita’s mother at the end of Act 1 Scene 7. Family and friends are in the pub, singing, and she suddenly cries. As Rita and Denny take her home, she uses the songs as a metaphor to explain her realisation that they could be doing and enjoying so much more with their lives. Denny jokes her out of this mood, but it is enough to make Rita determined not to give up her course.

Sandra
Sandra is Rita’s sister.

Frank’s wife
She left Frank, sometime before the beginning of the play.