

Pygmalion - character Guide

Eliza Doolittle: Eliza is an eighteen-year-old girl who sells flowers on the street. She is ambitious: she wants to improve the way she speaks so she can get a better job in a flower shop. Eliza quickly changes her voice because she is an excellent mimic, but finds it hard to change her unladylike behaviour.

Professor Higgins: Higgins is a middle-aged professor of phonetics (the study of speech). Higgins shows little care for the feelings of others. Eliza is a bet between him and Pickering: can he teach her to speak like a lady in six months? Higgins doesn't consider what will happen to Eliza when the six months are over when she will be somewhat changed. He seems to think it will be alright to put her back on the street.

Pickering: Pickering, like Higgins, is an expert on language. He is much nicer to Eliza than Higgins, but like Higgins, he is rather irresponsible when it comes to thinking about what will happen to Eliza when the bet is won.

Mrs. Higgins: Higgins' mother is a woman in her sixties who does not approve of the Eliza project and thinks her son and Pickering are behaving in an immature way. She is a sensible person who believes in considering the consequences of actions.

The Elynsford-Hill Family: Mrs. Elynsford-Hill, Clara and Freddy are acquaintances of Mrs. Higgins, and are first seen at the start of the play sheltering from the rain. Later in the play, Freddy falls in love with Eliza.

Mrs. Pearce: Mrs. Pearce is Higgins' housekeeper (she cooks and cleans for him). She doesn't like his insensitive behaviour towards Eliza and advises him to be more thoughtful. She is worried about Higgins' plan to have Eliza live there for six months as it is England in 1912: there were stricter codes of conduct then when it came to something like a young single woman living with two unmarried men.

Pygmalion – Act 2

Pickering. (Laughing) Higgins, I'm interested. Whoever teaches Eliza Doolittle to speak is the greatest teacher alive. Will you take on this challenge, Higgins? I'll pay for the lessons.

Eliza. Oh, thank you, sir.

Higgins. She's horribly dirty -

Eliza. Ah-ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo-oo!!! I aint dirty! I washed my face and hands this morning, I did.

Higgins. (Excited) In six months - in three if she works hard. We'll start today - now! Take her away and clean her, Mrs. Pearce. Is there a good fire in the kitchen? (...)

Mrs. Pearce. But sir, you can't take a girl up like that as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach.

Higgins. Why not?

Mrs. Pearce. Why not! But you don't know anything about her. She may be married.

Eliza. Garn! Who'd marry me?

Higgins. Eliza, the streets will be full of men wanting to marry you before I've finished with you.

Mrs. Pearce. Nonsense, sir. You mustn't talk like that to her. (...) What's to become of her? Is she to be paid anything while she's here?

Higgins. What on earth would she want with money? She'll have her food and her clothes. She'll only buy beer if you give her money.

Eliza. It's a lie! Nobody ever saw me drink!

Pickering. Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?

Higgins. Oh no, I don't think so. Not any feelings that we need bother about. (Cheerfully) Have you, Eliza?

Eliza. I got my feelings same as anyone else.

Mrs. Pearce. What is going to happen to her when you've finished your teaching? You must think about the future. (...)

Pickering. Excuse me, Higgins, if this girl is to put herself into your hands for six months for an experiment in teaching, she must understand what she's doing.

Higgins. How can she? She's incapable of understanding anything.

Eliza. (Starting to cry.) Ah-ah-ow-oo!

Higgins. There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah-ah-ow-oo! Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning to speak beautifully like a lady in a flower shop. If you are a good girl, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, have lots to eat and money to buy chocolates and take rides in cabs. If you are bad, your head will be cut off as a warning to other flower girls.

Mrs. Pearce. I think you'd better let me speak to the girl properly in private. Come with me, Eliza.

Higgins. Thank you, Mrs. Pearce. Take her off to the bathroom.

ACT 3

Maid enters with Eliza, dressed beautifully.

Maid. Miss Doolittle.

Higgins. Here she is, mother.

Eliza. (She speaks very differently from before and gasps her H.) How do you do, Mrs.Higgins?
(She sits elegantly.)

Mrs. E.H. My daughter Clara and my son Freddy.

Eliza.How do you do? Clara. How do you do?

Clara sits next to Eliza and looks at her enviously. Freddy bows and stares in wonder.

Higgins. Do you think it will rain, Miss Doolittle?

Eliza. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.

Freddy. How awfully funny!

Eliza. What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right.

Mrs. E.H. I hope it won't turn cold. There's so much flu about.

Eliza. My aunt died of flu, they said. But it's my belief they done the old woman in.

Mrs. Higgins. (Confused) Done her in?

Eliza. Yes! Why would she die of the flu? She'd had more serious illnesses! She could survive anything! My father kept spooning gin down her throat until she bit the spoon in two!

Mrs. E.H. Dear me! (...) Do you mean your aunt was killed?

Eliza.Certainly! Those that she lived with would have killed her to get her hat!

Mrs. E.H. But it can't be right for your father to pour gin down her throat like that. It might have killed her.

Eliza. Not her! Gin was like milk to her!

Mrs. E.H. Do you mean she drank?

Eliza. Drank! My word, she surely did!

Mrs. E.H. How dreadful for you!

Eliza. Oh, drink's not all bad! When my father lost his job, my mother used to give him four pence to go out and get drunk so he was fit to live with! It made the miserable old git happy. (To Freddy.) What are you laughing at?

Freddy. The new small talk! You do it so well!

ACT 4:

Higgins. I wonder where my slippers are.

Eliza looks at him angrily then stands up suddenly and leaves the room. She re-enters a moment later and puts the slippers in front of him. She sits.

Higgins. Oh lord, what a night! (He notices the slippers next to him.) Oh, there they are!

Pickering. Well, you've won your bet, Higgins. Eliza did a grand job.

Higgins. Thank God it's over!

Pickering. Eliza wasn't a bit nervous. I was!

Higgins. I wasn't nervous, just tired. This whole business has been a bore.

Pickering. But the Garden Party was exciting, wouldn't you say?

Higgins. Yes, for the first three minutes, but when I had to sit for an hour talking to that foolish fashionable woman I felt trapped like a bear in a cage. I tell you, Pickering, never again will I take on a bet like this. No more artificial duchesses.

Pickering. Anyhow, it was a great success. Eliza did it so well. She's a professional.

Higgins. Well, it's over and done with and now I can go to bed without dreading tomorrow.

Eliza looks at him with fury.

Pickering. I think I shall go to sleep too. It's been a great occasion: a triumph for you. Goodnight. (He goes.)

Higgins. Goodnight. (He yawns and starts to leave.) Put the lights out, Eliza, and tell Mrs. Pearce not to make coffee for me in the morning: I'll take tea. (He goes out.)

ACT 4 (the end)

Eliza is very angry. She throws herself onto the floor and flings her arms and legs about. Higgins comes back in looking around for his slippers. He sees her and stares. Eliza jumps up, grabs the slippers and throws them at him.

Eliza. There are your slippers. Take them!

Higgins. What's the matter? Anything wrong?

Eliza. Nothing's wrong. I've won your bet for you, haven't I? That's enough for you. I don't matter, I suppose.

Higgins. You won my bet? You? Insolent insect! I won it! What did you throw those slippers at me for?

Eliza. Because I wanted to smash your face! Why didn't you leave me in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and now you can throw me back there, don't you? (She leaps at his face.)

Higgins. (Holding her wrists.) Put your claws away, you cat! Sit down and be quiet! (He throws her into a chair.)

Eliza. (Sad) What's to become of me?

Higgins. How do I know what's to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?

Eliza. You don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead! I'm nothing to you.

Higgins. Why are you being like this? Has anyone here ever treated you badly?

Eliza. No.

Higgins. I'm glad to hear it. Perhaps you're tired. Would you like a glass of champagne?

Eliza. No. Thank you.

Higgins. You must have been anxious today. There's nothing more to worry about.

Eliza. Oh God! I wish I was dead!

Higgins. Why?! You're just tired. Go to bed.

Eliza. What am I fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do?

Higgins. Oh, that's what's worrying you. (He puts his hands in his pockets and walks about nervously.) You won't have much trouble finding something. What about that idea of a flower shop? Pickering could buy you one. You might marry, you know. You're not bad looking, except now, of course, because you've been crying. You go to bed and have a nice rest. You'll look a lot better in the morning. I must go to bed.