

## Reading Comprehension Questions for *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw

**Assignment 1: Annotate the following patterns** (and anything else you think will help you understand the book, or that will help you gather quotes to write about)

1. **Basic Pattern: Class Markers** (either characters acting according to their class, or acting ironically different)
2. **Advanced Pattern: One character insulting or minimizing another’s humanity or achievements**  
 Not just any insults, these are statements meant to make the other person seem less valuable on a deep, intrinsic level. They are key to understanding the Class Tensions.
3. **A Pattern of YOUR OWN:** (Write it in) \_\_\_\_\_

Annotate by **underlining directly in the text** where you see the pattern, or putting a sticky note right at that spot, and writing in the name of the pattern, and any other information or explanations you want to put down. Remember, if you did not buy the book, you must use sticky notes or underline lightly in pencil and erase it before returning it.

Target 1	1	2	3	4
I can annotate patterns	I have not demonstrated this skill yet.	Annotate basic patterns of authorial elements in a text given by teacher	Independently annotate patterns OR annotate sophisticated patterns of authorial elements in a text given by teacher	Independently annotate sophisticated patterns of authorial elements in a text.

### Assignment 2: Guided Reading Questions

Please read *Pygmalion* and answer the questions briefly (they are chronological).

Act I
1. What does Eliza (the Flower Girl) do and say in the opening scene that reveals her to be good natured and optimistic? (4)
2. Why does Eliza react so violently to being told someone is writing down her words? (4)
3. The first stage direction that describes Higgins (the Note Taker) is “ <i>The note taker opens his book and holds it steadily under her nose, though the pressure of the mob trying to read it over his shoulder would upset a weaker man</i> ]. What exactly is Shaw trying to express to the audience about Higgins in this first impression? (5)

4. Twice on page 4 Eliza protests that she is equal in some way to someone of the upper class. Quote them here (4):

5. What does Eliza do at once with some of the money Higgins gives her? What does the way she does it tell you about her understanding of how the upper class live? (7)

#### Act II

6. Shaw describes Higgins as “*a robust, vital, appetizing sort of man... of the energetic, scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people, including their feelings. He is, in fact, but for his years and size, rather like a very impetuous [hotheaded, impulsive] baby... His manner varies from genial [good-natured, friendly] bullying when he is in good humor to stormy petulance [temper tantrums, selfishness] when anything goes wrong; but he is so entirely frank and void of malice that he remains likeable even in his least reasonable moments.*” (7-8)

Higgins’s characterization is probably the most important part of the play in terms of keeping the audience interested. What is it about this character Shaw has created that is so interesting for the audience?

7. Eliza claims that she is “ready to pay,” that she’s “not asking any favor” from Higgins. What doesn’t she understand about her offer of a shilling an hour? (9)

8. What is ironic on both sides about this exchange between Eliza and Higgins:

HIGGINS: It’s almost irresistible. She’s so deliciously low—so horribly dirty—

LISA: Ah-ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo-oo!!! I ain’t dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did. (10)

9. Mrs. Pearce says “you can’t take that girl up like that as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach.” (10) Is that what Higgins is doing?

What is his response to her, and why is it significant?

10. What is ironic about this exchange between Higgins, Eliza, and Pickering (analyze the dialogue)? (11)

PICKERING: Does it occur to you, Higgins, that the girl has some feelings?

HIGGINS: Oh no, I don’t think so. Not any feelings we need bother about. [*Cheerily*] Have you Eliza?

LIZA: I got my feelings same as anyone else.

HIGGINS: [*to Pickering*] You see the difficulty?

PICKERING: Eh? What difficulty?

HIGGINS: To get her to talk grammar. Pronunciation isn’t enough.

11. What exactly are the terms of the deal that Higgins offers Eliza? Do you think he’s serious about all of it? (12)

12. What are the exact words Higgins uses when Pickering asks him if he is going to take advantage of Eliza (when he first realizes what Pickering is actually asking him)? Does this response show Higgins to be honorable, or dishonorable? (12)

13. What does Higgins say to Pickering after Mrs. Pearce tells him to reel in all his bad habits around Eliza? Do you think he believes what he says to Pickering? (13)

14. Shaw describes Doolittle as “*equally free from fear and conscience. He has a remarkably expressive voice, the result of a habit to giving vent to his feelings without reserve.*” (14) How is he somehow both an ironic example **and** a stereotypical example of someone of his class?

15. What does Higgins mean when he says Doolittle has “a certain natural gift of rhetoric?” (rhetoric is the art of speaking persuasively) How is he both praising Doolittle and insulting him? (14)

16. What does Doolittle respond when Pickering asks him “Have you no morals, man?” (15)? Why does that question have a different importance to Pickering than it does to Doolittle?

17. What two professions does Higgins say Doolittle would be great for if Higgins fixed his accent? Is Higgins insulting Doolittle, or the professions that he names? (15)

18. What is Doolittle’s argument that he will spend the five pounds well? Do you agree with him? (16)

### Act III

19. Based on the conversation with his mother, what consequences does Higgins face for not conforming to upper-class norms of behavior? (18-19)

20. What is Higgins's argument in his monologue that begins "You see, we're all savages..."? (20) \*not in film

21. What do you think is the funniest moment in the scene where Eliza is talking in Mrs. Higgins's room? Why? (20-21)

22. What does Higgins get Clara Eynsford Hill to do as she leaves? (22) What point is Shaw making when he writes in the stage directions that she is "*radiant, conscious of being thoroughly up to date*"? \*not in film

23. How, exactly, does Higgins describe what he is doing with Eliza to his mother (top of 23, monologue beginning with "HIGGINS: Playing!...") (23)

24. In what ways have they realized that Eliza is special? (23)

#### Act IV

25. The iconic scene from the film where Eliza is at the ambassador's ball was written by Shaw for the film. Also written for the film, and passed over in the original play, were the montage scenes of Higgins teaching Eliza little by little, and the scene where Freddy kisses her on the street. Why were these scenes not part of the original play?

26. How does Higgins describe the experiment with Eliza now that it's over? (25)

26. What is the symbolic significance of the slippers that Eliza throws at Higgins? (25)

27. Eliza begins to show her anger at Higgins by attacking him with her nails, but that fails. By the end of the scene, she "smiles" in "triumph," according to the stage directions. How is she able to wound him, using her words? Do you sympathize with her, or with Higgins? (26-27)

Act V.

28. Why is Doolittle now "Ruined... delivered into the hands of middle class morality?" Why can't he refuse the money (28-29)

29. As we find out from Mrs. Higgins, why was Eliza so upset the night before? How serious did her anger and sadness get? (30)

30. What is the significance of the verb "created" that Higgins keeps using with regards to Eliza? What does Eliza say to Pickering that proves Higgins did not "create" her? (31)

31. What, according to Doolittle, has “respectability” done to his soon-to-be wife? (32) What is Shaw saying about Class Tensions through this half-joke?

32. Similarly, what is Doolittle talking about when he says “that ain’t the natural way, Colonel: it’s only the middle class way.” (32) What is the significance of Doolittle pointing out the difference between “natural” and “middle class?”

33. Higgins claims that the secret is “not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is good as another.” (33) Do you believe Shaw intends this to be the moral message of the play? Why or why not?

34. What is Shaw suggesting when he has Higgins say “I think a woman fetching a man’s slippers is a disgusting sight: did I ever fetch *your* slippers? I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face”? (34)

35. One of the things that makes Shaw a genius is his ability to mix Realism with Romance (like Shakespeare and Tennessee Williams and Suzan Lori-Parks, too) Which character’s life is Higgins describing when he describes the lower-class life as: “Work till you are more a brute than a human being; and then cuddle and squabble and drink till you fall asleep. Oh, it’s a fine life, the life of the gutter. It’s real: it’s warm: it’s violent: you can feel it through the thickest skin: you can taste it and smell it without any training or work. Not like Science and Literature...” (34-35). Do you agree with his description? Why is Higgins best able to argue for the lower-class life he hates?

36. What does Eliza realize that lets her finally feel like she has won against Higgins? How does Higgins feel about her saying this? (35)

37. Do you think Eliza will buy the items as Higgins requested? How does Higgins envision the future will go? What do you think Eliza will do? (36)

38. Summarize the "SEQUEL" section of the book (Shaw wrote this for the published version, not for the stage).

39. What do you learn about Shaw from the way he writes his Preface and his Sequel to the play? What are his interests, his passions, his assumptions, his biases? (optional question, will not be on test)