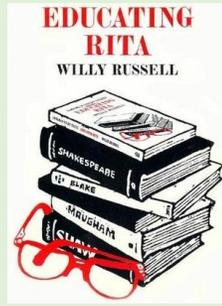


Ortu Hassenbrook Academy

Year 8 Educating Rita Knowledge Organiser

Educating Rita



Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: □ maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response □ use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

AO4: Use a range of Vocabulary and sentence structure.

GLOSSARY

Induce – to make something to begin.

Poppet – literally, a doll; used here as an endearing nickname.

Assonance – the use of words that have the same or very similar vowel sounds near one another i.e. summer fun.

Geriatric – old, ancient, elderly.

Malarkey – nonsense.

Patina – a layer of shine that forms on things over time.

Censorious – criticising someone.

Partisan – firmly adhering to one side or point of view.

Louse – literally, an insect that lives on the body of people; here, a cruel and insensitive person.

Inherent – part of the essential makeup of something.

Errant – poorly behaved.

Amateur – non-professional.

Warped – altered, changed, usually because of something bad.

Aversion – a deep dislike or fear or someone/something.

Germinate – to grow.

Sabbatical – a paid period of leave from work.

Rostrum – the platform from where a person makes a speech.

Irrelevant – not important or germane to what is at hand.

Pyrotechnical – relating to fire or fireworks.

CONTEXT

Willy Russell: Grew up in Merseyside. He left school at the age of 15 and became a hairdresser. While owning his own salon Russell decided to start writing and eventually recognised that he wanted to change careers and become a writer. Attending night school he completed his O Level English Literature course and went on to attend college.

While Educating Rita is not a wholly autobiographical, it is easy for the reader to recognise Russell in the character of Rita. Russell created a situation that allows him to entertain his audience and at the same time, explore several major issues using the characters of Frank and Rita.

The Open University: The OU is an online based education institution which celebrated its 50th anniversary in March 2019. It has afforded many people, all over the world, the opportunity to extend and further their education and knowledge through unconventional means such as virtual classrooms in place of attending a brick built university. Students engage with a combination of television, radio programmes, booklets and other printed resources and having regular meetings with an assigned tutor over the phone or internet.

THEMES

Social class	Rita and Frank are from different social classes – working and middle, respectively – and this is readily apparent in their manners of speaking, social moves and behaviour, extracurricular pursuits, views on the world and more. Frank’s intellect and education place him firmly in the middle class, but he seems to take it for granted, and to be aware of the hollowness of such an existence. Rita’s working class existences is rough in a very different way, but instead of languishing in apathy and self-pity, she proceeds with zest and ambition. Her desire to move up the social ladder is the core of the play, but is fraught with complexities and questions. She may end up in an elevated class, but whether or not she possesses true and lasting happiness and self-fulfilment are left unanswered by Russell.
Education	Rita and Frank are from different social classes – working and middle, respectively – and this is readily apparent in their manners of speaking, social moves and behaviour, extracurricular pursuits, views on the world and more. Frank’s intellect and education place him firmly in the middle class, but he seems to take it for granted, and to be aware of the hollowness of such an existence. Rita’s working class existences is rough in a very different way, but instead of languishing in apathy and self-pity, she proceeds with zest and ambition. Her desire to move up the social ladder is the core of the play, but is fraught with complexities and questions. She may end up in an elevated class, but whether or not she possesses true and lasting happiness and self-fulfilment are left unanswered by Russell.
Personal growth	Rita and Frank are opposites when it comes to personal growth. Rita fervently interested in bettering herself no matter how difficult or humiliating it might be. She succeeds in educating herself, moving up the social ladder, and freeing herself from the limitations of her old world. Frank, though, does not change at all. In fact, his drinking and his bitterness over Rita’s forward movement lead him to regress; he is temporarily removed from his job, loses his girlfriend, and prepares to leave for Australia. Russell leaves it open to interpretation if this disparity in personal growth in due to the character’s ages, backgrounds, or inherent characteristics.
Literature	Rita views literature as more than just the study of writers, books, and ideas. She sees it as liberation, as something that feeds her soul and makes her whole. She scoffs at Frank’s idea that she should study politics, preferring to delve into the works of great writers and poets because they speak to her soul more directly. She isn’t interested in large-scale activism – just her own personal development. As with other themes, though, Russell’s views on literature are not entirely clear. It’s obvious Rita believes that she is being “fed,” but by the end of the text it seems like all she has done is memorise the works of others rather than come to any understanding of who she is. On the other hand, literature did allow her to break free of certain shackles, so it may be as liberating and she believes it to be, albeit in a different way.
Mentoring	Frank and Rita have a classic mentor/mentee relationship at the beginning of the text; after all, the play is based on Pygmalion. Frank gets to mould and shape Rita in his image, and Rita gets to leave behind the constraints of her working class past through his tutelage. This relationship proceeds as expected throughout the play, for eventually Rita becomes independent of Frank, which engenders bitterness on his part and frustration on hers. That is the essence of Pygmalion as well as what traditionally happens in mentoring, especially when the mentor comes to the relationship with his or her own expectations. Frank’s impact on Rita is undeniable, but he also complicates it immeasurably through his own personal failings.

PLOT

The text follows the relationship between a young Liverpudlian working class hairdresser and a middle-aged university lecturer over the course of a year. Rita (real name Susan) is dissatisfied with her life – work and social – and seeks inner growth by signing up for and attending an Open University course in English Literature. The opening of the play shows Rita meeting her tutor, Frank for the very first time. Frank is a middle-aged, alcoholic career academic who has taken on the lecturer job just to pay for his drinking. Rita and Frank have an immediate effect on each other. Sadly, Frank's bitterness and negativity overwhelm their relationship as he notices Rita beginning to adopt the ways of the university culture he so despises.

CHARACTERS

Frank: A middle-aged, middle-class professor and form poet who tutors Rita. Frank is disillusioned with his life. He drinks heavily, does not care about teaching, has trouble with relationships, and excoriates his own failed attempts at being a poet. Rita is a breath of fresh air for him and he comes to care for her and value her, but he is occasionally paternalistic and struggles with her burgeoning independence.

Rita: A lively young woman from the working class, Rita seeks an education to attain self-fulfilment and a better life. She struggles with a boorish husband who feels betrayed, the limitations of her upbringing and her difficulties mastering English curriculum, and Frank's growing bitterness towards her. She does make many significant and minor changes, eventually becoming educated and no longer needing Frank, but questions regarding the long-term impact of her education, how much she really changed, and whether she is actually much better off are largely left unanswered.

Denny: Denny is Rita's husband, although they separate. He is part of her old life, and resents her foray into a new world that does not seemingly include him. He is hostile to the idea of Frank as her teacher, to her taking of birth control to preclude having child, and to her continuing her studies.

Julia: Julia is Frank's girlfriend, a younger, educated woman who admires Frank but is frustrated with his frequent absences. She decides not to accompany him to Australia.

Trish: Trish is Rita's flatmate after she leaves her husband. A fellow student, Trish appears to be classy and tasteful, but by the end of the play Rita admits there is more to her than meets the eye after coming upon her trying to commit suicide.

Tyson (Tiger): A loud attractive student in Rita's new friend group, he appears to be interested in Rita and invites her to vacation with his friends and himself over the holidays.

Rita's Mother: Rita's mother is working class and part of her old world; nonetheless, through Rita's descriptions, she seems to be kind-hearted and at least unconsciously interested in a better life. She also appears supportive of her daughter's choices.



- THEMES**
- Social responsibility
 - Age
 - Class
 - Gender
 - Change
 - Power
 - Injustice

SYMBOLISM

Character Names: Frank's last name is never revealed in the play. This accentuates the fact that despite his high educational level and upper-class background, he is a rather ordinary human being with strengths and flaws common to people of all groups. Rita calls herself Rita, instead of Susan - symbolises her working-class character's desire to be a refined, educated human being. Later in the play when Rita uses 'Susan' this signals that she has acquired both a more sophisticated idea of what constitutes literate and a greater degree of self-confidence.

Birth Control Pills: The birth control pills – and the pregnancy they prevent – symbolise Rita's independent nature.

Rita's Essays: Symbolise her desire to learn, her growth as a student, and her gradually emerging independence.

Locked door & shut windows: highlighting the obstacles to her development.

KEY QUOTATIONS & ANALYSIS

Rita, Act 1, Scene 1 *'There's no suppose about it. Looks at those tits.'* – Rita's crude yet insightful comment on the eroticism of Frank's religious print indicates a bright, if unrefined, mind. It is her fresh, instinctive approach to art and literature that impresses Frank.

Frank, Act 1, Scene 2 *'Oh Rita! Why didn't you walk in here twenty years ago?'* – This comment is one of many throughout the play that signals Frank's romantic attraction for Rita. His unrequited feelings for her contribute much of the emotional undercurrent of the play.

Rita, Act 1, Scene 3 *'People I work with, live with, grew up with – us, we've got no culture.'* – This is one of many lines given to Rita in which she laments her intellectual sparseness of the social class in which she was raised. Her awareness of this is what drives her to pursue an education.

Rita, Act 1, Scene 4 *'I'm busy enough findin' myself, let alone findin' someone else.'* – Rita scoffs at her husband Denny's suspicion –and Frank's apprehension – she might be using her time away from home for her tutoring sessions as a cover for having an affair. It is indicative of the anti-intellectualism of the working class that Denny feels and affair on Rita's part is more likely than her stated desire to become learned.

Rita, Act 1, Scene 4 *'I know what he's thinkin'; he's wonderin' where the girl he married has gone to.'* – Rita referring to her husband Denny. She expresses an understanding that both her marriage is in trouble and that she is the cause. Yet, her desire to rise above her circumstances despite her empathy for her spouse remains unshakable.

Frank, Act 1, Scene 5 *'Macbeth is flawed by his ambition – yes?'* – Frank responds to Rita's delight at seeing Macbeth as any good teacher would. He asks questions to help her deepen her understanding of the play and to broaden her understanding of literary techniques.

Rita, Act 1, Scene 6 *'I didn't want to come to your house just to play the court jester.'* – Rita explains why she skipped out at the last minute on a dinner party at Frank's home. Her insecurity about how she would be regarded by a group of intellectuals is a symptom of the lack of self-confidence she still has at this point. Her self-doubt is sparked by the working-class attitudes with which she has been raised.

Rita, Act 1, Scene 6 *'We could sing better songs than those.'* – Rita tells Frank about her mother's drunken crying. She interprets it as proof that many working-class people want more out of life than they get. This motivates her to continue her tutoring sessions.

Frank, Act 2, Scene 2 *'You haven't got an ugly voice; at least you didn't have. Talk properly.'* – Frank is responding to Rita's silly attempt to imitate the speech of the highly educated. His criticism is sparked by a legitimate criticism of pretentiousness but also by his fear Rita will change into someone other than the "marvellous" person he knows.

Frank, Act 2, Scene 4 *'You can hardly bear to spend a moment here, can you?'* – Frank expresses a sad worry over the possibility that Rita has reached a point in her educational growth where she no longer depends on him for guidance. His concern stems at least in part from the romantic attraction to her he feels throughout the play. However, it also derives from the pleasure he has taken in guiding and sharing her exuberant response to literature.

Rita, Act 2, Scene 5 *'Nobody calls me Rita.'* – Rita responds to Frank's mockery of her taking on the first name of her once-favourite author Rita Mae Brown. She has dropped the practice and reassumed her read name (Susan) because her growing refinement has led her to view the name-change as "pretentious crap".

Frank, Act 2, Scene 6 *'You see, she doesn't know the details...time and where the exam is being held.'* – Frank is trying desperately to reach Rita to inform her when and where her examination is going to be given. Although the two of them have fallen out, his affection for her leads him to look out for her in the one area he can.

Rita, Act 2, Scene 7 *'I came home the other night an' she'd tried to top herself.'* – Rita's roommate, Trish, has tried to commit suicide. This has shaken Rita badly because she saw Trish as educated and sophisticated. Rita now finds herself questioning the true value of education, much as Frank has done throughout the text. Rita recognises that superficial sophistication is no guarantee of real happiness.

Rita, Act 2, Scene 7 *'I might go to France. I might go to me mother's. I might even have a baby.'* – Shaken by the suicide attempt of her roommate, Trish, Rita is reconsidering the worth of the education she has pursued. Still, drawing on her new self-confidence, she processes the incident by asserting her independence and considering her options.

Rita, Act 2, Scene 7 *'I'm gonna take ten years off you.'* – Rita is preparing to cut Frank's hair. The final line of the play ends on touching and humorous note that recalls the two characters' first meeting.