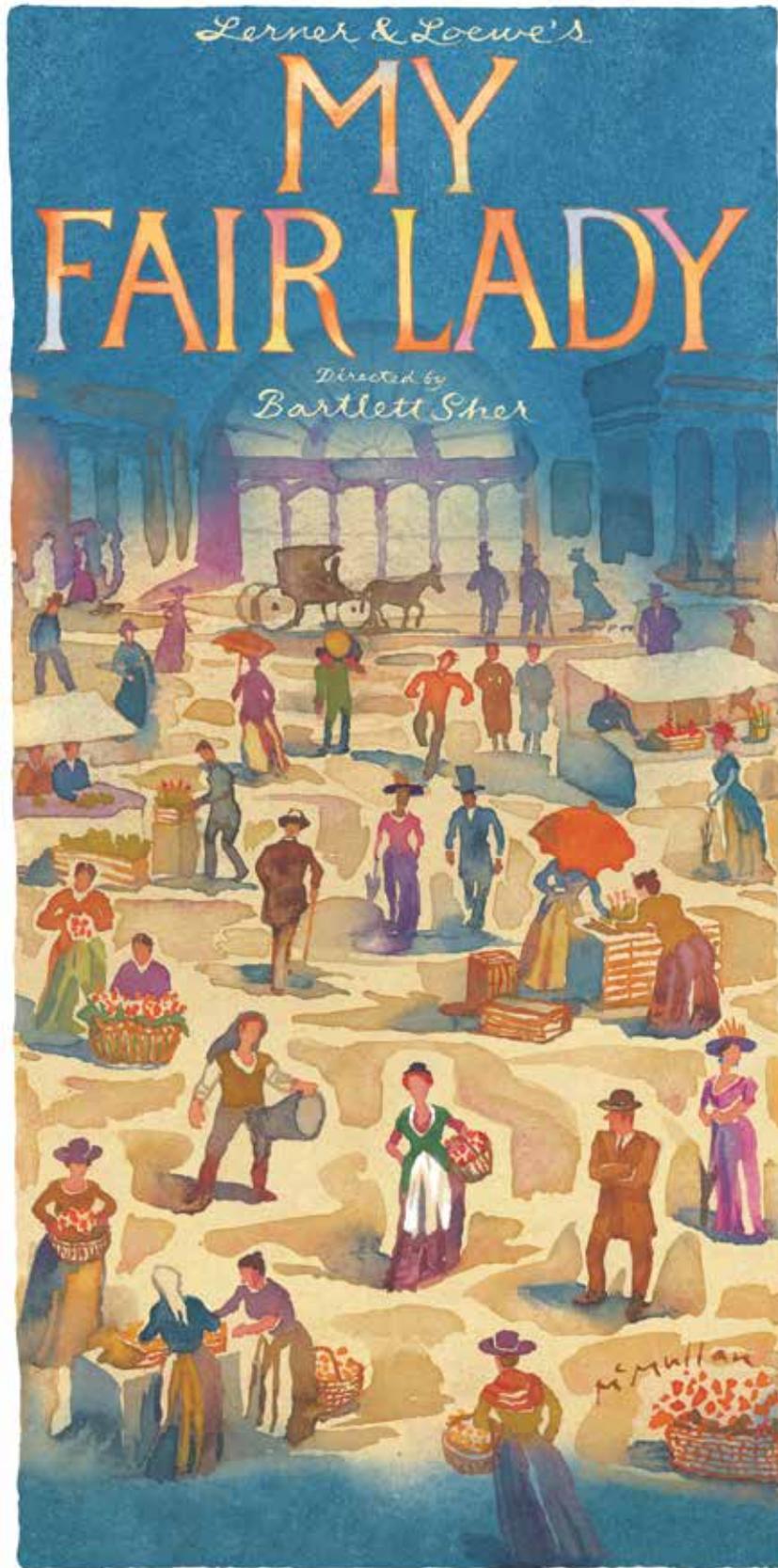


The Lincoln Center Theater Production of



TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

Teacher Resource Guide by Sara Cooper

Nederlander Presentations, Inc.

presents

The Lincoln Center Theater Production of

LERNER & LOEWE'S

MY FAIR LADY

Book and Lyrics
Alan Jay Lerner

Music
Frederick Loewe

Adapted from George Bernard Shaw's play and Gabriel Pascal's motion picture "Pygmalion"

Sets
Michael Yeargan

Costumes
Catherine Zuber

Lighting
Donald Holder

Sound
Marc Salzberg

Musical Arrangements
Robert Russell Bennett & Phil Lang

Dance Arrangements
Trude Rittmann

Casting
Telsey + Company

Hair & Wigs
Tom Watson

Music Direction
Ted Sperling

Choreography
Christopher Gattelli

Directed by
Bartlett Sher

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the teacher resource guide for *My Fair Lady*, a musical play in two acts with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe, directed by Bartlett Sher.

My Fair Lady is a musical adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, itself an adaptation of an ancient Greek myth. *My Fair Lady* is the story of Eliza Doolittle, a penniless flower girl living in London in 1912. Eliza becomes the unwitting object of a bet between two upper-class men, phonetics professor Henry Higgins and linguist Colonel Pickering. Higgins bets that he can pass Eliza off as a lady at an upcoming high-society social event, but their relationship quickly becomes more complicated. In *My Fair Lady*, Lerner and Loewe explore topics of class discrimination, sexism, linguistic profiling, and social identity; issues that are still very much present in our world today.

My Fair Lady premiered on Broadway in 1956 to great critical acclaim. That production set a new record for the longest-running Broadway show and, in 1964, it was made into an Academy Award-winning movie. Since then, *My Fair Lady* been produced—and beloved—all over the world.

My Fair Lady offers students the opportunity to reflect on:

- * social mobility and classism in our society;
- * change in gender roles and expectations;
- * musical theater as both entertainment and social commentary;
- * adaptation and how we tell stories.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This resource guide has been created to help prepare your students to see *My Fair Lady*. We also hope to direct you to resources that can further your classroom exploration of the show. We encourage you to print and share pages of this guide with your students. Throughout the guide you will find resources, including links to materials and videos available online, as well as discussion questions and suggested classroom activities that you can use before or after seeing the production.

The overall goals of this guide are to:

- * connect to your curriculum with standards-based information and activities;
- * engage your students' critical and analytical thinking skills; and
- * provide you with the tools to have an engaging and educational experience at the theater.

THE MUSICAL

The Characters

Eliza Doolittle: a young flower girl, strong-willed, uneducated but determined

Henry Higgins: a phonetics professor, smart but arrogant, a bachelor

Colonel Pickering: a linguist specializing in Indian dialects

Freddy Eynsford-Hill: a socialite, dreamy and inept

Alfred P. Doolittle: Eliza's father, manipulative, the life of the party

Mrs. Pearce: Higgins's maid, very proper



Zoltan Karpathy:
Higgins' former student

Mrs. Eynsford-Hill: Freddy's mother, upper-middle class and struggling to stay there

Mrs. Higgins: Henry Higgins' mother, highly intelligent, critical of her son

Ensemble: the minor characters in the musical (buskers, servants, aristocrats, etc.)



Right: Lauren Ambrose as Eliza Doolittle, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus. *Below:* Harry Hadden-Paton as Henry Higgins, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.

The Story

In this synopsis you will see the names of the songs in italics as they appear in the narrative.

Act I

In London in 1912, Eliza Doolittle tries to sell her flowers to the patrons of the Royal Opera House. After a young man named Freddy Eynsford-Hill bumps into her, causing her to drop all her violets in the mud, she meets phonetics professor Henry Higgins and linguist Colonel Pickering. Higgins dismisses her because of her Cockney accent and mannerisms (*Why Can't the English?*) and the two men set off for his house to discuss dialects. As they leave, Higgins casually throws some money at Eliza. Eliza and the other buskers and flower girls imagine what it would be like to have money (*Wouldn't It Be Loverly?*).

That night, Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's deadbeat father, asks her for some money. She gives it to him knowing he's going to spend it all on drinking, and it gives her an idea. She visits Henry Higgins at his house. She wants to use her newfound money to buy lessons from him so she can learn to speak properly and get a job at a flower shop. Although he initially dismisses her, Higgins agrees after making a bet with Pickering that he'll teach her so well that, after six months of lessons, she'll be able to pass for a duchess at the upcoming Embassy Ball. He convinces Eliza that his lessons will change her life for the better and they begin the process of making her into a lady. Pickering worries that Higgins will take advantage of or harm Eliza, but Higgins informs Pickering that he has no romantic interest in Eliza. In fact, he describes himself as a confirmed bachelor because, after all, women only ruin men's lives (*I'm An Ordinary Man*).

Meanwhile, Eliza's father Alfred Doolittle has run out of money. When he learns that Eliza is staying with the rich Henry Higgins, he begins to hatch a plan (*With A Little Bit of Luck*).

Back at Higgins' house, Eliza is not doing well at her lessons. Alfred Doolittle shows up and tries to blackmail Higgins. However, Higgins ends up being impressed with Doolittle's straightforward lack of morality. Higgins gives Alfred the money he asks for and sends him on his way. Higgins criticizes and threatens Eliza when she fails at her lesson and she fantasizes about getting revenge (*Just You Wait*).

Time passes. Eliza is unable to succeed, continuing to pronounce words with a Cockney accent and making social faux pas. The servants begin to despair, but Higgins and Eliza press on, butting heads as they go (*The Servants' Chorus*). Suddenly, something clicks and Eliza begins pronouncing everything in the proper, upper-class way. Higgins, Eliza, and Pickering are amazed and thrilled, and Higgins and Eliza share a moment in a joyous dance (*The Rain in Spain*). Higgins declares Eliza ready for a test run. Eliza is exhilarated (*I Could Have Danced All Night*).



Diana Rigg as Mrs. Higgins in Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Higgins takes Eliza to watch a horse race at an upper-class social club with Pickering and his mother, Mrs. Higgins (*Ascot Gavotte*). Eliza is convincingly aristocratic until she slips up at the end, charming Freddy, who falls madly in love with her. Freddy goes to Higgins' house later that day, but Eliza refuses to see him. He vows to wait for her (*On The Street Where You Live*).

Meanwhile, the day of the Embassy Ball has arrived. Pickering doesn't believe Eliza is ready, but Higgins believes she is and decides to proceed with the plan. Eliza appears, dressed beautifully. She takes Higgins' arm. They head out to the Ball.

Act II

At the Embassy Ball, Eliza is excelling when Higgins encounters his first-ever pupil, the now-successful Zoltan Karpathy. Karpathy has become a master of linguistic detection, and Pickering worries that he will reveal Eliza for who she really is (*The Embassy Waltz*).

After the ball, Higgins and Pickering celebrate Higgins' achievement: Eliza fooled everyone at the Embassy Ball and Karpathy thought she was Hungarian royalty. Pickering and the servants fawn over an already self-congratulatory Higgins, completely ignoring Eliza's contribution (*You Did It*). Higgins says he's relieved that the whole thing is over with. Everyone else leaves, and when Higgins asks Eliza off-handedly for his slippers, she throws them at him. They have a confrontation: Eliza is angry and hurt that Higgins is glad to be done with the whole thing and that she seems to mean nothing to him after all; she also worries that she has nothing and nowhere to go. They argue ferociously and, after losing his temper, Higgins eventually retreats to his room and Eliza, furious, is left alone (*Just You Wait Reprise*).

Moments later, Eliza exits the house to find Freddy waiting for her (*On The Street Where You Live Reprise*). Freddy confesses his love for her, but, still angry at Higgins, Eliza tells him he should stop talking and prove it, and then she walks away from him (*Show Me*).

Eliza returns to Covent Garden, but no one recognizes her. She no longer fits in, not here and not anywhere (*Wouldn't It Be Lovely? Reprise*). She runs into her father, Alfred Doolittle, who has been made middle class thanks to a recommendation from Higgins, and who is about to get married. Eliza leaves with Freddy. Alfred is miserable now, but he decides to have one last night on the town (*Get Me to the Church on Time*).

The next morning, Higgins learns that Eliza has left. He begins to panic, but he hides it in a diatribe against women (*A Hymn to Him*).



Norbert Leo Butz as Alfred Doolittle in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Higgins seeks out his mother and finds her having tea with Eliza. Left alone, they carefully discuss the nature of their relationship and Eliza tells Higgins she's going to marry Freddy. They argue and Eliza tells Higgins she doesn't need him (*Without You*). She leaves.

Left alone, Higgins laments that he's gotten used to having Eliza around (*I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face*). He goes back home and listens to the recording of her speaking in her lessons. Eliza enters his study and turns off the recording. They look at each other. Higgins says, "Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?" They share a moment. She leaves.

The Writers

Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe

A New York City native, Alan Jay Lerner began writing lyrics in college at Harvard and Julliard. Frederick Loewe, on the other hand, was the Austrian son of a famous Jewish operetta performer. He grew up in Berlin and began writing music at age seven. At age thirteen, he became the youngest-ever piano soloist to appear with the Berlin Philharmonic. This unlikely duo met by chance in New York City in 1942 at The Lambs Club, a hangout for songwriters and other theater professionals, and began to write together.

Lerner and Loewe's first musical together, *Life of the Party* (1942), was an adaptation of the play *The Patsy* by Barry Connors. The show opened and closed in Detroit. After that, the team wrote seven more musicals, all of which went to Broadway. Lerner and Loewe's Broadway shows were *What's Up?* (1943), *The Day Before Spring* (1945), *Brigadoon* (1947), *Paint Your Wagon* (1951), *Camelot* (1960), *Gigi* (1973), and, of course, *My Fair Lady* (1956). They also wrote film adaptations of several of their musicals as well as the 1974 film *The Little Prince*.



Julie Andrews, Rex Harrison, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Over the course of their career together, Lerner and Loewe won many awards for their work in musical theater, including three Tony Awards, two Golden Globes, three Academy Awards, two awards from the New York Drama Critics' Circle, and a lifetime achievement recognition in the form of the Kennedy Center Honors.

Alan Jay Lerner married eight times and had four children. He struggled with addiction and financial woes, but his work in theater and film was critically acclaimed for four decades. Frederick Loewe, who went by Fritz, was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1972.

Lerner and Loewe wrote together in a very specific way. They would write a detailed outline of the scenes together. Next, Lerner would write a title and an outline of song moments. Loewe would then write the melody, and Lerner would begin work on the lyrics. They wrote this way, song by song, until the entire score was complete.

Lerner and Loewe were very good friends in addition to being professional collaborators. Loewe retired after writing *Camelot*, but Lerner continued working with other composers until Loewe came out of retirement to do further work on *Gigi* (1973) and to write *The Little Prince* (1974).

The Adaptation of *Pygmalion*

My Fair Lady is a musical adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, which itself is an adaptation of an ancient Greek myth.

In the original story, Pygmalion is a sculptor who falls in love with a statue he has made and, when he kisses her, she comes to life. Shaw adapted this into a play in 1912 and modernized the story. Shaw set his play in the London of his time and created and developed Eliza Doolittle, Henry Higgins, and many of the other characters we see in *My Fair Lady*.

In fact, several great musical theater writers tried their hand at an adaptation of *Pygmalion* before Lerner and Loewe, including Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hammerstein, but they had a hard time musicalizing it. Shaw himself famously said he didn't believe his play could be adapted into a musical. In 1952, however, a producer named Gabriel Pascal approached Lerner and Loewe about taking on the project.



Lynn Fontanne as Eliza Doolittle and Reginald Mason as Professor Higgins in a scene from the 1926 production of *Pygmalion*. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

At first, Lerner and Loewe struggled, just as previous songwriting teams had before them. There was no subplot or romance in the play and no chorus, and the team felt that these elements were necessary for the kind of musical they wanted to write. They gave up on the project after just six months but, in 1954, Lerner came across Pascal's obituary and began thinking about *Pygmalion* again.

The team began by coming up with song titles and then writing the show song by song. They kept the characters and the basic plot and added a chorus and various locations to expand the world of the show from an intimate play into a sprawling musical. Before they had finished the first draft, they

brought in a director and some of the actors, including Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews. These collaborators helped inspire changes to the score, and they opened *My Fair Lady* to a captivated audience in New Haven, Connecticut in 1956. They continued to make changes as the show ran in Connecticut and then in Philadelphia. When it opened on Broadway later that year, *My Fair Lady* was an immediate smash hit. It ran for 2,717 performances and is still produced all over the world.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Adaptations in Media: An Introductory Activity

Contextualize

Discuss the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, making mention of the story, the author, and the time period.

Read

As a class, read Act 1, Scene 5 of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. <https://www.playshakespeare.com/romeo-and-juliet/scenes/297-act-i-scene-5>

View

Romeo and Juliet has been adapted many times and in many ways. For instance, *Romeo + Juliet* is a 90's teen movie by Baz Luhrman. Made with young actors, it juxtaposes the language of Shakespeare with contemporary visuals.

West Side Story takes the plot and themes of *Romeo and Juliet* and transforms it completely into a musical set in a different time period and in a completely different context.

Watch a clip of the same scene in these adaptations:

- *Romeo + Juliet* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCIVlc_niac
- *West Side Story* (1961 film) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77KnithfRRk>



Romeo and Juliet by Frank Dicksee. Wikimedia Commons.

The song “Exit Music (For A Film)” is not a direct adaptation; instead, it is a song by alternative rock band Radiohead that was inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*. “Exit Music (For A Film)” creates a new ending in which Romeo and Juliet escape and live happily ever after. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50rlHVe6g9Q>

Discuss

What are the similarities between the scene and the two clips? What are the differences? How does a direct adaptation like *Romeo + Juliet* differ from an indirect adaptation such as “Exit Music (For A Film)”?

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Pygmalion in Popular Culture: A Media Literacy Activity

Read

As a class, read *The Atlantic's* 2014 opinion piece about *Selfie*, a recent television adaptation of *Pygmalion*: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/selfie-pygmalion-in-2014-is-kind-of-a-creepy-idea-right/380981/>

Discuss

Is the *Pygmalion* story inherently sexist and classist? Can it be adapted in a way that is culturally sensitive or even enlightening?

Write

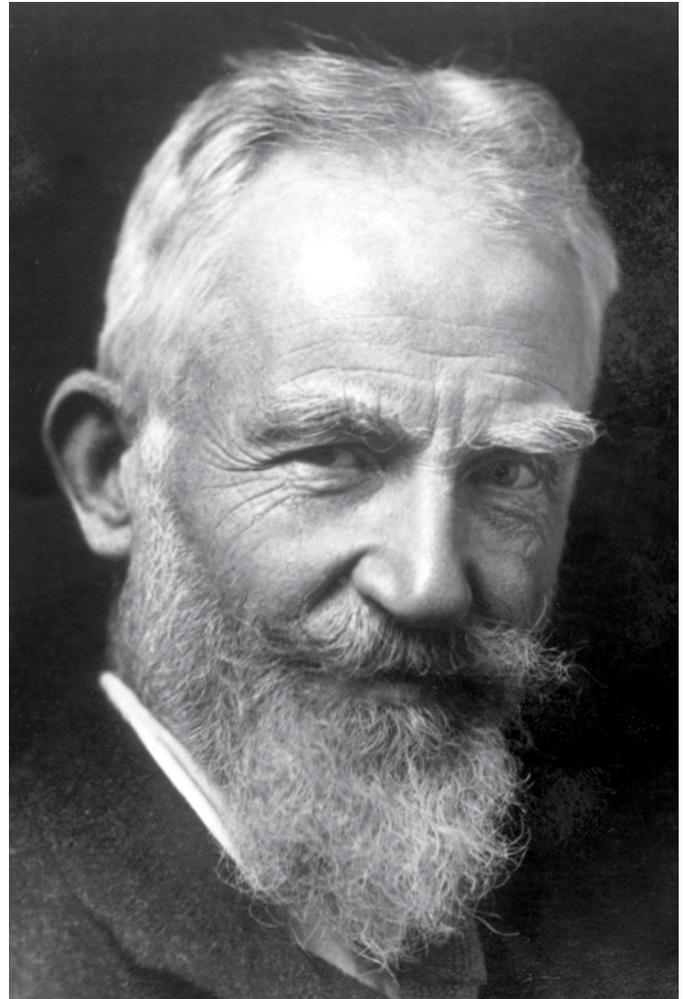
In small groups, brainstorm and write an outline for an adaptation of *Pygmalion* that makes a statement about the world we live in today. Using the basic premise of *Pygmalion*, set the story and characters in a different time period. For example, if the adaptation is set in present day, what would Eliza's job be and how would her ambitions change? If the adaptation is set in New York City, what would Eliza's accent sound like and how would that change her interactions with Henry Higgins? Would the students change the musical's ending or keep it the same?

Share

Have each group share their ideas. Discuss how changing the context of the story changes the story itself.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.



George Bernard Shaw, author of *Pygmalion*, in 1925.
Courtesy: CSU Archives/Everett Collection.

THE BACKDROP

Historical Context

Class systems were very rigid in London in 1912 and there was virtually no social mobility. People were judged not only by their place in the social hierarchy but also by the way their accents and dialects betrayed their social class. Although social mobility has since improved, the British class system remains rigid to this day.

King George V took the throne in 1910, and the country was thrown into constitutional crisis when the House of Lords rejected the People's Budget, overriding the House of Commons. The People's budget sought to tax the rich, particularly land owners. This caused great friction between the House of Lords and the House of Commons and led to the destabilization of the British government. This crisis, however, was merely a symptom of the great divide between the social classes, and it was clear to both the government and the people that reform was necessary and imminent. The National Coal Strike of 1912 established the first ever minimum wage laws in Britain. Suffragettes were active in the streets. Unions gained strength as the government tried and failed to offer adequate nutrition, jobs, and healthcare to the masses. Because there were so few resources, the lower class struggled to stay housed and fed.

All of this underscores Eliza's desperation to move up in the social class system. Her desire to work in a flower shop is not only borne of ambition, but in fact a bid to ensure she is able to meet her most basic needs.

ENGLISH CURRENCY IN THE TIME OF *MY FAIR LADY*

4 brass farthings = 1 pence

10 pence = 1 crown

12 pence = 1 shilling

2 shillings = 1 florin

20 shillings = 1 pound

21 shillings = 1 guinea

1 pound = 1 quid

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ascot Races: a racetrack in England known for its high-class thoroughbred horse racing events

Blighter: a person who is despicable or strongly disliked

Constable: an officer in the police force

Fiver: A five pound note, the equivalent of about \$750 in today's money

Scotland Yard: the headquarters of the London police force

St. James: an upper-class district in London

Language and Dialects in Musical Theater

My Fair Lady uses language and dialect to explore the complex web of classism and sexism in the London society of the time. In fact, musicals often use language and dialect for character development. Here are some examples:

- * In *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, which takes place in London in 1846, we are introduced to Mrs. Lovett in a song called “The Worst Pies in London” that uses language to demonstrate her low social class as well as to set up her quick talking and sharp wit. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqapHRAqnfk>
- * In the song “To Life” from *Fiddler on the Roof*, two opposing cultures—the Ashkenazi Jews and the Russians who have taken over their town—clash and then momentarily unite. Each culture uses their own language and their own dialect, both lyrically and musically. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9J4RsUwMh4>
- * *In the Heights* is a show about immigrants and first-generation Latinx Americans living in Washington Heights and working to fulfill their dreams. In “Breathe,” language is used to establish Vanessa as someone who is struggling to fit in both with her own culture and in the outside world of her college. <https://youtu.be/eCuvIWg-4PUw>

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Drawing Parallels to Today: A Media Literacy Activity

View

In “3 ways to speak English,” poet and educator Jamila Lyiscott examines the nuances of dialects, particularly in her hometown of Brooklyn. https://youtu.be/k9fmJ5xQ_mc

Discuss

What does it mean to be “articulate?” In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza is discriminated against because of her manner of speech. How do we see this in our world today?

Research

Have the class research “code switching” and “slang” in small groups. Have each group define and find an example of each of these terms.

Expand

Share the groups’ definitions and examples, and then discuss: When, how, and why do we use code switching and slang in our everyday lives?

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Writing in Dialect: A Literacy Activity

View

Bert Vaux, a former professor at Harvard, surveyed people across America to see how their way of speaking varies from region to region. Watch “Mapping How Americans Talk” to see what he learned. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HLY-e31MBrg>

Discuss

My Fair Lady tells us that people were immediately judged based on their manner of speech in London in 1912. Discuss how and why people speak differently depending on where they’re from, what they’re doing at the moment, and even who they’re with.



Norbert Leo Butz as Alfred Doolittle in Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.



London flower seller. Photo by: Mary Evans/Grenville Collins Postcard Collection/Everett Collection.

Research

What are some terms, phrases, or ways of saying particular words that are specific to New York in 2018, or even to individual boroughs?

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Linguistic Profiling: A Research Activity

Discuss

A major theme of *My Fair Lady* is classism, which manifests itself in the show through language. Linguistic profiling is a tactic used to identify groups of people by their accent or dialect. What are some potential consequences of this practice?

Research

In small groups, have students research linguistic profiling. What is it and what are some examples that have been in the news in the past few years?

Share

Have students present their findings to the class.

Expand

Now that they have seen current day examples, have students write a reflection on linguistic profiling and its possible impact on classism and racism in America today.



Harry Hadden-Paton as Henry Higgins and Lauren Ambrose as Eliza Doolittle in Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

THE FORM

Glossary of Musical Theater Terms

Parts of a Musical

Musical: a theatrical show that uses a combination of spoken dialogue and song in its core storytelling

Lyrics: the words in a song

Book: the “play” part of a musical script, including the story, dialogue, and action but not the songs

Libretto: the combined book and lyrics that make up the script

Score: the songs in a musical

Musical Theater Jobs

Lyricist: the person who writes the song lyrics

Composer: the person who writes the music

Bookwriter: the person who writes the book

Director: the person who leads and interweaves all the aspects of the production

Music Director: the person who teaches the music to the actors and musicians and leads the musical elements of the production

Actor: a person who performs in the production

Choreographer: the person in charge of creating dances and other movement in the production

Designers: the people who create the technical elements of the production, including lighting, costume, and set

Stage Manager: the person responsible for coordinating the logistics of the production

Parts of a Song

Verse: a stanza of a song that repeats musically but changes each time lyrically

Chorus: the section of the song that repeats both musically and lyrically throughout the song

Bridge: the section of the song that is different structurally from any other and which brings us to the final idea of the song

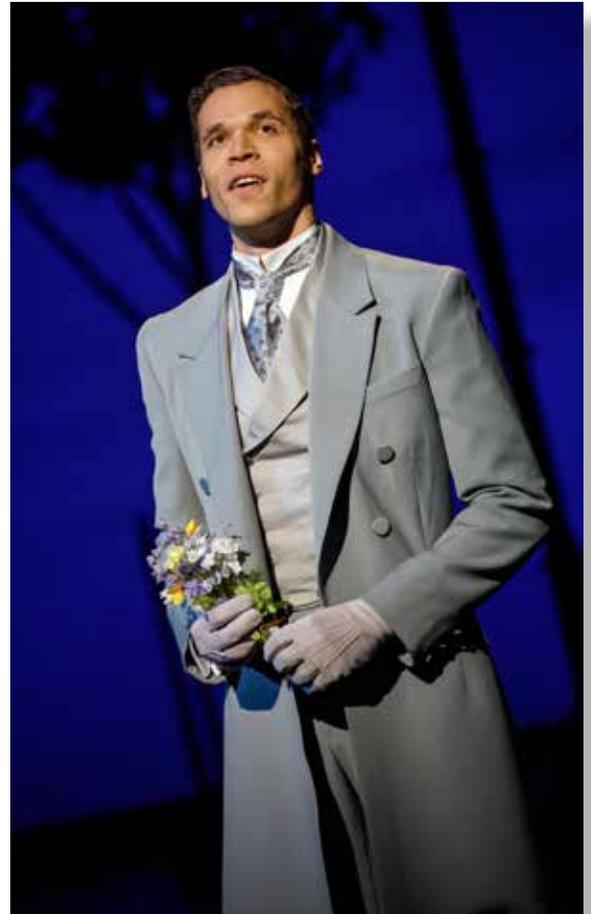
Verse-Chorus: a type of song structure that is used in musical theater and popular music

Hook: a line of the song that repeats, usually in the chorus, and is the main idea of the song (and usually the title)

Types of Songs in *My Fair Lady*

Today, musicals can be structured in new and exciting ways, but, throughout the history of musical theater, certain types of songs reoccur. This is a look at the types of songs that are typically included in traditionally structured musicals, along with corresponding examples from *My Fair Lady*.

- * **Opening Number** – usually an upbeat song that sets up the main characters and story (*Why Can't the English*)
- * **"I Want" Song** – sets up the main character's "want" and journey for the show (*Wouldn't It Be Lovely?*)
- * **Love Ballad** – a slow song about love (*On the Street Where You Live*)
- * **Dance Number** – the main purpose of this song is to have the characters dance, and not in a way that necessarily affects the story; these songs usually feature a lyric-free dance-break somewhere in the middle or end of the song (*The Rain in Spain*)
- * **Act 2 Opener** – sets up the conflict of the second act; often an upbeat song led by the main character (*You Did It*)
- * **Patter Song** – a clever comedy song that usually doesn't affect the plot (*Get Me to the Church on Time*)
- * **11 O'Clock Number** – the big show-stopper of the night; the climax of the score; usually the second-to-last song (*Without You*)
- * **Finale** – brings everything to a close; often sung by or about the main character with the entire cast (*I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face*)



Above: Jordan Donica as Freddy Eynsford-Hill, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Left: Harry Hadden-Paton, Lauren Ambrose, and Allan Corduner in a scene from Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus.

The Structure of a Standard Verse-Chorus Song in Musical Theater

There are many different song structures, but one that is often employed in musical theater is called “Verse-Chorus.” Here is a verse-chorus song from *My Fair Lady*:

ELIZA

BED! BED! I COULDN'T GO TO BED!
MY HEAD'S TOO LIGHT TO TRY TO SET IT DOWN!
SLEEP! SLEEP! I COULDN'T SLEEP TONIGHT!
NOT FOR ALL THE JEWELS IN THE CROWN!

Verse Intro:

- Sets up the song moment
- Has its own structure that is different from any other part of the song

I COULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHT!
I COULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHT!
AND STILL HAVE BEGGED FOR MORE.

Verse #1:

- 3-8 lines (usually)
- Establishes the rhyme scheme (which lines rhyme in each verse)
- Sets up the idea of the song (for example, in an “I Want” song, what does the character want? who are they singing to?)

I COULD HAVE SPREAD MY WINGS
AND DONE A THOUSAND THINGS
I'VE NEVER DONE BEFORE.

Verse #2:

- Same number of lines as Verse #1 that rhyme in the same places (same rhyme scheme)



Costume design sketches by Catherine Zuber for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*.

I'LL NEVER KNOW
WHAT MADE IT SO EXCITING;
WHY ALL AT ONCE
MY HEART TOOK FLIGHT.
I ONLY KNEW WHEN HE
BEGAN TO DANCE WITH ME,
I COULD HAVE DANCED, DANCED, DANCED ALL
NIGHT!

Chorus:

- The hook of the song is generally either the first or last line of the chorus
- Different number of lines than the verses
- Different rhyme scheme than the verses
- Often talks about the idea of the song in a poetic and beautiful (or funny, or sad) way; is often slightly different in tone than the verse]

I COULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHT!
I COULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHT!
AND STILL HAVE BEGGED FOR MORE.

I COULD HAVE SPREAD MY WINGS
AND DONE A THOUSAND THINGS
I'VE NEVER DONE BEFORE.

More Verses:

- Same number of lines as Verses #1 and #2 with the same rhyme scheme (in this particular case, the exact same words, but this is unusual)
- Usually looks at the idea of the song in another way (for example, why does the character want/need this?)

I'LL NEVER KNOW
WHAT MADE IT SO EXCITING,
WHY ALL AT ONCE
MY HEART TOOK FLIGHT.
I ONLY KNOW WHEN HE
BEGAN TO DANCE WITH ME
I COULD HAVE DANCED, DANCED, DANCED ALL
NIGHT!

Chorus and Outro:

- Exactly the same as the first chorus
- Final restatement of the hook in a slightly different way
- By the end of a musical theater song, something has changed for either the character or the plot]



Costume design sketches by Catherine Zuber for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Lyric Writing: An Introductory Activity

View

A Chorus Line is a multi-Tony Award-winning musical about a group of dancers auditioning to be in the chorus of a new show. Watch the song “Nothing” from *A Chorus Line*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlcxfX3L-II>

Discuss

In this song, a character wants something at the beginning of the song and we learn how that want changes by the end of the song. Discuss the character and her journey in the song. Identify the hook. (Hint: the hook is the word “nothing”.)

Write

As a class, choose a character. Decide what the character wants in this moment and why. This can be as serious or as silly as the class wants to make it—either way, their task is to be as detailed as possible. “Using The Structure of a Standard Verse-Chorus Song in Musical Theater” (on page 15-16 of this guide) as a structural guideline, write an outline for a song this character sings. Then write the chorus as a class.

Expand

Break the class into small groups. Have each group write one of the verses or the bridge from the outline.

Share

Put the lyrics all together in order and read the song out loud as a class.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.



“My Fair Lady” sheet music from 1956. Image courtesy of mooziic/Alamy Stock Photo.

EXPLORING THE THEMES

Thematic Elements

Below you will find thematic elements, lyrical excerpts, discussion questions, and suggested activities that can be used to launch a classroom exploration of *My Fair Lady*. These discussion questions can also be used to prompt conversation and debate or as essay writing assignments.

Social Class

Activity: Have students write a personal essay about a time in their lives when they observed or experienced differences in social class.

LOOK AT HER—A PRIS'NER OF THE GUTTERS;
CONDEMNED BY EV'RY SYLLABLE SHE UTTERS.
BY RIGHT SHE SHOULD BE TAKEN OUT AND HUNG
FOR THE COLD-BLOODED MURDER OF THE ENGLISH TONGUE!
(Henry Higgins, "Why Can't the English?")

- * What are the issues facing Eliza in *My Fair Lady* in regards to her social class?
- * What benefits and advantages do the upper class have in *My Fair Lady*?
- * How do you think social class plays a part in education?
- * What are the challenges facing someone in the lower class in America today?

Romance vs Love

Activity: Have students write an essay answering the question: Is anyone in *My Fair Lady* actually in love?

WORDS! WORDS! I'M SO SICK OF WORDS!
I GET WORDS ALL DAY THROUGH;
FIRST FROM HIM, NOW FROM YOU!
IS THAT ALL YOU BLIGHTERS CAN DO?
(Eliza Doolittle, "Show Me")

- * What is the difference between romance and love?
- * Do you think Eliza and Higgins become romantically involved at the end of *My Fair Lady*?
- * What are the elements of a healthy romantic relationship?
- * Is love important in marriage?



Lauren Ambrose as Eliza Doolittle and Diana Rigg as Mrs. Higgins in Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast. Photo by Joan Marcus

Transformation

Activity: Ask students to choose a character from a piece of literature or from a film who undergoes a transformation and have them compare and contrast it with the transformation undergone by Eliza Doolittle.

HER ENGLISH IS TOO GOOD, HE SAID,
WHICH CLEARLY INDICATES THAT SHE IS FOREIGN.
WHEREAS OTHERS ARE INSTRUCTED IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE
ENGLISH PEOPLE AREN.
AND ALTHOUGH SHE MAY HAVE STUDIED WITH AN EXPERT
DI'LECTICIAN AND GRAMMARIAN,
I CAN TELL THAT SHE WAS BORN HUNGARIAN!
(Henry Higgins, quoting Zoltan Karpathy, "You Did It")

- * What is an example of transformation in pop culture?
- * Do you think that Eliza's transformation is positive or negative?
- * What is a moment in your life when you experienced a transformation?
- * What transformations do the other characters go through in *My Fair Lady*?

Sexism

Activity: Discuss how gender roles have changed (or not changed) over the course of students' lives.

WOMEN ARE IRRATIONAL, THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO THAT!
THEIR HEADS ARE FULL OF COTTON, HAY, AND RAGS!
THEY'RE NOTHING BUT EXASPERATING, IRRITATING,
VACILLATING, CALCULATING, AGITATING,
MADDENING, AND INFURIATING HAGS!
(Henry Higgins, "A Hymn to Him")

- * Is the end of *My Fair Lady* romantic? Is it sexist? Is it both?
- * Is Eliza a feminist?
- * Are gender roles outdated or do you think they serve a purpose?
- * What is "internalized sexism"? Can you cite some examples of this?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Interview with Jordan Donica, Freddy in the original Broadway Cast

In Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Jordan Donica portrayed Freddy Eynsford-Hill. Before playing this role, Donica played Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson in the first national tour of *Hamilton*.

He answered some questions for us about his experience as a professional actor in the world of musical theater.

What was the most exciting part of the rehearsal process for *My Fair Lady*?

This entire process was exciting, so it is hard to pinpoint the most exciting moment. However, I'd have to say that my favorite moments was making a connection with everyone in the cast, crew, and at Lincoln Center Theater. The days where everyone was in the room or at the theater to get the piece on its feet are my most treasured memories, because theater and art are so collaborative. To get an opportunity to see and be inspired by the work that everyone has been doing, is why I love theater and storytelling!

What are the differences between creating a new role and creating a role within a revival?

It's a very similar process. I had the opportunity to do some work in the *Frozen* labs, and the similarity between that experience and this one is very striking to me. I had never seen *My Fair Lady*, but knew the music very well from when I was a child. At the end of the day, no matter if I'm creating a new role, creating a role within a revival, or replacing someone, I always look to the text and let the text be my guide and inform everything that I do. I also let my reactions to my partners guide me through the space and process to find who these people are and who I am as these characters are together.

What are your favorite roles that you've ever played and why?

One of my favorite characters was Algernon Moncrieff in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The reason that I loved that role so much is that it's the most challenging role I've ever done. I felt as though I had only really scratched the surface of that character. My other favorite was playing Jesus in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, one of my all-time favorite shows. The opportunity to play that role came at what felt like the perfect moment in life. I was studying theology and philosophy, and it was amazing to step into the shoes of a man who has been both blessed and burdened with the expectations of humanity on his shoulders and to really explore what that feels like. The possibilities were endless. As a disclaimer, I've truly loved every role I've ever played!

How did you get into character for your role in *My Fair Lady*?

It changed depending on where we were in the process. I listened to some intense rock music in my dressing room, followed by really lovely cinematic orchestrations. It helped me feel the angst and emotion that Freddy feels, and then layer on the "class" that he is forced to carry with him because of where he was born. He is always looking for that excitement and freedom, and he really finds that in Eliza. I also loved to take my time to put on the clothes and the shoes, because they were always the final pieces needed to become the character.



Jordan Donica, original Broadway cast

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Scene Writing and Acting: A Reflective Activity

Contextualize

The ending of *My Fair Lady* is ambiguous. After watching the production, discuss what might happen immediately after the end of the show, after Eliza touches Higgins' cheek and exits the stage.

Write

In small groups, have students write a new scene that could happen directly after that famous last line. Have them play the parts and rehearse it, preparing to act it out for their classmates.

Share

Have students perform their new final scenes of *My Fair Lady* for each other.

Expand

Compare and contrast the different endings each group wrote.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.



Harry Hadden-Paton as Henry Higgins in Lincoln Center Theater's production of *My Fair Lady*, Original Broadway Cast.
Photo by Joan Marcus

RESOURCES

Media

“Act 1 Prologue,” *Into The Woods* https://youtu.be/_Y4j-KDGCUC

“The Worst Pies in London,” *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqapHRAqnfk>

“To Life,” *Fiddler on the Roof* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9J4RsUwMh4>

“Breathe,” *In the Heights* <https://youtu.be/eCuvIWg4PUw>

“Nothing,” *A Chorus Line* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlcxfX3L-II>

“Ten Minutes of Hamilton Clips.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvBYOBTkDRk>

Lerner and Loewe

Alan Jay Lerner <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/alan-jay-lerner/>

Frederick Loewe <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/frederick-loewe/>

Alan Jay Lerner Obituary <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/15/obituaries/alan-jay-lerner-the-lyricist-and-playwright-is-dead-at-67.html?pagewanted=all>

Frederick Loewe, American Composer <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Loewe>

Adaptation

Romeo and Juliet <https://www.playshakespeare.com/romeo-and-juliet/>

Romeo + Juliet https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCIVlc_niac

West Side Story <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77KnithfRRk>

“Exit Music (For A Film)” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50rlHV6g9Q>

Pygmalion <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3825/3825-h/3825-h.htm>

“*Pygmalion*, Greek Mythology” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pygmalion>

“*Selfie’s* Challenge: The Inherent Creepiness of *Pygmalion* in 2014”

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/selfie-pygmalion-in-2014-is-kind-of-a-creepy-idea-right/380981/>

Classism and Language

“3 ways to speak English” https://youtu.be/k9fmJ5xQ_mc

“Mapping How Americans Talk” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HLYe31MBrg>

“The Class System in 1914 Britain” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/z2vpvcw>

Musical Theater

“PBS’s 100 Years of Musical Theater timelines” <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/timelines/>

“Elements of a Musical: The Score” <http://www.musicals101.com/score.htm>