

Educating rita by willy russell essay sample

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



Examine Frank's growing sense of unease as Rita becomes more educated.

Educating Rita is a play written by Willy Russell. The play is set in Liverpool during the 1980's. It is written to highlight the difference in class, between a middle class lecturer and a working class student. During the 80's period women were to have less challenging and rewarding jobs. Contrary to this men were expected to gain an education and become the income earner. Women no longer sought this role and wanted to lead the same life as men. This was a major issue in the 1980's.

At the beginning of the play Rita is simply a twenty-six year old hairdresser who is tired of her plain, mundane and repetitive lifestyle and is in need of a voyage of self discovery and pursues an education to broaden her horizons. She believes that the only way to break free from this rather boring way of life is to get an education. She wishes to attend an Open University course in order to obtain a degree in English Literature. Rita reflects a working class desire to escape from her own culture and background in order to lead a more fulfilling life in the type of society represented by her tutor Frank and other students. In the first act, Rita is presented as a working class woman, brought up in a working class environment; she has a strong sense of humour, emphasising her working class existence. Rita and Frank contrast greatly, Frank is a well educated, upper class lecturer, who is also very well spoken.

The main theme of this play is personal relationships. The audience watching the play see how Frank and Rita interact with each other and how they influence each other. Bored with teaching undergraduates English Literature,

Frank miserably reflects through a whisky glass on his failed marriage and his attempt at becoming a poet. His world is turned upside down by the arrival of Rita. At the start of the play Rita needs Frank to teach her as she looks up to him and idolises him, however as time progresses and Rita develops we realise that this relationship changes. Rita meets new people at summer school and finds a new flatmate, Trish who she now looks up to. The relationship between Frank and Rita drifts away as near the end of the play it is Frank who yearns for Rita.

In the opening of the play, Rita crashes into Dr Frank Bryant's life and her aggressive seriousness earns great respect of her lecturer who had previously resigned himself to a life of empty lectures and booze. Rita's character is a "breath of fresh air that's been in the room for years" for Frank and he begins to care about someone or something for the first time in his life since his break up of marriage. In this play Rita questions Frank on the understanding he has of his work and about himself. The play explores the relationship between the student Rita and the tutor Frank. The play shows how the two main characters transform and develop new skills and change the way they are.

Willy Russell tells us through the play "Educating Rita" how education has an important value and how it changes a person and their life. The playwright conveys through his play that Rita searches for a meaning in her life. Throughout the play Russell shows that anyone can educate or do what they want to as long as they do not give up. He shows this by using Rita and Frank. Rita has determination and she overcomes all the barriers that

prevent her success. She never gives up and ends up passing her examinations. Frank, who does not try things, ends up being sent to Australia. This shows how Willy Russell used his two main characters to portray what he wants to show.

At first we notice Rita coming across to us as a very nervous and timid character. The scene is set with Rita entering Frank's office in the Open University. She enters the room very suddenly and abruptly as she has to forcefully open the door. This immediately reveals the sign that she is feeling very nervous. To hide this she begins talking non stop without even being spoken to, as this is the only way she knows her nerves could be controlled showing that she is not nervous. Contrary to this it could show that she is brave and outspoken. It is more likely that in this sort of situation Frank and Rita should exchange roles. Rita should be the one who is shy and polite as she is new to the world to which she is about to enter. Frank should be more comfortable and confident as he knows the realm of English Literature well. Educating somebody is nothing new to him.

Rita " I'm comin' in, aren't I? It's that stupid bleedin' handle...You wanna get it fixed... Well there's no good meanin' to, is it..."

The use of the door is a device with many meanings, as physically the door prevents Rita from entering the room, but it is also symbolic as it is an object in Rita's path to success and shows that she will have many barriers in here journey. It is also significant to how Rita changed as we can see from the way she replied to Frank's answer. " Well there's no good meanin' to", shows that she likes to do things immediately and not to drag things out. This is

how her attitude to education is; she wants to learn everything about literature, now.

On the other hand, Frank's home, the study where the audience is constantly able to observe the growing relationship between Frank and Rita, represents the very nature of Frank himself. Although his broken door handle brings some humour to the play, it not only symbolises his lethargic nature but also that he is a rather lonely man. He rarely has any friends or visitors entering into his study and therefore has no need to fix his door handle. Once Rita enters his study she forces Frank to observe and consider the surroundings of which he has not paid any attention to in years. The way in which Rita notices and comments on everything which Frank takes for granted provides some stimulation for him.

There maybe only one pair in the play, but it is a very interesting one, because it is very symbolic of Frank's emotions and personality. For example he hides whisky in his bookshelf this shows one of the main factors in the story is about Frank's obsession with drinking. However he does hide the fact that he loves to drink but it is easily spotted by other students.

He has a naked religious picture in his office. Rita's reaction to the picture was different compared to Frank. Rita describes it as pornography and Frank just frankly replies by saying that he hasn't seen it for so many years. From now on Frank starts to see everything through Rita's eyes. Previously he had lost interest in things. Frank's window is jammed shut this shows that he doesn't open up himself. The lack of fresh air in his room represents the lack of freedom he lets into his life. This also applies to the fact that his door is

sealed shut which shows that no one goes into his office and he does not open it to let fresh air in

In the second scene of the play Frank's attitude and dialogue seems to be more confident and self-assured, but only when he is on the topic of education and Literature. When the conversation switches to other topics such as life, society and marriage, his shy and nervous nature returns and Rita once again dominates the scene. Rita also tells Frank what to do and what not to do, as if she has known him for a long time. It is easy for her to act like this, as her personality is very bubbly and outgoing with a sense of humour meaning that she does not and will not get embarrassed easily. By Act 1 Scene 3, she flounces into the room saying that she is bored and by now Frank and Rita's bond as friends has grown stronger and they both understand each other as they can talk to each other nevertheless still keeping it professional.

Rita " God, I've had enough of this. It's borin' ...honest to God he doesn't half get on my tits."

Frank " Good... show me the evidence."

Rita " Y'dirty sod."

The conversation can be looked at as a pun. It can be looked at as Frank is acting professionally by asking Rita to support her opinion to finding " Howards End" boring, or Frank and Rita were enjoying each others company and taking what they say to each other in a more sexual way. An alternative way to look at the relationship between Frank and Rita is that there is a

change in the balance of power between them. In fact, Rita compares their relationship to what a parent and a child has. While the child is still young and innocent the parent has a big influence on his/her life. The child relies and depends on the parent and as the child grows up he begins to discover things for himself and does not depend on the parent anymore.

“ What’s up, Frank, don’t y’ like me now that the little girl’s grown up, now that y’ can no longer bounce me on daddy’s knee an’ watch me stare back in wonder at everything he has to say?” and Frank replies “ Is that all you wanted. Have you come all this way for so very, very little?” These quotes show the different things that Rita and Frank value.

At first, Frank is able to impress Rita. He is able to change her ways, ideas and views on life and education. However, when she returns from summer school, Frank realises that she is not so dependant upon him any longer. She has found new influences to pursue. Instead of always following and accepting his ideas and judgements she begins to question them. Rita no longer needs to continue her relationship with Frank even though Frank still wants their relationship to carry on: In this way Frank remains an effective contrast to Rita throughout the play. As Rita continues to discover and develop her own self, Frank chooses to remain static. Rita is pleased that her character has improved to what she believes to be the better.

With Rita’s newly acquired confidence and intellectual maturity we see a shift in the balance of their relationship. Rita surprises Frank with her new literary knowledge. The fact that she has managed to develop good relationships with other tutors at summer school makes Frank feel insecure

and even jealous. Rita can now mix with “proper” students. In the opening scene, Rita started off being dependant on Frank, but as the play proceeded she began to need him less. She found other influences to follow such as summer school, her flat mate Trish and other students. She needed to finally break away from Frank. Contrasting with this, Frank seems to have developed a growing need for Rita. This led him to feeling betrayed when Rita no longer relied on him:

“ It struck me that there was a time when you told me everything.”

In the early scene of Act 2 some time has passed. This is evident from the changes in Rita, such as her knowledge about different poets and poems e. g. ‘ Lady Chatterley’s Lover’ and ‘ Sons and Lovers’ by D. H. Lawrence. This happens during summer school, when she visits London. She has become more independent. She has also begun to sound posh like other students and starts to have a more intellectual argument with other students about Literature. Frank has a negative towards this change in Rita and is jealous. He despises all other students because they are cocky and argumentative and does not want Rita to become like them. He is also jealous that Rita now confides more to her room mate instead of him.

In Act 2 Scene5, the devastating fight between Frank and Rita occurs as Frank becomes sad and bitter of the changes Rita has gone through and how she no longer depends on him. Rita has changed her name back to Susan which shows she no longer respects who she was before. Frank feels he has created a monster and calls her “ Frankenstein” and then ridicules her by calling her other literary names and says “ What is it now then? Virginia? Or

Charlotte? Or Jane? Or Emily?" This shows that Frank believes Rita is changing her name to seem more intelligent.

In Act 2 Scene 6, the impact of the fight is clear as Frank is alone without Rita which is a dramatic device used by Russell to show Frank's vulnerability and how distant Rita and Frank have become. The structure of the scene was short and without it the audience would have lost the knowledge of how sour Frank and Rita's friendship has turned. As Frank tries to contact Rita, it can be seen that Rita no longer needs him and is fine while Frank is upset and lonely which makes the scene extremely poignant.

Rita questions Frank "Have they sacked you?" Rita suggests that Frank has not done something worthwhile in the place and has done something wrong. Actually it shows that he has not achieved much. Willy Russell uses Frank as the lazy one who gives up everything and he ends up going to Australia. "If you give up, you cannot achieve much in life. Rita has passed her education and is moving up in her life. She has got across all the barriers in her way to get to this stage.

'Educating Rita' greatly concentrates on the relationship between Frank and Rita. Rita comes to Frank in hope of fulfilling her ambition to change her character and lifestyle. Although Frank helps her in doing this he regrets the person he has made her into. At the end of the play we as an audience are able to learn more about their characters than they do themselves. We notice how Frank's continuous drinking is driving Rita away. We also see how Rita overvalues and uses her education too superficially. All that Rita realises now that the middle class life is not all that good especially after her friend

Trish's near death experience. She realised that life is what you make it and not how it seems from the outside. Although both Frank and Rita warn each other they do not seem to realise what they are doing to themselves. She dropped her regional accent and has become more confident in revealing her views on particular topics.

The play appears to underline different messages about education. It is education which seems to almost destroy the true, good and unique character of Rita. It also leads to Frank almost regretting his own education. Rita idolised the concept of education but I think that the message Willy Russell was trying to portray through 'Educating Rita' is that education is not what life is all about. Education simply gives people power over their own lives. It did offer Rita some of the solutions which she had craved for when wanting to find a way out of what she believed to be an empty life. It did give her the freedom and choice which she had longed for even though it was in a different way to what she had expected. As Rita discovered towards the end of the play education does not necessarily bring somebody into a new, better character and way of life, it just gives the person the freedom to choose which path to follow in the future.