

Educating rita

Literature



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Throughout the play by Willy Russel, we see the main character Rita go through a lot of changes and metamorphosis from an unfulfilled hairdresser to a confident, educated woman. We see her go from one extreme to the other until she finally finds a middle ground where she is comfortable at. In this part of my essay I will be explaining how she got there. The first time Rita is mentioned is by her tutor, Frank, who says in a conversation that he thinks she will just be, " some silly woman's attempt to get into the mind of Henry James or whoever it is we're supposed to study on this course.

This gives us the impression that Rita will have no potential and not take the course seriously. In scene one Rita proves this more and more by the way she acts and it seems that her dreams of becoming an educated woman will never come about. Everything is against her and she is not a typical student. To start with her use of language is the complete opposite to Franks and her bad grammar and Liverpudlian accent combined sometimes make it hard for Frank to comprehend what she means. Rita speaks colloquially and also uses a lot of obscene, rude language.

This shows how different she is compared to Frank who we rarely see using vulgar language because he has a varied vocabulary, which means he can choose what and how he says things whereas Rita cannot at this stage. Rita has been brought up in a completely different environment and so her knowledge is very limited, an example of this is when she thinks that assonance is " getting' the rhyme wrong". She also believes herself to be well read and thinks that she knows real literature. To show this she changes her name from Susan to Rita, which was chosen after the author Rita Mae Brown.

She thinks this author is well known but actually she writes pulp-fiction books. This action illustrates Rita's lack of literacy awareness and misjudgement of what she believes is real literature at the time. Another problem which holds her back from being educated at the beginning is her family, especially her husband, Denny, who is absolutely against her taking the open university course and would prefer her to stay at home and start a family because that is what is expected of her at her age. This is not what Rita wants though.

In scene two she talks to Frank about how she did not get a good education at school because even though she wanted to learn and study, the peer pressure from her friends made her join in and push it to one side. She didn't want to become different from her family and friends, therefore she blocked out the feeling that she wanted to achieve more in life even though it was always "tappin' away" in her head that she had chosen the wrong path. "I'd just play another record or buy another dress an' stop worryin'... 'keep goin', tellin' yourself life's great. "

This is why she motivates herself by saying she will not buy a new dress until she passes her first exam. So although everything seems to be set against her, she is still determined to become educated. The reason Rita wants to become educated is because she thinks that education is the key to choice and freedom. She is trying to get away from her life and start afresh, have the choice to be who she wants to be and do what she wants to do.

She hates being a hairdresser where no one talks about things that matter and wants to move from the working class with its philosophies on how one

should live, into the middle class. Unfortunately her determination is not strong enough to pass an exam at this stage plus she cannot write an appropriate, educated essay, which is vital if she wants to pass her course. In Act 1, Rita starts to develop slightly. Throughout it she begins to gain some understanding and becomes more mature. Frank assumes that she is ready to cross over from the working class to the middle class when he invites her to a dinner party.

Rita obviously isn't though because she doesn't go in the end and she says that she thought that she would be playing "the court jester" and didn't know what to wear or what sort of wine to buy, which are all very trivial things and really she was hiding behind those excuses for the reason that she felt too paranoid about what the guests, especially Julia, would think of her. At the end of Act 1, Rita feels like a "half-caste" and doesn't feel comfortable in either world. During most of Act 1, Rita does not seem focused on the course and does not seem to be making much of an effort.

Then at the end of scene 7 we see her become inspired by her mum, who tells her the previous night when she is drunk: "We could sing better songs than those". Rita feels that her mum was telling her that she still has the opportunity to make something better of herself. Then in the next scene we see just how determined she is because when given the ultimatum by Denny to either quit the course or leave him she chooses the course and turns up at Frank's ready to work and even though he wants to talk it over with her she is more keen to talk over her Macbeth essay.

The essay is proof that Rita still has a long way to go because she gives an emotional reaction rather than an educational reaction in her essay which is wrong. Frank then tells her that if she wants to write better essays he will have to change her and really he doesn't want to do that any more because he is worried that she will lose her individuality and be converted into a boring, fake student. Rita on the other hand doesn't care about that and just wants to learn. It is a turning point for her in her metamorphosis because she says: " Here, it's crap. Right.

So we dump that in the bin, an' we start again. " She is resolute and ready to stop being an unfulfilled hairdresser and develop into the educated woman who she aspires to be. In Act 2 we see a very dramatic change in Rita who we haven't seen for an entire summer which she has been spending at a summer school. The first thing which is obvious is how confident Rita now is because she was able to spend an entire week with a group of people who she didn't know. The old Rita who we first met would never have been able to do this so something has obviously changed.

Rita now lives in an apartment with a fellow student called Trish who we discover to be a very big influence on how the new Rita acts. She also has a new job in a bistro, which she thinks is a lot more chic and interesting compared to her old job because she can " talk about what's important" there. I think that splitting up with Denny was a huge weight off her shoulders and now that he is out of her life she has more freedom to do what she wants and she can move on. If she was still with him I doubt that she would have gone to the summer school and she would still be at the stage where she couldn't write a decent essay.

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Also, she now has new influences in her life. The two main ones are her new flat mate Trish who Rita is in awe of and she looks up to her greatly. Here is a quote from the book describing Trish from Rita's point of view at the beginning of Act 2: " She's great. Y'know she's dead classy. Y'know like, she's got taste... She's just got it. Everything in the flat's dead unpretentious, just books an' plants everywhere. " The other new influence is a male student called Tyson, (also known as Tiger) who Rita finds " fascinating".

She likes Trish and Tiger because they make her feel young and she thinks that she should be like them as they are students, so she tries to mirror herself on Trish by taking lots of her views on issues. At the same time though she is losing part of the old Rita and just like Frank predicted, she is losing some of her creative flair and what made so her refreshing at the start has been lost over the summer. Her language and grammar have changed a lot. She is now almost grammatically perfect, she rarely swears and she uses less slang.

For a while in scene 2 Rita tries losing her accent and speaking in the way which she believes is " proper" because she thinks that she will be accepted by others more. Another small detail which she has changed is the fact that she no longer smokes, believing that it makes her more middle class by doing so. She has also changed her name back to Susan because she doesn't need to hide behind Rita any more and can be herself, she also realises that naming herself after Rita Mae Brown wasn't an educated thing to do and changing her name shows how she is now very confident and comfortable with herself.

She is also confident enough to mix with other students, even though in Act 1 she always set herself aside from the "proper students" as she didn't think of herself as a real scholar. Now though she talks to them with ease, as an equal. She even enters into discussions with them and wants to have her tutorials down on the grass amongst other people. All of this confirms that she doesn't rely on Frank that much anymore and can stand on her own two feet. We see this for definite in scene 1 when Frank wants to start on the poet Blake, only to discover that Rita studied him on the summer course and can even recite some his work off by heart.

Rita has now definitely crossed over from being the unfulfilled hairdresser to this educated woman. In scene 2 she asks how she did in her essay and Frank takes the essay and says that it "wouldn't look out of place with these" and he places it on top of a pile of other essays. This symbolizes that Rita is now in place with the other students and she is no longer behind them and is on the same level as them. In Act 2 Rita seems to go slightly over the top and possibly goes too far and has just gone from one extreme to the other. She has lost her originality and is no longer a "breath of fresh air" as Frank once called her.

It isn't until the final scene that we see a bit of the old Rita. She comes back from the exam and we find her smoking again which is a bit like the Rita we knew at the beginning of the play. She has her Liverpudlian accent once more and makes jokes with Frank, which shows that she has her old sense of humour restored again. She comes to his office to apologize because she realises that she has gone too far and her eyes were opened by Trish who

had tried to top herself and Rita realises that neither her nor Tiger were that amazing.

Frank accepts the apology and gives her a dress to symbolize that she is now the educated woman which she dreamt of becoming. She has passed her exam and now has the choice to do what she wants which was the whole reason she started the course to begin with. In conclusion Rita has finally reached a middle ground and we finally see that that the transformation from the unfulfilled hairdresser to the educated woman was a good change and has benefited her as a result. > If you were directing the play, how would you show these changes in Rita's character?

For this part of the essay I will imagine that the play I am going to direct will be set in modern times (21st century). To illustrate how I would show the changes in Rita's character I will write about 4 different scenes and use those to show the transformation she goes through. The four scenes I am going to use will be Scene 1 and 6 from Act 1 and Scene 4 and 7 from Act 2. I have chosen these 4 scenes because they are all at separate points during Rita's metamorphosis from the unfulfilled hairdresser to the educated woman.

At the start in Scene 1 when we first meet Rita I would want her to look really out of place and be wearing lots of makeup. Bright lipstick, thick lip liner, lots of over the top eye-shadow and eye-liner. This would be quite a contrast to the average students nowadays who usually look quite natural and wear little or no makeup. For the hair I would like her to have lots of it in a messy "up-do" which is quite popular for modern hairdressers. To make her the

perfect stereotype her hair should be bleach blonde. The picture above demonstrates how I would like her to look.

For clothes she should wear popular and fairly cheap clothes which are trendy in the working class but would look very out of place in the university, it would probably be quite a "tarty" outfit. At first she must have a strong Liverpudlian accent and dialect. As she is very nervous at the start her voice would be high pitched and she would be talking plenty, very fast and accentuate her grammatical errors. The actress would always have a cigarette in her hand because that is an important symbol throughout the play.

She would use big hand gestures and be pacing around the room looking at everything in awe as well as picking objects up, looking at them and then placing them down again to show her wonder for the study and everything in it. During the whole scene I don't want her to stand still for a moment; she must always be fidgeting or tapping her foot to show how nervous she is until the end of the scene when Frank tells her he won't be teaching her any longer. She must then stand still in shock and then have a go at him telling him he is going to be her tutor whether he likes it or not.

Her entrance and exit should be dramatic and make an impact on the audience and Frank. The main thing is that she makes the audience think that she is dim and will not be able to achieve anything until the end of the scene when she shows everyone that she is eager to learn. In scene 6 Rita still has her strong Liverpudlian accent and hair style but she will have slightly less makeup on to show that slowly she is changing. This is the scene

when she comes to tell Frank about going to the theatre so she must be out of breath from running and talking quickly to Frank because she is so excited.

She's really proud of herself for going to see her first real play so that must show in the expressions on the face of the actress throughout. To show her closeness to Frank she might hug him as soon as she sees him and stand near him during the scene. She should not sit down until Frank starts talking about the difference between the words tragic and tragedy. She would nod her head as well to show that she is beginning to understand and developing in this way. At the end when Frank asks her about the dinner party she will again be shocked and standing still and then start to fidget with her hands and become flustered and nervous.

This shows that she really isn't ready to make the cross over even though Frank thinks she is. At the end of the scene when Rita uses a lot of short sentences she should say them quickly until the last sentence when she says: " What shall I wear? " She should say this at normal speed to make the end of the scene more dramatic. When Rita returns from summer school in Act 2 Scene 1 we see a striking change in her personality in the book, so there should be quite a visual change in the play as well to show the transformation.

This time Rita will look more like the average modern student and stand out less and look quite average (also shows how she has lost some of her personality). She will have dyed her hair a mousey brown colour and cut it short and practical. Her makeup will now be down to the bare minimum. I

have decided to change Trish from being a bohemian hippy to a posh, neat, plain dressing woman. This means that as Rita tries to mirror herself on Trish she will end up wearing clean shirts, knee-length skirts and smart jeans.

I have made this change to make the play fit with the modern theme. The picture to the side shows how the actress will look and what type of clothes she will wear. She will have a confident air about her in the way that she moves and be very calm and stand still, with no fidgeting. She will still stand near Frank but is no longer in awe of him or the office and that is why she wants to go outside so much, to be around other people. She will still have her Liverpudlian accent but will no longer use any slang or say anything with grammatical errors.

When she comes into the study she should sit down and talk instead of pacing around like she used too. She will still talk quite fast in this scene because she has so much to tell Frank but it won't be because she is nervous, just excited to see an old friend. When she talks about Trish I would have the actress talking in wonder of her like she used to do about Frank. When Frank tells her that he will not go outside to sit on the grass she ought to act disappointed and look longingly out of the window.

Also when she realises Frank wants to talk about William Blake I would want her to act really pleased with herself that she already knows him and maybe even slightly bored at the prospect of having to do him all over again in her tutorials. Then at the end when she should say the following line in a know-it-all voice: " Of course; you don't do Blake without doing innocence and experience, do y' ". She should do this to show how much she has changed

and progressed and so the audience now knows that Rita has become an educated woman but they are starting to dislike this new side to her.

In the final scene of the entire play we see Rita at the middle ground she should be at. To show the slight return of the old Rita she should keep the same hair and just add a bit of colourful eye-shadow and wear a bright, cheerful t-shirt and some trainers. She should have her strong accent and dialect back but keep the perfect grammar and include a bit of slang. I would also make her hug Frank to show how she is sorry for the way they argued and make a point that they are friends again. I think she should be very relaxed and maybe stand up and talk with big hand gestures like she used too, to prove that her individuality is back.