

Willy russell's educating rita



**ASSIGN
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Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*. The comedy *Educating Rita* is based on the ancient myth of Pygmalion the sculptor who fashioned a female form which he called Galatea and then fell in love with her. The main theme of the play is the relationship between a teacher and a student. It traces the development of a young working class hairdresser who attends English literature tutorials with an older academic called Frank. While the story of Rita is both amusing and poignant, it is in fact the transformation of Frank that provides the richest message of the play. At the beginning of the play there is a deliberate contrast between Rita's fresh approach to literature, and Frank's obvious boredom with his job. This can be seen in the way that Rita surprises Frank in her answers to his assignment questions, for example when he asks her a question about how to stage the play *Peer Gynt*, Rita answers "Do it on the radio" (Act I, Scene 4). The audience knows that part of the reason for this short answer is that she had to struggle against the combined opposition of her partner and her father to complete this assignment. Frank, however, interprets this the answer of a genius, showing Rita is an original spirit, able to think around the question and reframe it in an intelligent and quite radical way. It is not the kind of answer that Frank would expect from his usual students. By the end of the first act, after many such instances Frank realizes that the education process is changing Rita, and probably not for the better. He tells "I don't know that I want to teach you." (Act One, Scene 8) because he knows that Rita is already very smart, and he is afraid that making her conform to a traditional curriculum will spoil her individuality. At this point Frank idealizes Rita, and is fascinated by her untutored mind. In the second act there is more of a focus on Frank and his dependence on "booze" to dull his brain and help him cope

with a career that has not lived up to his expectations. As Rita grows more confident in her judgements, and more competent as a student, Frank begins to express much more mixed feelings towards her. A key moment in their relationship occurs when Rita tells him that she wants to be known as “ Rita” and not her original name “ Susan.” (Act 2, Scene 5). Frank thinks this is pretentious and mocks her with the words “ What is it now then? Virginia? Or Charlotte? Or Jane? Or Emily? (Act 2, Scene 5) The use of these names connected with the most famous female novelists in British history is intended to hurt Rita, suggesting that she is reaching for a status higher than she is entitled to have. The real issue, however, is that education has changed Rita and that Frank can no longer control what she learns, or guide what she thinks. It is as if the statue he has made as come to life and is running away from him. The plot is neatly resolved in the final scene when Rita comes to Frank one last time and insists “ All I’ve ever done is take from you. I’ve never given anything” (Act 2, Scene 7) before taking out her scissors and cutting his hair. Frank’s good humor is restored, and the play demonstrates that Rita has rekindled Frank’s faith in literature. Frank has become the student, and Rita, the hairdresser, has become his teacher and his inspiration. Reference: Russell, Willy. *Educating Rita*. London: Methuen, 2007.