

Educating rita

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

As Rita enters Frank's office she uses very informal language. A lot different from the ordinary student. Rita's first, clumsy entry reflects her social inferiority rattling at the door knob and unable to get in. Finding it difficult to break into Frank's world, her strong Liverpudlian accent clearly identifies her as coming from a completely different background. However, there is an air of determination about her which Frank finds impossible to ignore. She is like a "breath of air", different from all the other students, and it is this freshness which is so appealing.

When talking about the picture of a nude religious scene hanging on Frank's wall, Rita asks her tutor whether or not he thinks of it as erotic. On hearing Frank's reply, "I suppose it is", Rita's reaction is to state, "There's no suppose about it Look at those tits". This is typical of Rita and Frank's conversation as they got acquainted. Their subjects of conversations quickly change, Rita offering Frank a cigarette and talking about people being afraid of death, which then reminds her of a poem on the same topic.

Frank immediately assumes that Rita is speaking of the celebrated Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, only to be told that she is, in fact referring to a poem by the contemporary Liverpool writer Roger McGough. Not surprisingly, Frank has to admit, "I don't think I know the actual piece you mean...". Rita's main reason for trying for an education is so she can have choice, she tells Frank that everyone thinks they have choice but they all think choice is deciding what drink to have or what to wear, Rita knows this is not choice, choice is something that will change her life.

Her husband's lack of support means that she has to write her essays in quiet moments at work. This conflict deepens when Denny burns her books, on finding out that Rita had been taking the contraceptive pill against his wishes. We learn that Rita's real name is Susan and that she is calling herself by this new name after Rita Mae Brown, the authoress of her favourite novel entitled *Rubyfruit Jungle*. Frank is clearly not impressed by such writing.

Rita talks about life at the hairdressers, herself and how at twenty-six, she feels "out of step"; while everyone else is expecting her to settle down and have children in the near future, Rita wants to discover herself first.

Education is a way for Rita to escape from her working-class surroundings. In Frank's room, Rita looks out of the window at the lawns and asks Frank whether the "proper" students sit down there to study, clearly distinguishing herself as not a "proper" student. This shows her lack of confidence in her new environment, and also has much to do with her simply not understanding the realities of university education.

As with her change of name, we recognise that in searching for her identity, she is simply moving further away from her true self. Her use of language is a barrier, the strong accent and dialect clearly pitching her in the working class and setting her apart from the rest of the students. Rita describes how, as a child, she had a yearning to attend boarding school because of her vision of "tuck-shop", "matron" and "prep". She describes her dissatisfaction with her own schooling: "borin', ripper-up books, broken glass everywhere, knives an' fights".

Although she jokes, "An that was just the staffroom", the audience senses that there's a serious issue underlying all this cheerful banter. Rita explains that although the teachers tried their best, she was unable to commit herself to her education because there was no academic atmosphere. Studying was for the "whimps", as she puts it, and for her to take school seriously she would have to become different from her friends. She now considers that it was this need for conformity that led to a rather shallow existence: music, clothes and "lookin' for a feller" seemed to be the sum total of her experience.

Rita's success at summer school means that she is brimming with confidence. She has stopped smoking, moved in with a new flatmate called Trish and, as she admits, "I'm having the time of me life". Frank tries to introduce Rita to the work of a "new" poet but he is surprised to learn that she has already "done" William Blake at summer school. Rita recites a poem from memory and explains that even though Blake was not on the syllabus, one of her tutors was such a "Blake Freak" that she ended up reading his works anyway. Rita's changing language is instantly recognizable.

When she tells Frank about her conversation with the tutor who asked her whether she was fond of Ferlinghetti, Rita acknowledges that the old Rita would have said "only with Parmesan cheese". Instead her reply is a carefully controlled and serious response: "Actually I'm not too familiar with the American poets." She also uses words like analogy, parody and tragedy with apparent ease, in contrast to not knowing what assonance meant at the beginning of Act 1 is a very positive change. Rita comments that buying a

new dress to change the external appearance can deflect you from the need to change yourself on the inside.

Now as a symbolic gesture, Rita is wearing an old dress and is refusing to buy another until she passes her first exam. By then, she hopes to have become an entirely new person and will be able to buy the " sort of dress you'd only see on an educated woman". Arriving late for her tutorial, Rita begins by speaking with an affected voice which she sees as " talking properly". Her flatmate, Trish has told her that " there is not a lot of point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice", but Frank is quick to point out that she hasn't got an ugly voice, or at least she didn't have.

He tells her to be herself but, as Rita indicated earlier in the play she is trying to become educated because " I don't want to be myself". Trish is becoming another influence in her life. She is a different form of teacher and becomes a sort of role model for Rita. Frank reacted very quickly because I think he feels Rita no longer needs him in quite the same way and he is failing to understand that Rita does not want to be " herself" and that she is trying to escape her situation by becoming educated.

Continuing from her success at summer school and her growing confidence which has resulted in her changing character, we now learn that for the first time, Rita has actually mixed with " proper" students and she has quickly realised that they are not so infallible after all. Her illusions of their academic prowess are shattered as she wins her argument with the other students about D. H. Lawrence. This represents a shift in her attitude and confidence. Rita is now able to hold her own in academic circles, whether it be down on

the lawns below Frank's window or in a more formal manner at the summer school.

Rita reports that one of the students, nicknamed Tiger, has invited her on a Christmas vacation to the South of France with the rest of his crowd. Frank reacts with what appears to be jealousy, making excuses about why she would be unable to go. Rita is shocked and cuts Frank short, suggesting that he is being ridiculous. The scene ends, however with Frank returning one of Rita's essays, telling her that it " wouldn't look out of place", with the other students on his desk.

At the beginning of the play Rita had no confidence in herself, no educational background and didn't interact with the other students. Now this has all changed as Rita has an abundance of confidence, summer school has been exceedingly good for her, educating her and now she is not fearful of the other students. She is actually quite the opposite and joins in with debates and wins arguments. These changes are very positive as she has got exactly what she wanted and has much more choice career wise. She does not feel " out of step" anymore she feels like a better person and has found herself.