

# Educating rita summary



At this time working class people did not usually stay in at school later than the age of 15. This led to talent being wasted and many people leaving school with no qualifications. This applied even more to the women of this time as many of them were expected to simply get married and become baby machines and then perhaps get a part time job. The Open University (OU) was the University that gave these people another chance at education as you need no formal qualifications to study there. People who enrolled into this university would typically be people who, would have left school at the age of 15 and maybe hadn't taken their education seriously the first time round.

The Open University functioned by giving their students personal tutors who would usually teach in the evenings as most of the students would be working as well as studying. The OU also organised summer school trips and set students assignments. There were also chances to learn through distance learning e. g.

BBC 2 programmes, TV and radio. The Open University was a huge breath of fresh air for the whole education system as it meant that nobody could be discriminated against and everyone had the opportunity to learn and gain knowledge. The OU followed a post-war philosophy that all citizens have a right of access to Higher Education. It also narrowed the borders that were up separating the middle from the working class, as now everyone was on the same level and were interacting with each other.

The two main characters in this play are Rita, a twenty-six year old hairdresser who is on a quest for knowledge and Frank an alcoholic

university tutor in his fifties who is unsatisfied and bored with his life. I have chosen to study Rita's behaviour in Act 2 Scene 1 of the play, 'Educating Rita'. I chose to base my essay on this scene as Rita changes in more than one way. The changes in Rita are obvious from the moment she enters the scene, right through to the end. Rita has just come back from Summer School in London; she shares a flat with a friend and has given up smoking, "No, ta, I've packed it in".

She has grown in confidence and has a more certain direction in life. I think this scene is interesting as while we witness Rita changing and flourishing, there is also evidence in the scene that Rita still needs to gain self-belief, for example when she recalls an event at summer school where she says, "I was pretendin' I was dead clever". This shows that although Rita has grown in poise, she still puts herself down and undervalues what she is capable of. The first thing you notice when Rita enters the scene are the clothes she is wearing. She is dressed in second hand clothes which she has purchased recently.

It is obvious she is happy and feels confident in these clothes as she bursts into Frank's study and swirls on the spot to show them off. This behaviour is typical of Rita; however, this is still significant as there is an air of new-found self-assurance which was not there before. Another thing that strikes me about the way Rita is dressed is that it is an unlikely 'turn out' for her. When Rita first began her lessons with Frank, she spoke of what her life was like, and why she wanted an education. She said that she was spending her time "out with the girls, chasing the lads and buying dresses", but she had now decided that there must be more to life than that.

On the subject of buying dresses she says, " An' I'm not gonna get another one either, not till - till I pass me first exam. Then I'll get a proper dress, the sort of dress you'd only see on an educated woman. " This line says a lot about her as I'm sure that when Rita was looking to the future during her first sessions with Frank, she would never have envisaged herself wearing second-hand clothes two years later. This is an obvious change in Rita, as before, she had an image of what an educated woman behaved like, and what an educated woman wore, whereas now that she was on her way to becoming an educated woman she was learning that she had choices and that she didn't have to conform, she could wear what she wanted to. There are not huge changes in the way that Rita speaks and interacts with Frank.

She has not lost her quirky, witty sense of humour which is important as it shows that although she has changed in other ways; she hasn't forgotten where she comes from or who she is. Rita is still speaking in a working-class liverpudlian dialect which the audience has grown to associate as a big part of her charm e. g. " let's do a dead good poet", " I was gonna sit down again" and " Trish, me flatmate". Later in the play Rita begins to loose this accent and adopts the style, manners and language of the middle class which dismays Frank greatly even though he had told Rita " you're going to have to change" in order to succeed in the middle-class Open University environment. In this scene Rita is bursting with enthusiasm about her time at Summer School.

She explains that she was very apprehensive at first and wanted to go home, but she controlled her fear and went on to become a very good student.

There is an obvious sense that Rita feels she has accomplished something

great and is very proud of herself. She recalls one particular event when she stood up in lecture hall in front of two thousand people and asked a question about the literature they were studying. She is very excited as she remembers this experience and tells Frank the details with huge enthusiasm. The audience are reminded of Rita's character when Frank goes on to ask Rita what the question she asked was, and she replies by saying, " Oh, I dunno, I forget now.

.. It was probably about Chekhov cos y' know I'm dead familiar with Chekhov now. " This to me, symbolizes a change in Rita's outlook as a few months ago her attitude probably would have been, ' Chek-who? ' I believe this passage also indicates the extent to which Rita hasn't changed for example, her not being able to remember what her question was exactly about, just the fact she had the courage to ask.

The way she recalls this is almost like a child reporting what they have done at school with an exciting, innocent pride. In this instance, I think Frank acts as a father figure to Rita, sharing her exhilaration and understanding her accomplishment. Another way I think Frank behaves in a fatherly way towards Rita is the language he uses when referring to her. He calls her " my dear" on more than one occasion throughout this scene and to me this represents the care and protection he feels over her. There are many indications in this scene that Rita and Frank do care for each other and have an understanding and mutual respect between them. This is reflected in the present Rita brings for Frank from her trip.

It has a personal inscription on it, saying, ' Must only be used for poetry. By strictest order - Rita'. This shows that Rita feels she is close enough to Frank to joke with him about something as personal as the poetry he writes - or doesn't write as the matter may be. Rita says, " Every time y' try an' write a letter or a note with that pen, it won't work; you'll read that inscription an' it'll make you feel dead guilty - cos y' not writing poetry.

I think this is a crucial step in their relationship as it has been unclear how Frank and Rita have felt about each other and this is a rare close moment. Rita also speaks of her concerns about Frank's alcohol consumption in this scene and the parental role then seems to swap from Frank to Rita. This shows the unpredictability and versatility of their relationship and also illustrates another time when Rita's relationship and comments are personal. Another significant change for Rita in this scene is the fact we hear her talk of her new flatmate, Trish. She speaks of Trish with great admiration and happiness, and her conservative ex-husband, Denny does not even get a second thought.

The changes in Rita are made even more apparent to Frank and the audience when they continue to study the work of William Blake and it is discovered that Rita has studied him during her summer school adventure and has memorised the short poem ' The Sick Rose'. This is a very proud moment for Rita and I feel that it is the climax of the scene; it is a moment that Rita has been working towards from the first time she met Frank. If I had the job of directing this scene I would ensure the main focus is on Rita all the way through, as I feel this is very much a scene where she develops and where the audience needs to grasp the changes that have happened in her

life and in her soul. I think Rita's story is very close to Russell's heart as he comes from the same area of England and has had similar experiences.

For this reason, I think the scene where Rita changes the most needs to show real passion, like the ardour of Russell, writing the play. I would like Rita's side of the stage to represent colour, excitement and life. I will do this by exaggerating the exhilaration in her voice and in her performance. I would not use lighting to emphasise this mood as I would see that as cheating. The lights in an Open University classroom would not be twirling pink and blue so I would not use these technical enhancements.

Instead I would allow the true nature of Rita's character and her relationship with Frank to light up the stage and the classroom. I would like Rita to be pacing the stage and moving about like an excited child. I would like her to bring a joy and animation to certain parts of the scene, but also to be still and thoughtful at other parts to show her versatility and understanding of the emotions conveyed by Frank. I think Frank's side of the stage will be darker, almost as if he is sitting in a shadow.

This contrast will be effective as it will show how Frank has helped Rita to become the woman she wants to be but has almost lost himself in the process. In this scene we see some of Frank's insecurities as Rita discusses them with him quite honestly. I think that the reason Frank is being open with Rita about his problems is due to the changes he can see in her. I think Frank feels that he can now confide in Rita as she knows him well enough to understand and advise him with the love of a friend. I would like to show that time has passed since the last time the Frank has seen Rita. The scene I

have chosen is the first of the second act so there will be an interval before this scene.

There are also clues in the script that Frank and Rita are meeting after a while for example when Rita says, " God has it really been that long since I've seen y', Frank? " The set of Educating Rita is very restricting in the sense that there are only two characters and one setting, but is also very broad in the sense that we have two hours to tell a story and delve so deep into the characters of Frank and Rita and their chaotic relationship, that the audience care for them and are hooked. I will have a spotlight on Rita as she recites the Blake poem and regard this as the climax of the scene. I think Rita should address the audience at this point as if in a monologue type speech to show that Rita is on top of the world when she is in her creative bubble. The audience that has been following her story so far will find this moment heart-warming and may even be able to relate to the feelings of delight and pride she will convey.