

# Educating rita – willy russell essay sample

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Educating Rita deals with many cultural issues. Some of these are addressed in a serious manner, while others are presented humorously.

By such cultural issues, the play is given an ambiguous tone, with a mood which is serious yet in many places comic. By examining examples of both comic and serious points we may understand more clearly which are more effective, and central to the play, as a whole.

At very beginning of Educating Rita, the cultural differences between Frank and Rita are illustrated.

Frank asks Rita her name in a manner which is natural for a Middle Class man,

“ You are?”

Rita doesn't understand and returns,

“ What am I?”

Even after Frank repeats the question Rita still doesn't understand,

“ I'm a what?”

Presently, Rita shows us again how different her background is from Frank's. No respectable member of Middle Class Society would describe a religious nude painting as “ erotic”. Rita declares,

“ Look at those tits!”

Of course it is most unlikely that this painting “ was the pornography of its day”.

Working Class Culture is again apparent in Rita, with its sexual innuendoes, a very short while after the first incident.

Rita declares that Howards End “ sounds filthy”.

Rita interprets the title, Howards End, with Working Class allusions, which are most unfitting for such a book. This misunderstanding is rather amusing for the audience but less so for Frank.

We do not have to wait much longer for Rita to misunderstand Frank again.

Frank refers to the renowned poet, Yeats. Rita, though, assumes that he is talking about quite another Yeats:

Yeats “ The wine lodge”.

Most predictably, Working Class Culture shows itself again, in Rita, a little later on. Again, Rita judges a book by its title, incorrectly, with sexual connotations. In fact the content of the book could not be further removed from Rita’s expectations.

Rita decides that Of Human Bondage “ sounds dead perverted”.

One may be sure that Somerset Maugham was thinking of a very different type of bondage.

Rita proves more mature in the second act and provide one with few examples of the clash of Working Class and Middle Class Culture. Therefore, all highlighted examples come from the first act.

In the course of the play, it becomes apparent that, among the Working Classes, education is regarded as unimportant, especially for women. Certainly, further education such as Rita is receiving would be frowned upon.

Rita tells Frank that “ Studying’ was just for the wimps”. Being “ different from me mates” was “ not allowed”.

Some way through the first act (I. v.) we discover just how strongly the Working Classes feel about education. Rita brings Frank the news that Denny “ burnt all me books”. Rita asks,

“ Why can’t he just let me get on with learnin’?”

However, it is only Rita’s mother (along with Rita herself) who sees that there is a better way of living. As she declares on the way home from the “ pub”,

“... we could sing better songs than those”

She despairs that she could have done better with her life than “ singin’ some song” which she had “ learnt from the juke-box”.

However, she stopped crying without much persuasion.

“ Ten minutes later, Denny had her laughing and singing again”

She realised that she has wasted her life but has not the conviction and determination necessary to actually change anything.

As a related example, we can look back to Rita asking a customer at the hairdresser, “ Do you know ‘ Peer Gynt?’” After Rita “ told her all about it”, though, “ she was dead interested”. Rita tells Frank, “ There’s loads of them round by us who feel”:

“ I wish I could go off searchin’ for the meanin’ of life.”

The Working Classes know that they could do better but none but Rita actively seek out a better life.

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Early in the play (I. iv) Russell addresses what Rita calls “ that Working Class Culture thing”. Frank apparently feels that every way of life is equally acceptable. For Working Class Culture you need only to “ look around you.”

However, in Rita’s opinion, there is no such thing Working Class Culture. She argues that, as “ round our way” the people have “ got no culture” as they themselves are not cultured. Rita declares:

“ I just see everyone pissed, or on Valium, trying to get from one day to the next.”

Frank replies, politically correctly, as any member of Middle Class society would,

“ Yes, but there’s nothing wrong with that [Middle Class Culture] if they’re content with it.”

Rita, seeing it from a Working Class perspective, declares that “ they’re not” content with it. As Rita so aptly puts it: It is...

“ Cos there’s no meanin’.”

In “ the past, y’ know, the war,” one felt that “ there was some meanin’ to it”. Yet now, while “ they know that they’re better off”, they feel that “ they’ve got nothin’ as well.” So, apparently, for the Working Classes, their lives have “ no meanin’”

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In the course of the play, the positions of Frank and Rita change considerably.

Rita begins the play as an ordinary Working Class girl but for her passion to learn – to live a better life. This is made apparent by her use of language and her unsophisticated dialect.

However, she struggles to do this and at one point feels a “ half-caste” – feeling neither of Working Class or Middle Class society.

Rita eventually develops to the stage of being almost a Middle Class young woman, at least on the outside. Rita knows “ what clothes to wear, what wine to buy” and which “ books to read”. Rita is being materialistic.

She doesn't realise that the Middle Classes are not materialistic. One may be oneself, so she can be Rita and still be respectable. For example, she could have come to Frank's dinner party and still have been herself. She feels insulted and that she could only have been entertaining as "a clown".

She has forgotten that "if you want to change y' have to do it from inside".

In fact, Frank declares himself to be "Frankenstein". He feels that he, like Frankenstein, has created a monster – out of Rita. He also refers to earlier in the play when Rita's mother declared, "we could sing better songs than those". Frank goes as far as to say that it is not a "better song" but merely a "different song" that Rita is singing and that it sounds "hollow and tuneless".

It is only when she drops the pretentious accent and the clichés that Rita returns to being Rita. Rita has developed inside, though. She has grown to appreciate literature in a critical manner and she now has choice in her life – she can stay with Tiger and "his mob", she can "go to me mother's" or she can come with Frank. It is only with development that she has gained these choices and freedom. Rita has now developed into a respectable woman, with tact and maturity, like any Middle Class woman.

While Rita rises in social standing, the reverse happens to Frank. Frank begins as a respected, if dissatisfied, teacher. He has family and a steady job. However, Frank's inevitable downfall is brought about by a flaw in his character – his drinking problem. This leads to him losing his wife and very nearly his job. He now has nothing to live for

By the end of the play, Frank is the one who, like a member of Middle Class society, has “ no meanin’ to life.” Rita, meanwhile, is now as respectable as Middle Class woman. So, in effect, Frank and Rita have almost traded places in society. In the sense that it is a flaw in his character that leads to his ruin, this play is, for Frank, a tragedy. Of course, the reverse holds true for Rita.

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The play is made more enjoyable by various humorous outbursts, from clever witticisms to amusing misunderstandings. However, it is the serious points and issues raised which are more effective. It is fundamentally a serious play dealing with many serious issues.