

Plot:

Plot: The **plot** of a novel encompasses all the events that make up the story and serve as the foundation of the story on which the characters and setting are built. There are five elements that make up the plot including introduction (where the characters and setting are developed), rising action (events leading up to the crisis), the climax, the denouement, and the resolution.

Pygmalion is divided into five acts, each act with one major event. In the first act, we are introduced to Eliza (the flower girl who does not speak proper English), Freddy (who barely notices Eliza until she is all cleaned up), and Higgins and Pickering (who introduce themselves as scholars of dialect). In the second act, Eliza agrees to be taught to speak, act, and dress properly (like an upper-class woman). In Act III, Eliza's skills are put to the test at Mrs. Higgins' apartment. In the fourth act, Higgins, Pickering, and Eliza attend the ambassador's party and Eliza is able to fool everyone into thinking she is an upper-class woman. And finally, in Act V, Higgins has won the bet and decided that he does not need Eliza anymore who is furious that she was treated so terribly and that her future was not considered.

Climax: The **climax** of the novel occurs when the conflict is at its highest point of tension, when the crisis is at its acme. Because there are two main crises in the novel, this means there should be two climaxes. The first climax relates to the first crisis. It occurs at the ambassador's party when The second occurs right after Higgins wins the bet and Eliza is able to fool everyone by making them. Usually, the novel ends with the winning of a bet, but with this resolution came another conflict. Pickering and Higgins treated Eliza as if she did not matter, as if she didn't actually do anything and took all the credit for themselves. This was the height of the novel because Eliza rebelled by yelling at Higgins, throwing a shoe at him, and running away to Mrs. Higgins' apartment.

Crisis: There are two main **crises** in *Pygmalion*; 1) Will Eliza be able to learn the proper dialect of English and fool others in thinking that she is an upper class lady? and 2) What will happen to Eliza after Higgins is done with her? The resolutions to these two questions become apparent in the **denouement** (the part of the novel when the resolution of the crisis is apparent). The first question is blatantly answered after the ambassador's party, but the second question, which was not even posed until after the party at Henry Higgins' home, is never answered. This is very unique to this novel in that it is not common for questions to go unanswered unless there is a sequel (which there isn't for *Pygmalion*), leaving the reader uncertain as to the resolution of one of the problems.

Complications:

Of course every story has a few **complications** (any events that cause ripples in the plot) and within *Pygmalion* there are a few. Notably, at the ambassador's party when Nepomuk met Eliza and Pickering and Higgins thought that she had been discovered as a fraud but Nepomuk actually believed that she was a Hungarian princess. Another complication was when Mr. Doolittle, Eliza's father came to Higgins' house. The readers expected this to be a complication for Higgins but in actuality, all Mr. Doolittle wanted was compensation for Higgins having taken his daughter.

Setting:

Setting: The **setting** is comprised of three components: social environment, place, and time. The setting of *Pygmalion* is clear: London, England and set in the early 1900's. There are only a few specific places in London that scenes took place including Henry Higgin's home on Wimpole Street, Ms. Higgin's apartment, and Covent Garden. (see website)

Tone: **Tone** is the author's attitude towards a subject, generally conveyed through his or her's choice of words. Of course, there are multiple tones that Shaw uses throughout the work. Use of amusing and sympathetic tones are all evident in the novel. A prominent example of Shaw's use of an amused tone is the scene, in the first half of the book, when Higgins and Eliza discuss Eliza's living circumstances. Shaw uses Henry Higgins to convey that he is amused that Eliza is disgusted by free lodging, free food, and free education when she should instead be grateful (especially because she is living on the streets). Shaw uses Mrs. Pearce to convey sympathy towards Eliza through her always looking out for her best interests. When Higgins pushes her too far, Mrs. Pearce is there to say slow down or be nicer and when Higgins fails to consider Eliza's future, Mrs. Pearce encourages him to be more sympathetic.

Mood: While tone conveys the author's feelings towards a subject through word choice, **mood** evokes feelings in the reader through word choice. Eliza's cockney accent and her process of learning proper English creates an amusing atmosphere while Higgin's harsh teaching method and lack of sympathy towards Eliza (or anyone really) creates an atmosphere of pity towards Eliza.

Characters:

Characterization: **Characterization** is a literary device that is used to explain and reveal the personality of a character including the behavior, thought-process, and opinions of the character. There are two types of characterization: direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization requires the author to introduce one character who then

encounters all other characters whereas indirect characterization involves the audience to interpret and be able to figure out each character's personality from being thrown into the middle of a story. George Bernard Shaw uses indirect characterization to introduce us to all other characters. We begin on the street where two nontrivial characters introduce us to Eliza. After we meet Higgins and Pickering, and through conversations with other characters learn of their occupations, they introduce us to other characters such as Freddy and Mrs. Higgins.

Protagonist: A **protagonist** is the leading character in a novel. There are actually two protagonists in *Pygmalion*: Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle. Eliza Doolittle is clearly transformed from a flower girl into a woman who speaks, acts, and dresses like an upper class woman. She serves as a kind of underdog who the readers route for to change and successfully fool others into thinking she is an upper-class woman. Henry Higgins, on the other hand, seems rude and unsympathetic on the surface, but if one looks deeper, you see that Higgins actually took Eliza into his home, gave her clothing, food, and education for free and spent his time teaching and training her to move up the social ladder.

Antagonist: In general, the **antagonist** of the story is the opposing force in a piece of literature that brings conflict against the protagonist. The protagonist must overcome this character. In this case the antagonist is actually society. Eliza has to change herself to move up in social ranks because it is society that has deemed that upper-class people must speak the most proper English, and dress and act differently. Because of society, Eliza must overcome society's standards and, without this antagonist, the crises would not have existed and the plot would not have developed.

Stereotype: A **stereotype**, in literature, is a character who is unoriginal or a representation of a type, gender, class, etc. The upper-class people we meet at the ambassador's party are all stereotypical in that they dress and act as pretentious as readers would believe the elite to be. They dress too elegantly, speak too pompously, and surround themselves with rather extravagant belongings. Eliza also serves as a stereotype of the poor class with her rather exaggerated Cockney accent and in the condition in which Higgins found her, begging on the street.

Irony:

Verbal Irony: **Verbal irony** is a form of irony and involves saying something (verbally) that is not actually true or is not what the speaker actually means. Some of the metaphors used throughout the play can also be seen as uses of verbal irony. For example, Eliza calling Henry "a great brute" or Henry calling Eliza a "squashed cabbage leaf" though they clearly aren't actually these things (but act like them).

Irony: **Irony** can be defined in two ways: 1) it is a figure of speech in which the actual meaning of a phrase is not the intended meaning of the phrase (verbal irony or dramatic irony) and 2) the textbook definition, a strange twist ending. In this case, *Pygmalion* has irony in its ending. The strange, twist ending is that the readers do not know what is going to happen to Eliza. Generally, by the end of a book, all of your questions are answered, but, in this case, George Bernard Shaw ended the book before the readers could find out whether or not she gets married, goes back to the streets, or stays with Henry Higgins.

Dramatic Irony: **Dramatic irony** is unlike situational irony in that the characters are oblivious of the ironic situation while the audience understands the irony. One example of this type of irony in *Pygmalion* is when Eliza is introduced to new people as an upper-class woman instead of as a flower girl. This occurs at the ambassador's party as well when she first meets Freddy Eynsford Hill, who falls in love with her not knowing she is a flower girl. We, as the readers, know that Eliza is a flower girl, but the other characters (aside from Higgins and Pickering) are not aware and therefore her interactions with them and fooling them into thinking she is an upper class woman, is dramatic irony.

Satire: **Satire** is a technique used by writers to expose and ridicule an individual or society and often involves the use of irony. It is regularly used to bring to light dishonesty, corruption, or the weakness of individuals. If we take a deeper look at the entirety of the play, we can tell that Shaw uses these characters and the play itself to criticize the British social class system. Shaw uses the fact that Eliza has to dress differently, speak differently, and act differently to be an upper class woman. It shows how lowly these people are, focused mainly on outward appearances. Even Freddy Eynsford Hill began to fall for Eliza based solely on her outward appearances and the fact that she was an upper class woman.

Themes and Symbols:

Symbols: A **symbol** is an object that stands for another. This is generally used in literary works to give the object a deeper, more significant meaning. The most important symbol prevalent throughout *Pygmalion* is clothing. The play is centered around convincing society that a woman from the streets is actually an upper class woman. This shows the readers that really the only difference, if you look at outward appearance like these people seem to do, are language and clothing. The clothing plays an important part throughout the story for example when Eliza first takes a bath, her dad does not recognize her and when her dad first changes his clothing and cleans up, Eliza does not recognize him. The clothing shows the distinctions between all of the social classes as well. Clearly Eliza dressed differently as a flower girl and as an upper-class woman.

Themes: The main idea or underlying meaning of a work is known as the **theme** of a literary work. There are a few prevalent themes that are apparent throughout *Pygmalion* including those of society and class, appearance, and transformation. Shaw uses the characters of Eliza and Higgins to show that there is a distinction of social classes in twentieth century London, but that if you try hard enough, it is possible to bridge that gap. Essentially, he proves the English saying “fake it till you make it.” He also uses a theme of appearance, showing just how shallow the elite in London were. Evidenced by Eliza’s ability to fool the upper-class just by changing her dialect and clothing. And finally, George Bernard Shaw uses a Cinderella-like transformation in which Higgins turns Eliza into an upper-class woman, or tries to at least, but there are some characteristics that he just cannot rid her of. He feels as though he had almost transformed her, but near the end we see that she is slowly going back to her old self just as Cinderella's spell had to end sometime, Higgins’ had to too.

Allegory: Unlike a symbol which is an object that stands for another object, an **allegory** is a complete narrative which uses a combination of characters, figures, and events to stand for an idea or event. Shaw uses two notable allegories to reference other ideas which include a reference to Narcissus (Greek mythological figure) and “The Japanese Lady”. In Act II, Shaw references a Greek figure known for his handsome appearance and popularity among women. This young man was rather vain and with intervention from a Greek god, Narcissus fell in love with himself and, later, killed himself. Eliza has her own fear of the “looking-glass” (which may have spawned from Narcissus’ doom from seeing his reflection), uneasy that she may face the same fate as him.

YouTube Video: The second allegory is to the idea that “the clothes makes the man”. After Eliza is bathed and clothed, her appearance is so transformed that even her own father does not recognize her. This further exemplifies the power of appearance. In fact, Henry Higgins even conveys that there is even a correlation between social class and appearance. For Eliza to fool others into thinking she is an upper class woman, she must not only learn to speak proper English but also dress herself, clean herself, and portray herself as an upper class woman because appearance is just as important as speech as indicators of upper class society.

Allusions: An **allusion** is a reference to an idea, place, thing, or person with historical or cultural significance. An allusion usually does not need an explanation because readers in that time period should understand these type of references. In *Pygmalion*, Shaw makes these brief and indirect references to the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, *Odyssey*, Brahms, and Beethoven. Examples of lines allusions from the play include a reference to Buckingham Palace in Act II as well as references to Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible (“Remember that

you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible...”).

Literary Elements:

Foreshadowing: **Foreshadowing** is a literary device in which a reader is able to develop their own expectations as to what will occur in the story using hints strategically given by the author. Though we cannot quote specific quotes that serve as foreshadowing because it usually a few lines or a scene that will cause readers to foreshadow, we can cite some examples. For example, when Henry Higgins so confidently makes the bet that he can teach Eliza to speak like a lady, readers can foreshadow this occurring at some point during the play. But, at the same time, Henry Higgins’ harsh treatment of Eliza and rough teaching methods serves as a foreshadowing that Eliza will soon be sick of his harshness and will speak out against him.

Burlesque: A **burlesque** can be best described as the literary version of one child mimics the words of another’s in a comical or absurd way. In *Pygmalion*, Higgins is the child that mimics Eliza. Though the readers understand the absurdity of Eliza’s Cockney accent, it is further expounded when Higgins imitates her accent to show her just how lowly it sounds.

Cacophony: **Cacophonies** are sudden, harsh, and harmonious sounds. These sounds prevail in Eliza’s Cockney accent. Examples include when she first sees her father and screams out in her Cockney accent “Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-oo (32)” and is further exemplified when Henry Higgins tells Eliza to “Live where you like; but stop that noise (18)” in reference to the harsh sounds that came across in Eliza’s accent. These sounds, when said aloud, are harsh sounds that are not consistent with the proper English of the other characters.

Effect: The **effect** of a play is the description of the setup of the stage and setting that the narrator usually gives in a literary work or the lights and set-up on stage give away in a play. In *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw begins each act with a description of what the surroundings of the scene or stage should look like. Shaw has included comments including “The double doors are in the middle of the back wall... (Act II)” or “... in the corner stands a flat-writing table (Act II)”.

Sarcasm: Shaw uses ironic remarks to mock a person or a section of society. This literary rhetorical device is known as **sarcasm** and is a type of verbal irony. Shaw uses this device through Henry Higgins as his character fits well with one that is satirical and sarcastic. Throughout the play, Higgins makes comments such as “...shall we throw her out of the window?” when Eliza first enters Higgins’ home. Obviously Higgins will not throw Eliza out

of the window but he is making a satirical remark for someone not inviting her in or asking her to sit. Another sarcastic comment made by Henry Higgins was “...If the King finds out you’re not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptions flower girls.” Higgins says this as if to say that there are other flower girls that have done this before which is unlikely at best.

Simile: A **simile** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two objects using the words “like” or “as”. Shaw uses this tool to express ideas and draw comparisons. For example in Act 1, Higgins tells Eliza not to “sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon” which gives the readers better context of her character as well as the obnoxious Higgins’ character. Another example would be Higgins’ line describing the garden party. He states “...I felt like a bear in a cage. hanging about doing nothing” which conveys to a reader how useless he actually felt using a comparison lay people could understand.

Metaphor: A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two contrasting objects that have a few common characteristics. An examples of Shaw’s use of this literary device is shown in Act II when Eliza calls Higgins “a great brute” comparing Higgins’ inhumane treatment of her to that of a great beast.

Critical Reviews: