
Main Characters Overview In 'Pygmalion' By George Bernard Shaw

First introduced as the flower-girl in Act One, and called variously Liza, Eliza, and Miss Doolittle. Eliza is the subject of Higgins and Pickering's experiment and bet. While not formally well-educated, she is quick-witted and is a strong character, commonly unafraid to stand up for herself. Shaw has created this character, of a strong independent, free spirited young woman, a quick learner, who never came across as feeling intimidated to converse with people of different backgrounds and social stature. This character may have been challenged academically, but the way Shaw wrote the character of Eliza, was very clever, entertaining and not afraid to voice her opinion, no matter what the subject or who's company she was in. This was well received by the audience, and Shaw was clever to ensure that the character kept the play progressing and interesting. A character where most of the audience could engage with if they met her in the street selling them flowers.

Higgins is a brilliant linguist, who examines phonetics, documents and different dialects, and ways of speaking. He first emerges in Act One, as the dubious man in the back of the crowd writing down notes on everyone's form of speech. Shaw has written the character Higgins, as a hard man to impress, very high standards, but also, not afraid to accept a challenge and prove a point, as long as the character Higgins is always right! The way Shaw has written the two main characters, Eliza and Higgins, shows the audience that opposites can come together, it's a fiery friendship, constantly entertaining, and keeps the audience engaged. The character Higgins is often rude not only to Eliza, but broadly to everyone he meets. He is restless with class hierarchy and the obsession with manners. As he tells Eliza in Act Five, he treats everyone the same (that is, rudely) regardless of social class. By the end of Act Five, Eliza has learnt the manners of a lady. Thus, while an impolite character — and often a sexist — Higgins sees through the deception of the social hierarchy, and relishes the excuse to beat high society at its own game by making Eliza pass as a lady.

Shaw's play also includes yet another complex character, this time around, we have the character of Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, who appears at Higgins' house in Act Two, asking for money, in return for him allowing Eliza to stay with Higgins. This character is your typical sneaky, hustler, street smart middle-aged man, who will find a way to scam people out of a dollar. The mixing of these three totally different characters, keeps the audience engaged and entertained. They want more. Shaw has also given this character an edge where he has no morals, he would sell his daughter to the first high bidder, and in a way, that's what he's done with Higgins. Eliza doesn't trust her father, as he is a man who does not show empathy or love towards his daughter, although this changes to some degree at the end of the play. Throughout the play, Shaw transformed the character Doolittle into an empathetic person towards his Eliza at the end of Act Five.