Educating Rita

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLY RUSSELL

Willy Russell grew up in a working-class family, and his father struggled with drug addiction. Throughout the years, Russell worked several jobs, including teaching, singing at a folk club, and even running a hair salon. He penned his first play, *Keep Your Eyes Down*, in 1971, while a student at St. Katharine's College of Higher Education. After making an impression with his writing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1972, Russell began writing musicals, plays, and TV scripts. He was later commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company to write *Educating Rita*, which premiered in London in 1980. Throughout his career, Russell has received a number of accolades for his work, including Academy and Golden Globe Award nominations, three Laurence Olivier Awards, and a nomination for the Tony Award. Since the 1970s, Russell has continued writing and has even expanded his literary works to include novels and albums. He currently lives in Liverpool with his wife Anne. They have three children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As noted in the revised edition of *Educating Rita*, Willy Russell has gone through the text to "address those areas where there were very, very specific references to the time in which the play was originally written." Indeed, he has taken out these "specific references" so that "the play can be perceived as taking place in its own time." Having said that, it's worth acknowledging that *Educating Rita* is set in England and deals with the difference between the country's social classes. In light of this, readers should bear in mind that in the past, England has been starkly divided along socioeconomic lines. In the Victorian era, for example, British society was broken up into the noble upper class (which included aristocrats, dukes, and rich families working in the courts), the middle class, the working class, and the under class. Needless to say, the working and under class were severely disenfranchised and had very little access to education. Although *Educating Rita* is set long after the Victorian era, certain elements of this societal division remain at play in this otherwise-contemporary narrative, as Rita works hard to rise up from her working-class background.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Educating Rita takes cues from George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. In *Pygmalion*, a self-assured professor decides to test his abilities by educating a working-class woman. Although this woman has no formal education, she, like Rita, is witty and naturally intelligent. *Educating Rita* is also loosely related to Greek mythology, since *Pygmalion* itself borrowed from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which a sculptor named Pygmalion falls in love with one of his sculptures, which then comes to life. This echoes the way that Frank falls in love with his student, Rita. In addition, in *Educating Rita*, Rita is enamored of the novel *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown, a book about a woman who honors herself even when society refuses to accept her. Of course, this message of independence resonates with Rita, a woman who refuses to be held back by the society in which she has grown up.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Educating Rita*
- **When Published:** *Educating Rita* premiered on June 10th, 1980
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Realist Theater
- **Setting:** A prestigious university in England
- **Climax:** After Rita tells Frank his poetry is amazing, he rips his two books to shreds and tells her to go away—a statement that encourages Rita to call him a "Self-Pitying Piss-Artist" and storm out of his office.
- **Antagonist:** There is no discernible antagonist in *Educating Rita*, though it's worth noting that Frank's disenchantment as an alcoholic poet and scholar causes trouble not only for him, but for Rita and his other students, too.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Big Screen. In 1983, Lewis Gilbert (who directed several James Bond movies) directed a screen adaptation of *Educating Rita*. The film starred Michael Caine (from the Batman films) and Julie Walters (who played Molly Weasely in the Harry Potter films). Willy Russell wrote the screenplay.

On the Radio. In addition to turning *Educating Rita* into a movie, Russell also adapted the play for the radio, possibly pointing to Rita's witty line, "Do it on the radio.". The program aired on BBC Radio 4 in 2009.

PLOT SUMMARY

Frank, a middle-aged professor, drinks scotch in his university office and has a telephone conversation with Julia, his girlfriend. Sipping his drink, he tells her that he'll miss dinner because he has to give a private tutoring session to a woman taking night classes at the university. He adds that he plans to

go to the pub after the tutorial, saying that the entire reason he agreed to take on this extra teaching load was to pay for his drinking habit. When he hangs up, his student arrives. Her name is Rita, a hairdresser with a large personality. Within minutes of arriving, she surprises Frank by swearing and talking bluntly about a nude painting hanging in his office. Although some of her observations are crass, he's pleasantly surprised by her wit and commentary.

Rita tells Frank about life as a hairdresser, saying that her clients expect too much of her. "I tell them, I'm just a hairdresser, not a plastic surgeon," she says. "They want to be changed. But if you wanna change y' have to do it from the inside, don't y'?" She adds that this is what she's trying to do by seeking an education. When Frank asks what she wants to learn, she says, "Everything." Surprised, he asks what has led her to this sudden pursuit (she is, after all, twenty-six, making her older than the average student). In response, she explains that her decision wasn't "sudden." In fact, she's been thinking for "ages" about pursuing an education, since she's unhappy with her current working-class life. She says that everybody in her community, including her husband, expects her to get pregnant, but she's not ready to become a mother. Instead, she wants to "find" herself first. As such, she takes birth control pills, though Denny, her husband, doesn't know this.

Frank quickly comes to admire Rita throughout the course of their conversation. Because he appreciates her untrained intelligence, he tells her that he can't be her tutor. "There's nothing here for you!" he says. Going on, he tells her that he's an "appalling" teacher, and that this usually doesn't matter because his students are normally "appalling," too, but that she *isn't* appalling. He claims he has nothing to offer her, stating, "Everything I know—and you must listen to this—is that I know absolutely nothing." Hearing this, Rita slowly leaves, but she immediately returns and declares that she'll return in a week because she likes him and wants him to be her tutor.

Throughout the semester, Frank teaches Rita how to write literary criticism. For her first assignment, she pens an appreciation of her favorite novel, **Rubyfruit Jungle** by Rita Mae Brown. Frank teaches her that the style of her essay doesn't meet the standards of academic writing, which demands a certain amount of objectivity. Explaining that her essay wouldn't receive a good grade on an examination, he urges Rita to "discipline" her mind.

During their sessions, Frank and Rita often discuss personal matters. Rita, for example, asks about Frank's past as a poet, asking why he doesn't write anymore. Reluctantly, he tells her he stopped when his wife left him. Now, he explains, he lives with Julia, a former student who admires him and also teaches at the university. When he tries to direct Rita's attention back to the educational material at hand, she insists that they keep chatting. There should be room in education, she argues, for students to explore multiple topics. Frank is enthralled by this idea, agreeing wholeheartedly that teachers are too quick to squelch enthusiasm and curiosity by forcing their students to think in the narrow-minded ways deemed worthwhile by academia.

During the semester, Frank gives Rita an assignment to answer how a person might go about navigating the "staging difficulties" that come along with putting on a production of Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*. In response, she writes, "Do it on the radio." Once again, Frank tells her that there are a set of rules and expectations when it comes to answering academic questions. Despite Rita's rather uninvolved answer, though, she tells him that she's been thinking a lot about the play, considering the fact that its protagonist searches for meaning in his life. In fact, the play has been on her mind so much that she talks about it to her clients at the salon (since she can't talk about it with Denny, who hates that she's getting an education and thus forbids her from doing anything academic at home). This leads Frank and Rita into a conversation about "working-class culture," which Rita argues doesn't exist. Indeed, she upholds that her way of life is completely devoid of meaning, since everybody wants to buy material objects instead of actually doing anything to change their lives. Even she has lived this way, she says, telling Frank that she used to buy **dresses** as a way of distracting herself from her discontent. Now, though, she has decided to refrain from buying a new dress until after she has passed her first exam.

Not long thereafter, Rita comes to Frank's office without an essay she was supposed to hand in. Although she *did* write it, Denny finally got fed up with her academic pursuits and burned the piece, along with several books Frank lent her. "You'd think I was havin' a fuckin' affair the way he behaves," she laments, and Frank suggests that perhaps Denny thinks she's having an affair with *him*. Rita contests this, saying she has told Denny that her relationship with Frank isn't romantic.

As Frank and Rita's mentor-pupil relationship grows, Frank becomes enamored of her. His romantic feelings surface in their conversations, as he makes insinuations about wanting to run away with her. Despite Frank's interest, Rita manages to let these comments roll off her. Without insulting her mentor, she successfully shifts the conversation back to academic matters.

One day, Rita rushes into the office and tells Frank she has just seen a production of *Macbeth*. Floored by the play's beauty, she decides to write an essay about it. Frank then invites her to a dinner party, telling her she can bring Denny. Although she's hesitant at first, she agrees to come. In the next scene, though, they're back in the office and talking about why she never showed up. Frank says Julia was upset to have two empty seats at dinner, and Rita explains that she *wanted* to come but that Denny refused. Nonetheless, she went on her own. But as she approached the house, she saw Frank and his guests through the window and was unable to enter. Feeling like she'd never fit in with this crowd, she turned around and went to the pub

where Denny and her mother were drinking and singing along to a jukebox. As they sang, she decided to never come back to Frank's office, resolving instead to join Denny and her mother in their singing. Just then, though, her mother started crying, saying that they could "sing better songs." Before long, Denny cheered her back up, but her comment stuck with Rita. As such, she changed her mind, once again determining to continue her quest to attain upward mobility by securing an education.

In the play's second act, Rita has just returned from summer school in London, and Frank has returned from a vacation in France, where he wrote a little bit and broke up with Julia for a very short period before getting back together again. In contrast, Rita had a wonderful time in the city, where she studied with inspiring young tutors and consorted with enthusiastic students. As she tells Frank about her experience, it becomes clear that he doesn't want to hear about her adventures. Offering cranky responses, he tells Rita that they'll be studying the poetry of William Blake. As he takes a Blake anthology off the shelf, Rita perfectly recites one of the author's most famous poems from memory—an impressive feat that only seems to disappoint Frank. Nonetheless, he gives her an assignment to write an essay about a Blake poem.

As Rita's second semester progresses, she starts spending time with a group of new friends. This group is made up of students who go to the university and are the kind of intellectual company she has always wanted to keep. Around this time, Denny discovers she has been secretly taking birth control. When he gives her an ultimatum to either stop getting an education or move out, she finally decides to leave him. She then moves in with a cultured and educated young woman named Trish. As she gains independence, her mentor-pupil relationship with Frank suffers. When she writes an essay about a Blake poem that doesn't align with his academic views, he disparages her work, saying she has left behind her unique way of looking at the world. She tries to tell him that she can have her own ideas and that she doesn't have to agree with everything he says, but he merely says, "Be careful," upholding that she has taken on the identity of an elite academic at the expense of her own personality. When she asks why he wants her to be careful, he says, "Because I care for you."

Rita continues spending time with her new group of friends, including a man called Tiger, of whom Frank is jealous. She also stops working at the hair salon, instead taking on a waitressing job at a bistro. Frank, for his part, starts drinking more than normal, feeling like Rita doesn't want to study with him. She points out that she would probably enjoy coming to his tutorials more if he wasn't always drinking so much, and this sparks an argument, at the end of which Frank thrusts a pile of his own poetry into her arms and tells her to write an essay about *his* work.

The next day, Rita surprises Frank by appearing in his office. She couldn't wait to come, she explains, because she wants to tell him that his poetry is magnificent—both she and Trish think so. In response, Frank calls his work "worthless," which frustrates Rita so much that she storms out, determined never to return. Later, Frank drunkenly calls her apartment and tells Trish that he has signed Rita up for her exams.

In the play's final scene, Rita finds Frank packing up his belongings. Because of his excessive drunkenness, the university is forcing him to take a sabbatical in Australia. As he puts his suitcases down, Rita thanks him for signing her up for her exams and tells him he's a good teacher. Apparently, the exam's first question asked her to outline how she might navigate the "staging difficulties" of producing *Peer Gynt*. Because Frank asked her this very same question, she knew exactly how to answer, and although she was tempted to write, "Do it on the radio"—an answer she knew would please Frank because it would show that she hasn't changed—she decided to put down a more acceptable response. "I had a choice," she says. "I chose, me. Because of what you'd given me." As a result, she passed the exam. To congratulate her, Frank gives her a beautiful dress he bought for her. Grateful, Rita tells Frank to sit down. She then finds a pair of scissors and tells him she's going to give him a haircut.

CHARACTERS

Rita – A twenty-six-year-old hairdresser who signs up for tutoring lessons with Frank, a professor at a nearby university. Rita is fiercely intelligent but has little in the way of a formal education. Although she often wanted to show interest in academic pursuits when she was growing up, she felt as if she couldn't outwardly show her intellectual curiosity, since the people surrounding her in her "working-class culture" perceive school as "worthless." As a result, she distracted herself by frequently buying new **dresses**, which helped her stave off her lack of fulfillment. As a hairdresser, Rita hates that her clients expect her to somehow fundamentally change them for the better, since she believes change should ultimately come from the "inside." It is this mentality that encourages her to enroll in Open University, a program that allows her to learn from Frank even though she doesn't actually attend the university where he teaches. Unfortunately, Rita's husband, Denny, disapproves of her academic pursuits. When he discovers that she has been taking birth control to avoid getting pregnant (because she wants to "find" herself before becoming a mother), he tells her she can either stop getting an education or move out. She chooses the latter, moving in with an educated young woman named Trish and getting a new job at a bistro. Meanwhile, Rita relishes the time she spends with Frank in his office, where they discuss not only literature, but life in general. Before long, Frank starts to fall for her romantically, ultimately shifting the dynamic of their relationship. Despite this, Rita manages to keep most of their conversations related to the educational

material they're supposed to be covering. Indeed, she is extremely determined to become an intellectual, and this is what she tries to focus on. She eventually succeeds in doing this, acquiring a number of cultured friends and demonstrating a solid and wide-ranging understanding of art and literature.

Frank – A professor in his mid-fifties who takes on Rita as a student. Frank used to be a little-known but well-respected poet, but he stopped writing when his wife left him. In the years since, he has started drinking heavily and doubting the value of his role as an educator. When Rita asks Frank to tutor her, for instance, he tells her that he knows "absolutely nothing," and that she'd be better off if she didn't study with him. However, she refuses to leave because she admires his unconventional methods. Likewise, he comes to appreciate her unique mind, believing that her untrained intelligence is spectacular. Although Frank lives with his girlfriend, Julia (a former student of his), it isn't long before he develops romantic feelings for Rita. Thankfully, he never physically acts on these feelings, but he does sometimes allow his interest in her to interfere with his role as her teacher, as he tries to keep Rita from changing herself too much. Because he values her unmitigated intelligence, Frank urges Rita to remain true to herself, not wanting her to erase herself in an attempt to become an intellectual. In turn, his dissatisfaction with academic life mingles with his romantic feelings for Rita, ultimately causing him to resent her when she starts to live the life of a cultured academic instead of a witty working-class woman. By the end of the play, Frank's drinking problem gets the better of him, and the university forces him to take a two-year sabbatical in Australia.

Trish – A cultured and educated young woman who becomes Rita's roommate when Rita leaves Denny. Trish represents the kind of person Rita has always wanted to be, and the two new friends spend their time talking about art and literature. When Frank gives Rita his poetry collections, she brings them home and shows them to Trish, who thinks the poems are incredible. Despite the fact that Trish seemingly has it all—intelligence, elegance, youth—Rita comes home one night to discover that her friend has tried to kill herself. Because of this, Rita sees that being an intellectual doesn't inherently bring happiness to a person's life.

Denny – Rita's husband, who disapproves of her academic pursuits. Denny believes that Rita should focus on becoming a mother instead of seeking an education. As Rita explains to Frank, Denny dislikes anything he doesn't understand or seems "different." When he discovers Rita has been secretly taking birth control, he burns her books and gives her an ultimatum: she can either stop attending Frank's tutorials, or she can move out. Rita swiftly chooses the latter, leaving Denny behind once and for all.

Julia – Frank's girlfriend, whom he lives with. Julia used to be Frank's student, and she admires him greatly. She now teaches at the university, though she never meets Rita. Unfortunately, Julia's relationship with Frank isn't very strong because he seemingly has very little interest in pleasing her. It's no surprise, then, that she decides to not accompany him to Australia when the university finally forces him to go on sabbatical because of his troublesome drinking habits.

Rita's Mother – A woman who spends her time drinking in pubs with people like Denny. When Rita has second thoughts about her academic pursuits one night, she decides to go out to a pub with her mother and Denny, who both start singing along to the jukebox. At one point, Rita's mother dissolves into tears, complaining that they could be singing "better songs" than the ones they're currently singing. Although Denny quickly cheers her up and gets her to start singing again, her comment resonates with Rita, inspiring her to continue her journey to educate herself and thus find a better "song" to sing.

Tiger (Tyson) – A young student Rita meets on the university lawn. Tiger takes a liking to Rita because of her interesting ideas about literature, and he even invites her to come with him and his friends to the South of France for the holidays. When Rita tells Frank about Tiger, Frank is clearly jealous, immediately telling her that she shouldn't go on the trip because she has exams—despite the fact that her exams are set to take place before the trip to France. Like Trish, Tiger comes to represent the kind of intellectual that Rita wants so badly to become, and he also embodies Frank's fear that Rita is going to leave him behind in her pursuit to enter into the elite academic sphere.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SOCIAL CLASS AND IDENTITY

In *Educating Rita*, Frank and Rita come from different backgrounds. Frank has lived a comfortable life as a university professor for many years, even enjoying some minor success as a poet in his early days. In contrast, Rita hails from England's working class and spends long hours on her feet as a hairdresser. Throughout the play, though, Rita wants to shift away from this identity as a young working-class woman. To do this, she reads the books Frank gives her, makes fundamental changes to her personal life, and tries to secure an education that will enable her to transition away from her blue-collar background. In this way, she exalts the idea of becoming an elite intellectual and, in doing so, overlooks the merits of her own identity. Seeing this,

Frank tries to dissuade her from discounting her own value. In turn, Willy Russell demonstrates that people often romanticize the idea of change and growth. By showcasing Rita's eventual realization that she can retain parts of her old identity while still taking on new traits and skills, Russell suggests that people don't have to entirely renounce their backgrounds to accommodate personal change.

Rita comes to study with Frank because she's discontent with who she is and the life she leads. She tells Frank that the people she lives with—the people she's surrounded by every day—have no "culture." When Frank argues that she comes from a "working-class culture" that deserves its own recognition, she disagrees, saying, "I don't see any culture; I just see everyone pissed or stoned tryin' to find their way from one empty day to the next." In an attempt to rise out of this hollow existence, she seeks out the stereotypical trappings of life as an elite intellectual, thinking that this will make her feel like somebody who isn't simply living "from one empty day to the next." After her first semester studying with Frank, she leaves her husband, Denny, acquires new friends, and moves in with an educated roommate named Trish. "She's great," she tells Frank. "Y'know she's dead classy. Y' know, like she's got taste, y' know, like you, Frank, she's just got it." According to Rita, education has enabled her to fraternize with people who are "classy"—people she admires for having a seemingly innate sense of "taste." Simply put, by taking steps toward upward mobility, she romanticizes people like Frank and Trish, wanting badly to assimilate into the life of an intellectual, thereby leaving behind her supposed "working-class culture," which she thinks doesn't even deserve to be called a "culture" at all.

Despite Rita's determination, Frank is hesitant to help her change. When Rita writes an essay about *Macbeth* that probably wouldn't pass an exam, Frank insists that she should focus on how "moving" the piece is, insisting that is actually quite good. Instead of turning the essay into something that adheres to the standards of academic writing, he encourages her to see the merit of her own approach. "In its own terms it's—it's wonderful," he says. However, Rita wants to learn to pass exams. In response, Frank says, "But if you're going to write [that] sort of stuff you're going to have to change." Rita asks Frank to teach her how to change, but Frank replies, "But I don't know if I want to tell you, Rita, I don't know that I want to teach you. What you have already is valuable. [...] Don't you see, if you're going to write this sort of thing—to pass examinations, you're going to have to suppress... perhaps even abandon your uniqueness. I'm going to have to change you." According to Frank, Rita has qualities worth keeping, though Rita herself has trouble acknowledging her worth. "But don't you realise," Rita exclaims, "I *want* to change!" Given her strong desire to "change," it's unsurprising that she proceeds to completely alter her personality, even transforming her voice in order to sound like her new educated friends.

Although Rita enthusiastically takes on the identity of an elite intellectual, she begins to understand by the end of the play that she has romanticized the idea of change. She recognizes that becoming an intellectual doesn't automatically add meaning to a person's life, admitting in the final scene that she was overzealous when she first came to Frank with the hopes of abandoning her identity as a working-class young woman. "I was so hungry," she says. "I wanted it all so much that I didn't want it to be questioned." Now, though, she's capable of "question[ing]" her desire to become somebody new, and this leads her to realize that she doesn't have to entirely give up her identity in order to educate herself. In keeping with this, Rita gives Frank a haircut as a way of thanking him for educating her, ultimately drawing upon her blue-collar experience as a hairdresser without feeling like it will interfere with her new way of being. In turn, Russell presents the audience with a character who has found a way to merge two identities together, as Rita finally reconciles her working-class background with her newfound academic persona—proof that personal change doesn't always mean erasing one's entire identity.

MENTORSHIP

In *Educating Rita*, Willy Russell demonstrates that mentorship relationships are often fraught with complex interpersonal dynamics. From the outset of the play, Frank and Rita's rapport seems to go beyond that of a standard teacher-student relationship. Russell quickly establishes that both Frank and Rita appreciate one another as individuals, suggesting that mentors and pupils often form bonds that transcend the very context of their relationships. Having said that, it's worth noting that Frank's lurking (but still apparent) romantic interest in Rita impedes his ability to effectively serve as her mentor and tutor. At various times throughout the play, he becomes jealous of Rita's new friends and her life outside his tutelage, and this jealousy encourages him to spitefully shirk his role as her teacher. This clearly does a disservice to Rita, who merely wants to learn from Frank. Thankfully, Frank never actually makes a sexual or outright romantic advance, and so his and Rita's dynamic remains more or less productive to her education. Nonetheless, by highlighting how close Frank comes to derailing his relationship with Rita by blurring its boundaries, Russell illustrates the volatility of mentorship relationships. Although mentor-pupil connections sometimes become personal, romantic overtones can arise to the detriment of the relationship's educational purpose and thus must be navigated with caution and restraint.

In the play's second scene, Frank makes several comments that reveal how he feels about Rita. While both of them have by now made it clear that they admire each other for various (innocent) reasons, Frank admits that he is attracted to more than Rita's intelligence. This becomes apparent when Rita asks him why

he's teaching her, a question he answers by saying, "Because it's what *you* wanted. If it was up to me, what I'd like to do is take you by the hand and run out of this room for ever." Rita, for her part, ignores this as flattery, but he insists on showing her his romantic and sexual interest, saying, "Right now there are a thousand things I'd rather do than teach—most of them with you, young woman." As if this sexually charged statement doesn't do enough to show Rita his attraction to her, he adds, "Oh Rita! Why didn't you walk in here twenty years ago?" By saying these things, Frank blatantly showcases his feelings for Rita. In turn, Rita sees that these feelings are more personal and intimate than the kind of feelings that normally characterize a relationship between a mentor and a student. In response, she reminds Frank of the context of their connection, saying, "But it's not twenty years ago, Frank. It's now—you're there an' I'm here." When she says, "you're there an' I'm here," she instills a sense of distance between Frank and herself, ultimately emphasizing the fact that they're in a professional and academic situation in which he is an older professor and she is a younger student. By doing this, she manages to keep their relationship from becoming too personal. Fortunately, this helps Frank acknowledge that their connection isn't based on romance or attraction, but on learning. "Yes," he says, "and you're here for an education." With this, he turns his attention back to the lesson plan.

It's rather unsurprising that Frank takes a romantic interest in Rita, considering that he seems to have a history of becoming involved with his students. When Rita asks if he lives by himself, he says, "No! I live with someone; an ex-student, she's now a tutor here. She's very caring, very tolerant, admires me enormously [...]." As such, Russell shows that Frank has a tendency to enter into personal relationships with students, especially if they "admire" him. Since Rita herself "admires" Frank's wit and intelligence (and later, his poetry), it's no shock that he wants to "take [her] by the hand and run" away with her. The more he feels this way about her, though, the more the nature of their mentor-pupil relationship changes. For instance, when Rita starts spending time with a group of cultured students and makes new friends, Frank has a hard time accepting her newfound independence. Jealous, he tries to make her feel guilty for developing herself intellectually with these people. When he criticizes her views on the poet William Blake (views informed by her new friends), she says, "I don't have to go along with your views on Blake, y'know. I can have a mind of my own, can't I?" In response, he tells her to "be careful." Angrily pacing about, she informs him that she can have opinions of her own and asks him *why* she should "be careful." He responds, "Because—because I care for you—I want you to care for yourself." When he says this, it becomes evident that he's letting his romantic feelings influence the advice he imparts to Rita. Unfortunately, this advice does nothing but hold her back, inhibiting her growth as a free-thinker, since an important part of education is testing out new ideas and opinions.

Thankfully, Rita recognizes that Frank's feelings for her threaten to inhibit her intellectual development. She acknowledges this by saying, "I—I care for you, Frank...But you've got to—to leave me alone a bit." Indeed, Rita cares for Frank, but not in the romantic way he cares for her. Once again, she reminds him of the nature of their relationship, and this helps keep them on platonic grounds. By the end of the play—after Rita has passed her exams—they manage to show each other that they "care" for one another without beginning a romantic relationship. As such, Russell intimates that the complicated emotional dynamics that often arise between mentors and their pupils don't necessarily have to ruin the relationship, as long as the teacher and student find a way to manage their feelings without fundamentally shifting the relationship from an educational one to a romantic one.

INSTITUTIONALIZED EDUCATION VS. EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

As made obvious by the title, *Educating Rita* is a play about teaching and learning. In her pursuit to secure an education, Rita enrolls in Open University, a public institution that enables her to sign up for tutoring sessions with Frank even though she isn't a matriculating student at the university where he teaches. When she begins her sessions, she must face the ins and outs of institutionalized education, where she discovers there are sets of rules and customs surrounding the learning process. At first, she balks at these customs, instead following her own instincts when it comes to writing essays and answering questions. In turn, Frank recognizes her intelligence and tries to encourage her creativity while simultaneously training her to adhere to the standard requirements of institutionalized education. However, because he himself has grown weary and suspicious of the value of such an education, he finds it increasingly difficult to teach her the prescribed methods of academia, instead urging her to remain true to herself. As Frank reveals his misgivings about higher education, Russell highlights the difference between standardized teaching practices and experiential education, ultimately suggesting that sometimes there's more to be learned outside of school than within its confines.

For her first assignment, Rita writes a piece of literary criticism about her favorite book, **Rubyfruit Jungle**. When she turns it in, she's surprised by the feedback she receives. Frank tells her, "The thing is, it was an appreciation and erm, a reasonably structured outline of the plot. But you've made no attempt to explore whatever themes there are or how character is portrayed and developed or what kind of narrative is being employed. In short, you haven't really brought any criticism to bear." Hearing this, Rita insists that she doesn't *want* to criticize her favorite novel, but Frank explains to her that in academia,

there is a difference between "analytical criticism" and "being critical in a censorious way." This conversation marks the beginning of Rita's initiation to the hallmarks of standardized education, where there are certain expectations a person must meet in order to receive passing grades or, on a deeper level, respect as an intellectual.

Before long, Rita begins to understand that in order to succeed in academia, she'll have to adhere its various conventions and expectations. However, this understanding doesn't necessarily mean she's immediately capable of writing in this style. When she gives Frank an essay about *Macbeth*, for example, the piece lacks the kind of objectivity that exam graders look for when giving test scores. Despite this, though, Frank hesitates to frame her work as badly rendered. This is because he has his own misgivings about the narrow-minded approach championed by higher education. "It's a totally honest, passionate account of your reaction to a play," he tells her, even as she urges him to give her his harshest critique of her writing. "It's an unashamedly emotional statement about a particular experience." Although he admits that her essay would be "worthless" when it comes to passing exams, he insists that "in its own terms" it is "wonderful." This attitude denotes his belief that the "worth" of a person's thoughts and ideas doesn't necessarily align with academia's narrow conception of what is and what isn't valuable. Instead of training Rita to blindly follow the standards of higher education, Frank encourages her to see the merits of her own unconventional approach.

Frank encourages Rita's unique intellectual process because he doesn't think institutionalized education employs the best techniques when it comes to fostering creativity and free thinking. This is evident in a conversation he has with Rita in the play's second scene. Rita explains to him that she was once on a fieldtrip as a little girl, where she saw a beautiful, exotic bird. As she stared at it, though, one of her classmates warned her not to say anything about it because the teacher would inevitably make them write an essay about the creature if she announced its presence. "That's what they do wrong in schools," Rita tells Frank, "they get y' goin' and then y' all havin' a great time talkin' about somethin' that's dead interestin' but the next thing is they wanna turn it into a lesson." Frank can't contain his agreement, shouting, "Yes! It's what we do, Rita; we pluck birds from the sky and nail them down to learn how they fly." By saying this, Frank frames academic study and the general approach of institutionalized education as needlessly analytical, stuffy, and blind to beauty and curiosity. In order to "learn how [birds] fly," he says, teachers want to "pluck them from the sky and nail them down," thus ruining their otherwise majestic splendor. This, it seems, is what he worries he might do to Rita, whose untrained ideas are "wonderful" even as they exist outside the academy's serious and stifling set of expectations.

According to Frank, the trappings of institutionalized education can sometimes suppress a student's curiosity and open-mindedness. As such, he advocates for experiential education, or an approach to learning that values the process of discovery. Although the university focuses on outcomes and final results (wanting students to write answers in a specific style and punishing them for straying from convention), Frank urges Rita to benefit from the very process of learning itself. "You'll have a much better understanding of something if you discover it in your own terms," he tells her, thereby emboldening her to value her own approach. In turn, Russell implies that recognizing the limits of institutionalized education might enable students to actually make use of their own experiences in the world, thereby allowing the wonders of everyday life to lead to intellectual development and academic growth.

SELF-WORTH

In *Educating Rita*, Willy Russell demonstrates that a person's sense of self-worth doesn't always correspond to tangible measures of success. When Rita first enrolls in Open University to study with Frank, she does so because she wants to realize her full potential. Fortunately, she achieves this goal, but she soon realizes that many of the people around her—even those who have accomplished much more in terms of academic success—are miserable or think quite lowly of themselves. For starters, her highly educated and cultured roommate, Trish, tries to commit suicide. Even Frank, an accomplished poet and scholar, seemingly loathes himself and deals with this insecurity by drinking heavily and disparaging his own work. As such, Russell suggests that one's self-worth shouldn't (and doesn't) necessarily depend upon standard metrics of success or accomplishment, but rather on an inherent capacity for self-esteem and personal value.

In the play's first scene, Rita comes to Frank and tells him why she wants to secure an education for herself. When he asks what led her to "suddenly" pursue this, she explains that her husband, Denny, wants her to get pregnant and that "everyone" around her "expects" her to start thinking about motherhood. "See," she says, "I don't want a baby yet. I wanna find myself first, discover myself." Rather than simply accepting the idea of becoming a mother even though she doesn't want to, Rita decides to follow her aspirations to become an educated woman. The fact that she wants to "find" herself suggests that she believes there is something lurking in her that is worth looking for in the first place. Indeed, she wants to "discover" her own potential, a notion that emphasizes the belief and confidence she has in herself.

While Rita seeks to "discover" herself by expanding her intellectual horizons and becoming an educated person, Frank lacks even the smallest sense of self-worth. Even though he teaches at an esteemed university and has published several collections of poetry, he doesn't seem to value himself at all. He makes this clear when he disparages himself to Rita, telling her

that he can't possibly impart anything of worth to her. "Everything I know," he says, "is that I know absolutely nothing." This attitude underlines how deeply he doubts himself, even in the context of academia—an environment in which he has already garnered success. Unfortunately, this success does nothing to improve his self-worth, and so he wallows in his low opinion of himself by drinking heavily and claiming that his talents amount to nothing.

When Rita passes her examination, she comes back to Frank's office to thank him for teaching her. During this conversation, she admits that proving herself academically hasn't necessarily given worth or meaning to her life. Frank commends her on her high marks, and she says, "Yeh. An' it might be worthless in the end. But I had a choice. I chose, me." By saying this, she recognizes that academic success isn't valuable in and of itself. Suggesting that her educational triumphs might be "worthless in the end," she acknowledges that such achievements don't automatically lead to a sense of self-worth. However, the reason she sought an education in the first place wasn't simply to pass exams or earn accolades, but to prove her personal agency to herself. Indeed, she wanted to "discover" her potential. By "choosing" to work hard for herself—to pursue what *she* wants in life, not what her husband and society thinks she should want—Rita has acted on the belief and confidence she has in herself. Because Rita is the only person in *Educating Rita* who demonstrates even a modicum of self-worth, Russell shows that true personal value comes not from arbitrary accomplishments, but from a genuine belief in oneself that underscores a one's agency and inherent worth.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE

In *Educating Rita*, Rita Mae Brown's 1973 novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, represents the difference between open-mindedness and close-mindedness when it comes to literature and education. Known as the first lesbian coming-of-age novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle* has been both critiqued and praised for its sexually explicit content. In *Educating Rita*, Rita loves the book so much that she takes the author's first name, insisting that everybody call her Rita instead of her real name, which is Susan. When she first comes to study with Frank, she can't believe that he hasn't read it, immediately pulling a copy out of her bag and lending it to him. Interestingly enough, she does this shortly after Frank has just lent *her* a book—one of the first indicators in the play that both Frank and Rita have things they can teach one another. Indeed, whereas Frank originally assumes *Rubyfruit Jungle* is a low-brow novel that isn't worth reading, he eventually comes to appreciate it, calling it "excellent." By this point, however, Rita has become something of an elite intellectual and, thus, is embarrassed to have liked *Rubyfruit Jungle*. "Of its type it's quite interesting. But it's hardly excellence," she says disparagingly. She utters these words during a time in which she desperately wants to fit in with her new, cultured group of friends. The novel appeals to people outside the university and includes certain qualities that might be associated with smut or pornographic literature. As such, Rita can't afford to praise *Rubyfruit Jungle*, since by doing so she might run the risk of seeming unsophisticated. Whereas Rita's desire to become sophisticated and cultured leads her to belittle what used to be her favorite novel, Frank's willingness to venture outside the narrow confines of what academia deems valuable enables him to appreciate *Rubyfruit Jungle*.

DRESSES

In *Educating Rita*, Rita's habit of buying dresses symbolizes her desire to bring about meaningful change in her life. In a discussion about her educational background and her experience growing up in the working class, Rita tells Frank that she always wanted to apply herself in school but felt like she couldn't because everybody around her considered academic pursuits as worthless. "Not that I didn't go along with it because I did," she admits. "But at the same time, there was always somethin' tappin' away in my head, tryin' to tell me I might have got it all wrong. But I'd just put the music back on or buy another dress an' stop worryin'." Whenever she started to consider the fact that she wasn't living up to her full potential, Rita went out to "buy another dress." One day, though, she finally asked herself, "Is this it? Is this the absolute maximum that I can expect from this livin' lark?" As she details her change of heart to Frank, she says, "Because that is when you've got to decide whether it's gonna be another change of dress or a change in yourself." As such, she likens her obsession with dresses to a superficial kind of "change" that doesn't give a person a true sense of fulfillment, but rather a temporary feeling of contentment. Rather than embracing external transformations, Rita seeks true personal growth by telling herself that she can't buy another dress until she passes her first exam, thereby turning the idea of a new dress into an incentive for self-improvement rather than a fleeting thrill.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Methuen edition of *Educating Rita* published in 2007.

Act One, Scene One Quotes

❝ Well, then you shouldn't have prepared supper, should you? Because I said, darling, I distinctly recall saying that I would be late…Yes, yes, I probably *shall* go to the pub afterwards—I shall no doubt *need* to go to the pub afterwards if only to mercifully wash away some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James or Thomas Hardy or whoever the hell it is we're supposed to study on this course…Christ, why did I take this on? …Yes, darling, yes, I suppose I did take it on to pay for the drink… Determined to go to the pub? When did I need determination to get *me* into a pub…?

Related Characters: Frank (speaker), Rita, Julia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frank is speaking to Julia (later revealed as his girlfriend and former student) on the phone. When he suggests that he will "*need* to go to the pub" after teaching Rita—whom he hasn't even met yet—he reveals the extent to which he has fallen out of love with the act of teaching. He automatically assumes that teaching a new student will be so painful and laborious that he will have to drink to recover afterward. Although Frank has spent the majority of his life as a professor, he no longer gains any sort of pleasure from working within the confines of institutionalized education. As such, he looks forward to getting drunk at the pub, organizing his life around his drinking habits rather than his profession. When he says that he'll have to "wash away some silly woman's" ideas about famous authors, he displays an uncharacteristically classist and sexist outlook. He degrades Rita's intelligence without having even met her, assuming that she will be a "silly woman," a phrase that demeans female intelligence. Of course, it's worth noting that this unfortunate outlook is generally out of step with his normal worldview, since at other points throughout the play, he encourages Rita's unconventional intelligence and insists that coming from a working-class background is just as valuable (if not more so) than coming from an elite academic background.

❝ See, the properly educated, they know it's only words, don't they? It's only the masses who don't understand. But that's because they're ignorant; it's not their fault, I know that, but sometimes they drive me mental. I do it to shock them sometimes; y' know if I'm in the hairdresser's—that's where I work—I'll say somethin' like 'I'm as fucked as a fanny on a Friday night!' and some of the customers, they'll have a right gob on them just 'cos I come out with something like that. […] But it doesn't cause any kind of fuss with educated people though, does it? Because they know it's only words and they don't worry. But these stuck-up ones I meet, they think they're royalty just because they don't swear. An' anyway, I wouldn't mind but it's the aristocracy who swear more than anyone, isn't it, they're effing and blinding all day long; with them it's all, 'I say, the grouse is particularly fucking lovely today although I'm afraid the spuds are a bit bollocks don't you think?' (*She sighs.*) But y' can't tell them that round our way. It's not their fault; they can't help it. But sometimes I hate them. (*Beat.*) God…what's it like to be free?

Related Characters: Rita (speaker), Frank

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rita explains to Frank the different ways in which working-class people and elite academics use language. According to her, "the masses" "don't understand" that swears are "only words," instead becoming offended whenever somebody uses foul language. Since she has noticed this, she goes out of her way to "shock" her clients at the hairdresser's, getting a kick out of flabbergasting them. Rita's careful attention to language and class illustrates that she is very aware of the differences between her working-class background and Frank's elite academic sphere. Because she's so cognizant of the subtle variations that separate these two worlds, she notices the way language operates in each setting. This makes sense, since the way that people use language ultimately reflects the way they live their lives. The members of the working-class, then, are always trying to gain respect (according to Rita, at least), so they avoid crass language because they think doing so will improve how they are perceived. "Educated people," on the other hand, aren't as eager to prove their refinement, so they don't mind swearing. Whether or not Rita's theory is accurate, what's important to understand is that she senses a fundamental distinction in the way people speak in different social settings. Because she wants so badly to rise out of the working class and improve her sense

of self-worth, she is incredibly attuned to the variations between both social classes. Since she wants to move beyond her blue-collar background, she eagerly disparages the way working-class people wield language, even saying, "Sometimes I hate them."

They expect too much. They walk into the hairdresser's and expect to walk out an hour later as a different person. I tell them, I'm just a hairdresser, not a plastic surgeon. See, most of them, that's why they come the hairdresser's—because they want to be changed. But if you wanna change y' have to do it from the inside, don't y'? Know like I'm doin'…tryin' to do. Do you think I will? Think I'll be able to do it.

Related Characters: Rita (speaker), Frank

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Rita talks to Frank about her working-class background as a hairdresser. Her clients, she explains, "expect too much" of her, hoping that she'll be able to fundamentally change them just by cutting their hair. Indeed, they think they will "walk out an hour later as" "different" people, even though their external appearance has only been slightly altered, and their internal self remains the same. Rita takes issue with her clients' perspective because she doesn't believe that's how change really works. "I'm just a hairdresser, not a plastic surgeon," she insists, highlighting how a haircut is only a minor change. What's more, she adds that change has to come from "the inside," which is why she's pursuing an education: to improve herself in a meaningful way. Rather than wanting to simply change her hairstyle—like many of her customers want to do—she's after a more profound kind of personal improvement that will enable her to attain upward mobility and improve her sense of self-worth. In turn, Russell shows the audience what Rita wants to get out of her tutoring sessions with Frank.

I've been realisin' for ages that I was…slightly out of step. I'm twenty-six. I should have had a baby by now; everyone expects it—I'm sure my husband thinks I'm infertile. He's always goin' on about havin' babies. We've been tryin' for two years now; but I'm still on the pill! See, I don't want a baby yet. I wanna find myself first, discover myself. Do you understand that?

He nods.

Yeh. They wouldn't round our way. I've tried to explain to my husband but between you an' me I think he's just thick! No, not *thick*; blind, that's what he is. He can't see because he doesn't *want* to see. If I try an' do anything different he gets a gob on him; even if I'm just reading or watchin' somethin' different on the telly he gets really narked.

Related Characters: Rita (speaker), Denny, Frank

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Rita tells Frank why she wants to pursue an education and change herself internally. Thinking that she has been "slightly out of step" for quite some time, she realizes that she doesn't want what everybody around her thinks she should want. Rather than getting pregnant and becoming a mother, Rita wants to "find" and "discover" herself. In this way, Rita intuits her own intellectual potential and thus doesn't want to lock herself into her current life as a hairdresser by having a baby—a choice that would surely make it difficult for her to follow her dreams of rising through academia. Frank understands her point of view, and Rita is unsurprised, once again sensing a difference between the people from her own background (like Denny) and people who make up the intellectual elite (like Frank). The idea of self-improvement is ubiquitous in academia, so Frank has no trouble comprehending why Rita wants to "discover" herself. Unfortunately, though, Denny—Rita's husband—doesn't feel the same way, instead trying to confine his wife to a narrow existence in which anything considered "different" should be avoided.

I'll make a bargain with you, yes? I'll teach you everything I know…but if I do that then you must promise never to come back here…because there's nothing here for you! You see I never…I didn't want to teach this course in the first place; allowed myself to be talked into it. But I knew it was wrong and seeing you only confirms my suspicion. My dear, it's not your fault, just the luck of the draw that you got assigned to me; but get me you did. And the thing is, between you, me and the walls, I'm really rather an appalling teacher. Most of the time that doesn't really matter—appalling teaching is quite in order when most of my students are themselves fairly appalling. And the others manage to get by despite me. But you, young woman, you are quite, quite different, you are seeking a very great deal indeed; and I'm afraid I cannot provide it. Everything I know—and you must listen to this—is that I know absolutely nothing.

Related Characters: Frank (speaker), Rita

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frank attempts to convince Rita to leave his office and never come back. He does this for several reasons. First of all, he has a very low sense of self-worth, believing wholeheartedly that he's an "appalling teacher." More importantly, though, he doesn't want to teach her because he has severe misgivings about the efficacy and merit of institutionalized education. When he looks at Rita, he sees that she is "seeking a very great deal," and is unique in her vigor and conviction. In other words, he admires her natural, untrained intelligence and thinks that conventional tutoring might flatten her valuable qualities, which might not adhere to academia's standardized expectations. This outburst perfectly encapsulates Frank's entire attitude about teaching, since it reveals both his low self-esteem (made evident by the fact that he says he knows "absolutely nothing") and his hesitancy to help Rita change, since he already appreciates the way she thinks. In turn, this passage foreshadows his eventual insistence that Rita's attempt to become an intellectual has short-circuited her original identity.

Act One, Scene Two Quotes

Rita: See, if I'd started takin' school seriously then I would have had to become different from my mates; an' that's not allowed.

Frank: Not allowed by whom?

Rita: By y' mates, y' family, by everyone. So y' never admit that school could be anythin' other than useless an' irrelevant. An' what you've really got to be into are things like music an' clothes and getting' pissed an' coppin' off an' all that kind of stuff. Not that I didn't go along with it because I did. But at the same time, there was always somethin' tappin' away in my head, tryin' to tell me I might have got it all wrong. But I'd just put the music back on or buy another dress an' stop worryin'. 'Cos there's always something that can make y' forget. An' so y' keep on goin', tellin' y'self that life is great—there's always another club to go to, a new feller to be chasin', a laugh an' a joke with the girls. Till one day, you just stop an' own up to yourself. Y' say, 'Is this it? Is this the absolute maximum that I can expect from this livin' lark?' An' that's the really big moment that is. Because that is when you've got to decide whether it's gonna be another change of dress or a change in yourself.

Related Characters: Frank, Rita (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rita explains to Frank the way her working-class community approaches education. During her schooling years, Rita's "mates" and "family" considered an education to be "useless" and "irrelevant," and this made it hard for Rita take school seriously. In fact, if she had wanted to express an interest in academia, she would have found herself out of step with her peers and her entire social class. In this context, Rita learned to focus her attention on clothing. Instead of "takin' school seriously," she focused on buying new dresses and not "worryin'" about the future. In this moment, then, she suggests that people often use materialism to ignore the fact that they aren't being proactive in their lives. Before long, though, Rita recognized her own discontentment, realizing that buying a new dress or going to "another club" or "chasin'" a "new feller" never satisfied her desire to get the "absolute maximum" out of her life. Rather, these activities only simulated what it might feel like to make progress but never did anything to add to

Rita's sense of self-worth or her ability to attain upward mobility.

Act One, Scene Three Quotes

❝ Look, there's a way of answering examination questions that is…expected. It's a sort of accepted ritual. It's a game, with rules. And you have to observe those rules. Poets can ignore those rules; poets can break every rule in the book; poets are not trying to pass examinations. But Rita, you are. And therefore you must observe the rules.

Related Characters: Rita, Frank (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Frank says this to Rita in a discussion about an essay she wrote. In response to the question, "Suggest how you might resolve the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*," she has written, "Do it on the radio." In light of this, Frank tells Rita that this answer wouldn't earn good marks on a real exam. To emphasize his point, he explains that there's "a way of answering examination questions," and that this way is "expected." He alerts her to the fact that institutionalized education champions certain ways of thinking, setting forth a number of "rules" that must be "observed" if a person wants to succeed. "It's a game," he says, suggesting that sometimes doing well in academia has more to do with knowing how to cater to the system than it has to do with displaying actual intelligence. He also points out that poets don't have to adhere to these rules because they aren't "trying to pass examinations." In doing so, he juxtaposes academia's rigid demands with the intellectual and artistic freedom enjoyed by people who operate outside the paradigms of higher education. Although in this passage he doesn't disparage the "game" that comes along with academia, the audience knows by this point in the play that Frank is suspicious of institutionalized education and the way it forces people to adhere to its standards. As such, the fact that he tries to teach Rita the "rules" of answering exam questions shows that he has decided to do what he can to help Rita reach her educational goals, even if this means going against his own pedagogical beliefs.

❝ There is no contentment. Because there's no meanin' left. (*Beat.*) Sometimes, when y' hear the old ones tellin' stories about the past, y' know, about the war or when they were all strugglin', fightin' for food and clothes and houses, their eyes light up while they're tellin y' because there was some meanin' then. But what's…what's stupid is that *now*…now that most of them have got some kind of a house an' there is food an' money around, they're better off but, honest, they know they've got nothin' as well—because the meanin's all gone; so there's nothin' to believe in. It's like there's this sort of disease but no one mentions it; everyone behaves as though it's normal, y' know, inevitable, that there's vandalism an' violence an' houses burnt out and wrecked by the people they were built for. But this disease, it just keeps on bein' hidden; because everyone's caught up in the 'Got-to-Have' game, all runnin' round like headless chickens chasin' the latest got-to-have tellies an' got-to-have cars, got-to-have garbage that leaves y' wonderin' why you've still got nothin'—even when you've got it. (*Beat.*) I suppose it's just like me, isn't it, y' know when I was buyin' dresses, keepin' the disease covered up all the time.

Related Characters: Rita (speaker), Frank

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Rita offers this social commentary in a discussion with Frank about "working-class culture." In this passage, she suggests that "meaning" in life comes out of a struggle for improvement. This is why she sees elderly people's eyes "light up" when they talk about "the war or when they were all" "fightin'" to sustain themselves. Now that these people have found a sense of stability, though, there's no longer any "meaning" in their lives. Instead of trying to truly improve their situations, people simply focus on getting the latest "got-to-have" items, basking in a materialistic mindset that doesn't ultimately add any sort of meaning to a person's life. Rita admits that she has also experienced this kind of existence, referencing how she used to only care about "buyin' dresses." What she fails to take into account, though, is that her current attempt to improve her life—her struggle to gain an education and thus attain a sense of self-worth—will inevitably reach a point where there's no longer anywhere else to go. In the same way that her elder community members eventually achieved stability and thus lost a sense of meaning in their lives, Rita will someday accomplish her educational goals and find herself wondering what else she can do to improve upon her life.

This is what happens, it seems, when a person relies on tangible measures of progress to add meaning to her life. In turn, Russell suggests that although determination and self-improvement are important for a happy life, people should try to cultivate an inherent sense of self-worth that remains uninfluenced by notions of accomplishment.

Act One, Scene Six Quotes

❝ I'm all right with you, here in this room; but when I saw those people you were with I couldn't come in. I would have seized up. Because I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with any more. An' I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday, or them out there, because I can't learn the language. I'm an alien. I went back to the pub where Denny was, an' me mother, an' our Sandra, an' her mates. I'd decided I wasn't comin' here again. I went into the pub an' they were singin', all of them singin' some song they'd learnt from the jukebox. An' I stood in that pub an' thought, just what in the name of Christ am I trying to do? Why don't I just pack it in, stay with them, an' join in with the singin'?

Related Characters: Rita (speaker), Denny, Rita's Mother, Frank

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rita explains to Frank why she didn't end up coming to his dinner party. As she explains her reasoning, it becomes clear that she's uncomfortable with the division between working-class people and intellectuals. Despite the fact that Frank genuinely likes her and thinks she's intelligent, Rita couldn't bring herself to go inside when she went to his house, fearing that she would "seize up" and not know what to talk about. Unfortunately, though, her newfound education has also rendered her nearly incapable of talking to the people she has grown up with, too. "I can't talk to the people I live with any more," she says, calling herself a "freak." As such, the audience sees that Rita is straddled between two social classes and unable to call either one her own. Recognizing this, she decides to stop coming to Frank's office, implying that "pack[ing] it in" and settling back into her old life will be easier than trying to make herself fit into an elite academic setting. However, in this passage, Rita is back in Frank's office and has clearly changed her mind about quitting her lessons with him, suggesting that her desire to educate herself and achieve upward mobility is too strong to suppress.

❝ Well, I did join in with the singin', I didn't ask any questions, I just went along with it. But when I looked round, my mother had stopped singin', an' she was cryin'. Everyone just said she was pissed an' we should get her home. So we did, an' on the way I asked her why. I said, 'Why are y' cryin', Mother?' She said, 'Because—because we could sing better songs than those.' Ten minutes later, Denny had her laughing and singing again, pretending she hadn't said it. But she had. And that's why I came back. And that's why I'm staying.

Related Characters: Rita (speaker), Denny, Rita's Mother, Frank

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Rita tells Frank what she did after deciding to not attend his dinner party. Intimidating by the prospect of fitting in at Frank's dinner party, Rita went to the pub, where she found Denny and her mother singing drunkenly. Feeling caught between two worlds—her blue-collar background and the academic sphere she wants to join—she decided to rejoin the people with whom she lives, "join[ing] in with the singin'." She adds that she "didn't ask any questions," making it clear that in order to return to her old life, she can't let herself think too much—otherwise, she'll realize she's unhappy. This, it seems, is what happens to her mother, who suddenly starts crying because she thinks she "could sing better songs." Although this might be a simple drunken statement, it denotes a lack of fulfillment. Indeed, Rita's mother thinks that she might be able to sing a "better song," but she's stuck belting out the same tunes in the same pub with the same people, representing the static nature of her life. While her mother eventually comes to terms with this by returning to her singing as if nothing had happened, Rita decides to keep pushing forward in her attempt to educate herself. Not wanting to find herself in the same situation as her mother—who can't bring herself to improve upon her life—Rita resolves to keep coming to Frank's office for tutoring.

Act Two, Scene Three Quotes

Rita (*angrily*): What d' y' mean be careful? I can look after myself. Just 'cos I'm learnin', just 'cos I can do it now an' read what I wanna read an' understand without havin' to come runnin' to you every five minutes y' start tellin' me to be careful. (*She paces about.*)

Frank: Because—because I care for you—I want you to care for yourself.

Rita: Tch. (*She goes right up to Frank. After a pause.*) I—I care for you, Frank…But you've got to—to leave me alone a bit. I'm not an idiot now, Frank—I don't need you to hold me hand as much…I can—I can do things on me own more now…And I'm careful. I know what I'm doin'. Just don't—don't keep treatin' me as though I'm the same as when I first walked in here.

Related Characters: Frank, Rita (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rita and Frank argue about the intellectual independence that Rita has recently acquired. The argument itself arises because Frank takes issue with the way Rita interprets a particular William Blake poem. When Rita defends her viewpoint, Frank tells her to be "careful," and she tells him she can "look after" herself—an exchange that sounds like an argument between a father and his daughter, not a teacher and his student. Indeed, Rita now has the intellectual tools to bring her own interpretative arguments to bear, so she emphasizes the fact that she can "understand" rigorous material without having to come "runnin'" to Frank—a statement that hurts him, since he has feelings for her (and thus *wants* her to come "running" to him). In keeping with this, he tells her that he "care[s] for" her, a remark that shifts the tone of their conversation. Whereas the argument begins as a squabble regarding academic matters, now Frank makes it personal, transcending the conventional emotional boundaries that separate mentors from their pupils. Rita picks up on this shift in the conversation, walking "right up" to him, pausing, and telling him that she cares for him, too. However, she also adds that he needs to "leave [her] alone," thereby reminding him that their relationship should have its basis in literature and education, not in romantic feelings. Having made this clear, she once again highlights her intellectual independence, saying, "I'm not an idiot now." In this way, she urges Frank to stop idealizing her for who she used to be, wanting him to recognize the validity of her new identity as an intellectual.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

In his austere university office, Frank searches his alphabetized bookshelves. When he finds the section he's looking for, he removes several books so that the audience sees a bottle of scotch that has been hiding behind the tomes. Frank empties the alcohol into his glass. Startled by the ringing telephone, he sips his drink before answering the call. He informs the person on the other end of the line—whom he calls Julia—that he has a student coming from Open University, wondering aloud why he ever decided to "take this on." After a brief pause, he says, "Yes, darling, yes, I suppose I did take it on to pay for the drink." He then tells her to leave his dinner in the oven because he plans to go to the pub after meeting with his new student.

In the opening scene of Educating Rita, *Frank displays apathy when it comes to his apparent drinking problem. When Julia—probably his wife or girlfriend—points out that he took on an extra student in order to pay for his drinking habit, he doesn't even refute the claim. In fact, he agrees that he makes decisions based on his alcoholism, clearly ignoring the critique and making peace with his problem—an early indication that his sense of self-worth is quite low. The brief mention of Open University refers to a program in which community members who are not matriculating students of the university can enroll to study with professors.*

A knock sounds on Frank's office door. Promising Julia that he'll only have "a couple of pints" (but whispering, "four…!" to himself), he hangs up. He opens the door, and Rita enters. Right away, Frank and Rita confuse one another with their styles of speaking, going back and forth in an elliptical conversation as Frank tries to remember Rita's name. "Now, you are?" he asks, and she responds, "What am I?" Turning to a nude painting hanging on the wall, Rita says, "It's nice, isn't it?" In turn, Frank says, "I suppose it is, erm 'nice.'" Continuing her examination of the artwork, Rita considers whether or not the painter intended it to be erotic, suggesting that this kind of work was "like the porn of its day." Frank, for his part, can't deny this fact and is amused by Rita's unreserved observation.

During Rita and Frank's first conversation, Russell plays upon their different styles of speaking. Coming from a working-class background, Rita doesn't use eloquent language to speak about art, instead calling the portrait on Frank's wall "nice." Because Frank is used to dealing with prestigious—and most likely pretentious—people in the academic world, he's caught off guard by this understatement. Nonetheless, he seems to admire Rita's straightforwardness, appreciating her assessment that the nude portrait must have been "the porn of its day." It seems that he's not used to this kind of honesty, and so he finds Rita's perspective refreshing. In turn, Russell implies that Rita might end up teaching Frank just as much as he teaches her.

Shifting her attention away from the painting, Rita admits that she was surprised Open University accepted her as a student, though she adds that they must accept anybody, suggesting that they're probably "desperate." She then offers Frank a cigarette, which he declines because he has quit smoking. Rita disapproves, bemoaning the fact that everybody these days is afraid of getting cancer. "You've got to challenge death an' disease," she declares, saying she read a fantastic poem recently about this idea. "Ah, Dylan Thomas," says Frank, but Rita tells him the poem is by Roger McGough and that Frank probably wouldn't like it because "it's the sort of poetry you can understand." Taking a cue from this, Frank asks if she thinks it's important that poetry be understood, and she affirms that she does, admitting that poetry isn't the only thing she doesn't understand.

Rita underhandedly insults herself when she says that she was surprised when Open University allowed her to sign up for classes. This attitude suggests that she doesn't think she's worthy of studying in this context, which is prestigious and elite. However, it's worth noting how Frank and Rita's conversation easily transitions into an educational discussion of poetry. As they converse, they naturally begin talking about educational material, which suggests that academic study can blossom even in casual contexts, not just in the narrow confines of a lesson plan. The poem Frank assumes Rita is talking about is Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," but she's actually talking about "Let Me Die A Youngman's Death" by the performance poet Roger McGough—a poet to whom Rita would no doubt have more experience with, since his work was more accessible to uneducated readers and listeners.

Frank offers Rita a drink, and though she says that scotch kills a person's brain cells, she accepts. Searching for a new bottle (since he finished the last one before Rita's arrival), Frank pulls the book *Howards End* from the shelf and takes yet another scotch from behind it. When he sets the book down, Rita picks it up and says, "Sounds filthy, doesn't it? E.M. Foster." Correcting her, Frank says, "Forster!", and Rita says, "Forced her to do what?" After a moment, Frank breaks into "real and appreciative laughter" (according to the stage note) and says that E.M. Forster wouldn't have "forced 'her' to do anything," since he was a "committed homosexual." Her interest sparked, Rita asks if the book is about being gay, and Frank offers to loan it to her.

Once again, the audience sees how seamlessly Frank and Rita transition into talking about educational material. What begins with Frank offering Rita a drink ends in a discussion of one of the twentieth century's most famous British novelists, E.M. Forster. Interestingly enough, Howards End includes one of Forster's best known quotes: "Only connect." In this moment, Frank and Rita are not only connecting their conversation to a discussion of literature, but are also connecting across social classes, each one seemingly charmed by the other's refreshing perspective.

Rita decides to take Frank up on his offer, saying she will indeed borrow *Howards End*, adding that she can mail it back to him if she ends up deciding to quit the class. "You've not even started yet," he says. "Why should you pack it in?" In response, Rita tells him that she might decide coming here was a "stupid idea." Confused, Frank asks why she enrolled in the course in the first place, and Rita says, "Because I want to know." When Frank asks what, exactly, she wants to know, she says, "Everything." She explains that she wants to be the type of person who can pass exams or watch operas and ballets and "understand" them. Rather than calling such performances "rubbish" because she doesn't comprehend what's going on, she wants to grasp the deeper meaning embedded in high art.

Rita's assertion that she might quit Frank's course is a defense mechanism. Indeed, she is making herself vulnerable by seeking out an education, which means that coming to Frank as a student is most likely intimidating. If she fails, she might feel stupid and worthless. In order to protect herself from this fate, then, she gives herself a way out, saying that the very idea of pursuing education might be "stupid" in and of itself. What's interesting, though, is that she also reveals her vast ambition. Although she gives herself an excuse to quit if things don't go well, she also sets the bar very high for herself, determining to learn "everything" there is to "know" about art and literature.

Rita asks Frank if he minds that she swears, and he assures her that he doesn't. This pleases her and confirms her theory that "the properly educated" don't care about vulgar language because they understand that "it's only words." Unfortunately, she says, the people she spends most of her time with "don't understand" this, instead thinking that crass language is offensive. She even admits that she sometimes purposefully tries to "shock" her clients when she's working as a hairdresser. What annoys her, she tells Frank, is that working-class people "think they're royalty just because they don't swear," despite the fact that "it's the aristocracy who swear more than anyone." "But y' can't tell them that round our way," she says. "It's not their fault; they can't help it. But sometimes I hate them."

In this moment, Rita highlights what she sees as the difference between her working-class background and the more prestigious ranks of the academic sphere. She is, it seems, extremely unhappy with her socioeconomic standing, and so she aspires to become part of the "aristocracy." The fact that she says that working-class people "don't understand" what it means to swear suggests that she doesn't align herself with these people, but rather with the elite class of educated individuals who—she thinks—better grasp the fact that swears are "only words."

Interested in the considerations Rita has unearthed, Frank offers her another drink while pouring himself one. As he does so, Rita admits that she wouldn't have stayed if he had objected to her swearing. She then suddenly asks, "What does 'assonance' mean?" The question is so unexpected that Frank has to spit out some of his scotch as he laughs. "Don't laugh at me," Rita says. Quickly growing serious, Frank tries to explain that assonance is "a form of rhyme in which the corresponding vowels have the same sound but not the consonants that precede or follow the vowels." After he and Rita go through a few examples of assonance, Rita posits, "So…so 'assonance' means gettin' the rhyme wrong?" This definition strikes Frank as surprisingly apt, and he says, "Yes, in a way, yes it does, it bloody well does."

This is the first moment in which Frank seems to grasp just how striking Rita's natural intelligence is. At first, he's merely surprised and amused by her honesty and wit—he even spits out his drink because her question about assonance is so unexpected. However, she quickly proves that she not only grasps his explanation, but also is capable of defining assonance in an even more tangible and creative manner

Frank says he's surprised by Rita's name, since her forms indicate that her first name begins with an "S." "Oh that!" she says. "Yeh, that's just 'S' for 'Susan.' That's my real name. I've changed it to Rita though. I'm not Susan any more. I've called myself Rita—y' know, after Rita Mae Brown." When Frank's confusion is obvious, Rita says, "Y' know, Rita Mae Brown—**Rubyfruit Jungle**. Rita Mae Brown, she wrote *Rubyfruit Jungle*." Frank confesses that he's never read this book, which Rita can't believe. In fact, she's so shocked that she reaches into her bag and produces a copy, insisting that he borrow it from her.

Rubyfruit Jungle *is a novel that came out in 1973 and is known as one of the first lesbian coming-of-age stories. Despite its fame and merit, though, some people write the novel off as lewd and pedestrian—most likely because of its extremely sexual content. When Rita waxes poetic about* Rubyfruit Jungle, *then, the audience sees that she is interested in literature that Frank most likely either looks down upon or has no desire to read. Once again, Russell accentuates the difference between Frank and Rita's backgrounds while also opening up space in the play for Rita to introduce Frank to new ideas.*

Frank asks Rita about her experience as a hairdresser, and she tells him that the clients get on her "nerves." She explains that they always request silly things that won't make their hair look good, but they insist that she give them what they want. "They expect too much," she says. "They walk into the hairdresser's and expect to walk out an hour later as a different person. I tell them, I'm just a hairdresser, not a plastic surgeon. See, most of them, that's why they come the hairdresser's—because they want to be changed. But if you wanna change y' have to do it from the inside, don't y'? Know like I'm doin'…tryin' to do." She then asks Frank if he thinks she will be able to change, and he tells her it depends upon how "committed" she is. In response, she assures him that she's "dead serious."

Once again, it becomes clear that Rita is unhappy with her life as a young working-class woman. Instead of spending her days helping people "change" on the outside, she wants to achieve a more meaningful sense of transformation, which she believes must take place from "the inside." This is why she's pursuing an education: to improve her sense of self-worth while also rising into a supposedly more elite social class.

Frank reiterates admiringly that Rita wants to "know" "everything." He then pauses for a moment and studies her, and when she asks why he's looking at her, he says, "Because I think you're really rather marvelous." Moving on, he asks what has led her to suddenly seek an education, and she explains that it actually isn't so "sudden." "I've been realisin' for ages that I was…slightly out of step," she says. "I'm twenty-six. I should have had a baby by now; everyone expects it—I'm sure my husband thinks I'm infertile." She tells Frank that her husband (later referred to as Denny) is always talking about having babies, but that she doesn't want to get pregnant yet. In fact, they've been "trying" for two years to have a baby, but she has secretly been taking the pill. "See, I don't want a baby yet. I wanna find myself first, discover myself."

Two things happen in this section that are worth noting. First, Frank articulates his admiration for Rita. This is important because he is otherwise so fed up with academia and his job as a professor. Indeed, he can't even refrain from drinking heavily at work. Suddenly, though, he's deeply interested in a student, whom he finds "marvelous." Second, Rita reveals that she wants to "discover" herself, an idea that implies that she believes—on some level—that there's something more to her than the identity she has cultivated thus far in life. In order to pursue this, she lies to her husband and ignores what her community expects of her, thereby acting upon a sense of personal agency and a desire to improve herself regardless of what other people want her to do.

Once again, Frank offers Rita another drink while pouring himself one. "When d' you actually, y' know, start teaching me?" she asks, and he wonders what he could "possibly" teach her. "Everythin'," she says. After a pause, Frank proposes a bargain, saying that he'll teach her everything he knows if she promises never to return. He insists that there's "nothing here for" her, admitting that he never wanted to teach this course because he "knew it was wrong," and now Rita has only "confirm[ed]" his "suspicion." He tells her that he's "really rather an appalling teacher," though normally this doesn't matter because his students themselves are also "fairly appalling." "But you, young woman, you are quite, quite different," he says, "you are seeking a very great deal indeed; and I'm afraid I cannot provide it. Everything I know—and you must listen to this—is that I know absolutely nothing."

In this moment, Frank makes it overwhelmingly clear that he not only has a very low sense of self-worth, but that he doesn't believe in model of institutionalized education despite his occupation as a professor. When he says he has always thought that tutoring people "was wrong," he implies that the very act of teaching somebody in this context threatens to diminish that person's inherent curiosity and intelligence. Because he finds Rita so "marvelous"—and because she is "seeking" so much in terms of education—he refuses to take her on as a pupil, insisting that he knows "nothing," despite the fact that he works at a well-respected university.

After Frank's tirade, Rita slowly walks out the door. Moments later, though, she comes back and struggles with the stubborn door handle, yelling at Frank to let her in. "Leave me alone," Frank says, intent on going to the pub. "There are other tutors, I've told you." In response, Rita shouts that she doesn't *want* another tutor. When she finally manages to open the door, she says that she wants to study with Frank because he's a "crazy mad piss artist" and because she likes him. She also adds that she's going to bring her scissors when she returns because his hair is ridiculous. "You are not coming back next week," he says, but she ignores him, proudly exiting without paying attention to his protests.

Although Frank's outburst scares Rita off at first, his unconventional approach is ultimately appealing to her. This makes sense, considering that she also refuses to simply go along with what society expects of her.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

When the lights come on, Frank is in his office looking out the window. After approaching the bookcase several times but refraining from looking for scotch, he says, "Oh, sod it!" to himself and starts searching for a bottle behind the books. As he does so, he hears Rita outside the door—she is oiling the tricky handle. She then enters and starts walking through the room and inspecting things, telling Frank that she loves his office because there's nothing "phoney about it." She wants a space like this someday, she tells him. When she asks if he's been drinking, Frank says that he hasn't, and she asks, "Is that because of me? Because of what I said to y' last week?" In response, he says, "What? You think where so many others have failed, you have reformed me!"

When Rita asks if Frank has stopped drinking because of what she said the previous week, the audience senses that a little bit of time may have passed between scene one and scene two. Nonetheless, Rita and Frank still have more or less the same dynamic at play in their mentor-pupil relationship—Rita still admires Frank, and Frank is still a disenchanted professor who openly embraces his alcoholism. One thing worth noting is that Rita's oiling of the door handle is in many ways symbolic, as she goes out of her way to enable herself to more easily access Frank's office, a place that represents the kind of elite educational realm she wants so badly to inhabit.

Rita looks out the window and speaks admiringly about the campus and its students, telling Frank about her own experience in school. She explains that when she was younger, she couldn't focus on her studies because doing so would have been out of step with what everybody around her was doing. She says that everybody always said school was "useless an' irrelevant," instead paying attention to "things like music an' clothes an getting' pissed." She admits that she acted like this, too, but eventually she paused to consider what she was doing. "One day, you just stop an' own up to yourself," she says. "Y' say, 'Is this it? Is this the absolute maximum that I can expect from this livin' lark?'" She explains that when she asked herself this question, she knew she had to decide between "another change of **dress** or a change in [herself]."

Yet again, Rita illustrates the ways in which she feels held back by her working-class background, where nobody seems to value education or encourage the kind of personal growth that can come out of academic pursuits. Instead of focusing on her studies, Rita has spent her life pursuing superficial things like buying new dresses. In keeping with her earlier assertion that a person has to change "from the inside" in order to actually make a difference in his or her life, Rita has now determined to remain true to her desire to attain the "absolute maximum."

Rita explains that she's not going to get a new **dress** until she passes her first exam, at which point she'll get "a proper dress, the sort of dress you'd only see on a educated woman." Changing the topic, Frank and Rita discuss an essay Rita wrote about **Rubyfruit Jungle**. Frank tells her that her work was really more of "an appreciation" of the book than it was a piece of "analytical criticism." "But I don't *want* to criticise *Rubyfruit Jungle*!" Rita says. "Because I think it's brilliant!" In response, Frank explains that there's a difference between "analytical criticism" and "being critical in a censorious way." In this regard, he tries to get Rita to approach literary criticism as "being purely objective," telling her that calling a book "brilliant" is subjective and thus doesn't qualify as "analytical."

This is the first time Rita encounters the various expectations and conventions that come along with institutionalized education. Indeed, Frank tries to show her that she has to adhere to a certain standard when writing essays. In this case, that means remaining "objective" when discussing literature, even if she thinks a book is "brilliant." Of course, this doesn't come naturally to Rita, who is strongly opinionated and wants to express her thoughts in her own manner rather than adhering to a conventional form.

In light of what he has just said about literary criticism, Frank asks Rita to write an analysis of E.M. Forster's *Howards End*—an assignment that annoys Rita because she disliked the book, finding it difficult to care about its characters or themes. As Frank tries to convince her that she'll have to learn how to write intelligently even about books she hates (if she wants to pass her exams), she interrupts him by asking if he's married. Frank tells her that he's not, explaining that he's divorced because one day, his then-wife pointed out that he had spent fifteen years writing poetry about nothing but the beginning of their relationship. "Are you a poet?" Rita asks, and he says. "Was—an extremely minor one—and so, to give me something fresh to fire the muse, she left me." Instead of writing new poems, though, Frank stopped writing altogether.

Russell clarifies the nature of Frank's disenchantment in this moment, showing the audience that his defeated mentality is the result of his failed past not only romantically, but also in terms of his work as a poet. What's more, the fact that his conversation with Rita about Howards End quickly transitions into a highly personal discussion of his history with love and literature shows once again the fluidity of his and Rita's rapport. In the same way that everyday conversations can quickly turn into academic lessons, literary discussions also morph into intimate topics, ultimately suggesting that the process of learning can't be confined to only one realm. Rather, a true education is wide-ranging and doesn't always adhere to the boundaries put in place by conventional pedagogical methods.

Rita asks if she can buy some of Frank's poetry, but he tells her that his books are out of print, and that she wouldn't like them because they depend upon literary allusion, rendering them difficult to understand. "So d'you live on your own now?" she asks. "No!" he replies. "I live with someone; an ex-student, she's now a tutor here. She's very caring, very tolerant, admires me enormously." While telling Rita about his girlfriend, Julia, Frank reveals that he often "stops out" for several days at a time. "If you were mine an' y' stopped out for days, y' wouldn't get back in!" Rita declares, and Frank says, "Ah, but Rita, if I was yours would I even consider stopping out for days?"

This is a pivotal moment in Educating Rita. *First of all, Frank reveals that he is romantically involved with a former student, meaning that he doesn't mind transcending the standard boundaries between a mentor and a pupil. Second of all, he makes it clear that he harbors certain romantic interests for Rita, saying that he wouldn't "stop out" on her if they were together. By saying this, he suddenly shifts the dynamic of their relationship, essentially erasing the distance between teacher and student and implying that he thinks about her in a romantic way.*

Rita asks if Frank even likes Julia, and he says, "I like her enormously. It's myself that I'm not too fond of." In response, she says, "But you're great." Nonetheless, he assures her that there's "less to [him] than meets the eye." Missing the point, Rita says, "See—you can say dead clever things like that. I wish I could just talk like that, it's brilliant."

Frank's low self-esteem resurfaces, as he says that there's "less to [him] than meets the eye." What's more, it's worth noting that Rita thinks Frank is "brilliant" because he can say "clever things." Considering the fact that Frank is clearly interested in Rita romantically, it's significant that she admires him. However, her admiration is tied to his intelligence—his "clever[ness]" and "brillian[ce]."

At this point, Frank tries to direct Rita's attention back to *Howards End*, but she refuses, telling him that sometimes talking freely is important. "That's what they do wrong in schools," she says. "They get y' gin' and then y' all havin' a great time talkin' about somethin' that's dead interestin' but the next thing is they wanna turn it into a lesson." Going on, she tells him about a fieldtrip she took once as a young student. On this trip, she spotted a beautiful, exotic bird. Just when she was about to tell the teacher about it, a fellow-student shushed her, saying, "Keep y' mouth shut or she'll make us write a bleedin' essay on it!" Hearing this story, Frank says, "Yes! It's what we do, Rita; we pluck birds from the sky and nail them down to learn how they fly."

After Rita says that she admires Frank because he can say "clever things," Frank seemingly recognizes that her admiration has nothing to do with romance. As such, he refocuses on the lesson plan. When does so, though, Rita objects, saying that educators are too quick to disregard the benefits of paying attention to things that exist outside the scope of their lesson plans. Since Frank is so suspicious of higher education and its rote methods, he's delighted by this idea. Indeed, he agrees that teachers often make interesting things boring, even finding ways to ruin the beauty of, for example, an exotic bird. In this way, Russell suggests that institutionalized education is preoccupied with its own pedagogical approach and that this narrow-mindedness can be the detriment of a student's educational journey.

"You'd think there was something wrong with education to hear you talk," Rita says, and Frank suggests that "perhaps there is." Rita then asks why Frank's teaching her. "Because it's what *you* wanted," he says. "If it was up to me, what I'd like to do is take you by the hand and run out of this room for ever." Rita takes this as a joke, saying, "Oh, be serious!", but Frank pushes on, saying, "I am, Rita. I am! Right now there are a thousand things I'd rather do than teach—most of them with you, young woman." He then laments that Rita didn't walk into his office twenty years ago. "I know," Rita says. "But it's not twenty years ago, Frank. It's now—you're there an' I'm here." In response, Frank says, "Yes and you're here for an education. Now come on! Forster."

When Frank says that "there are a thousand things" he'd like to do with Rita, he insinuates that he'd like to have sex with her. Despite the fact that this transgresses against the boundaries between a mentor and a pupil, Rita finds a way to brush off Frank's interest. She does this by reminding him of the circumstances that separate them, saying, "You're there an' I'm here." This phrase essentially emphasizes the distance between the two of them, as Frank is an older professor, while she is a young pupil. By forcing him to acknowledge the context and nature of their relationship, she succeeds in shutting down the possibility of romance. Thankfully, Frank recognizes this, ultimately turning his attention back to an appropriate subject: Rita's education.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

Sitting at his desk, Frank reads one of Rita's essays as she rushes into the room and apologizes for being late. Accepting her apology, he asks her about the piece she wrote. He says, "In response to the question, 'Suggest how you might resolve the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*,' you have written, quote, 'Do it on the radio', unquote." This, he tells Rita, is not a sufficient answer because it's too short. Defending herself, Rita says that she didn't have much time to focus on the assignment because the salon was busy this past week and she can't work on her writing at home because Denny, her husband, "gets really pissed off" if she does academic work at home.

The fact that Rita is unable to devote time to her academic studies when she's at home illustrates that her background and the people closest to her are weary of her efforts toward personal growth. Indeed, Denny "gets really pissed off" when she does schoolwork, a sentiment that aligns with Rita's previous statement about the widespread negative attitude toward education that she encountered while growing up. Unfortunately, Denny seems to have carried this mentality into his adult life, thereby inhibiting Rita and compromising her ability to secure an education.

Frank tries to get Rita to see that she won't pass her exams if she writes such short answers, even if they're technically correct. He asks her to sit down and write a new response. After only a few moments of writing, though, she starts talking again, saying, "Y'know Peer Gynt? He was searchin' for the meaning of life, wasn't he?" She then tells Frank that she was doing a client's hair the other day and started talking about *Peer Gynt*, telling the woman the entire plot. "An' y' know somethin', she was dead interested," Rita says. "She said to me, this woman, after I'd told her all about it, she said: 'I wish I could go off searchin' for the meanin' of life.' There's loads of them around by us who feel like that. Because there is no meaning!"

When Frank tells Rita that she has to elaborate upon her answer even though the idea itself is valid, he once again emphasizes that there are certain standards and expectations inherent to institutionalized education. However, Rita's genuine interest in the subject material—the play Peer Gynt*—is perhaps even more valuable than learning how to formulate a conventional essay. After all, she has clearly internalized the play's major themes, thinking about the work so much that she even talks about it to a client.*

Still contemplating the "meaning of life," Rita posits that people from her background don't have a "culture," suggesting that there's no such thing as "working-class culture." In turn, Frank suggests that she should perhaps open her eyes to her surroundings. "I do," she says. "But I don't see any culture, I just see everyone pissed or stoned tryin' to find their way from one empty day to the next." She then outlines a theory that everybody's always trying to acquire new things, going through life with a "Got-to-Have" mentality that never results in true "contentment." She calls this way of living a "disease," saying that she herself suffered from this mentality when she was buying **dresses** instead of seeking meaningful change.

When she says that the working-class is completely devoid of "culture," Rita degrades her own background and fails to recognize that "culture" isn't a fixed concept. Indeed, her blue-collar origins don't align with the kind of "culture" she associates with high-society people, but that doesn't mean there's no such thing as a "working-class culture." Rita's notion that consumerism is a "disease" points back to when she told Frank during their first meeting, "You've got to challenge death an' disease." At the time, Rita was referring to cigarettes, but the sentiment remains the same. Rita is committed to "challeng[ing]" the conventions that surround her.

Listening to Rita's ideas about "contentment" and society's "Got-to-Have" mentality, Frank suggests that she should take a politics course, but she says she hates politics. She insists that what she learns about art and literature from Frank sustains her throughout the week, even though Denny tries to stop her from coming to the lessons. "He hates me comin' here," she says. "It's like druggies, isn't it? Addicts hate it when one of them tries to break away. It makes me stronger comin' here. That's what Denny's frightened of."

By comparing Denny to a drug addict who hates seeing one of his fellow users get clean, Rita suggests that upward mobility is a sensitive concept in the working-class. Because she wants to pursue an education and thus improve her sense of self-worth, Denny is "frightened" that she'll completely leave him behind. As such, he makes it clear that he "hates" it when she goes to study with Frank, since to him this symbolizes her discontentment with the existence she leads—an existence he is very much a part of.

Hearing Rita move from talking about *Peer Gynt* to "contentment" to her problems with Denny, Frank quotes *Howards End*, saying, "Only connect." Rita scoffs at this, begging Frank not to go into Forster again, but Frank points out that she has been connecting ideas to her own life. In turn, Rita finally sees the merit of *Howards End*, understanding one of the novel's key themes. "Why didn't you just explain that to me right from the start?" she asks. "I could have done," Frank replies. "But you'll have a much better understanding of something if you discover it in your own terms." Satisfied, Rita stops talking and focuses on her answer to Frank's question about *Peer Gynt*. When she shows him what she's written, she's proud to have finally properly addressed the prompt.

In this moment, Frank praises the benefits of experiential education, or a style of teaching in which the student's process of discovery is just as important as the answer itself. Rather than simply telling Rita how Forster's phrase "Only connect" pertains to the book and life itself, he waits for her to come to this realization on her own.

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

On a snowy night, Rita comes to Frank's office without an essay to hand in. She explains that Denny found her birth control pills, so he burned her essay and a number of Chekhov books Frank lent her. She says that Denny absolutely hates the idea of her coming to tutoring sessions, as if she's having some sort of an affair. When Frank suggests that perhaps Denny thinks Rita is having an affair with *him*, she says that she assured her husband that Frank is just her teacher, somebody who "feed[s]" her "without expectin' anythin' in return." By way of contrast, Denny buys Rita gifts in an attempt to bring back the person she was before she sought out an education. "I see him lookin' at me sometimes, an' I know what he's thinkin'; he's wonderin' where the girl he married has gone to."

Denny—and seemingly everybody else in Rita's life except for Frank—thinks that Rita should get pregnant. Because she doesn't feel ready to do this, though, Rita has been secretly taking birth control pill, thus allowing herself time to "find" herself before becoming a mother. When Rita says that Frank "feeds" her but doesn't "expect anythin' in return," she inadvertently reminds Frank that their relationship is strictly devoted to her education, regardless of his romantic feelings for her. Because their relationship is platonic, Rita can benefit from her rapport with Frank. Her relationship with Denny, on the other hand, inhibits her sense of personal growth because he actively tries to keep her from changing.

Frank asks Rita if she wants to "abandon this course" in light of her personal troubles, but Rita rejects this idea, saying that the art and literature Frank shows her doesn't "take the place of" her life. Rather, she says that such things *provide* her with life. Still, Frank insists that they skip class and go to the pub, but Rita refuses. As such, Frank decides that they should treat his office like a pub, and so he takes a bottle of liquor from the shelves. When Rita asks why he keeps his alcohol hidden, he says, "A little arrangement I have with my immediate employers. It's called 'discretion.' They didn't tell me to stop drinking, they told me to stop displaying the signs."

Once again, Rita articulates the importance of her time with Frank. She emphasizes the vitality that education gives her by saying that the books Frank tells her to read ultimately form the basis of a new life—a life in which she can become an intellectual and break out of the narrow-minded conception of contentment championed by people like Denny. Interestingly enough, though, Frank himself is completely disinterested in the very same life that Rita wants to attain. Whereas Rita yearns to become part of the elite academic sphere, all Frank wants to do is go to the pub. Indeed, his alcoholism is so overwhelmingly pervasive in his life that his "immediate employers" have asked him to do a better job of hiding it.

Hearing Frank talk about drinking, Rita asks him if he drank back when he was a poet. He says that he did, though not quite as much, and this leads them into a conversation about the difference between creating poetry and creating literature. In turn, Rita wonders if she'll ever fully understand the difference between various types of writing. For example, she read Chekhov's play *The Seagull* and found it incredibly sad, but then she read blurbs about Chekhov that called him a "comedic genius." Hearing this, Frank explains that these blurbs aren't using the word "comedy" in the way Rita thinks. "Have you ever seen Chekhov in the theatre?" he asks, and when she says no, he encourages her to go. "Hey! Why don't we go tonight!" she says, but he declines, saying that he hates theater.

Once more, the audience sees how easily Frank and Rita's conversations turn toward academic matters, as they seamlessly transition into a discussion about Chekhov. What's more, Frank tries again to use a model of experiential education by urging Rita to go to the theater. Although he himself hates seeing plays, he clearly thinks it's important that Rita have the experience for herself.

Despite his protests, Rita urges Frank to go to a play with her. In response, he asks what he'd tell Julia, who'd surely be jealous. "If she knew I was at the theatre with an irresistible thing like you?" he says. "Rita, it would be deaf-and-dumb breakfasts for a week." Nonetheless, she keeps pressuring him, picking up the phone and telling him to call Julia to inform her of their plans. At this point, he admits Julia is out for the night. Eventually, Rita convinces him to accompany her to an amateur production of *The Important of Being Earnest*, though Frank not only complains that Julia will be jealous, but also that he's going to miss an evening in the pub to see a bad performance. Nonetheless, Rita manages to get him out the door, telling him on the way not to spoil the plot of the play for her.

Frank's assumption that Julia will be jealous says something about the way he views his relationship with Rita. Despite the fact that Rita just wants to go to the theater with Frank because she wants to see a play and because (presumably) she enjoys Frank's company, he views the proposed outing as a date. As such, he thinks Julia would be jealous. Of course, Rita knows there's nothing to be jealous about, since she's confident nothing romantic or sexual will happen. In turn, Russell highlights the fact that Frank and Rita seem to harbor different conceptions regarding their mentor-pupil relationship.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

While Frank eats lunch, Rita bursts into his office. Out of breath, she tells him she only has a few minutes because she left a client at the hairdresser's. She explains that she went to a production of *Macbeth* last night, and that she simply had to come tell him about it. "I thought it was gonna be dead borin' but it wasn't—it was brilliant. I'm gonna do an essay on it," she says. After raving about Shakespeare, Rita says she must hurry back to the shop or else "there'll be another tragedy," since her customer's "lo' lights" won't turn out right if she doesn't hastily return. Hearing this, Frank explains that this isn't the same kind of tragedy as the kind that characterizes *Macbeth* as a tragic play.

Perhaps Frank's best quality as a teacher is his ability to turn his conversations with Rita into learning experiences. Although he doesn't do much in the way of conventional teaching, he does always find a way to give Rita a valuable piece of information. In this case, he seizes the opportunity to teach her about the formal definition of the word "tragedy" when applied to literature and performance. What's more, it's worth noting that he does this in a way that still feels immediate to Rita, as he lets the lesson arise alongside her excitement about and engagement with Macbeth.

Frank explains that the protagonists of a tragedy go "blindly on and on" without knowing that they're "spinning one more piece of thread which will eventually make up the network of [their] own tragedy." He then asks Rita to come to lunch with him, but she tells him again that she has to return to her client. As such, he asks her to come over that night for a dinner party he and Julia are hosting. "An' y' want *me* to come?" Rita asks, and Frank assures her that he does, telling her to invite Denny. "What's wrong?" he asks, sensing a tension. "What shall I wear?" she asks, and then the stage lights go dark.

Frank teaches Rita about tragedy—a genre in which the protagonist hurdles toward his or her own "tragedy" because of a "tragic flaw" inherent in his or her personality. After this small pedagogical moment, Frank once again transcends the standard boundaries between mentors and pupils by asking Rita to come to a dinner party. Thankfully, he says that Denny should also come, and this helps the invitation remain friendly rather than romantic. Regardless, Rita can't help but think about what she'll wear, clearly feeling like she'll be out of place as a young working-class woman at a prestigious dinner party.

ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

In his office, Frank tells Rita that Julia was upset that Rita and Denny never came to the dinner party, since there were places set for them. Rita explains that Denny "went mad" when she told him about the invitation. Nonetheless, she resolved to go without him, but as she approached Frank's house, she saw him and his guests through the window and couldn't work up the nerve to go inside. Worrying about what she would talk about with such educated people—and self-conscious about the low-quality wine she brought—she turned around. Frank finds this ridiculous, insisting that his guests would have found her "funny, delightful," and "charming." In response, Rita tells him she doesn't *want* to be seen as "funny." "I wanna talk seriously with the rest of you," she says.

The fact that Frank can't imagine why Rita would feel out of place at his dinner party suggests that he's ignorant of the difficulties that come along with attaining upward mobility. Indeed, Rita thinks she'll be out of place at the party, but Frank simply tells her she's "funny, delightful," and "charming," ultimately failing to grasp that none of these compliments will make Rita feel like a valid member of his elite group. Instead, these compliments imply that Rita would have been a source of entertainment.

Rita tells Frank that she didn't want to go to his house "just to play the court jester." This enrages Frank, who says, "If you believe that that's why you were invited, to be laughed at, then you can get out of here right now. You were invited because I wished to have your company." Responding to this, Rita says, "I can't talk to the people I live with any more. An' I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday, or them out there, because I can't learn the language. I'm an alien." Feeling this way, she explains, she went to the pub and found Denny and her mother singing jukebox songs and getting drunk.

It becomes clear in this scene that Rita is straddled between two social classes. Embarking upon a journey of personal growth, she feels as if she's outgrown her working-class background. At the same time, though, she doesn't yet feel capable of fitting into the aristocratic sphere of intellectuals she wants so badly to join. Because it's harder to project herself into a new environment, she goes to the pub with Denny and tries to revert to her old way of life.

Continuing her story about Saturday night, Rita says that she stood in the pub and wondered what, exactly, she's trying to do by getting an education. She wondered why she won't just quit and rejoin people like Denny and her mother, spending her time singing in pubs and getting drunk. "And why don't you?" asks Frank. Frustrated by this question, Rita makes it clear that she *can't* simply go back to living the existence she once led. She says that her mother got so drunk that night she started crying. When Rita asked her mother why she was crying, her mother said, "Because we could sing better songs than those." Despite this, though, she was back to singing and laughing with Denny ten minutes later and acting like she'd never said such a thing. "But she had," Rita says. "And that's why I came back. And that's why I'm staying."

Rita's story about her drunk mother on Saturday night aligns with her own belief that the people from her working-class background aren't content with life. Her mother confirms this notion when she says that she could "sing better songs" than the ones playing on the pub's jukebox. However, she quickly goes back to singing those same songs, illustrating just how difficult it is to make a change in one's life. Having seen her mother ignore her unhappiness, Rita is determined to never let go of her resolve to gain an education and thus improve her sense of self-worth.

ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN

While Frank is grading papers, Rita enters the office holding a suitcase. Apparently, Rita broke up with Denny, so now she's moving in with her mother. "He said either I stop comin' here an' come off the pill or I could get out altogether," she tells Frank. In light of this, she decided to leave and continue her education. After a moment, Rita asks Frank how her *Macbeth* essay was, and though he thinks they shouldn't bother working today, she presses him to deliver his honest feedback. "Was it rubbish?" she asks. "No," he answers. "Not rubbish." When Rita asks if it's overly sentimental, he says, "No no. It's far too honest for that. It's almost—erm—moving. But in terms of what you're asking me to teach you of passing exams…In those terms it's worthless. It shouldn't be, but it is; in its own terms it's—it's wonderful."

It's unsurprising that Rita has decided to pursue an education over staying with Denny, considering the renewed sense of determination she developed on Saturday night after watching her mother wallow in her own discontent without trying to make a change. When she turns to Frank to help her continue her journey toward academic success, though, she discovers that he's suddenly hesitant to help her become somebody else entirely. Indeed, he finds her essay about Macbeth "moving," emphasizing how "wonderful" it is despite the fact that it doesn't adhere to the expectations or standards that are normally used to measure academic success.

Having heard Frank say that her *Macbeth* essay wouldn't pass an exam, Rita decides that the piece is, indeed, "worthless." As such, she asks Frank to tell her how to write a better response, but he confesses that he's reluctant to do so because he doesn't know if he wants to teach her, since what she already has is "valuable." She protests this idea, but he pushes on, saying, "But, don't you see, if you're going to write this sort of thing—to pass examinations, you're going to have to suppress…perhaps even abandon your uniqueness. I'm going to have to change you." This, Rita says, is the point. "Don't you realize, I *want* to change!" she insists. Telling Frank to throw her essay into the garbage, she sits down determined to write a new one.

In this moment, Russell shows that Frank doesn't want Rita to change. After all, not only is he skeptical of a standard education, but he also has strong feelings for Rita and thus doesn't want her to erase herself in the process of becoming an intellectual. He tries to tell her that securing an education doesn't have to mean completely blotting out her unique individuality, which he believes is "valuable." While this is certainly the case, it's also worth keeping in mind that intellectual and personal growth often comes along with periods of radical change. This, it seems, is simply part of Rita's journey as a self-empowered person seeking to improve upon herself. Although Frank has good intentions, his hesitancy to help her succeed threatens to interfere with her otherwise-worthwhile pursuit.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Sitting at his desk, Frank busies himself with typing, periodically pausing to sip from a mug. Before long, Rita enters, aglow in a new ("second-hand") **dress**. "Frank, it was fantastic," she says. "What are you talking about, London or summer school?" he asks. "Both," she says, explaining that she had a great time with a group of classmates who "stuck together all week," staying up late and talking, getting drunk, going to the theatre, and buying second-hand clothes. She tells him how hard they all studied, relating a story about a young tutor whom she impressed with her wit. Changing the subject, she says, "Hey, what was France like?", but Frank says there isn't much to tell, though he says he did manage to do some writing. "So y' wrote a bit an y' drank a bit? Is that all?" she asks, and he says, "Julia left me."

At the outset of the second act, the summer has passed. Rita has apparently spent time in London with a group of peers while studying at summer school. Considering the way she gushes about her time in the city, it's clear she has found the kind of elite and educated culture she's been seeking. Frank, on the other hand, has spent the summer drinking and dealing with a breakup. However, he has also done some writing, which is significant, because he hasn't written anything since his wife left him. The only difference in his life, it seems, is Rita's presence, suggesting that she has inspired him to return to poetry. Considering that he clearly has romantic feelings for her, this is rather unsurprising, since his original poetry was about the beginning of his relationship with his wife. In turn, the audience senses that budding romance is one of the only things that truly inspires Frank.

Frank explains to Rita that Julia left him while they were in France, but now they're back together again. Since Frank clearly doesn't want to talk about Julia anymore, he and Rita start discussing Trish, Rita's new roommate. "She's great," Rita says. "Y' know she's dead classy. Y' know, like she's got taste, y' know, like you, Frank, she's just got it." She asserts that she's having the time of her life with her smart new friends. She then gives Frank a pen she made for him. Written on its side are the words, "Must only be used for poetry. By strictest order—Rita."

When Rita talks about Trish's sense of "taste," Rita says, "she's just got it." As such, it becomes clear that she sees this kind of sophistication as something that some people innately possess. This, it seems, is what she wants: to reach a point where she's so educated and elite that it seems as if she has an inherent command of style and grace.

Rita asks Frank what they'll be studying. Her chipper attitude seems to bother him, though he doesn't say anything about it. Rita grabs a bottle of scotch and asks why Frank drinks when he has "so much goin' for [him]." She reminds him that his drinking habits will kill him, and he says, "I thought you weren't interested in reforming me." She acknowledges that this is true, but she also suggests that she thought Frank might start "reforming" *himself* under her influence. "But Rita," he says, "if I repent and reform, what do I do when your influence is no longer here? What do I do when, in appalling sobriety, I watch you walk away and disappear, your influence gone for ever?" When she asks why he thinks she'll "disappear," he says, "Oh you will, Rita. You've got to."

Frank's curmudgeonly attitude seems to be a response to Rita's excitement about having had a great time in London. Indeed, she has met new people who have enriched her life in the way that Frank cannot, since their relationship is confined to his office. As such, he is jealous, though he refrains from expressing this. Instead, he tries to seem apathetic about the reality of their relationship, which he suggests is predicated on a temporary connection. By saying that Rita will "walk away and disappear," he underhandedly tries to make her feel guilty for abandoning him. At the same time, he recognizes that the point of their relationship is that she will eventually be able to move on from the classroom. This is why he says, "You've got to," when she asks why he thinks she'll leave. In this way, Russell shows that Frank grasps—and even accepts—that his connection with Rita has nothing to do with romance, even as he jealously bemoans this fact.

Frank chooses a collection of poetry by William Blake from the shelves, and Rita recites one of his most famous poems by memory. Registering Frank's surprise, she explains that she covered Blake in summer school with an overzealous lecturer who loved his poems. Somewhat dejected, Frank walks to the shelf and replaces the book, returning to his chair as the lights go out.

In this moment, Frank feels unnecessary to Rita's education. Now that she has gone to the city and studied with a number of exciting young intellectuals, it's clear Frank's sense of self-worth as her teacher has diminished, thereby further straining their mentor-pupil relationship.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Rita enters Frank's office and starts talking to him in a strange new voice. When he asks why she's speaking differently, she says, "I have merely decided to talk properly. As Trish says there is not a lot of point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice." Frank takes issue with this idea, saying that Rita doesn't have an "ugly voice" and that he refuses to give a tutorial to a "Dalek" (a race of fictional aliens made popular by the television series *Doctor Who*). "Just be yourself," he tells her, and as he does so, he notices some grass on her back. Apparently, Rita fell into conversation with some students on the university lawn before coming to Frank's office. Hearing them engaged in a literary discussion, she interjected and proved her intelligence to them.

The course of Rita's development is now almost completely out of Frank's hands. Not only has she come back from summer school capable of reciting Blake by memory, but now she has a cultured roommate coaching her how to change her voice. Unsurprisingly, this upsets Frank, who wants to help Rita gain an education without actually changing herself, since he thinks what she already has is "valuable." Rita, on the other hand, eagerly embraces the project of completely overhauling her previous identity. As she does so, she delights in fraternizing with students on the university lawn, finally feeling like she has joined the social sphere she has always longed for.

As Frank turns his attention back to grading one of Rita's essays, she tells him that she met a student named Tiger, whose real name is Tyson. Apparently, Tiger was one of the ones having a literary discussion on the university lawn. As she talks about Tiger, it becomes clear that she admires him. "They're all goin' to the South of France in the Christmas holidays, slummin' it," she adds, to which Frank immediately responds, "You can't go." When she asks what he means by this, he says, "You can't go—you've got your exams." Still, though, this doesn't make sense, considering that Rita's exams take place before Christmas. As she talks about Tiger, Frank interrupts, saying, "Is there any point [in] me going on with this?" Going on, he asks if there's "much point in working towards an examination if [Rita's] going to fall in love and set off."

Frank's jealousy of Rita's development outside his office is overwhelmingly obvious in this moment. Unable bear hearing her talk about Tiger, Frank tries to curtail her excitement by telling her that she "can't go" to France with her new friends, acting like a jealous boyfriend or a parent. Rather than encouraging her to experience the world by traveling—a pursuit he would otherwise endorse, since he's normally an advocate of experiential learning—he tells her that she must stay in England. When this doesn't work, he tries to make her feel guilty for acquiring interesting new friends. In turn, Russell shows that Frank has become consumed by his personal feelings for Rita, which now negatively influence their mentor-pupil relationship.

Rita rejects Frank's suggestion that she's falling in love. "All right," he says, "but please stop burbling on about Mr. Tyson." He then focuses on grading her essay again, and she asks him how it looks. "Oh—it—erm—wouldn't look out of place with these," he says, pointing to a stack of other essays on his desk. "Honest?" Rita asks. "Dead honest," he replies, and the lights go out.

There's no doubt that Rita takes immense pleasure in hearing that her essay "wouldn't look out of place with" a stack of pieces written by Frank's full-time students. For Frank, though, this is a depressing fact, since he's unhappy to see Rita change.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

While Rita sits by the window and reads, Frank enters the office, exceedingly drunk. "Fuck them, eh, Rita," he says, eventually explaining that his students reported him for being drunk. Pulling out a bottle of liquor from the shelf, he claims that he gave the best lecture he's ever given, but that students still reported him because he fell off the podium twice. While he lies flat on the floor, Rita asks if the university has sacked him. "The sack?" he says. "God no, that would involve making a decision. Pissed is all right. To get the sack it'd have to be rape on a grand scale, and not just the students either." Instead of firing him, he explains, the university suggested that he take a sabbatical to Europe or America. "I suggested that Australia might be more apt," he says.

Frank's apathy when it comes to teaching finally interferes in a way that is impossible to hide. Despite this, he has worked at the university for a long time and most likely has a permanent teaching position, meaning that he would have to do something truly atrocious in order to get fired. Unfortunately, this only fuels his indifference. Indeed, he has seemingly no remorse about having been caught drinking. In fact, he's angry at his students for reporting him, thereby taking the blame off of himself, though it seems he knows it's his own fault. In this way, Rita sees how little Frank values himself and his wellbeing (both professionally and in terms of his health).

Rita says that Frank's drunkenness is perhaps unfair to his students, but he refutes this point, claiming that even in his inebriation, he delivered a valuable lesson. "'Assonance'—I said to them—'Assonance means getting the rhyme wrong…," he says. "They looked at me as though I'd pissed on Wordsworth's tomb." In response, Rita tells Frank they can talk about her essay about Blake next week, but he insists that she stay. "You can't go," he says, holding up her essay. "I want to talk to you about this. Rita, what's this?" He then takes issue with her interpretation of the poem she wrote about, suggesting that she's reading too far into the text. Despite this, she holds her ground, asserting that the poem is "richer" if the reader taps into its hidden meanings.

In his drunken lecture, Frank borrows Rita's definition of assonance. He has always found this definition witty and insightful, perhaps because it remains truthful even while underhandedly scoffing at the normal formality of academic definitions. Indeed, it is exactly because this definition of assonance doesn't align with how the academy usually speaks about literature that Frank's students look at him as though he "pissed on Wordsworth's tomb." Still, he holds his ground, suggesting that he gave a brilliant lecture. The fact that he borrowed from Rita reinforces the idea that he thinks her untrained intelligence is quite valuable. As a result, he dislikes her essay about the Blake poem, clearly believing that she has altered her views (likely because of her new friends' influence) and, in doing so, has lost her innate ability to straightforwardly point out intelligent ideas.

Frank refuses to agree with Rita's conception of Blake's poem, arguing that the verses in question are "simple" and "uncomplicated." "Yeh, that's what you say, Frank," Rita replies, "but Trish and me and some others were talkin' the other night, about Blake, an' what came out of our discussion was that apart from the simple surface value of Blake's poetry there's always a like […] a like vein. Of concealed meaning." When Frank still doesn't agree, Rita asks if her essay is wrong, and he says, "It's not—not wrong. But I don't like it." In turn, she points out that he is being "subjective." This makes Frank laugh, and he admits that she's probably right.

In this argument, Frank struggles with the notion that Rita has gained her own intellectual independence. Of course, it's obvious that his moodiness is a result of the jealousy he feels regarding Rita's new life and new friends, but it also has to do with the fact that he has always valued the way she thought before she started conforming to academia's stuffy conventions.

As Frank heaves himself into his desk chair, Rita asks what kind of score her essay would receive if it were in an exam. "A good one," Frank says. "What I'm saying is that it's up to the minute, quite acceptable, trendy stuff about Blake; but there's nothing of you in there." "Or maybe, Frank," she says, "y' mean there's nothing of your views in there." She points out that Frank has taught her how to develop arguments and wonders, in light of this, why he's now taking issue with her attempt to form an opinion. "Your views I still value," he replies. "But, Rita, these aren't your views."

Frank genuinely wants Rita to recognize the value of her own "views" rather than learning how to reproduce "trendy" ideas that are popular in academia. However, Frank's sourness also has to do with the fact that he doesn't want her to change because he feels romantically inclined toward the person she used to be. In this way, he tries to teach her an important lesson about the nature of intellectual growth while simultaneously impeding her process of educational discovery.

"Look, Frank," Rita says, "I don't have to go along with your views on Blake, y' know. I can have a mind of my own, can't I?" When he says that he "sincerely hope[s] so," she asks what, exactly, that's supposed to mean. "It means—it means be careful," he says. This angers her, and she says that she can "look after" herself. "Just 'cos I'm learnin', just 'cos I can do it now an' read what I wanna read an' understand without havin' to come runnin' to you every five minutes y' start tellin' me to be careful," she says. In response, he says, "Because—because I care for you—I want you to care for yourself." A bit more calmly now, Rita admits that she cares for him, too, but that he has to "leave [her] alone a bit."

In this moment, Rita asserts her independence, recognizing that Frank's advice is tarnished by his personal interest in her. When she says that she doesn't have to come "runnin'" to him whenever she reads something new, she implicitly acknowledges that Frank wants to still be needed as her teacher. In line with this notion, Frank says that he "care[s]" for her, ultimately admitting that he's letting his feelings for her affect the advice he provides as her teacher. Although Rita understands, she tells him that he needs to "leave" her "alone" for a little while, effectively reestablishing an appropriate amount of mentor-pupil separation.

Just before Rita leaves, Frank tells her that he finally read **Rubyfruit Jungle**. "It's excellent," he determines. "Oh, go away, Frank," Rita replies, laughing. "Of its type it's quite interesting. But it's hardly excellence."

The fact that Frank has read Rubyfruit Jungle is a testament to both his open-mindedness when it comes to what's considered quality literature and his desire to grow closer to Rita. In contrast, Rita now takes pride in belittling the book and, in doing so, emphasizing how far she's come in her intellectual journey—and how much she's changed along the way.

ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

Rita enters Frank's office and apologizes for being late, saying that she lost track of time because she was talking about Shakespeare with her friends. Turning to leave, she suggests that she's too late to make the session worthwhile and promises to be on time next week. However, Frank asks her to sit down. When she does, he tells her he recently called the hairdresser's shop and learned she no longer works there. She confirms this, informing him that she works in a bistro now. Hurt that she never told him, Frank says, "It struck me that there was a time when you told me everything." Pouring himself a drink, he asks if Mr. Tyson is one of her customers at the restaurant, where she claims to have conversations that are much more stimulating than the ones she ever had at the hairdresser's.

Yet again, Frank's jealousy regarding Rita's newfound independence and friends comes to the forefront of Educating Rita. *Indeed, his envy is obvious when he asks if Tiger (Mr. Tyson) visits her at the bistro. At this point in the play, the audience understands that Frank and Rita's relationship has shifted dramatically. Rita has grown less interested in attending Frank's tutoring sessions (seen by her tardiness and newfound aloofness), and Frank has become unable to contain his feelings of resentment about her new life and identity.*

"Look," Rita says, "for your information I do find Tiger fascinatin', like I find a lot of the people I mix with fascinating." With his back turned to her, Frank says, "Perhaps—perhaps you don't want to waste your time coming here any more?" This annoys Rita, who tells him not to be stupid. After a moment of silence, she announces that she has to leave because she and Trish are going to a production of *The Seagull*. Again, Frank tells her she can stop coming to these sessions. Sipping his drink, he says, "You really don't have to put in the odd appearance out of sentimentality."

Anything positive Rita has to say about her friends—especially Tiger, of whom Frank is blatantly envious—only makes Frank feel unimportant, once again highlighting his low self-esteem. In suggesting that she doesn't have to "put in the odd appearance out of sentimentality," Frank attempts to make Rita feel guilty for abandoning him. Although he used to accept the fact that she would one day leave him behind, now his attachment to her causes him to act out of resentment and scorn.

In response to Frank's suggestion that she can stop coming, Rita says, "If you could stop pouring that junk down your throat in the hope that it'll make you feel like a poet you might be able to talk about things that matter instead of where I do or do not work, an' then it might be worth comin' here." Clearly offended, Frank asks Rita if she really thinks she's "capable of recognising what does or does not matter," and she says, "I understand literary criticism, Frank. When I come here that's what we're supposed to be dealing with." After looking at her for a moment, he gives her two thin books and says, "You want literary criticism? I want an essay on that lot by next week. No sentimentality, no subjectivity. Just pure criticism. A critical assessment of a lesser-known English poet. Me."

Finally, Rita acknowledges that it is no longer "worth" coming to Frank's office for tutoring, as all he ever wants to talk about now is her personal life. Once again, Rita tries to establish the appropriate boundaries in their mentor-pupil relationship, this time reminding him that they're "supposed to be dealing with" literary criticism, not her private affairs. In turn, Russell portrays mentorship relationships as quite volatile, illustrating that romantic interest can quickly destabilize an otherwise productive learning environment. In addition, by assigning Rita an essay on his own work, it seems that Frank is attempting to force Rita to pay attention to him.

ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

Sitting at his desk with a bottle of whiskey before him, Frank hears a knock on the door and tells Rita to enter. He asks her what she's doing at his office, since she isn't supposed to come until the following week, but Rita ignores his question and asks if he's sober. When he confirms that he is "this side of reasonable comprehension," she says, "Because I want you to hear this when you're sober. These are brilliant, Frank, you've got to start writing again." Holding up his poetry collections, she tells him that she and Trish stayed up all night talking about how wonderful his work is. After Rita gushes praise and admiration, Frank says that he might—like her—change his name, perhaps to Mary Shelley, since Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*. After all, he insinuates, he has created a monster.

In this scene, Frank uses his self-deprecating attitude to insult Rita and himself. Indeed, he disparages Rita's ability to recognize good literature, consequently implying that he thinks very little of his own work. Instead of accepting Rita's well-intentioned praise, Frank suggests that he has created a monster—the new, sophisticated version of Rita—by teaching her literary criticism.

When Rita asks what Frank means, he picks up his poetry and calls it a "clever, pyrotechnical pile of self-conscious allusion" that is "worthless, talentless, shit." He insists that there's more "wit" and "insight" in the telephone book than in his poems. Ripping up his books, he says he doesn't expect Rita to understand. "Why don't you just go away?" he asks. "I don't think I can bear it any longer." Firing back, Rita says that what Frank can't bear is *himself*, calling him "Mr. Self-Pitying Piss-Artist." "What you can't bear is that I am educated now," she says. "What's up, Frank, don't y' like me now that the little girl's grown up, now that y' can no longer bounce me on Daddy's knee an' watch me stare back in wide-eyed wonder at everything he has to say?"

This is Frank and Rita's most intense moment of conflict in the entire play. As such, they say a number of things they might not entirely mean. For example, although Frank says that he doesn't expect Rita to understand why he dislikes his own poetry, the audience knows that Frank actually deeply respects Rita's intellectual talents. Further, he tells her to go away even though it's clear that this is the opposite of what he wants, since he's previously worked so hard to keep her from growing apart from him. However, although Rita is equally upset and says even harsher things, her statements perhaps bear more truth, since it certainly is the case that Frank pities himself and that he has trouble seeing her (metaphorically) grow up and gain independence.

Continuing to insult Frank, Rita says, "I don't need you." Getting up, she moves toward the door, saying, "I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read. I can do without you." Taking this in, Frank says, "Is that all you wanted? Have you come all this way for so very, very little?" Rita then points out that this might be "very little" to Frank, a professor who squanders his opportunities and degrades himself while taking his privilege for granted. "Found a culture, have you, Rita?" Frank says. "Found a better song to sing, have you? No—you've found a different song, that's all—and on your lips it's shrill and hollow and tuneless." As she leaves, Rita tells him she no longer goes by Rita, then slams the door.

Although Rita is right that it pains Frank to see her develop beyond the point of "need[ing]" him, Frank also touches upon a point worth considering—that Rita has simply traded one life for another. Indeed, she wanted a "culture" and a "better song to sing," but it's questionable whether she has genuinely gained these things or if she has simply learned how to mimic them. Frank tells Rita that on her lips, this "better song" is "shrill and hollow and tuneless," suggesting that she is merely playing the part of the cultured academic and is blindly following academia's narrow-mindedness.

ACT TWO, SCENE SIX

Incredibly drunk, Frank leans against the bookshelf and talks into the phone. Slurring his words, he asks the person on the other end if Rita is there. "No? Thank you…" He then hangs up, dials another number, and asks this person to tell Rita that he has signed her up for her exams.

This scene showcases the intensity of Frank's interest in Rita. Indeed, his drunken calls suggest that he is perhaps obsessed with her. At the same time, though, he's only calling to tell her that he has signed her up for her exams, meaning that he is ultimately only trying to be a good teacher and help her with her academic pursuits.

ACT TWO, SCENE SEVEN

Wrapped in a winter coat, Rita enters Frank's empty office and places a Christmas card on a filing cabinet, where many others are displayed. Frank then comes through the door carrying two heavy cases, and Rita jumps to help him. "Merry Christmas, Frank. Have they sacked y'?" she asks. "Not quite," he says, explaining that he has to go to Australia for two years as a punishment for a particularly drunken night. Julia isn't going to accompany him. He jokes that he'll fit right in when he goes to Australia, claiming that the country is a drinker's "paradise." Changing the subject, Rita thanks him for signing her up for her exams. She tells him that when she flipped the exam over, the first question read, "Suggest ways in which one might cope with some of the staging difficulties in a production of *Peer Gynt*."

In the play's final scene, Frank's life has completely fallen apart. His alcoholism seems to have reached its peak, he's been punished by the university, and Julia seems to have finally left him. Rita's presence, then, is quite significant, since he cares so much for her and she has not entirely abandoned him. What's more, he learns that the very same question he made her practice regarding Peer Gynt *ended up appearing on her exam, meaning that he was, in the end, a rather effective teacher.*

Rita explains that at first, she could only stare at the question on her exam and think about what Frank had once said about it. "You think you gave me nothing, did nothing for me," she says. "You think I just ended up with a load of quotes an' empty phrases; an' I did. But that wasn't your doin'. I was so hungry. I wanted it all so much that I didn't want it to be questioned." She then tells Frank that she recently came home to find that Trish, who is so educated and proper, had tried to kill herself.

It's clear in this moment that Rita is no longer angry at Frank for being jealous of her private life. Instead, she thanks him for teaching her, admitting that she was "so hungry" to change, that she was slightly overzealous and out of touch with reality. Indeed, she wanted so badly to become a sophisticated, educated person, but she now knows that this doesn't automatically lead to happiness. After all, Trish is sophisticated and educated, and yet she tries to kill herself, proving to Rita that becoming an intellectual doesn't simply solve a person's problems.

Frank asks Rita if she answered the *Peer Gynt* question by writing, "Do it on the radio," and she says that she *could* have done this, but she didn't. "You'd have been proud of me if I'd done that," she says. Instead, she answered the exam questions in the standard, academic way, and she earned high marks, too. "It might be worthless in the end," she admits. "But I had a choice. I chose, me. Because of what you'd given me. I had a choice. I wanted to come back an' tell y' that. That y' a good teacher." Flattered, Frank asks Rita to come with him to Australia, but she politely declines, explaining that Tiger—who she now recognizes is "a bit of a wanker"—wants her to come to France, and her mother wants her to come home for Christmas.

Frank would have been proud of Rita if she'd written, "Do it on the radio" because doing so would have suggested that Rita was remaining true to her original identity as a straightforward, blunt, and witty woman. However, Rita ultimately decides to honor herself and her own agency by answering the question correctly, thereby proving that she won't simply do whatever people expect or want her to do. In this way, she has actually internalized Frank's lesson that she should remain true to herself, even when this means straying from Frank's own opinions. This is why she thanks him and calls him a "good teacher." He has helped her realize her own independence, which is the very thing she has sought all along.

"Whatever you do," Frank says, "you might as well take this. It's erm—well, it's er—it' a **dress** really. I bought it some time ago—for erm—for an educated friend—of mine…" Unwrapping the gift, Rita looks at the dress and asks, "This is what you call a scholarly neckline?" Frank admits that when he was choosing it, he put "more emphasis on the word woman than the word educated." Thankful for this gesture, Rita laments that she only ever "take[s]" from Frank but never gives him anything in return. Because of this, she tells him to sit down, finds a pair of scissors, and says, "I'm gonna take ten years off you…"

Once again, Frank blurs the line between an academic relationship and a personal relationship, this time doing so by giving Rita a dress with a provocative neckline. However, it is the case that their connection has greatly evolved over time, meaning that it isn't entirely unreasonable to approach the relationship as a personal one. Despite the romantic overtones of the gift, it's clear that Rita appreciates Frank's gesture, and she even wants to return the favor. When she determines to cut his hair, she blends her working-class background as a hairdresser with her new persona as an "educated woman." In this way, it seems that Rita has finally realized that she doesn't need to completely give up the person she was in order to be an intellectual.

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