

# Educating Rita

## Willy Russell

William Russell was raised in a working class family and actually worked as a female hairdresser. Many of his plays have a semi-autobiographical and elements of the playwright's personal experience are also evident in 'Educating Rita'. The play explores notions of personal growth and self-awareness through the transformation and process of change that occurs within the two markedly different protagonists. The playwright describes his play as being 'a love story' but the relationship that develops between Rita and Frank is also a deeper and transformational relationship between teaching and learning. This is represented through the juxtaposition of class, background, social expectations and values. In the play's introduction, Russell explains that he aimed to achieve this in a way that 'engaged' an audience and 'was relevant to those who considered themselves uneducated, those whose daily language is not the language of the university or the theatre.'

Fundamental notions about the social role of education are explored within the play as well as the personal motivations and dreams that inspire this particular student. Russell uses this educational context to explore the development of skills, attitudes, values and outlook that takes place in both his characters. Structurally, the play is a fifteen scene, 'two-hander' script with only two characters. Each scene depicts one of Rita's visits. She is a rebellious working-class hairdresser in her mid-twenties who sees education as an escape route from a crushingly preordained lifestyle. Frank, on the other hand is a middle class academic, nearly twice her age, who struggles with alcoholism, artistic mediocrity and a sense that he is a failure. The need for extra income is the only reason that he has considered extra tuition which results in their unlikely educational connection.

Both are flawed individuals from totally different social backgrounds but they are similar in that they shared jaded outlooks about their stultifying lifestyles which seem to offer no opportunities for personal advancement or opportunities. Over time the class barriers that differentiated them are narrowed by Rita's dogged determination to get the education she sees as the only escape route open to her. Both resent what they see as the crushing uniformity of their social existence but where Rita wants something other than marriage, motherhood and a hair-dresser's salon, Frank has lost his ability to express feelings through his own poetry and sees his educational role as a shallow alternative. A Bildungsroman literary style is used to chart the transformation and role reversal that broadens their initial teach/student relationship. Stylistic conventions typically include a strong reflective and subjective tone. Perceptions of self and social identity are examined and as such the characterisation is psychologically complex and morally ambiguous.

The changes that occur are often motivated by a desire for self-improvement or self-fulfilment and can result after great struggle in the achievement of greater self-knowledge. These features are clearly seen in the altered outlooks both Rita and Frank exhibit by the end of their time together. As Rita's desire for self-improvement opens up new literary worlds for her, her confidence and self-awareness blossoms. Their relationship becomes more psychologically complex and morally ambiguous for initially, as she grows, she seems to be leaving her tutor further and further behind. Her determination prompts strong audience identification and admiration for what she has achieved. The audience is also encouraged to re-evaluate the social importance of literature, language and education. The play's underlying philosophical assertion is that anyone is capable of positive change if they want it hard enough and despite whatever obstacles may in their path.

## Contextual Setting

A member of the middle class and the academic fraternity, Frank has shown some early literary promise but has sunk into a university position that offers no real challenge and even less personal satisfaction. He has lost youthful ambition and is fast sinking into morose middle age. The social and historical context in Britain was marked by tough economic times and the rise of trade unionism that were yearning to break down class divisions and so escape the underclass stigma that had treated the working class as socially inferior. The playwright's cultural focus is on the middle class rather than the aristocracy because the educational gaps between those two classes were sufficient to keep people like Rita largely in their socially disenfranchised place. It was the middle class academic movement that worked towards trying to remedy this situation by promoting movements like the Open University and the Keynesian Welfare State.

This was an attempt to ensure that knowledge, political power and the economy were areas run by the state and not by the aristocracy as they had been in the past. By the 1970's which is the period in which the play is set, class consciousness was therefore beginning to become an ideal that stirred social emotions about still entrenched social divisions. This juxtaposition of two disparate worlds is engagingly explored within the play. Frank's academic world is dominated by superficial appearances and although outwardly impressive, it seems to this cynical lecturer, ironically as suffocating to him as Rita's working class world is to her. He robotically goes through his duties and copes with low self-esteem and a sense of personal failure by remaining in an almost constant semi-alcoholic stupor.

His study is messily strewn papers and books, a visual inference that academia no longer holds and magic for him. It reflects the man he has become and when Rita asks about how one can 'make' a room like this, he gives a very revealing reply, 'I didn't make it. I just moved in. The rest sort of happened.'

He has become largely oblivious to his physical surroundings and does not value it in the same that Rita does. It is a stereotypical academic place of work, with book lined walls, a bay window and two desks. It is physically impressive and Rita is awe-struck, by his alphabetically arranged books which to Frank are just his tools of trade and a convenient place to hide his 'booze'. For him it is a place to retreat to whereas to Rita, it becomes a mecca of opportunity and the chance of a new life and future. Frank's study, Rita's place of work and the 'pub' highlight the social and educational differences between them. The 'pub' also means something different to Frank and Rita. He can shed his middle class identity there and be rejuvenated after working with uninspiring students who offer no challenge. He has lost direction or purpose in his life and the 'pub' is a place to drown his feelings of inadequacy, telling his partner Julia over the phone, 'I probably shall go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to wash away the memory of some, silly woman's attempt to get into the mind of Henry James... What do you mean I am determined to go to the pub? I don't need determination to get me into a pub.'

Conversely, the same place has only negative connotations for Rita who sees it as another form of entrapment, a daily site for getting drunk and singing along to popular but inane Jukebox tunes. Her outlook is shared by her mother who never escaped and when asked by Rita why she was crying, answers bitterly, 'Because, because we could sing better songs than those'. Rita tells Frank, 'I should have had a baby by now, everyone expects it' but desperate to escape this fate, she takes steps to change her destiny. Metaphorically, the pub represents the depth of understanding they come to share when Frank tells her, 'you've found a different song to sing.'

## Characterisation

### Rita

Rita undergoes a massive transformation but it is questionable whether her reinvention of herself will prove to be beneficial or detrimental. Her motivations prompted her to undertake the enormous challenge that she has obviously thought about for some time as a way of avoiding the socially entrenched expectations that she would live her life as a clone of her mother and so many other working class women. She wants an education not just for pragmatic reasons but in the pragmatic belief that it will enable her to do and achieve things that would otherwise be denied to her. There is a much deeper desire to grow, to explore untapped personal potential, 'I wanna discover meself.' Audiences can easily connect with this and Russel's wry humour and brilliant dialogue between his two protagonists prompts empathy with her desire and struggle to give herself other options in life. Rita says culture is a 'way of living' but because she wants to be 'successful' she sheds her culture like a skin.

Her longing for something more than domestic drudgery underpins the play for she knows that this will be her only real bid for freedom while there is still time. She already feels alienated from her peers, chaffed by family pressures to have children and accept her lot. By challenging all expectations in her current social sphere, including her marriage by studying for an English degree via the Open University Scheme, Rita not only wants to succeed, she must succeed if she is to escape her mother's fate. The play's social context gives timeless relevance to the issues raised about self, social identity and inequity. Her feeling of entrapment is clear when she tells Frank that her husband 'thinks we have choice already, choice between Everton and Liverpool, choosing which washing powder.' The idea that this will be her future fills her with dread, triggering her ultimatum, 'I told him I'd only have a baby when I have choice.' Educational success is the 'way of achieving the choices' she craves.

Russell's audience chart her intellectual and emotional growth, witnessing the way insecurity and ignorance is shed as she gains confidence alongside academic insight and the jargon that goes with it. She can better articulate and assert her feelings and the choices she makes, telling Frank, 'I didn't want to come to your house to play the court jester. Some stupid woman who gives us all a laugh because she thinks she can learn, because she thinks that one day she'll be like the rest of them, talking seriously, confidently-with knowledge, livin' a civilised life-Well, she can't be like that really but bring her in because she's good for a laugh'. Many emotional insecurities are embedded in this revelation, hinting at personal doubts and insecurities she has had to battle with, highlighting the many difficulties associated with transitions into new phases of life.

She demands objective honesty in her tutor's literary criticism of her work and feels empowered by his acknowledgment of her academic improvement and her ability to 'talk now y'know, Frank'. She doggedly reaches her goals but realises she has become a different person in the process. Adopting her Susan persona shows recognition of her outsider 'other' status, '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 a half-caste.' She had wanted to move from one world to another but now finds that she lives in an in-between world, uncomfortable in both. Self-awareness makes her more conscious of the pretentiousness of others like Tiger and Trish, 'I thought she was so cool an' together... she spends half her life eatin' whole foods an' health foods to make her live longer, an' the other half tryin' to kill herself'. She can recognise what is 'fucking rubbish' and choose between 'ballet or the opera or the telly' as well as grasp that language empowers the educated but in the end, 'See, the educated classes know it's only words, don't they?'

### Frank

Frank is a disenchanted academic who is nearly twice Rita's age. This generational age difference impacts on the relationship that develops between them, for while it liberates Rita in many ways, there is never any real suggestion of a romantic attachment. Russel wanted more than just another representation a typical Romeo and Juliet love story. Frank feels lost, adrift in a lifestyle that offers no challenges or personal satisfaction. His social existence is markedly different to the one that Rita experiences but in many ways they are both searching for ways to make their lives more meaningful and less restrictive and regimented. Both feel socially restrained but in completely different ways; Rita through education and Frank through cynicism and alcohol. They are characterised in many ways by antithetical differences. Whereas she is assertive and proactive, he has become complacent and submissive, lacking any real incentive to act. He muses about the possibility of fleeing the world of academia and turns to drink as a melancholic panacea to poetic failure.

He pessimistically regrets his decision to work as a tutor, predicting that after his pupil's visit he 'shall need to wash away the memory of some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James. . . Why did I take this on?' Audience's quickly gauge his outlook as one marked by mediocrity and cynicism. Rita however, immediately challenges his expectations, and totally ignores his warning that he is an 'appalling teacher' who will be unable to give her what she wants. She exudes a fresh, challenging and uncluttered way of thinking that drags him out of his intellectual malaise. She acts as the impetus for his own re-evaluation of who he is and what he wants to change most about his life. She also challenges him, making him respond to her educational demands because she seeks real explanation rather than stock responses, demanding that he demystify learning which makes him become a learner again and a much better teacher.

Her confrontational manner refuses to be ignored, reawakening in its urgency for answers, his love of learning, making him observe in the opening scene, 'I think you're the first breath of air that's been in this room for years.' She metaphorically opens a new window in his life in the same way that he does for her. This reciprocal transformative motif underpins the play for she acts as the same psychological catalyst for his rebirth and enlightenment, as he does for her. Both undergo a process of educational and personal maturation. Introspection and personal reflection are forced on both of them as a result of their mentor/student bond, 'I like her enormously it's myself I'm not too fond of.' He becomes increasingly dismayed however, by signs that in her haste to adopt an educated mantle, she is prepared to jettison her individuality for academic conformity. He worries that her subjective perceptions have been squashed by the demands of the educational rank and file. Relishing the moment when he can introduce her to the poet Blake, she unexpectedly dismisses it out of hand because she has already 'done him.'

Irony is used to foreground the danger of merely replacing one form of conformity for another, Frank is disheartened because she has fallen into the trap of echoing the thoughts of others rather than voicing her own, 'Your views I still value. But, Rita, these aren't your views.' Her failure vicariously represents his, and he is upset by what she has become, 'Have you come all this way for so very, very little?' Matching insight with insight, she in retaliation targets his major flaw, 'It's little to you who squanders every opportunity and mocks and takes it for granted.' Both are flawed individuals but it is their relationship that enables them to truly appreciate their areas of weakness. They have shared much and it is appropriate that language is one of the benchmarks used to demonstrate it She has assaulted his smugness and assumptions as well as his senses. His decision to go to Australia shows that he too has grown more self-assured by the association and while he would have loved Rita to accompany him, it would only have limited his future growth and hers.

## Conceptual Focus

### Education

The first Act focuses on Rita's growth and development, while the second highlights Frank's growing dissatisfaction with his personal life. Both are representative of their respective social milieu and the educational backgrounds that are signified. Their developing friendship becomes representative of social reconciliation, shifts in attitude and relationship reflected in Rita's growing control over her personal life and improved academic grades. She sees education as an escape route, a means of fleeing societal restrictions as a working class woman. It offers the potential to grow and move into another world and a means of discovering another part of her own identity, 'You know what I learn... about art an' literature, it feeds me inside.' She has left a lifestyle that made her feel stultified to embrace one that nurtures her. She learns how to express her ideas and attitudes with clarity and sophistication but in moments of stress or excitement, her working class heritage becomes evident.

What she has also learned however, is how to control it rather than it letting it control her. She tries to shed her dialect and many of the attitudes and values that had made her what she was, but not all the changes are for the better. Comedic elements such as visual gags and colloquial language, 'oh sod it' and 'off me cake', provide an amusing, satiric subtext while reinforcing the fact that her language was a marker of social dismissal. Her sexually coarse language emphasises her working class background which means that it hogs her to her current social situation. As she becomes more educationally adept however, the banter between teacher and student becomes wittier, giving her a language with which she can literally 'voice' ideas that had been locked away. Another indicator of the social gulf between them is Rita's ignorance of the many literary allusions in the opening act such as famous writers and poets. Her suggestion that they should 'do it on the radio' to a question asking her to find a way of resolving, 'the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen's Peer Gynt' makes her lack of academic skills clear to the audience but in an endearing way.

Both undertake a personal odyssey of re-evaluation that broadens their outlook, values and attitudes. They benefit from mutual effort, reflection and co-operation. As an inspirational mentor, Frank tries to 'discipline' her mind, giving her the language needed to analyse literature in a less subjective way. He guides her through a foreign and challenging intellectual world, teaching the skills needed by a pupil demanding to be taught 'Everything'. She feeds off his knowledge and gains the success she needs to continue but Russell uses their relationship to offer social criticism about how traditional schooling erodes a student's love of learning. Frank shows this when he acknowledges that Rita's appraisal of 'Macbeth' is heartfelt but educationally flawed, 'that's what we do, Rita we call it education.' Her blunt response voices her determination, 'I don't want pity Frank. Was it rubbish?' Frank tries to be diplomatic and not stifle her enthusiasm; 'No, no. It's not rubbish. It's a totally honest, passionate account of your reaction to a play. It's an unashamedly emotional statement about a certain experience.'

She accepts the challenges of entry into another world that is closed to those without a proper education and demands that Frank teaches her how to use the required metalanguage to 'perform' to the standards that will give her social mobility. Improvement brings confidence, poise and self-awareness but at the cost of spontaneity and effervescence. Frank believes he has created a monster one he can no longer control, making an allusion to Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein', 'Oh I've done a fine job on you, haven't I.' Rita however values the educational transformation, 'I've got what you have an' you don't like it because you'd rather see me as the peasant I once was.' In truth, education has moulded both of them, influencing the way they see themselves and the world. She had adopted what she thought was a more sophisticated way of speaking without realising how unnatural and false it sounded.

Education has also brought pressure on her marriage because it has widened the gulf between them, 'He wants to take life away from me.' What she does now lies in her hands, 'I dunno... I might go to me mothers. I might even go to France. I might even have a baby. I'll make a decision. I'll choose.' Choice is a sign of the independence she has craved and education has been a means of achieving it. She had been literally unschooled but with a 'native wit'. She becomes a stronger, more resilient individual and make the move into the world she sought but Russell challenges his audience to ponder whether it will be as fundamentally 'honest' as the one she leaves behind. Frank has taught her the necessary the magical code, 'There is a way of answering examination questions that is expected. It's a sort of accepted ritual, it's a game, with rules. And you must observe those rules.'

When he quizzes her in the second half of the play about how she responded in the exam to the very same question he had set earlier, she jokingly replies that she could have given the same answer "An' you'd have been proud of me if I'd done that an' rushed back to tell you wouldn't y'? But I chose not to. I had a choice. I did the exam'. She goes on to say, 'Because of what you'd given me I had a choice. I wanted to come back and tell y'that. That y'a good teacher.' Education has been Rita's passport out of mediocrity but in shedding her gritty working class identity, Frank worries that she has assumed in its place, the type of shallow pretentiousness that he despises. Transitions can offer many benefits but the gains they offer can also come at great personal cost.

### Personal growth

Rita explodes onto the stage in the opening scene, showing a dynamic personality and a clear idea of what she wants and why. She admits she had not tried at school but like her peers, was concerned only with clothes, music and 'looking for a fella.' Her workplace customers have clarified that she must take her future into her own hands, 'These women, you see, they come to the hair dressers 'cos they wanna be changed. But if you want to change, y' have to do it from the inside, don't y'? Know like I'm doin'? . . . See, I wanna discover myself first.' She yearns for escape but has the intelligence to know she must change 'from the inside.' Added pressure comes from her husband not understanding her passion for change, or understanding the changes when she begins slipping away from him. She had told Frank, 'I wanna know' but her husband is confused about the changes in his wife, 'I see him looking at me sometimes and I know what he's thinking, he's wondering where the girl he married has gone to.'

Nearly every facet of her life is altered, including her name, attitudes, clothing, hair colour and voice. Act 1, Scene 4, evidences this change, 'I've begun to find me-and it's great y' know, it is Frank.' She has got rid of the old Rita 'an' I've taken her place.' Frank questions her transformation as pretentious but she is excited although in a later scene, echoes of an underlying lack of confidence can still be heard, 'An' all the time I'm trying to think of things I can say, what I can talk about.' Other influences become more obvious, 'As Trish says there is not a lot of point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice.' Rita quits the salon and begins working in a bistro in the belief it will offer her even more opportunities. In Act 2, Scene 4 she says, 'I can look after myself... I wanna read and understand without havin' to come running to you every five minutes.'

She no longer needs Frank as much as she once did but she has also shed some of the very personality traits that had made her so refreshingly unique. When she tells him his poetry is 'brilliant, witty, profound...' he replies sarcastically that she must have finished her education now, 'found a new song to sing have you, no you've found a different song to sing.' The growing gulf between them puts them at a cross-road, 'It struck me that there was a time when you told me everything' but she points out, 'You can't bear that I'm educated now. Don't you like that the little girl has grown up.' Education has brought mixed blessings.

## Love and Transformation

The relationship between Rita and Frank teaches them both a great deal about themselves. He is fascinated by her and warns her of the dangers in her changing the way she writes in order to adhere to a required code of analysis: 'You're going to have to suppress, perhaps even abandon your uniqueness. I'm going to have to change you.' He does not want to do this because it is her very uniqueness that he is attracted by. In Rita's eyes however, this would hold her back, 'But don't you realise, I want to change!' As she improves, she sees him more as an aging don and gravitates instead towards the company of younger people such as Tiger and Trish, 'I find a lot of people I mix with fascinating they're young, and they're passionate about things that matter. They're not trapped-they're too young for that. And I like to be with them.'

The age-gap is compounded by his drinking which increases the distance between them. She challenges him about his drinking problem: 'It'll kill y', Frank' but Frank objects to her attempts at reforming him, 'Rita-if I repent and reform, what I do when your influence is no longer here?' She is also still married and jokingly reveals Denny's jealousy of her relationship with Frank, 'Oh go way. You're me teacher. I've told him... I've tried to explain to him how you give me room to breathe. Y' just, like feed me without expectin' anythin' in return'. Dramatic irony means that, unlike the audience, she remains unaware of how much she comes to mean to him. Frank tries to limit his drinking, looking forward to their lessons together, anticipating their future discussion of Blake's poetry, only to find that she has already 'done' him at Summer school. He had told her she had to go but the increased confidence she has when she returns makes him realise she will soon 'walk away and disappear'.

He tries to explain his fondness for his work, to share his pleasure, 'they overcomplicated him, Rita, but you will understand-you'll love the man'. The transition has already meant that her previously unspoiled outlook has been tarnished by being reduced to something that is 'quite acceptable in academic terms but lacking her innovative insight that he had hoped to share: 'there's nothing of you in there'. She can't understand that part of his disappointment is that the Rita he loves is slipping away, 'But you told me not to have a view. You told me to be objective, to consult recognised authorities. Well that's what I have done.' His disappointment is not in response to her literary ability but to her no longer being reliant on his judgement and assistance. His admission, 'I care for you' is only thinly disguised by the afterthought, 'I want you to care for yourself.'

His awareness that he is losing her is shown when he asks her to analyse his own slim volume of poetry, demanding that he wants, 'No sentimentality, no subjectivity. Just pure criticism. A critical assessment of a lesser-known English poet. Me'. He considers what she writes as a 'heap of shit' because it is stylised and not true to 'real life'. He worries she has lost sight of the 'things that matter' and begins drinking more and even falling over during a lecture. She becomes more remote; 'Tch (She goes right up to Frank) I-I care for you, Frank. . . But you've got to-to leave me alone a bit' going on to say she does not need him to 'hold her hand as much'. He has been a wonderful mentor but he can never become her lover. Both have failed relationships but differences in age and social background show there is never any chance of a romantic attachment. She has learned the 'rules' that enable her to say, 'I've got what you got Frank' and that now 'I can do without you.' Her rejection of his offer to follow him to Australia is realistic rather than callous for there can be no fairytale ending with her life opening up and his narrowing. He has wasted the privileges bestowed on him and she is determined not to waste the opportunities that his teaching has offered her.

## Dramatic Techniques

'Educating Rita' has only two main characters, a Two Act structure as well as two main settings. This binary structure and dramatic form throws focus on the characterisation and conceptual ideas about growth, transition and education. Language is the key dramatic device that is used to emphasise the transformation that takes place in both protagonists. Rita's entrance in the opening scene immediately defines many of her personality traits for the audience, the faulty door acting as a physical barrier. It becomes a recurring comic motif that stresses their changing relationship. Initially, she almost falls into Frank's study after finally getting the door open; her language serving as a dramatic device to contrast their social backgrounds.

Whereas he speaks in a cultured and sophisticated manner, her language is common and full of expletives, 'I'm comin' in, aren't I? It's that stupid bleedin' door. You wanna get it fixed!' Loud, assertive and apparently unintimidated by meeting her university tutor, she launches into telling him what he should do. Her dynamic personality unsettles Frank as she seems to take charge; wandering around, inspecting and questioning everything. Her egalitarian, almost disrespectful manner is an effective dramatic role-reversal, casting the lowly hairdresser as the more confident of the two. He appears insecure and disoriented while she voices her attitude, her blunt questions met with embarrassed reluctance.

Her return from 'Summer School' in the opening scene of the second Act stresses the social and educative alteration she has undergone under Frank's tutelage and just how dramatically she has changed. Less feisty, assertive and bossy, she is now more composed and confident, shown by moving her chair so that she sits next to rather than opposite him as she had previously done. Her language has also drastically changed, causing him to quizzically ask 'what's wrong with your voice?' Her reply shows the energy she has invested in reinventing herself, 'Nothing is wrong with it, Frank. 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.' The audience shares Frank's concerns about the cost of this transformation as she talks of the fears, uncertainties and discomfort she felt when she first went there.

Heightened self-esteem and pride in her ability to voice her ideas implies that she has outgrown him, 'I was askin' questions all week, y' couldn't keep me down.' She has also stopped smoking and swearing, shedding other trappings of the working class background she wants to leave behind her. Pride in what she has achieved energises her recount, 'This tutor came up to me... an' he said, "Are you fond of Ferlinghetti?" It was right on the tip of me tongue, to say, 'Only when it's served with parmesan cheese', but, Frank, I didn't!' She enthusiastically tells Frank of other experiences she had had that simultaneously inform him and the audience, about how extensively she has changed. She has a new self-awareness, 'after he'd finished his lecture this professor asked if anyone had a question, an', Frank, I stood up! (She stands) Honest to God, I stood up, an' everyone's lookin' at me. I don't know what possessed me, I was gonna sit down again, but two thousand people had seen me stand up, so I did it, I asked him the question.'

Language is a mark of character, status and attitude, clearly showing how she has continued to grow and develop a new identity, 'I've got choice now'. While Frank feels rejected and abandoned, she shows excitement at the possibilities now opening up before her. He is also concerned that he is losing touch with her. He has shared his literary jargon with her and taught her how to apply it while she has shown him how to express himself more openly. Her speech had previously been marked by the constant use of the term 'dead'. She used it as a way of emphasising or intensifying what she was trying to say. She was, 'dead surprised', 'dead serious' or 'dead narked' while things or situations were described as 'dead good', 'dead affected' or 'dead loud'.

As a linguistic sign of the learning they have shared, Frank in the last scene adopts this previous manner of speaking, declaring, 'dead honest'. This shared language becomes a dramatic motif for the almost fairytale metamorphosis they have both undergone. Rita is no longer restrained by family and social pressures. The play has shown a dramatic metamorphosis of almost fairy-tale proportions. Rita feels she has shed her ugly duckling trappings and achieved the status of a swan, able to fly unfettered by family and social pressures or restraints that previously kept her pinioned to the ground. The closing scene is clouded in ambiguity because the final outcome is not certain. Rita's education has been completed and Frank has been forced to acknowledge this. Graduation is normally marked by celebration and gift giving. Both Frank and Rita exchange gifts which are symbolically significant.

Symbols also show the understanding that has been forged between them. The dress he offers as fitting 'an educated woman friend' is a physical sign that she is now qualified to move in his educated circles as 'one of them'. In exchange, she offers a haircut to ensure he is not perceived as a 'geriatric hippie'. Their gifts acknowledge what they have learnt from each other. The dress he offers is worth far more symbolically than her paper diploma, just as her haircut shows that the former bold and flamboyant Rita still exists. She forces him into his chair for one last time and he willingly submits. His outer appearance will also change just as hers has, and that, when armed with a pair of scissors, she is able to 'take ten years off' him as she had promised to do when she first came into his study. The final scene is a kind of reconciliation, but the outcome is left unresolved. Rita is now her own woman – Frank is off to Australia. She can now make her own decisions and will do so. Her education is complete in that sense. Frank has also learned something and been given the chance for a new start, but it remains unclear what will happen to either of them.

## Educating Rita

### What is being said?

1. What is achieved by the dramatic juxtaposition of Frank and Rita the opening scene?
2. In what ways could this working class woman be 'like a breath of fresh air' to this middle-aged academic?
3. What central ideas are developed throughout both acts of the play? How is the audience prompted to interpret the final scene?
4. In what ways is the audience's interest engaged and maintained as they both undergo transformation and enter new phases of their lives?
5. Evaluate how Rita and Frank are both educated in different ways by their relationship.
6. In what ways does the play explore notions of growth, transition, maturation?
7. Evaluate what sacrifices Rita has made to move into an educated world and through appropriate textual reference, consider whether the benefits are worth the costs? Close textual reference is required to support your idea.

### How is it being said?

1. The two-hander play form throws focus on both protagonists. How are their respective character personalities and attitudes revealed by what they do and their body language?
2. How are dialogue, humour and literary allusions used to delineate and develop the two protagonists?
3. Choose a scene where there is a pivotal moment of change and detail the nature of the change and how it is dramatically represented.
4. Discuss the irony of Frank having everything that Rita wants and yet ironically, feels unhappy because he sees little meaning in his life. What is the playwright suggesting by this situation?
5. Comedy and character juxtaposition help highlight the changing attitudes of Rita and Frank undergo as they prepare to explore new worlds of experience. Choose a key scene where such techniques are effectively used.
6. What is significant about the reciprocal gifts given in the final scene?