Pygmalion Discussion Questions - Act III
SELECT 10 to answer

1. What role does coincidence play in Act III? Why is the coincidence important to the play’s narrative? And is the coincidence a believable one? Why or why not?

2. Examine the relationship between Higgins and his mother and the role she plays in his life. What are her primary character traits?

3. Explore the theme of feminism and the ideal woman as presented in Act III.

4. What do the two subjects Higgins tells Eliza she is allowed to discuss suggest about the mentality of the upper class? How does Mrs. Higgins’s version of what is considered appropriate conversation differ?

5. In bringing Eliza to Mrs. Higgins’s house, what critical perspective is Higgins hoping his mother can provide that he cannot seem to manage on his own? What is his mother’s evaluation of Eliza? And what irony is present in this situation?

6. Compare and contrast Clara and her mother in terms of their actions, reactions, and their overall attitudes. What is the primary difference between mother and daughter?

7. Contemplate the significance of Higgins’s reaction to the landscape outside his mother’s window and what it says about his character. Compare the settings of their two homes as described by the author and reflect on the subsequent character traits those settings would indicate.

8. Mrs. Higgins tells her son, “You are the life and soul of the Royal Society’s soirees; but really you’re rather trying on more commonplace occasions.” What does she mean by this statement and how is it tied to any major themes in the play?

9. Discuss the varying reactions to Eliza and her performance. What is inherently humorous about this scene? What is the irony of Higgins’s own performance in this scene?

10. What is Higgins’s attitude towards his mother’s guests, and what does it reveal about his character?

11. How does Act III further illuminate the theme of appearance versus reality?

12. Explain the irony of “the new small talk” and how it reflects on the themes of class distinction and manners.

13. Compare and contrast the portrait of Eliza in Act III versus the previous two acts. Reflect on both the outward and the inward changes apparent in her demeanor and dialogue.

14. Pickering tells Higgins, “Come, Higgins: you must learn to know yourself.” What is ironic about this statement? How might the repercussions of this fact affect Eliza?

15. Mrs. Higgins says to her son, “Don’t you realize that when Eliza walked into Wimpole Street, something walked in with her?” What does she mean and how does this comment parallel the opinions expressed by Mrs. Pearce?
16. How is the overall tone of this act markedly different from the previous two in terms of Higgins’s attitude towards Eliza? What is the sole indication in this act that Higgins might actually have sentimental feelings towards Eliza rather than just scientific awe?

17. Compare the attitudes Higgins and Pickering display towards Eliza in Act III with the attitudes they displayed toward her in Acts I and II.

18. Explain the significance of Mrs. Higgins’s comment: “You certainly are a pretty pair of babies playing with your live doll.” What is Higgins’s defense, and why is it significant to the meaning of the work as a whole? Finally, explain the irony of Higgins’s reference to Eliza’s “soul” in this argument.

19. Analyze the primary rhetorical device used in the final paragraph of Act III and the effect on the reader and on the audience.