

Paper 2 Module A
Elective 1: Distinctive Voices

Compare the ways distinctive voices are created in *Pygmalion* and in ONE other related text of your own choosing.

Prescribed text: *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw, 1912

Related text: *Voices in the Park*, Anthony Browne, 1998 (picture book)

General statements about distinctive voices and the responder are followed by introduction to the texts, drawing similarities (*dislike divisions of social class*) and stating differences in the way each composer deals with the topic

Voices are created by what is said and how it is said. We all have our own distinctive voices that distinguish us from each other and reflect our own unique backgrounds and understanding of the world. In *Pygmalion*, a play by George Bernard Shaw and *Voices in the Park*, a picture book by Anthony Browne, the interplay of these distinctive voices helps us to gain a fuller understanding of characters and events in the texts. Both writers dislike the divisions of social class, but Shaw looks at ways of bridging the gaps, while Browne criticises these artificial divisions. Shaw intrudes his own beliefs and opinions quite openly into the text, to make sure the audience understands his points, while Browne lets the diction, statements, images and fonts of his story speak for themselves.

Focus on prescribed text and its purpose

Shaw has several purposes in *Pygmalion*. As the Preface indicates, he is very concerned with the use of English in his day, and hopes that the play will encourage his audience to at least think about how they speak and what they say. In the epilogue, he wants his audience to think about the limitations and hypocrisy of social class and remember that it is not a real indicator of character. He uses the different speaking voices, attitudes and social classes of his characters to make the point that the differences are not as great as they might seem, and that it is the way that people behave and treat others that really matters.

Focus on one scene that introduces the ideas of the play, focusing on voice

The scene in Covent Garden in Act 1, where Higgins is identifying people's background through their speech patterns, shows how our individual distinctive voices can label us to others and create an impression about a person that is not accurate. He dismisses Eliza as a "squashed cabbage" and a "guttersnipe" because of the sounds she makes, without really listening to her statements asserting her independence and sense of self-respect.

Note how the quotations are integrated smoothly as part of the sentence

Throughout the play there is tension between the accent of the voice and what the voice is saying, most notably in exchanges between Higgins and Eliza, to highlight the point that the true markers of a lady or gentleman are not accent or class, but behaviour and treatment of others. Higgins is an expert in speaking and language, but what he says can be so upsetting that his mother will not let him near her friends. In Act 5, Eliza reinforces this idea when she tells Higgins that when she first met him, she was just like him, "unable to control myself, and using bad language on the slightest provocation." She is now fully a "lady", but implies that he is not quite a gentleman. The point is made repeatedly in the play that Higgins knows how to pronounce, but doesn't know what to say.

The earlier scene is connected with a later one that shows the development of the character

Use of humour is linked to purpose

Shaw lightens his didactic purpose with humour. In Act 3, when Eliza has her first social outing at Mrs Higgins' house, there is humour through the

Humour emerges through the voice and words that are used

Text is connected to its context

Composer's message is considered

Final message of play about the relationship of voice to social class

Related text is introduced by connecting with the previous discussion on social class

Quick summary of the book connects characters to class and a context for the discussion to follow

The relationship between the two texts is demonstrated in this comparative sentence

Grammar of the characters is used to explore distinctive voices – this is related to the font used

Another character's voice is explored to further develop the ideas

contrast of Eliza's exact pronunciation and fashionable appearance with her story about family drunkenness and murder. This contrast stresses how unreliable appearance and the sound of the voice are in assessing a person's character - we also have to think about what is said and how it is said. There is also humour in Eliza's use of the word "bloody", which would have been quite shocking to hear in public in 1912. It is forgivable in Eliza, because she has had so little time to change her habits after a lifetime of use. It is less funny and less forgivable when Clara copies her, because Clara has had the social advantages to know better and is being dishonest when she says that, "Nobody means anything by it." Throughout the play, Shaw is arguing that we should be careful about the way we approach language, not using it carelessly like Higgins, and not using it to offend for mere effect.

There is a sense of loss at the end of the play when we realise that Eliza has been trained so well that she no longer has her distinctive voice. There is irony in the fact that by losing her distinctive voice and sounding as though she fits into the middle class, she has also lost her independence and the means of supporting herself. She cannot return to Covent Garden to sell flowers on the street - her voice and her manners label her now as someone who does not belong there. Instead, she must be set up, at great expense, in a respectable flower shop. While her new voice frees her from her old hand-to-mouth existence, it chains her instead to the expectations and stifling respectability of "middle-class morality".

In Voices in the Park, Anthony Browne is showing that class creates artificial divisions between people, when they would be much better off connecting with each other. The book shows the experience of four people, two adults and two children, who all recount a single incident from their own perspective of events and other people. The single event is that two parents separately take their child and dog to the same park. The dogs immediately connect because they do not recognise class barriers. The children are both lonely and find some common ground, despite their differences. The middle-class mother disapproves strongly of both her son and her dog playing with their 'inferiors'. The unemployed father is pleased that his child is happy and that they have had a small break from their difficult daily routine. Because we cannot hear the different accents of class, as we can in Shaw's play, Browne gives us written and visual clues to the distinctive voices of all four characters.

The social classes are shown through the way the characters use grammar. The middle-class mother speaks in fully correct sentences at all times, but the unemployed man speaks colloquially, saying "me and Smudge took the dog to the park." His daughter also speaks less formally than the boy and his mother, asking, "D'you wanna come on the slide?" The words the characters use are distinctive indicators of their views and attitudes. The mother is clearly a snob: the dog is a "pedigree", the other dog a "scruffy mongrel" and her son's new friend is a "very rough-looking child." She talks to her son and her dog in the same way, ordering them both to "sit" and "come". Her version of events is presented in a formal, old-fashioned font, to show her stuffiness of character.

The next voice, the unemployed father, establishes many contrasts. While he has much to be unhappy about, his language shows that he is trying to fight

the gloom. He is happy that the dog loves the park and tells himself that “you’ve got to have a bit of hope, haven’t you?” His font is darker and stronger than the mother’s, and looks less fussy and old-fashioned. The accounts of the two parents as they leave the park also tell us their distinctive views about their experiences. The mother says that she and Charles “walked home in silence”, while the father comments that “Smudge cheered me up. She chatted to me all the way home.”

Next character’s voice is explored using quotations followed by explanations and reference to the font

Charles, the boy, is lonely in his big house. He uses the words “friends” and “friendly” in his account, to show that he is looking for someone to connect with. His account shows that he is not concerned with where his new friend lives or how she speaks, but much more interested in having fun. The sense of loneliness is reinforced when he asks hopefully at the end of his account, “Maybe Smudge will be there next time?” Charles’ story is also presented in a formal font, but it is not as solid as the one used for his mother’s story, to show that he is not as firmly set in his ideas as she is.

The final character’s voice is explored and compared through the use of the superlative (*chattiest*)

Smudge’s account is the chattiest and most cheerful of all the four stories. She says what she thinks, calling the mother a “silly twit” for being upset about the dogs playing together. When she, Charles and the two dogs all play together, she feels “really, really happy” and she tells us something about the event that no-one else has mentioned – “Charlie picked a flower and gave it to me.” In this way, Smudge’s account brings all four stories together to tell us about loneliness, exclusion and some small attempts in a park to make some connections with others.

Final paragraph that sums up the two texts by comparing them both to the set question

Both texts use distinctive voices to make their points, but the voices in each text are presented quite differently. In Pygmalion, Shaw lets us hear the way people speak and tells us that this does not really tell us much about them as people, by showing how accent is not linked to manners or character. Anthony Browne also shows us through what his characters say, and how the words appear on the page, that a person’s voice does not tell us what that person is really like.