

ENGLISH STANDARD: MODULE A

Oral Presentation: 'Pygmalion'

Your voice is the key to your identity. What does your voice convey about you? Composers use a variety of different voices to promote and enhance the meaning and purpose of their text, through the feelings and emotional positioning of the characters. Distinctive voices can be analysed to develop an understanding which may reflect, confront or contradict society's values or beliefs within a given context.

George Bernard Shaw achieves this by the adaptation of the Greek mythological tale of a sculptor who falls in love with his perfect female statue. Pygmalion centres on the transformation of Eliza, a lower class flower girl with a Cockney accent, who is transformed into a young lady who passes as a duchess in genteel society. Through the creation of Higgins and Eliza's characters, Shaw demonstrates how distinctive voices influence manner, habits and appearance. Higgins transforms Eliza appearance by instructing Mrs Pearce to 'take all her clothes off and burn them.' Higgins tone is one of power and authority allowing the reader to judge him as being cold, detached and objective. When Eliza protests at her clothes being burnt, Higgins insists that she must rid herself of her 'Lisson Grove prudery' if she is to be transformed into a duchess. 'You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess.' Higgins presents Pickering with a challenge of transforming the girl. The use of a demeaning term 'creature' shows the reader that Eliza isn't even considered to be a human she is just some 'thing' on the side of the road. Higgins uses a negative tone and sarcasm to criticise Eliza due to her lack of manner. His confidence and pride in his profession especially in his ability to make someone out of something is evident in his arrogant tone 'Take her away, Mrs. Pearce. If she gives you any trouble wallop her'. Eliza, responds to this in a defensive way, trying to prove, be it in a incoherent, and, monosyllabic way that she is more than worthy of respect. Shaw's characters show the discrimination between social classes and the interaction between them to transform and create a new identity. He illustrates how language coaching can tear away at age old prejudices and class division.

Similarly 'I am the First Accused' were the opening words of Nelson Mandela's speech in his own defence at his trial in April 1964, where he was imprisoned for life for plotting a violent revolution in South Africa. Mandela became a symbolic figure head for anti-apartheid and anti-racist campaigns throughout the world. His speech was strong, emotive and persuasive outlining the plight of the Africans in South Africa. Mandela presents his speech with confidence establishing his credentials as an intelligent, a well educated African. He speaks with authority emphasising his knowledge of laws. Mandela's statement 'White supremacy implies black inferiority.' is powerful in identifying the lack of human dignity experienced by Africans. Mandela arouses sympathy with the repetition of 'they do not look... they do not realise...' This conveys that whites need to recognise blacks as human beings with feelings. He describes vividly the harsh life of Africans through the use of statistics, 'hundreds and thousands of Africans are thrown into jail each year under pass laws.' Mandela identifies solutions to fix the unjust society by listing things that Africans want 'Africans want to be paid a living wage' and 'Africans want a just share in the whole of South Africa.' Mandela depicts his point in a subtle, well mannered, organised way in order to transform the country peacefully.

Both Shaw and Mandela confront discrimination in their own unique styles. Shaw explores transformation through the dialogue of his various characters. Whereas Mandela uses his authentic voice to project the hardship, resilience and ultimate triumph of his African people. I would like you to think how you use your voice to enhance meaning.