Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Block: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Pre-Reading: Language and Social Class**

**Phonetics and Dialects**

1. Language plays a significant part in the play, *Pygmalion*. As a professor of **PHONETICS** (the study of speech and language) Henry Higgins believes that the way a person speaks is the most important factor in establishing his or her social class. Eliza Doolittle, on the other hand, speaks in the language of the London streets. She is unconcerned with her pronunciation and grammar; as a poor flower girl supporting her hard-drinking father, she has more immediate issues to worry about.

Being a professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins studies different dialects.

You may not realize it, but we all speak a **DIALECT**. A dialect is a common language spoken by a group of people who share some characteristics, such as location or social class. Dialects can vary a great deal even within a short geographical distance.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you speak the same dialect as the rest of your immediate family? Grandparents? Aunts/Uncles? Explain.
2. Do you speak the same dialect as your classmates/friends? Explain.
3. Give examples of specific words you or someone you know uses or pronounce differently than other people you know.

**Cockney Dialect**

While Henry Higgins speaks nearly flawless, proper English, Eliza Doolittle, on the other hand, speaks in the **COCKNEY** dialect. Cockney (Eliza’s specific dialect) is found in the East End of London and is often seen as a type of slang.

**How to do a Cockney Accent**

- Drop your *h*’s (say “‘alf a ‘undred” for “half a hundred”)

- *Ay* (as in *pay*) is pronounced *aye* (as in *pie*)

- Long *i* (as in *fine*) is pronounced *oi* (as in *join*)

- Long *e* (as in *teach*) is pronounced *uh-eye*

- *oi* (as in *spoil*) is pronounced *aw* (as in *call*)

- *ir* (as in *girl*) is pronounced *e* (as in *bell*)

- *oo* (as in *you* or *duty*) is pronounced -*oo* (as in *salute*)

- short *e* (as in *well*) is pronounced *a* (as in *cat*)

- Many sounds are slurred together.

**Try saying these sentences aloud using a Cockney accent:**

*The girl was fine until she remembered she forgot to pay for the milk that was about to spoil. This will surely teach her a lesson.*

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Compare and Contrast**

Here is an example of how Henry Higgins talks:

*“Yes, you squashed cabbage leaf, you disgrace to the noble architecture of these columns, you incarnate insult to the English language; I could pass you off as the Queen of Sheba.”*

Here is an example of how Eliza Doolittle speaks:

*“Aoooow! I ain’t dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did.”*

See the difference??

Eliza uses the word “ain’t” instead of “I am not”, “afore” instead of “before”, and “I come” instead of “I came”. She adds the phrase “I did” to the end of her sentence for extra emphasis. She makes the unusual “Aoooow” sound (which particularly drives Henry crazy) to express anger and displeasure. All of these word choices stem from her upbringing in the Cockney dialect.

**Language and Social Class**

During *Pygmalion*’s time period in England, social class and dialect were closely connected. **A person could not change class without changing dialect.** Knowing this will either make or break her final transformation, Henry Higgins sets out to drastically change the way Eliza speaks.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Discussion Questions**

**In our modern-day society:**

1. Is there a “proper” way of speaking, as Henry Higgins argues? Explain.
2. Does the way a person talks affect the way other people view them? Give an example.
3. Do social classes exist? Give an example.
4. Does language have an effect on a person’s social class? For instance, can someone that talks in “slang” be President of the United States? Why or why not? Explain.