

# lit

PAPER 2



# EXEMPLAR

TEXT 1: "PYGMALION"

TEXT 2: "IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST"

MARKS: 23/25

IB SCORE: 7

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# STUDENT EXEMPLAR

**PROMPT:** If an audience is to be engaged by a play, the exposition must very quickly include elements that promise interesting ideas, characters or events. In what ways have at least two playwrights you have studied ensured that the plays' opening moments are likely to engage the audience?

## INTRODUCTION

Playwrights often introduce interesting ideas, characters and themes in the opening moments of a play in order to capture the audience's interest and create a sense of eagerness toward the rest of the play's events. This technique of eliciting the audience's interest is clearly exemplified in the plays of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw and *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, both of which are plays set in the Victorian era of England with the purpose of undermining and ridiculing the authority of the upper class, although Shaw's play has a far more serious effect on its audiences. Hence, **both Shaw and Wilde utilise the construction of atypical characters and the introduction of ideas that challenge contemporary norms to create audience interest.**

## POINT 1, TEXT 1

Firstly, Wilde provides an atypical portrayal of the aristocratic character Algernon Moncrieff in Act 1 in order to create a comic effect that engages the audience and invites them to ridicule the upper class. The setting is in a house in the fashionable "**Half-Moon Street**", and the room is "**luxuriously and artistically furnished**", complete with the melody of a piano playing in an adjoining room. The lavish setting therefore clearly establishes the audience's expectation of the play's focus on the upper class, and so the associated notions of nobility, honour, morality and respect are naturally aroused in the audience. However, using situational irony, Wilde creates humour by characterizing Algernon as an iconoclastic character who is the antithesis of the stereotype of the honourable upper class gentleman. In the opening moments of the play, Algernon makes numerous inversions of common proverbs, such as "**In married life, three is company and two is none.**" This reversal of the proverb is sarcastic and insinuates the failure of marriage in the upper class as a result of adultery, as suggested by "Three is company." Given that contemporary audiences, which most likely consisted of middle and upper class Victorians, held marriage as a revered institution and tradition, the audience is thus invited to laugh at the scandalous comments made by Algernon, thereby creating the impression of not only his ridiculous, witty and interesting character, but also of the farcical nature of the remainder of the play. This interest is further maintained through Wilde's use of witty epigrams which, too, conflict with contemporary social expectations of sociable behavior.

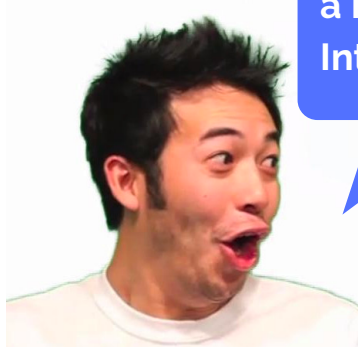
Algernon remarks with a confident, matter-of-fact tone that **“The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain.”** This witty epigram further exposes the superficiality and the folly of the upper class as this rather harsh focus on appearances and the shallowness of Algernon’s approach to sex is in direct opposition to the audience’s expectation of upper class gentlemen to be well-mannered and honorable in intention. Thus, through the iconoclastic comments in conjunction with the setting of the opening Act, Wilde develops situational irony in the characterization of Algernon’s triviality and scorn for marriage. These thoughts and behaviours challenge the stereotypical views of the audience towards the upper class, thereby creating humour and farce which together induce the audience’s interest towards the continuation of such themes through the remainder of the play.

### POINT 1, TEXT 2

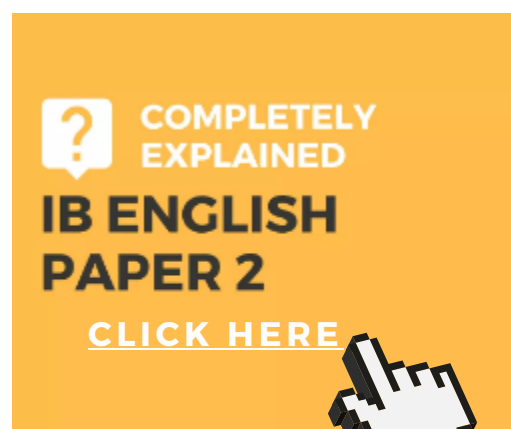
In a similar fashion, Shaw employs the characterization of the atypical character of Eliza Doolittle (the Flower Girl) in the opening scene (Act 1) of the play *Pygmalion* in order to create interest. In a comparable manner to Wilde, Shaw relies upon the conflict between his atypical characterization and the audience’s stereotypical view of the lower class. The audience, which likely consisted of upper class people, expected the lower class to be amoral or immoral. Using situational irony like Wilde, Shaw hyperbolises the Flower girl’s atypical obsession with morality. Her constant repetition of **“I’m a good girl,”** combined with her criticism of Freddy Eynsford-Hills’ lack of manners in **“There’s manners for you”**, construct Eliza’s concern for her morality. This challenging portrayal of a lower class character therefore shocks the audience members and creates interest.

### POINT 1, COMPARISON & CONTRAST

However, Shaw’s treatment of atypical characterization is more serious than Wilde’s attempt. Shaw does not use witty sayings to create humour; instead, the playwright introduces the more serious theme of class distinction in order to make the audience begin to question the difference between Victorian classes, thereby achieving his more serious purpose of extending social criticism. Hence, Shaw uses challenging but serious ideas in the opening of the play to create interest, whilst Wilde utilizes challenging but trivial ideas in Act 1 of *Earnest* in order to create interest through humour, wit and farce.



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## POINT 2, TEXT 1

Furthermore, both plays explore interesting themes as well to generate interest early in the plays. Both Shaw and Wilde employ the technique of foreshadowing in Act 1 of their plays in relation to the theme of transformation and the theme of deception, thereby creating suspense and interest. Firstly, the element of transformation is introduced in Act 1 when Higgins foreshadows his future make-over of the poorly-dressed, lower-class flower girl. Higgins suggests a bet to another gentlemen (Pickering) about whether he will be able to change Eliza into an upper-class lady. Higgins says: **“You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days [...] in three months I will pass this girl off as a duchess in an ambassador’s garden party”**. Higgins’ contemptuous tone is created by the dehumanising diction in **“creature”** and the disparaging language in **“kerbstone”**. Eliza’s costume is equally poor and unattractive: she wears a **“shoddy black coat”** and her hair is a **“mousy colour”**. This unattractive portrayal of Eliza, established through the use of costume, therefore makes the audience perceive this audacious proposition by Higgins to be entirely improbable. The transformation of Eliza is foreshadowed in the juxtaposition of the diction **“kerbstone”** and **“duchess”**, which suggest the significant, unimaginable leap across social classes. Thus, the audience’s interest is clearly aroused through Shaw’s foreshadowing of the imminent transformation of the poor flower girl. The element of doubt also amplifies this sense of interest as the improbability of such a significant transformation creates suspense and dramatic tension from the outset of the play.

## POINT 2, TEXT 2

Similarly, Wilde uses the foreshadowing of future events in Act 1 of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in order to create interest in the audience. In contrast to Shaw’s focus on transformation and the serious topic of social mobility, Wilde chooses to focus on the mischief and deception of the upper-class to generate interest. The deceptive nature of the characters, especially Algernon, is established early in the Act, when Algernon deceives Lady Bracknell about the inability to provide **“cucumber sandwiches”**, not even for **“ready money”**, in spite of his clear role in eating all of the sandwiches. However, this humour becomes much more interesting when Algernon develops interest in Jack’s ward, Cecily Cardew. Wilde uses stage directions to foreshadow his future deception. Algernon first steals the name card of “Ernest Worthing” from the cigarette case, suggesting to the audience the possibility of Algernon endeavouring to Jack’s country house under the false pretense of Ernest, which creates tension and interest early in the play. Furthermore, Algernon eavesdrops on Gwendolen and Jack in Act 1 when Jack shares his address in the country to Gwendolen. The audience sees Algernon artfully and deceptively copy the address onto his “shirt cuff”. Thus, through the use of subtle stage directions, Wilde is able to build tension by foreshadowing the future mischief of the character of Algernon. The audience is therefore captured by this tension and wish to keep watching the play.

## **POINT 2, COMPARISON & CONTRAST (ALSO CONCLUSION)**

Both Shaw and Wilde utilize foreshadowing, however Wilde uses stage directions to much greater effect than Shaw to achieve a tense atmosphere. Wilde's foreshadowing, and thus the interest evoked in the audience, is more effective because the lack of dialogue and the sole use of subtle stage directions creates a much greater sense of suspense and mystery. In contrast, Shaw's creation of interest mostly relies upon dialogue, which also differs from Wilde's style of dialogue. In the Importance of Being Earnest, Algernon's epigrams and iconoclastic statements are rather ridiculous and characterised by wit, whereas Shaw's dialogue evokes interest not through humour but through the exploration of serious themes relating to social class. Hence, the diverging natures of Wilde's and Shaw's dialogues reflect the fundamental differences between the distinct genres of farce and social criticism. While both playwrights generate interest in the beginning of their plays, Wilde employs a more varied combination of techniques to develop a richer interest in the audience.

# Expert's Feedback

23/25

Overall, the student has written an **insightful** piece of analysis of the individual texts *Pygmalion* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, together with **strong comparisons and contrasts** being drawn between these two plays, including references to **style, genre and technique**.

## Criterion A - Knowledge and Understanding: 5/5

No problems here! Great usage of a range of quotes and techniques. Contexts of the quotes are explained well.

## Criterion B - Appreciation of writer's choices: 4/5

Strong analysis for the individual analysis, but more insightful comparisons and contrasts could have been derived.

## Criterion C - Organisation: 4/5

The only disappointment in an otherwise well-organised essay is the lack of balance between the points. Point 1, Text 1 gets a lot more attention than Point 1, Text 2.

## Criterion D - Language: 5/5

Formal register, sophisticated vocabulary. Well done!

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