

DOLLY AT THE DENTIST

G. B. Shaw

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856 -1950) was a playwright, novelist, critic, and passionate socialist. Enthused with a powerful urge to reform society, he wrote about fifty plays which include Arms and the Man (1894), Candida (1897), Man and Superman (1905), Major Barbara (1905), Pygmalion (1913), Back to Methuselah (1922), St. Joan (1923) and The Apple Cart (1929). Widely regarded as the greatest British dramatist after Shakespeare, Shaw exhibits in his plays a unique blend of acute comments on society, a delectable rhythm of prose and buoyant wit. All his plays are intelligent debates and one is bound to encounter unpalatable truths, though beguilingly dressed. 'Dolly at the Dentist', the piece that follows, is the opening scene from You Never Can Tell. The duel of the sexes, a frequent theme in Shaw's plays, is in the focus here. The scene is short, but the vitality of Shaw's characters and his characteristic wit and humour are evident throughout. The way in which words such as 'didn't', 'don't', 'haven't' and 'can't' are written in this lesson, clearly shows Shaw's idea on how the English language should be written. The deliberate omission of apostrophe from 'didn't', 'don't', 'haven't' and 'can't' is a case of Shaw's emphasis on bringing uniformity between speech and writing.



A. Work in small groups and discuss the following questions:

1. Have you ever suffered from toothache? If yes, what did you do to overcome aching?
2. Who cures you from toothache?
3. Have you ever been to a dentist's clinic or have you ever accompanied anyone to a dentist's clinic?
4. How did you feel at the clinic?

DOLLY AT THE DENTIST

In a dentist's operating room on a fine August morning in 1896 a very pretty woman in miniature, hardly eighteen, is seen holding a glass of water in her hand. The expression of tense patience under pain is rapidly clearing from her small firm-set mouth and quaintly squared eyebrows. The dentist, a handsome young man of thirty or thereabouts, watches her with the self-satisfaction of a successful operator.

THE YOUNG LADY (handing him the glass): Thank you. (In spite of the biscuit complexion she has not the slightest foreign accent).

THE DENTIST (putting it down on the ledge of his cabinet of instruments): That was my first tooth.

THE YOUNG LADY (aghast): Your first! Do you mean to say that you began practising on me?

THE DENTIST: Every dentist has to begin with somebody.

THE YOUNG LADY: Yes: somebody in a hospital, not people who pay.

THE DENTIST (laughing): Oh, the hospital **doesn't count**. I only meant my first tooth in private practice. Why didn't you let me give you gas?

THE YOUNG LADY: Because you said it would be five shillings extra.

THE DENTIST (shocked): Oh, don't say that. It makes me feel as if I had hurt you for the sake of five shillings.

THE YOUNG LADY (with cool insolence): Well, so you have. (She gets up) Why shouldn't you? It's your business to hurt people. (It amuses him to be treated in this fashion: he chuckles secretly as he proceeds to clean and replace his instruments. She shakes her dress into order: looks inquisitively about her; and goes to the broad window.) You have a good view of the sea from your rooms! Are they expensive?

THE DENTIST: Yes.

THE YOUNG LADY: You don't own the whole house, do you?

THE DENTIST: No.

THE YOUNG LADY: I thought not. (tilting the chair which stands at the writing-table and looking critically at it as she spins it round on one leg) Your furniture isn't quite the latest thing, is it?

THE DENTIST: It's my landlord's.

THE YOUNG LADY: Does he own that toothache chair? (pointing to the operating chair).

THE DENTIST: No: I have that on the **hire-purchase system**.

THE YOUNG LADY (**disparagingly**): I thought so. (Looking about in search of further conclusions) I suppose you haven't been here long?

THE DENTIST: Six weeks. Is there anything else you would like to know?

THE YOUNG LADY (the hint quite lost on her): Any family?

THE DENTIST: I am not married.

THE YOUNG LADY: Of course not: anybody can see that. I mean sisters and mother and that sort of thing.

THE DENTIST: Not on the **premises**.

THE YOUNG LADY: Hm! If you've been here six weeks, and mine was your first tooth, the practice can't be very large, can it?

THE DENTIST: Not as yet. (He shuts the cabinet, having **tidied up** everything).

THE YOUNG LADY: Well, good luck! (She takes out her purse). Five shillings, you said it would be?

THE DENTIST: Five shillings.

THE YOUNG LADY (producing a **crown piece**): Do you charge five shillings for everything?

THE DENTIST: Yes.

THE YOUNG LADY: Why?

THE DENTIST: It's my system. I'm what's called a five shilling dentist.

THE YOUNG LADY: How nice! Well, here! (holding up the crown piece) a nice new five-shilling piece! Your first fee! Make a hole in it with the thing you **drill** people's teeth with; and wear it on your watch-chain.

THE DENTIST: Thank you.

B.1 Answer the following questions very briefly:

1. 'That was my first tooth.' What does this mean?
2. Why did the lady refuse to take gas?
3. 'It's your business to hurt people.' Why does the lady say so?
4. Is the business of a dentist to hurt people? Give your opinion.
5. 'Is there anything else you would like to know?' What made the dentist say so?

6. Why did the lady ask the dentist to wear the five shilling piece on his watch chain?
7. How long has the dentist been working in that clinic?
8. Why is the dentist called a five-shilling dentist?
9. When the lady asks the dentist if he has any family, he replies, 'I am not married.' What does family mean here?
10. What, in your opinion, does family stand for? Does it mean only wife and children?

THE PARLOUR MAID (appearing at the door): The young lady's brother, sir.

A handsome man in miniature, obviously the young lady's twin, comes in eagerly. He is promptitude itself, and has a question ready the moment he enters.

THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Am I in time?

THE YOUNG LADY: No: it's all over.

THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN: did you howl?

THE YOUNG LADY: Oh, something awful. Mr Valentine: this is my brother Phil. Phil: this is Mr Valentine, our new dentist. (Valentine and Phil bow to one another. She proceeds, all in one breath) He's only been here six weeks and he's a bachelor the house isn't his and the furniture is the landlord's but the professional plant is hired he got my tooth out beautifully at the first go and he and I are great friends.

PHILIP: Been asking a lot of questions?

THE YOUNG LADY (as if incapable of doing such a thing): Oh no.

PHILIP: Glad to hear it. (To Valentine) So good of you not to mind us, Mr Valentine. The fact is, we've never been in England before; and our mother tells us that the people here simply won't stand us. Come and lunch with us.

(Valentine, bewildered by the leaps and bounds with which their acquaintanceship is proceeding, gasps, but has no time to reply, as the conversation of the twin is swift and continuous.)

THE YOUNG LADY: Oh, do, Mr Valentine.

PHILIP: At the Marine Hotel: half past one.

THE YOUNGLADY: We shall be able to tell mamma that a respectable Englishman has promised to lunch with us.

PHILIP: Say no more, Mr Valentine: you'll come.

VALENTINE: Say no more! haven't said anything. May I ask whom I have the pleasure of **entertaining**? It's really quite impossible for me to lunch at the Marine Hotel with two perfect strangers.

THE YOUNG LADY (**flippantly**): Ooooh! What bosh! One patient in six weeks! What difference does it make to you?

PHILIP (maturely): No, Dolly: my knowledge of human nature **confirms** Mr Valentine's judgement. He is right. Let me introduce Miss Dorothy Clandon, commonly called Dolly. (Valentine bows to Dolly. She nods to him). I'm Philip Clandon. We're from **Madeira**, but perfectly respectable, so far.

VALENTINE: Clandon! Are you related to ...

DOLLY (unexpectedly crying out in **despair**): Yes we are.

VALENTINE (astonished): I beg your pardon?

DOLLY: Oh, we are, we are, It's all over, Phil: they know all about us in England. (to Valentine) Oh, you can't think how maddening it is to be related to a **celebrated** person, and never be valued anywhere for our own sakes.

VALENTINE: But excuse me: the gentleman I was thinking of is not celebrated.

DOLLY AND PHILIP (staring at him): Gentleman!

VALENTINE: Yes. I was going to ask whether you were by any chance a daughter of Mr Densmore Clandon of Newbury Hall.

DOLLY (**vacantly**): No.

PHILIP: Well, come, Dolly: how do you know you're not?

Dolly (cheered): Oh, I forgot. Of course. Perhaps I am.

VALENTINE: Don't you know?

PHILIP: Not in the least.

DOLLY: It's a wise child...

PHILIP (cutting her short): Sh! (Valentine **starts** nervously: for the sound made by Phil, though but momentary, is like cutting a sheet of silk in two with a flash of **lightning**. It is the result of long practice in checking Dolly's **indiscretions**). The fact is, Mr Valentine, we are the children of the celebrated Mrs Lanfrey Clandon, an authoress of great **repute** - in Madeira. No household is complete without her

work. We came to London to get away from them. They are called the Twentieth Century Treatises.

DOLLY: Twentieth Century Cooking.

PHILIP: Twentieth Century Creeds.

DOLLY: Twentieth Century Clothing.

PHILIP: Twentieth Century Conduct.

DOLLY: Twentieth Century Children.

PHILIP: Twentieth Century Parents.

DOLLY: Cloth **limp**, half a dollar.

PHILIP: Or **mounted** or **linen** for hard family use, two dollars. No family should be without them. Read them, Mr Valentine: they'll improve your mind.

DOLLY: but not till we've gone, please.

PHILIP: Quite so: we prefer people with unimproved minds. Our own minds have successfully **resisted** all our mother's efforts to improve them.

VALENTINE (dubiously): Hm!

DOLLY (echoing him inquiringly): Hm? Phil: he prefers people whose minds are improved.

PHILIP: In that case we shall have to introduce him to the other members of the family: The Woman of the Twentieth Century: Our sister Gloria!

B.2. Answer the following questions briefly :

1. What does the lady report to Philip about the dentist?
2. Why do Philip and Dolly invite Valentine to lunch?
3. Is the dentist willing to dine with the lady and her brother? Why?
4. What reasons do they give for their coming to England?
5. Why are the books called Twentieth Century Treatises?
6. Why do they not want the dentist to read the books before they have gone away?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

in miniature (phr): small in size

quaintly (adv): strangely

complexion (n): colour of skin

accent (n): way of pronouncing

ledge (n): narrow shelf

cabinet (n): piece of furniture with shelves or drawers

aghast (adj): filled with fear

- doesn't count** (idiom): need not be considered
- gas** (n): kind of gas used to deaden the sense of feeling and hence pain
- insouciance** (n): insulting behaviour
- chuckles** (v): quietly laughs with closed mouth
- inquisitively** (adv): showing eagerness to know
- about** (prep): around
- tilting**(v): putting in a sloping position
- hire-purchase system**: system under which the buyer of a thing pays by instalments with the right to use it after the first payment
- disparagingly** (adv): in a manner that makes it appear less valuable
- premises** (n): building together with its grounds
- tidied up** (v): placed in order
- crowm piece** (n): coin worth five shillings
- drill** (v): make a hole in
- Parlour maid** (n): maid who waits at table
- obviously** (adv): as can be seen easily
- promptitude** (n): readiness to act
- howl** (v): cry loud and long
- awful** (adj): very bad
- at the first go** (idiom): at the first attempt
- stand** (v): bear
- leaps and bounds** (idiom): great speed
- acquaintanceship** (n): familiarity
- gasps** (v): struggles for breath
- entertaining** (v): receiving as visitors
- flippantly** (adv): without trying to show respect
- bosh!**(int): nonsense
- confirms** (v): shows as correct
- Madeira** (n): island in the Atlantic Ocean
- despair** (n): the state of having lost all hope
- celebrated** (adj): famous
- vacantly** (adv): showing no signs of interest
- starts** (v): makes a sudden movement (from surprise)
- lightning** (n): (flash of) bright light produced by natural electricity in the sky
- indiscretions** (n): remarks and acts going against the rules of good social behaviour
- repute** (n): fame
- treatises** (n): books that deal in detail with a single subject
- creeds** (n): sets of religious beliefs
- limp** (adj): not stiff
- mounted** (pp, as adj): put and fixed in position
(By 'cloth limp' and 'mounted on linen' the speakers refer to the two types of binding in which the books were available. A limp cloth bound copy is cheaper than the one hard and linen-bound.)
- resisted** (v): remained uninfluenced by

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Write the gist of the conversation between Dolly and the Dentist.
2. What are the qualities you look for in a dentist? Is Mr Valentine the dentist of your choice? Explain.
3. Find out the remarks or observations which you find particularly very amusing. Why do you find them amusing?
4. Who do you find more amusing – Dolly or her bother? Why? Give reasons in favour of your choice.
5. Give a brief character sketch of Dorothy Clandon using adjectives from the list given below:

pretty	young	talkative	miserly	foreign accent
old	reserve	observant	practical	biscuit complexion
lavish	insolent	nuisance	impatient	makes friends easily
irritating	social	jealous	teasing	well behaved

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

- a. Nucleus family consists only of husband, wife and children. There is hardly any room for uncle, aunt, grandpa or grandma in it? Do you think it is a better option than the joint family? Give reasons in favour of your argument.
- b. Being unnecessarily inquisitive about someone's personal life is against social decorum. Do you agree?

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 100 words on the following:

- a. The duty of a doctor
- b. The relation between a doctor and a patient.

D. WORD STUDY**D.1. Dictionary Use**

Ex.1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

compection	acquaintence	awfull
insolance	disperaging	despeir
intertaining	indiscritions	treatiese

Ex. 2. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of each of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common:

accent premises drill celebrated mounted

D.2. Word-formation

Look at the following examples:

We're from Madeira, but perfectly **respectable**, so far.

May I ask whom I have the pleasure of **entertaining**?

Valentine, bewildered by the leaps and bounds with which their **acquaintanceship** is proceeding, gasps.

You see that in the first example adjective **respectable** is derived from the verb **respect**. In the second example, present participle **entertaining** is derived from the verb **entertain**. In the last example, noun **acquaintanceship** is derived from the verb **acquaint**. In fact, a number of words can be derived from a verb as illustrated below:

Expect (v): expected (adj) expectedly (adv) expectation (n)
 expectant (adj) expectantly (adv)

Ex. Write as many words derived from the following verbs as possible, as illustrated above:

acquaint	amuse	celebrate	continue
entertain	marry	operate	resist
produce	relate	practise	

D.3. Word-meaning

Ex. 1. Find from the lesson words the meanings of which have been given on the left hand side. The last part of each word is given on the right hand side:

readiness to act	.....tude
way of pronouncing	.....cent
piece of furniture with shelves or drawers:	.....net
rest or sleep in the early afternoon	.....ta

the state of having lost all hope	.....pair
famous	.....ted
laugh quietly with closed mouth	.....kles
building together with its grounds	.....mises
without trying to show respect	.....antly
books that deal in detail with a single subject	.....tises

Ex.2. Fill in the blanks with suitable adjectives given below:

awful critical celebrated inquisitive
 flippant mature momentary

- (i) She isenough to take her decision herself.
- (ii) Dr Bhabha was a..... scientist.
- (iii) It is difficult to forget that sight even today.
- (iv) Chaitali's expression makes her a very charming character..
- (v) After a hesitation, Philip entered the room.
- (vi) Dr Dwivedi has written a study of modern Hindi literature.
- (vii) Any responsible man cannot make such a remark.

D. 4. Phrases

Ex.1. Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used. Then use them in sentences of your own:

All over by any chance cut one short as if
 at one go for the sake of in miniature a lot of
 in spite of leaps and bounds in search of in the least

E. GRAMMAR

Ex.1. Questions: Yes/No and information types

Study the following questions from the lesson:

- (a) Are they expensive?
- (b) Do you charge five shillings for everything?
- (c) Am I in time?

You see that all the questions above begin with an auxiliary verb 'are', 'do' or 'am'. These questions are called Yes/No questions as they can be answered in 'yes' or 'no' only.

You also see that the subject in example (b) is placed between the auxiliary and the main verb. The structure of the Yes/No questions is further exemplified in the following table:

Auxiliary	Subject	Main Verb	Object, complement, etc.
May	I	come	in?
Have	you	sent	him a letter?
Could	you	help	me?
Will	he	handle	the situation?
Do	you	like	him?

Form ten Yes/No questions using each of the following auxiliaries twice: may, have, could, will, do.

Ex.2. Study the following questions from the lesson:

- Why didn't you let me give you gas?
- How do you know you are not?
- What difference does it make to you?

You see that the questions in the examples begin with a wh-word, eg., 'why' 'how' and 'what'. These questions are called Information questions as they ask for information of different kinds. You can't answer these questions by saying 'yes' or 'no'. The pattern of these questions as given in the following table is: Wh-word + Yes/No question.

Wh-word	Auxiliary	Subject	Main Verb	Object, Complement, etc.
Where	is	the teacher	-	-?
When	will	you	come	back
Why	are	they	laughing	-?
How	can	I	inform	my friend in time?

Now form eight more Information questions using each of these Wh-words twice: where, when, why, how.

Ex.3. Note how the Wh-words in the following questions are the subjects of the sentences and how they are followed directly by the main verb. No auxiliary verb is used in these questions:

Wh-word as Subject	Main Verb	Object, Complement, etc.
Who	is	you teacher?
What	make	you so sad?
Who	brought	you here?
Which	is	the right way?

Now form six more Information questions using each of these Wh-words twice: who, what, which.

F. ACTIVITY

Taking help from reference books and your teacher find out:

- What is wit?
- What is humour?

Find out the instances of wit and humour in the lesson.

