Study Questions and Activities

Major Barbara

2. Explain the Andrew Undershaft foundling tradition.
3. What challenge does Barbara level at her father in Act I?
4. Who is Barbara’s grandfather?
5. Why does Bill Walker strike Jenny Hill?
6. What financial aid does Undershaft offer his three children?
7. What is Stephen’s main criticism of Undershaft’s treatment of his workers?
8. Does Nietzsche’s definition of “Dionysian” (and “Apollonian”) in Birth of Tragedy apply to Dolly’s understanding of the term? See a good handbook of literary terms such as Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms, ed. J.A. Cuddon; or A Handbook to Literature, Holman and Harmon; or A Glossary of Literary Terms, M.H. Abrams.
9. Why is winning Barbara’s capitulation in the wager so important to Undershaft? Why does Barbara capitulate?
10. Discuss how Shaw explores the notion of class in the play.
11. Explore Shaw’s presentation of men and women as it challenges or conforms to dramaturgical conventions of gender at the turn of the 20th century as well as today.
12. Who is Mrs. Baines, and what key announcement does she make?
Suggested Essay or Discussion Topics

1. Look up the term *psychomachia* in a good reference source such as your favourite glossary or handbook of literary terms. Is *Major Barbara* structured as a kind of psychomachia? If so, whose soul is being fought over? Who are the angelic and diabolical characters or tempters?

2. In what way is Undershaft a “Grand Inquisitor” figure? [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Grand_Inquisitor](en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Grand_Inquisitor)

3. Compare characters and situations from *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Major Barbara*. How might Lady Bracknell be seen as a source character for Lady Britomart?

4. One critic suggests that in addition to the Spenserean allusion, Britomart’s name also suggests “British Market.” Refute or support with evidence.

5. Why does Shaw name Undershaft’s business partner Lazarus? Be sure to read Chapter 16 from the Gospel of Luke as a starting point.

6. Discuss Charles “Cholly” Lomax as comic character.

7. What typical characteristics of a utopia do you find in the depiction of the community of Perivale St. Andrews in Act III?

8. Discuss any particularly useful changes to the play in Gabriel Pascal’s 1941 film version of *Major Barbara*. Note that Shaw helped write the film script and published his screen version in 1946.

9. Explore the use of music in the play.

10. Discuss Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle (1845-1921) as the source for Lady Britomart.

11. Discuss Gilbert Murray as Shaw’s source for Adolphus Cusins.

12. Discuss the various comic techniques, especially characterization, that Shaw uses to keep his audience involved in the action of the play.

Resources

[Major-Barbara-Study-Guide](http://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature/Book%3A_English_Literature_-_Victorians_and_Moderns_(Sexton)/11%3A_George_Bernard_Shaw_(1856%E2%80%931950)/11.5%3A_Study_Questions%2C_Activities%2C_and_Resources) [pdf booklet by permission of the Shaw Festival, Niagara-on-the Lake]

Preface to *Major Barbara*

[http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/shaw...a/preface.html](http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/shaw...a/preface.html)


Attributions

Figure 1

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