

## Summary & questions on *The School For Scandal*

### PROLOGUE:

Written by the actor-manager David Garrick and performed by the actor playing Sir Peter Teazle, the prologue introduces themes of the play.

The prologue slips into the part of Lady Wormwood, reading a popular scandal sheet, such as *The Morning Post* or the *Town and Country Magazine*, which publishes scandal about well-known people while only giving their initials (for fear of being sued for libel).

He compares the young satirist (Sheridan) who has written this play first to Don Quixote, the famous mad cavalier of seventeenth century Spanish fiction, then to Hercules, killer of the famous Hydra. He points out how pointless it is to attack Scandal, as it will always grow again.

### QUESTIONS:

The prologue (often written by someone apart from the author of the play) was the traditional way for plays to begin in the eighteenth century. Do you think this still works? Why? If you were directing the play, how would you make this speech work as the introduction to the play?

Do the comments Garrick makes about scandal, and the way it works, still apply now? Why?

The prologue works to place us in a specific class and social system: why do you think Garrick puts us there?

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**ACT ONE SCENE ONE:**

Lady Sneerwell and Mr Snake are “discovered” on stage in her dressing room, discussing planting scandals in a scandal sheet, possibly *The Morning Post* or the *Town and Country Magazine*, and starting rumours about others of their acquaintance.

They want a story to reach a gossiping acquaintance, Mrs Clackitt, so that she will spread the rumour.

Snake does not understand why Lady Sneerwell is so involved in the intrigue between the two Surface brothers (Joseph and his younger brother Charles) and Sir Peter Teazle and his new wife. He says it is known how much Joseph admires her, but she tells Snake that Joseph is only interested in Sir Peter’s ward, Maria, for her money, but Maria is in love with Charles, with whom Lady Sneerwell is also in love.

Lady Sneerwell reveals that, while Joseph appears to be “man of sentiment”, he is in fact a hypocrite who has fooled everyone apart from her.

Joseph is shown up, and expresses remorse at the dissipation of his brother, until Lady Sneerwell reminds him that he is among friends and does not need to express any moral sentiments with them.

When Snake leaves, Joseph expresses doubt in his fidelity to the cause of scandal: he has spent too much time talking to Rowley, formerly his father’s steward.

Maria arrives, trying to avoid her ‘lover’ Sir Benjamin Backbite (“a poet and a wit”) and his Uncle Crabtree.

They discuss whether wit can be really funny unless it hurts someone. Maria thinks it is only funny when it doesn’t hurt anyone; Lady Sneerwell states that it is not funny unless it is cruel.

Mrs Candour, a woman who does more harm to people’s reputation by defending it, arrives to spread more gossip, while saying how she hates people who spread gossip. She spreads more rumours about (among others) Charles (Maria’s beloved) and Sir Peter Teazle (Maria’s guardian) and his wife.

Sir Benjamin Backbite and his Uncle Crabtree arrive in pursuit of Maria. They tell stories,

spread gossip, and humiliate Charles about his spending and his ridiculous borrowing of money. Maria leaves in distress, and Mrs Candour, Sir Benjamin and Crabtree go after to cheer her up.

Joseph and Lady Sneerwell worry that Maria is still too much in love with Charles for their plans.

### **QUESTIONS:**

What age is Lady Sneerwell? She is often played by an actress in her forties or fifties, but there is no reason why she could not be a widow in her mid-twenties. How does her age affect what we can see as her motivations?

What is Lady Sneerwell's motivation? She claims that she herself was "Wounded myself in the early part of my life by the envenomed tongue of slander": is this why she is punishing others (whether or not they may be innocent)? She further claims that she is in love with Charles Surface: to what extent do we believe her?

Sheridan sets up a lot of information, about Joseph, Charles, Maria, Rowley etc, long before these characters appear on stage. How effective is this? If you were directing this play, how would you make sure that this important information about the characters was retained by the audience?

In the scene with Maria & Lady Sneerwell, Joseph manages to agree with everyone, even when they disagree with each other. Look at how skilfully Sheridan enables him to do this. How, if you were playing the character, would you make this both funny and sinister?

The comedian Mel Brooks is quoted as saying "The difference between comedy and tragedy is this: Tragedy is when I fall down a manhole; comedy is when you fall down a manhole." Do you agree with Lady Sneerwell that comedy (wit) must hurt if it is to be funny, or do you agree with Maria that true wit hurts no one? Which, from your reading of the play, do you think Sheridan agrees with? Why?

The speech against male slanderers (and vaguely in defence of female slanderers slandering each other's reputation), lines 157-160, is given by some manuscripts of the play to Lady Sneerwell, while most give it to Maria. To whom do you think it is most suited? Does our opinion change of either character if Lady Sneerwell says it? How sarcastic is the speech?

Does Mrs Candour realise she is spreading gossip? Her lines suggest she does not. While she is a funny character, can she be made realistic?

What is the real relationship between Sir Benjamin and his “uncle”? They seem almost to be a couple (they never appear on stage except in each other’s company), and Sir Benjamin seems very “foppish”. No one, however, comments on their relationship: why is that?

**ACT ONE SCENE TWO:**

Sir Peter Teazle, an “old bachelor” recently married, complains about his new wife’s extravagances, and how she constantly disagrees with him. He married her on the basis that she was a country-bred girl, and therefore with simple tastes, but she turns out to be spendthrift and hanging out with the wrong crowd.

His problem is that he is still in love with his wife, but he has too much strength of character to admit it.

Rowley, the honest steward of old Mr Surface, tells Sir Peter not to judge Charles too harshly, as his father was similarly “wild” at his age. Sir Peter, who “was never mistaken in my life”, admires Joseph and despises Charles, having brought them up since the death of their father.

Rowley tells Sir Peter about the (secret) arrival back from India of Sir Oliver Surface, Joseph and Charles’ uncle and the source of their income. He has been away fifteen years.

**QUESTIONS:**

What age are Sir Peter and Lady Teazle? In the original production, they were played by Peter King (then 47) and Frances Abington (then 40, though looking quite a bit younger), and they were both well-known enough for the audience to have had a good idea about their ages. There is no reason from the script, however, why Lady Teazle and Maria cannot be the same age. If you were director, what age would you cast and play the Teazles?

Sir Peter regards it as strength of character not to admit to his wife how much he loves her. To some extent, some of the desperation of his character (and Lady Teazle’s) in the play stems from this. To what extent do you regard it as strength of character not to admit feelings, and to what extent is it a weakness? If you were directing the play, how would you play the love relationship between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle?

**ACT TWO SCENE ONE:**

We start in the middle of an argument between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. Sir Peter complains about her spending, her taste and her friends, to all of which she has a defence. Despite all her resistance, she has a charm that disarms him.

**QUESTIONS:**

Are any of Lady Teazle's arguments actually fair? Or reasonable? Or are they just witty?

Apart from what Sir Peter says in his soliloquy, is there any evidence of love between the two of them in their dialogue? If you were directing, what emotion would you play the most of? How?

**ACT TWO SCENE TWO:**

Sir Benjamin shows off his facility for instant satirical poetry to Lady Sneerwell et al.

When Lady Teazle arrives with Maria, Lady Sneerwell tries to get Maria to play piquet, a two-handed card-game, with Joseph.

Lady Teazle starts to get jealous of Joseph's interest in Maria.

After Lady Sneerwell et al have gossiped about others of their acquaintance (their class, size, weight, overuse of makeup, and teeth), Sir Peter arrives. After they continue to abuse people, Sir Peter tries to stop them. He says that wit and good nature are closely related, at which the others make jokes. They accuse him of trying to curb their free speech.

Sir Peter insults Lady Sneerwell and friends as "qualified old maids and disappointed widows", and tries to make his escape unobserved.

The others leave for the other room, leaving Joseph and Maria together. Joseph gets down on his knees to make a proposal to Maria, when he is interrupted by Lady Teazle. He has to explain this to a jealous Lady Teazle as being him begging to Maria to save Lady Teazle's reputation. Immediately following this, he invites her to see his library. She reminds him he is just her "Platonic cicisbeo" (admirer of a married woman) and not her lover, but Joseph suggests that she gets "revenge" on Sir Peter for his neglect of her.

When Lady Teazle goes, Joseph wonders how much trouble his "politics" have got him into.

**QUESTIONS:**

Is "Free Speech" more important than "Reputation"? The gossips in the play try to defend themselves that they are exercising a human right, but their victims are actually suffering from their actions and words. Which side do you think Sheridan is on? Why?

How sexy is the scene between Joseph and Lady Teazle? Joseph is quite clearly seducing her, but how much is she resisting? How much physical contact is there between them in this scene? Sheridan has written *The School For Scandal* without any overt sex, but does this make these seduction scenes more or less erotically charged?

**ACT TWO SCENE THREE:**

Sir Oliver is discovered talking to Rowley, laughing at how Sir Peter Teazle has got married.

Rowley tells him how the gossips have insinuated there is a relationship between Charles and Lady Teazle, but Oliver refuses to believe it. He also states that “If Charles has done nothing false or mean, I shall compound for his extravagance”.

Sir Peter arrives, doesn’t want to talk about his marriage, but confirms all the rumours about Charles. Sir Oliver regards the fact that “everyone speaks well of” Joseph as being a point against him, because he is always trying to keep in people’s good books, rather than being honest himself. Sir Oliver is opposed to “Prudence”, as opposed to “Benevolence” or “Charity”, in the young.

**QUESTIONS:**

Sir Oliver is clearly made out to be “right” in his argument with Sir Peter. Is it his own dissipated youth that makes him more tolerant of Charles’ behaviour, and more condemnatory of Joseph’s? Why has Sheridan given him this insight that is missing from Sir Peter? If you were acting the part, how would you make Sir Oliver act as more than merely a plot function?



**ACT THREE SCENE ONE:**

Rowley explains to Sir Peter and Sir Oliver how he is going to test Joseph and Charles: Sir Oliver is going to pretend to be a distant relative, Mr Stanley, who has been unwise in his investments, and faces prison for debt (according to some manuscripts of the play, he is already in prison). From Joseph, he has received only promises of future help, whereas Charles has sent him such money as he is able to.

Rowley also shows in "a friendly Jew", Moses, who has been unable to curb Charles' extravagance.

Moses has recently found Charles someone willing to lend him money, a Mr Premium, and Sir Peter suggests that Sir Oliver would be better placed to pretend to be Mr Premium.

Moses explains how to convince Charles he is a genuine moneylender: he must ask exorbitant rates of interest, and make it difficult for himself to lend the money.

Sir Peter tries to persuade Maria to accept Joseph and reject Charles, but she refuses. He threatens to force her to marry Joseph.

When she has gone, he explains to the audience the circumstances of how he became her guardian: two weeks after his marriage, her father died and left her in his care.

Lady Teazle arrives and wants Sir Peter to give/lend her £200. He agrees to it as long as they don't argue so much. She points out that he always starts it.

The argument reaches such a pitch that he agrees to a separation, and now believes the stories about her and Charles. The threat to divorce Lady Teazle makes her happy.

**QUESTIONS:**

Even though Moses is referred to a "friendly Jew", and he claims he has tried to help Charles sort out his finances, is there any way to play this scene without appearing anti-Semitic? Interestingly, they speak to him as "Mr Moses", which implies some sort of respect. Or are all the comments about Moses' honesty and trustworthiness merely ironic or sarcastic? How do you deal with some of the lines, especially the ones about Moses being "faithful"?

Maria spends a lot of time in the play saying how much she loves Charles, but we never see the two characters together. Why do you think Sheridan never shows us a scene between

the two characters? What is he saying about either character by this omission? What could happen in a scene between the two of them? If you were to write this scene, what would happen in it?

We follow one scene about money-lending (Premium and Charles) with another (Lady Teazle trying to get money off Sir Peter). How similar are they? What parallels has Sheridan put between the two scenes? How does the juxtaposition of the two scenes make the idea stronger?

**ACT THREE SCENE TWO:**

Sir Oliver & Moses visit Charles, and get into conversation with his dandyish servant Trip. Charles' house is his brother's old house, which he bought off Joseph: Sir Oliver disapproves of Joseph having sold it.

Trip claims to be underpaid and behind in his pay, but still has money for "bags and bouquets": he also tries to borrow money off Moses, using Charles' clothes as collateral.

**QUESTIONS:**

Sir Oliver treats Trip's behaviour as demonstrating how reprehensible Charles' lifestyle is, but we might see that actually Charles is a good master, generous towards his servants. How would you play Trip? What morals would you draw from this scene (if any)?

**ACT THREE SCENE THREE:**

Charles and his dissolute companions drink and sing.

He praises those who drink, spend and gamble, and disapproves of those who have “reformed” and now are against any of these vices.

Charles believes that alcohol can tell you most accurately who it is that you love: he refuses to tell his friends who it is that he loves most, as it will embarrass the rest of them. They persuade him to name Maria, and he gets them to drink to her beauty. They sing a filthy song about all the attractive women of the world.

They are interrupted by the arrival of “The Jew and the broker”: Charles’ friends want him to invite them in, so he does, and he offers them a drink; in fact he forces Sir Oliver to drink a pint, though Moses can only cope with a quart.

Charles prides himself on his plain-speaking to Sir Oliver, saying how much he wants and needs the money. Sir Oliver, in return, tells the story he and Moses have worked out.

Charles’ only hope of returning the money is in inheriting money from Sir Oliver in the East Indies. He has heard that he is the favourite nephew and will inherit everything: Sir Oliver says he has not heard that. He asks Sir Oliver (as Premium) for a post-obit on his (Sir Oliver’s) life (i.e. he will have to repay when Sir Oliver has died), though he professes himself keen for Sir Oliver to live long, as the old man has been so generous to him in the past. Nonetheless, he has heard that Sir Oliver is ill.

Sir Oliver asks if Charles has anything he can sell, but he has already sold his father’s family plate and his father’s library; all he has left are the family pictures, which he is prepared to sell to the highest bidder. Sir Oliver is horrified that Charles can dispose of his relatives’ pictures so easily.

Charles asks his friend Careless to be auctioneer.

**QUESTIONS:**

This is the first scene with Charles. He has been represented (by Rowley) as being a good and pure man, and by Sir Peter as dissolute and adulterous. On first inspection, which

picture does he more resemble?

On one level, we are asked by Sheridan to admire Charles: he is more a “what you see is what you get” character (thus he is “Surface” as his name suggests), but is there more to him than that?

In early drafts of the play, Charles was named Frank. Which name is more suitable? Why? Why do you think Sheridan renamed the character?

It was considered bad manners to the lady to toast your beloved when drunk: Charles comes out with a different reason. Which is the correct one?

A lot of the comedy of the scene between Charles, Sir Oliver and Moses is that Charles is unaware that he is speaking to Oliver, and therefore is unaware of the truth of otherwise of what he is saying. How would you increase the dramatic irony of this scene?

The end of Act Three is customarily the place where the audience goes out for the longest break. Why do you think Sheridan places this (biggest) break at this point in the story? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the break here? Where would you put the break?

**ACT FOUR SCENE ONE:**

Charles shows Sir Oliver and Moses his collection of family portraits. They are all stiff and awkward pictures, unlike the modern style of Joshua Reynolds. Sir Oliver is still horrified that Charles can sell his family in such a way.

He undersells most of the pictures, selling the whole lot for £400, except for one. This is the portrait of Sir Oliver, which he refuses to sell.

Sir Oliver forgives him everything, because of his affection for the portrait, and pays him double the amount he promised.

Careless persuades Charles not to use any of his new wealth to pay off his debts, because “tradesmen... are the most exorbitant fellows”.

When Rowley arrives, Charles asks him to take £100 immediately to old Stanley to pay off some of Stanley’s debts, and keep him out of prison.

**QUESTIONS:**

Why does Sheridan choose to have Charles’ great-uncle Sir Richard Raveline a hero of “the Battle of Malplaquet”, which was nigh on the battle that lost the British the War of the Spanish Succession? Why has he not chosen a more successful battle for Sir Richard to have taken part in? What is he saying about the Surface family by choosing this battle for Sir Richard to have fought in?

Why does Charles refuse to sell the portrait of Sir Oliver? Is it purely affection, or is there a more mercenary motive? If it came back to Sir Oliver that his nephew had sold his portrait, would he inherit anything?

Why does Charles give money to old Stanley, a family member he has never met, when he is so much in debt himself?

Rowley tries to persuade Charles to “Be just before you’re generous”, an idea of prudence against benevolence. Charles immediately dismisses this idea. Is this evidence for Charles being a benevolist, or just of him being imprudent?

**ACT FOUR SCENE TWO:**

Moses commiserates with Sir Oliver that his nephew is such a spendthrift and so “charitable”, but Sir Oliver is pleased that (and keeps repeating) “He would not sell my picture”.

Rowley arrives with the money for Old Stanley to give to Sir Oliver. In the light of this, Sir Oliver agrees to pay off all Charles’ debts.

Trip wants to borrow some money off Moses.

**QUESTIONS:**

Is it a racist stereotype that Moses is so against Charles being “charitable”? How would you play the scene to avoid accusations of racism?

How self-centred is Sir Oliver?

**ACT FOUR SCENE THREE:**

Joseph waits for a message from Lady Teazle, but he is worried she may have guessed his intentions towards Maria, and he needs her more in his power, probably by sexual blackmail, if he is to get her back on his side.

Lady Teazle arrives and questions him about Maria. She complains that she is having so many stories spread about her. Joseph suggests that she get revenge on Sir Peter: by actually having an affair. He suggests she would grow in confidence as a result and thus be better able to resist the accusations of others.

The arrival of Sir Peter makes Lady Teazle think she's "ruined" at being found alone with Joseph. She hides behind a screen.

Sir Peter comes in, and, in secret, tells Joseph about the state of his relationship with Lady Teazle, and his suspicions about her affair with Charles.

He tells Joseph that he has been mean to Lady Teazle, so has two deeds he wishes to place on her, either to give her £800 a year for life, or to give her his fortune when he dies.

When Sir Peter switches the conversation to Joseph's failure to make any headway in his relationship with Maria, Joseph tries to silence him.

Charles wants to come in, so Sir Peter wants Joseph to tempt Charles into making an admission of his relationship. He suggests hiding behind the screen, but Joseph stops him by saying he has a woman behind there, "a little French milliner": Joseph is not "an absolute Joseph". Sir Peter hides in a cupboard.

Charles wonders what Joseph has to hide.

Joseph taxes him with the accusation that he has enticed Lady Teazle's affections away from him, and Charles is amused, and says he thought she was more attracted to Joseph, and indeed he had caught them together before.

To shut him up, Joseph tells him Sir Peter is listening in, so Charles calls Sir Peter forth. Sir Peter is now reconciled to Charles, just as Joseph is called out of the room.

Charles accuses Joseph of being "too moral by half", but Sir Peter tells him about the



milliner; Charles tears down the screen and reveals Lady Teazle just as Joseph reappears.

Now that all the damage is done, Charles leaves them to it.

Joseph tries to explain his way out of it, but Lady Teazle accuses him of seducing her, and how she regrets it, having heard how much Sir Peter loves her.

Sir Peter now accuses Joseph.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Is it worse, as Joseph suggests, to have stories spread about you that are untrue? Or is that simply a way that Joseph uses to get Lady Teazle to have sex with him? If everyone believes something bad about you that you haven't done, is it now acceptable for you to do the thing you are accused of?

The scene between Lady Teazle and Joseph can be very sexy: in Declan Donnellan's 1998 production, Joseph and Lady Teazle slowly removed their clothes to make explicit the meaning of this scene. How would you go about directing this scene to bring out the erotic tension implicit in the scene?

The behaviour of Joseph and the attitudes of Sir Peter are typical of their age. It is unacceptable for Joseph to have a mistress of his own class (like Lady Teazle), but perfectly fine for him to be carrying on an affair with a working class French milliner. Compare the attitudes of Lady Sneerwell et al in Act One Scene One towards women who sleep with men from a different class. How does this reflect the double standards of the late eighteenth century? What sexual double standards are there in our own time to compare to this?

What forces Lady Teazle to change her mind and accuse Joseph? To what extent is she prompted by Sir Peter's generosity (that she overheard)? How ambiguous is her "repentance"?

**ACT FIVE SCENE ONE:**

Joseph is waiting to see Sir Oliver in the form of Mr Stanley, though he is ill-disposed to see him.

Rowley and Sir Oliver come in; Rowley dismisses Joseph's generosity being merely something he pretends to do, rather than something actual.

Sir Oliver and Joseph are left alone together. Joseph says he feels for Stanley and wishes he could do more to help him. He claims that Sir Oliver has given him so little to live on, as a result of the avarice of old age, and that he has lent a lot of his own money to support Charles. He offers to help Mr Stanley when he can.

When Joseph is alone, he regrets having been given such a generous reputation, as it encourages people to ask him for money.

Rowley comes to inform Joseph that his uncle has arrived back from India and wishes to see him. Joseph panics, and wants to get Stanley back so that he can give him some money.

**QUESTIONS:**

Everyone believes Joseph, yet all the audience know him to be a hypocrite. If you were acting Joseph, how do you act him so that he is convincing to everyone around him? Try different ways of performing this scene, so that you can make him as convincing as possible.

**ACT FIVE SCENE TWO:**

At the Teazles', Mrs Candour wants to see Lady Teazle, to confirm the story she has heard, that Sir Peter discovered Lady Teazle with Charles.

Sir Benjamin arrives, having heard she was discovered with Joseph, and Sir Peter was wounded in the side, in the duel they had, with swords.

Lady Sneerwell arrives, and she and Mrs Candour complain about Lady Teazle. She too has heard Lady Teazle was discovered with Joseph, but nothing about a duel.

Crabtree arrives, and confirms Sir Peter was wounded in the throat, by a bullet from Charles. Crabtree's version has more details in it, so more people are inclined to believe it.

When Sir Oliver appears, they all believe he is Sir Peter's doctor, until Sir Peter appears, fit and well. When they try to commiserate with Sir Peter over the misfortunes of his marriage, he will have none of it. He throws them out of his house.

Sir Oliver and Rowley admit they have been to see Joseph and Charles, and they tease Sir Peter about his respect for Joseph. Sir Oliver leaves to go to Joseph's house. Rowley persuades Sir Peter to go in to the crying Lady Teazle and forgive her: his marriage will be stronger as a result, and he will be able to resist people's laughter if he forgives her.

**QUESTIONS:**

Is this scene, about the different ways rumours get around, realistic? Is it supposed to be? Compare to the story about Miss Piper and the twins in Act One Scene One (ll.293-310). Has this story been planted so that this scene of confusion and rumour feels more likely?

Re-read Crabtree's version of the duel. Does the accumulation of interesting but totally irrelevant details make the story feel more or less likely? Why? What do details add to a story?

Why does Sir Peter defend Lady Teazle to her "friends"? Is it just pride, or has he forgiven her? Why?

Is Rowley's advice to Sir Peter sound? Should he forgive her, just to appear stronger and better in public?

**ACT FIVE SCENE THE LAST (SCENE THREE):**

Lady Sneerwell argues with Joseph about the possibility that Charles may now have Sir Peter's blessing to marry Maria. Joseph tries to remain calm. Lady Sneerwell reveals how deeply in love she has been with Charles, whereas Joseph has only been attracted to Maria's money.

Joseph reminds her that, while Snake is still loyal to them, they still have the forged letters against Charles to support them, and Snake will say that Charles is already engaged to Lady Sneerwell.

Lady Sneerwell goes, and Sir Oliver arrives: Joseph believes he is Old Stanley and tries to get rid of him before Sir Oliver arrives. Sir Oliver suggests he might do better if he asked for help from Sir Oliver directly.

Charles arrives and finds Joseph (apparently) having a fight with his money-broker.

Sir Peter, Lady Teazle, Rowley and Maria arrive to find the two Surfaces manhandling their uncle.

All is revealed, and the Surfaces realise they have been tricked.

Sir Oliver lists the faults of both Joseph and Charles, supported by Sir Peter and Lady Teazle.

Joseph tries to defend himself, but Charles doesn't bother: he did what he did. Sir Oliver forgives him.

Maria believes the story about Charles and Lady Sneerwell, so is prepared to give him up. Joseph supports the story, and produces Lady Sneerwell.

Rowley brings on Snake, who has been paid double what Lady Sneerwell paid him "to speak the truth".

Lady Teazle rejects the "School For Scandal" and hands back her "diploma".

Lady Sneerwell leaves, cursing Lady Teazle with "May your husband live these fifty years", a sentiment which Lady Teazle now (apparently) approves.

Joseph follows Lady Sneerwell off, and Snake asks that no one tells of his one moment of goodness, as it will ruin his reputation.

Charles wants to marry Maria as soon as possible: she has apparently given consent with her eyes. She denies it.

Sir Peter says that he and Lady Teazle intend to be happy together.

Charles makes no promises to reform, but says that, with Maria's guidance, he will try.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

The passion Lady Sneerwell reveals for Charles seems to be very unexpected. Why do you think Sheridan has placed this passion so late in the play?

The revelation scene is very quick, with the two Surfaces exchanging six words between them. Why do you think this is effective? Why did Sheridan not make this moment longer?

Why does Maria, having defended Charles for the whole of the play, suddenly give up on him now?

Why is this the first scene that Sheridan has given where Charles and Maria are onstage together? Is there any passion between them?

Do we believe that Sir Peter or Lady Teazle have learnt enough to make their marriage work? Why? How would you direct this scene to make that message clearer?

Many people, including Sheridan's father, saw Sheridan as a combination of the two Surface brothers. Sheridan saw himself more as a reformed Charles. Do you find Charles as sympathetic? Why? Do you really believe his marriage to Maria will change him? Does Sheridan?

**EPILOGUE:**

Written by George Colman, and originally performed by Frances Abington, who played Lady Teazle. She states that she is fed up of all this scandal in town, and she will go and live peacefully with her husband in the country. She (Frances Abington) will quit doing comedy and sign up to do dark tragedy next year.

**QUESTIONS:**

Do we believe that Lady Teazle will be happy back in the country?

Frances Abington, the original speaker of this epilogue, had just been exposed as the mistress of Lord Shelburne a few weeks before the opening night. Why do you think Sheridan made her the speaker of these lines? How ironic do you think he wants us to understand the moral of this play?

The idea of an epilogue is to alternate between the character played and the actress playing her. How much of this speech is about Lady Teazle, and how much really about the actress? See what you can divide between them, and which parts are equally valid for both.



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