

George Bernard Shaw's  
*Arms and the Man*

Study Guide

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# Arms and the Man

Welcome to *Arms and the Man*. We hope that this study guide will help you further your understanding and enjoyment of one of G.B. Shaw's most popular comedies. The Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival has a strong belief in the relationship between the actor and the audience because, without either one, there is no theater. We hope that this study guide will help bring a better understanding of the plot, themes, and characters in this play so that you can more fully enjoy the theatrical experience.

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**This guide was written to correspond to the following Sunshine State Standards:**

### **The Arts**

**Skills and Techniques** - The student understands and applies arts techniques, media and processes.

**Creation and Communication** - The student creates and communicates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas using knowledge of structures and functions of the arts.

**Cultural and Historical Connections** - The student understands the arts in relation to history and culture.

**Aesthetic and Critical Analysis** - The student analyzes, evaluates, and responds to characteristics of works of art.

### **Language Arts**

**Writing** - The student uses the writing process effectively.

**Listening, Viewing, & Speaking** - The student uses listening strategies effectively.

**Language** - The student understands the nature and power of language.

## Meet the Characters

**Captain Bluntschli:** A professional soldier from Switzerland. He is roughly 35 years old. He is working as an officer for the Servian military fighting for hire against the Bulgarian army. When his line was broken and his forces scattered by a Bulgarian cavalry charge, he took refuge in Raina's room. He is worldly, cool-headed, and pragmatic, with a sense of humor about his situation and the world.

**Raina Petkoff:** The only daughter of one of the wealthiest families in Bulgaria. Her father is a major in the Bulgarian army. She is young and beautiful and intensely conscious of that fact. She has many romantic ideals about love, nobility, courage and beauty, but she is not above using them to get what she wants.

**Catherine Petkoff:** Raina's mother. She has a powerful and commanding presence that even her husband respects. She is a smart and capable woman over forty, who is determined to be a Viennese lady. To that end, she wears a fashionable tea gown on all occasions.

**Major Petkoff:** Raina's Father. He is a cheerful, excitable, insignificant, unpolished man of about 50, naturally unambitious except when it comes to his income and his importance in local society. Just now he is greatly pleased with the military rank which the war has thrust on him as it makes him a man of consequence in his town.

**Major Sergius Saranoff:** Engaged to Raina. He is dashing and romantically handsome. He is observant, but what he observes constantly disappoints his romantic ideals for the world. Not even he can live up to his ideals. This has created an ironic and slightly cynical air of general brooding that suits him well.

**Louka:** Louka is a maidservant in the Petkoff household. She is handsome, but proud. She is so defiant that her servility to Raina is almost insolent. She is afraid of Catherine, but even with her goes as far as she dares. Very ambitious, she has the greatest contempt for those who serve willingly.

**Nicola:** Head Servant in the Petkoff household. He is a middle-aged man of cool temperament and low but clear and keen intelligence. He is complacent about his station as a servant and values himself on his rank in servility. He has the imperturbability of the accurate calculator who has no illusions. A very intelligent and capable man, he plans to open his own shop eventually.

## Plot Summary

### ACT I

The play begins in Raina's bedroom. It is an odd mix of the expensively grand and tastelessly cheap. Raina stands out on her balcony enjoying the idea that she makes the lovely evening even more so. She wears a fur dressing gown worth three times the room's furniture. Catherine, her mother, enters and tells Raina that there has been a great battle. The war between Bulgaria and Serbia may have been decided by this great victory. Leading the daring charge was Raina's fiancée: Major Sergius Saranoff. The routed forces of the enemy are being hunted through the streets of the city.

Their maid servant, Louka, enters and informs the rejoicing mother and daughter of orders that the windows must be kept shuttered and barred, lest escaping soldiers or errant bullets get in. Raina's window does not bolt, but she closes the shutter and hides from the gunfire under her covers. It is then that a bedraggled-looking Servian officer climbs in her window.

Raina is not about to be intimidated and the two talk for quite a while. An officer of the Bulgarian army requests to search the room, as some people reported seeing a man climb in. Raina hides the Servian officer and convinces the other soldiers that there is nobody there.

The soldier reveals that his gun has no cartridges and that, in fact, he generally carries chocolates where they should be. He is a professional soldier and knows that chocolates and food are more important in the long run than bullets. Raina contemptuously gives him the last of her chocolate cremes and he gratefully eats them. Rather than allowing him to take the chance of capture and execution, Raina convinces the Officer (he isn't hard to convince) to rely upon her and her mother's good will. She leaves to enlist the help of her mother and when Raina and Catherine return to the room, the Officer has fallen asleep from stress and exhaustion. They wake him, dress him in an old coat of the Major's, and sneak him out safely.

### ACT II

In the courtyard of the Petkoff house, Nicola is lecturing Louka about her insolence towards her employers. She scorns Nicola for his servility, but he knows the way things are and talks to her of practicalities and the real world. She will hear none of it.

Major Petkoff comes into the garden. He has just returned from the newly finished war. Treaties have been signed, and the two sides have begun diplomatic relations again. Petkoff is very glad to be home. Catherine runs out to greet him and they talk about the state of the two nations and of their own social status.

Sergius Saranoff arrives. Before he is brought around to the courtyard, Catherine presses Petkoff to arrange a promotion for their daughter's fiancée, but Petkoff assures her that it will not be very likely. Though his charge was brave, and worked, it was

only through luck. It was actually a foolish move that only succeeded because of a technical problem in the enemy's machine guns. Nobody will give Saranoff a higher rank which would mean even more men to risk.

Saranoff realizes that his charge was "the cradle and the grave" of his military career and he announces his intention to retire. Raina arrives right on cue (Catherine remarks that her daughter waits for such moments).

Talking to Petkoff, Saranoff mentions an odd Swiss soldier they met during a prisoner exchange. He was an interesting fellow and definitely got the better of them in the trade. He told them a very interesting story about a spectacular escape from the Bulgarian forces. It involved crawling in the window of a young lady's bedroom and, with the assistance of the young lady and her mother, his escape in an old house-coat. This shocks Raina and Catherine, but both hide it well.

The major heads to the library to finish some plans for the military movements as they head back home. Saranoff and Raina are left alone. They trade romantic endearments and mutually worship each other's qualities. Raina convinces Saranoff to go for a walk with her and runs into the house to change dresses for the walk.

Saranoff takes the opportunity to drop his façade of courtly love and flirts with Louka. He is conflicted about the propriety of his own actions and varies between loving Louka and chastising himself, flirting and then apologizing. She is attracted to him, but also insulted by his actions. She hints that Raina isn't as innocent as Saranoff thinks, and he becomes angry, bruising her arms in his grip.

Raina enters to take Saranoff for a walk, but Catherine interrupts them, telling Saranoff that the Major needs his help with figuring out the troop movements. Saranoff promises to return in five minutes and runs into the Library. Raina admits to her mother that she isn't really as taken with Saranoff as she pretends to be.

Raina leaves as Louka re-enters to inform Catherine that a Servian Officer named Bluntschli has come to visit. It quickly becomes clear that this is the "Chocolate Crème Soldier"- the man they helped to escape. He has come to return the old house coat. Catherine sees him secretly in the courtyard and asks him to leave as quickly as possible.

He says he understands and begins to leave as Major Petkoff and Saranoff enter. Recognizing the soldier, they greet him warmly and insist that he stay at the Petkoff home. He tries to back out, but they are insistent. Raina runs in and, recognizing Bluntschli, calls him her "Chocolate Crème Soldier" in shock. She and Catherine have to cover quickly for her slip. Finally, with Raina insisting that he stay as well, Bluntschli agrees to prolong his visit for a few days.

### ACT III

The library, later that afternoon. It really isn't much of a 'library' but the Petkoffs are enormously proud of it as a symbol of their wealth. Major Petkoff sits reading a paper. Bluntschli is studiously focused on writing the orders for troop movements that Petkoff and Saranoff couldn't figure out. He hands each completed order to Saranoff to sign. Saranoff is at once awed and jealous of Bluntschli's military knowledge. Catherine sits working on sewing, while Raina poses gazing out the window.

The major complains that he misses his old house-coat. He can't find it anywhere. Little does he know that his wife gave it to Bluntschli in his escape. Now returned, Catherine tells Petkoff to look in an upstairs closet, but the major insists that he's checked the closet a dozen times. He sends a servant to check once more, and Nicola enters with the house-coat. Amazed and a bit confused, the major happily dons his favorite garment.

Finishing the orders, Bluntschli sends the Major and Sergius out to dispatch them to the troops. Left alone, Raina teases Bluntschli about the coat and his escape. The conversation becomes serious as she blames Bluntschli for forcing her to tell the only two lies she has ever told- one to the officer searching her room in Act I, and the other to her father to cover for calling him her "chocolate crème soldier". Bluntschli laughs at the idea that she could be so innocent. Indeed, she is not. Once she is through raging at him, she admits that he's right. She is impressed- he is the only person to actually take her so seriously.

She asks him if he liked the portrait she sneaked into the pocket of the house-coat, but Bluntschli has never seen it. He did not go through the pockets of the coat when he escaped. Raina realizes that the portrait, which she inscribed "to my chocolate crème soldier" is likely still in the pocket of the coat.

Louka enters with mail for Bluntschli. He receives a telegram informing him of his father's death and his inheritance. He exits to pack, as he must be leaving very soon to take care of the arrangements. Louka compares him unfavorably to Saranoff and Raina leaves, offended.

Nicola again tries to curb Louka's ambition and insolence. They are engaged, and he would like her to be content with the life ahead of her. If she can not be, she will quickly be discharged. She keeps getting more and more insolent with Raina. Louka, however, just despises Nicola's servility all the more.

Sergius enters and Nicola leaves to let them be alone. Sergius apologizes for hurting her, but says that he is "never sorry" for anything. Again, he varies between his desires and his ideals. Louka calls him a coward. She says that he refuses to marry her simply because of station, and that is cowardly. Were she Empress of Russia, she claims, she would marry whom she pleased and show her own bravery.

Getting carried away, Louka tells Saranoff that Raina is really in love with Bluntschli and that it was Raina who helped him escape. Saranoff at first refuses to believe it, then rages. Louka continues to taunt him about his own infidelities. Incensed, Saranoff swears to Louka that if he ever holds her again, it will be as his fiancée.

Bluntschli enters and Sergius challenges him to a duel. He is shocked and hasn't any idea why, but if Sergius is determined, he will fight. Raina enters and Sergius makes his grievance clear. He accuses Raina of secretly trysting with Bluntschli. They both deny this and it is true, neither has done anything inappropriate. Bluntschli tries to help Sergius repair things with Raina, but it is too late. Saranoff's philandering with Louka comes out, and Louka is found eavesdropping on the conversation. Now both Louka and Raina proceed to berate Sergius who, while deserving, is totally incapable of defending himself.

Petkoff enters and everything comes out. The portrait addressed to "the chocolate crème soldier" is found, Sergius breaks off his engagement with Raina. Then, he takes Louka's hand and, once she reminds him of his oath, he swears to marry her. Nicola quietly gives up his claim on her. Bluntschli, recognizing Nicola's intelligence and dedication suggests that he has an excellent position running hotels for him.

Bluntschli intends to leave, but Saranoff deduces the Officer's real reason for his visit. He must be in love with Raina. Since he can not deny this, Bluntschli then tells Petkoff that he intends to court Raina for his wife. Catherine objects to her daughter marrying a poor officer in the Swiss Army. Now Bluntschli admits to his inheritance and makes it clear that he is a VERY wealthy man. Raina initially objects, saying that it was the poor officer that she was interested in, but Bluntschli makes it clear that he is quite the same man, regardless of wealth. He is her "chocolate crème soldier."

## Discussion Questions:

### 1) Ideals vs. Pragmatism

Which characters have illusions about themselves and the world they live in? How do these illusions help them? How do they hinder them? Who is pragmatic and sees the world as it is? How does this view help them? How does it hurt them?

### 2) Bravery

What different kinds of bravery are displayed throughout the story? Who shows the most bravery in the play?

### 3) Station vs. Power

How do people display their social status? Who has the most power? Is it always the people with the highest rank? Do servants have power?

### 4) Soldiers

Who is the best soldier? What makes them the best soldier? What is the difference between Saranoff's kind of soldier, and Bluntschli's?

### 5) A Woman's Place

Who really runs the household, Petkoff or Catherine? Who holds the power in the relationships? How do the women in this play prove themselves to be just as powerful and intelligent, if not more so, than the men. They may not have been allowed in actual battle at the time, but what kind of battles do the women in this play fight?

## Complete Learning Plans

This LEARNING PLAN is designed for Grades 5 - 8

**Objectives:** Some younger students may find it difficult to connect to the manners and façade that Shaw mocks in his comedy. This lesson will help them to identify with the actions of the characters. Through the exploration of melodrama and societal roles, students will find that the actions of the characters are very similar to their own.

**Standards and Benchmarks:** LA.A.1.3, LA.C.1.3, LA.C.2.3, LA.C.3.3, LA.D.2.3, TH.A.1.3, TH.D.1.3

**Materials Needed:** Included scenes, pencil and paper

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### Suggested Lesson Plan:

- 1) Hand out roles and assign scene partners. Make sure that for every Raina-Sergius scene, there is at least one Sergius-Louka or Raina-Catherine scene for contrast. **For more advanced students:** Assign each group the Sergius-Raina scene *and* one of the contrasting scenes.
- 2) Read the scenes over in class. Discuss the differences between the way the characters act and speak between the Sergius-Raina scene and the others.
- 3) Have the students performing the Sergius-Raina scene play up the melodrama. Encourage them to enjoy the over-done actions to go with their over-done language.
- 4) Follow each Sergius-Raina scene with one of the other two scenes. Allow students to drop the façade and melodrama for these scenes and play them simply.
- 5) Discuss that these are the same people. Discuss the differences between how the characters talk when in different situations.
- 6) Have students give (or write) examples from their own life in which they have played different 'roles' for different situations (friends, parents, teachers, etc.).

**Assessment:** The students should have a greater connection to the characters in the show and a greater understanding of those characters' motivations. If students can identify with Sergius or Raina in their own lives you have succeeded.

## Raina and Sergius Scene

*Act II - Sergius has just returned from the war as a hero. He has come to visit Raina's house. They are finally left alone together in the garden to chat for the first time since he left for the war.*

**RAINA:** My hero! My king.

**SERGIUS:** My queen!

**RAINA:** How I have envied you, Sergius! You have been out in the world, on the field of battle, able to prove yourself there worthy of any woman in the world; whilst I have had to sit at home inactive,--dreaming--useless--doing nothing that could give me the right to call myself worthy of any man.

**SERGIUS:** Dearest, all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking on at him!

**RAINA:** And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble\* thought.

**SERGIUS:** My lady, and my saint!

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\* **Ignoble:** Of low birth or family; not noble; Not honorable, elevated, or generous

## Sergius and Louka Scene

**Act II** - Immediately after the Sergius-Raina Scene. Raina has just run into the house to change so she and Sergius can take a walk together. When Louka, the Petkoff's servant, enters to clear up breakfast, Sergius tries to flirt with her.

**SERGIUS:** Louka: do you know what the higher love is?

**LOUKA:** No, sir.

**SERGIUS:** Very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Louka. One feels the need of some relief after it.

**LOUKA:** Oh, sir, I'm surprised at you!

**SERGIUS:** I am surprised at myself, Louka. What would Sergius, the hero, say if he saw me now? What would Sergius, the apostle\* of the higher love, say if he saw me now? What would the half dozen Sergiuses who keep popping in and out of this handsome figure of mine say?

**LOUKA:** I shall be disgraced. Have you no common sense? I know the difference between the sort of manner you and she put on before one another and the real manner.

**SERGIUS:** Damnation! How dare you?

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\* **Apostle:** A passionate adherent; a strong supporter.

## Raina and Catherine Scene

**Act II** - *Sergius has left Raina with her mother so that he can help with a military question in the house. Catherine is shocked that Sergius and the Major have actually met their 'Chocolate Crème Soldier' (the man they helped escape), but Raina doesn't care who knows. Catherine warns her that there would be a scandal if anyone found out Raina sheltered a strange man in her room.*

**CATHERINE:** Oh, Raina, Raina! Will anything ever make you straightforward? If Sergius finds out, it is all over between you.

**RAINA:** Oh, I know Sergius is your pet. I sometimes wish you could marry him instead of me. You would just suit him. You would pet him, and spoil him, and mother him to perfection.

**CATHERINE:** Well, upon my word!

**RAINA:** I always feel a longing to do or say something dreadful to him--to shock his propriety\*. I don't care whether he finds out about the chocolate cream soldier or not. I half hope he may.

**CATHERINE:** And what should I be able to say to your father, pray?

**RAINA:** Oh, poor father! As if he could help himself!

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\* **Propriety:** Correct or appropriate behavior

## Complete Lesson Plans

This LEARNING PLAN is designed for Age/ Grades 7 - 12

**Objectives:** One of Shaw's intentions in writing *Arms and the Man* was to show the foolishness of war. He intended to present audiences with the reality behind their foolish ideas of clean, pretty, honorable war. Unfortunately, his message was largely lost on his audience. They enjoyed the comedy, but soon after plunged into the first World War. The message, however, remains current as ever. This exercise is intended to help students connect to the ugly truths that lie below the surface of Shaw's comedy and to those same issues in their own lives.

**Standards and Benchmarks:** LA.A.1.4, LA.A.2.4, LA.B.2.4, LA.C.1.4, LA.E.2.4, TH.C.1.4, TH.D.1.4, TH.E.1.4,

**Materials Needed:** Included handouts, current newspaper, pencils, paper

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### Suggested Lesson Plan:

- 1) Hand out copies of the propaganda poster examples (or any others you may want to use) provided. Have students discuss what kind of effect and/or message these posters want to convey. Talk about modern recruiting imagery.
- 2) Have students look through newspapers for current examples of news about warfare. How are battles and soldiers represented? Have students bring in an example of a news report or recruiting commercial and discuss what picture of war these elements paint.
- 3) Discuss the differences between Sergius' picture of warfare (the romanticized view) and that of Bluntschli (practical and realistic). Who is the better soldier?
- 4) Discuss the current world view of warfare versus the romanticized ideal that Shaw was writing against. What does Shaw do to get his point across? Have students look for and write down moments during the show when Shaw presents either: **A)** Romantic ideals of warfare or **B)** The unpleasant reality of warfare.
- 5) Have students turn in their findings and write about what point Shaw was making about warfare through the contrast of Sergius and Bluntschli.

**Assessment:** Students should be able to recognize elements of propaganda in their daily life. If they can identify these elements and contrast them with the reality behind those representations, they have succeeded. Students should be able to identify the different ideas about war that each character in the play espouses.



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