

# THE RIVALS

by Richard Brinsley Sheridan



## THE AUTHOR

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) was born in Dublin to a mother who was a playwright and a father who was an actor. He thus came by his talents honestly, though he far exceeded the modest accomplishments of his parents. Already one of the most brilliant and witty dramatists of the English stage before the age of thirty, he gave up his writing and went on to become the owner and producer of the Drury Lane theater, a well-regarded Whig member of the English Parliament, and a popular man-about-town.

Despite his family's poverty, he attended Harrow, a famous prep school, though he appears to have been unhappy there, largely because the rich boys at the school looked down on him because of his humble origins. The bitter taste of his school years drove his later ambitions, both for literary and political success and for acceptance in the highest strata of society. He used his profits from his writing to buy the theater and his profits from the theater to finance his political career and socially-active lifestyle.

Sheridan was a tireless lover and a man who, no matter how much he earned, always managed to spend more. In 1772, he married a lovely young singer named Elizabeth Ann Linley; she had already, before her twentieth birthday, attracted the attention of several wealthy suitors twice her age, but she and Sheridan eloped to France without the knowledge or permission of either set of parents. Though she loved him deeply, he was not a one-woman sort of man, and his constant infidelities led to a temporary separation in 1790. She died of tuberculosis shortly thereafter, and Sheridan married Hester Jane Ogle, a girl half his age, three years later, though again he was frequently unfaithful to his long-suffering wife.

As a writer, Sheridan leaped to the attention of the theater-going public in 1775, when *The Rivals* and *The Duenna*, a light opera, reached the stage. In 1777 he produced his most famous comedy, *The School for Scandal*. After the debut of *The Critic* in 1779, he gave up writing and turned to producing, politics, and high living. As a result of a complete inability to handle money or follow a budget, a lifestyle that far exceeded his income, and lifelong bouts of drunkenness and debauchery, when Sheridan lost his seat in Parliament, he was left as a sick old man, carted off to

the poorhouse by the local constabulary. His second wife stayed by his side to the end, and he died in poverty in July of 1816, but was buried with honors in Westminster Abbey.

*The Rivals* is a comedy of manners, a farce of mistaken identity that has much in common with Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, which came out two years earlier. Like Goldsmith's comedy, a main character masquerades as someone of a lower class to gain romantic advantage, the young lovers must overcome the interference of a country bumpkin and an elderly rich aunt, and a second couple provides a subplot and foil to the main romance. Perhaps the most memorable character in *The Rivals* is the elderly aunt, Mrs. Malaprop, who consistently butchers the English language, taking her name from the solecism in which she so frequently engages. After the first performance of *The Rivals*, it was panned by the critics, and Sheridan hastily revised it in less than two weeks, shortening it by over an hour, making some of the characters more sympathetic, and cleaning up the language, after which it was praised enthusiastically.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Sir Anthony Absolute - A wealthy country gentleman who assumes that those around him will naturally obey his wishes, he has a terrible temper but is also quick to forgive.
- Captain Jack Absolute - Sir Anthony's son, he is enamored of Lydia Languish, and has disguised himself as Ensign Beverley in order to win her hand. Despite the revelation of his deception, he and Lydia wind up together.
- Fag - Jack "gentleman's gentleman," he often carries messages and transmits information.
- Julia Melville - Sir Anthony's ward and Lydia's cousin, she is in love with Faulkland. She is easily the most sensible of the four young lovers in the story.
- Mrs. Malaprop - Elderly aunt of Lydia who controls her fortune, she butchers the English language in accordance with her name.
- Lydia Languish - Mrs. Malaprop's niece, she is a hopeless romantic as a result of her obsession with romance novels. She longs to fall in love with a poor man like Ensign Beverley, elope, and be deprived of her inheritance for love, and is terribly disappointed when she finds out that Jack is wealthy, and that their elders approve of the match.
- Lucy - Mrs. Malaprop's maid, she is adept at playing all sides against the middle for her own benefit. Her willingness to spread the information she knows for pecuniary advantage helps drive the plot.
- Faulkland - A friend of Jack Absolute, he is in love with Julia Melville. He is a melancholy lover who is only happy when he is miserable, and is constantly convincing himself that Julia doesn't really love him and taking her words in the worst possible light. She nonetheless forgives him in the end, and they get together.

- Bob Acres - A country simpleton who tries to rise in the world by offering himself as a suitor to Lydia, he never has a chance, and is manipulated into a duel he doesn't want by Sir Lucius. He ultimately gives up any claim on Lydia and gladly foregoes the duel.
- David - Bob Acres' servant, he is a cowardly country bumpkin.
- Sir Lucius O'Trigger - An Irish nobleman with a hair-trigger temper who loves to fight duels and encourage others to do the same, he is involved in an anonymous romance by letter with a woman who he thinks is Lydia, but in reality is Mrs. Malaprop. When he finds out he has been deceived, he gladly gives up Lydia to Jack, but refuses to pursue a romance with Mrs. Malaprop.

### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“But you know I lose most of my fortune if I marry without my aunt's consent, till of age; and that is what I have determined to do, ever since I knew the penalty. Nor could I love the man who would wish to wait a day for the alternative.” (Lydia Languish, Iii)

“Obligation! why a water spaniel would have done as much! Well, I should never think of giving my heart to a man because he could swim!” (Lydia Languish, Iii)

“Thought does not become a young woman.” (Mrs. Malaprop, Iii)

“It is not to be wondered at, ma'am - all this is the natural consequence of teaching girls to read. Had I a thousand daughters, by Heaven! - I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet.” (Sir Anthony Absolute, Iii)

“Why what difference does that make? ... If you have the estate, you must take it with the live stock on it, as it stands.” (Sir Anthony Absolute, Iii)

“Ah! my soul, what a life will we then live! Love shall be our idol and support! we will worship him with a monastic strictness; abjuring all worldly toys, to center every thought and action there. Proud of calamity, we will enjoy the wreck of wealth; while the surrounding gloom of adversity shall make the flame of our pure love show doubly bright.” (Jack Absolute, IIIiii)

“Oh, there's nothing to be hopes for from her! she's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile.” (Mrs. Malaprop, IIIiii)

“Now I think he has given you the greatest provocation in the world. Can a man commit a more heinous offense against another than to fall in love with the same woman?” (Lucius O'Trigger, IIIiv)

“What the devil signifies right, when your honor is concerned? Do you think Achilles, or my little Alexander the Great, ever inquired where the right lay? No, by my soul, they drew their broadswords, and they left the lazy sons of peace to settle the justice of it.” (Lucius O'Trigger, IIIiv)

ACRES: "Think of that, David - think what it would be to disgrace my ancestors!"

DAVID: "Under favor, the surest way of not disgracing them is to keep as long as you can out of their company." (Ivi)

## NOTES

**Act I, scene 1** - The entire play takes place in Bath, a popular vacation spot for the upper classes, in the course of a single day. In the opening scene, Thomas, the manservant of Sir Anthony Absolute, encounters Fag, gentleman's gentleman to his son, Captain Absolute. Sir Anthony and his retinue have just arrived in Bath, and Fag informs him that Captain Anthony is masquerading as Ensign Beverley in order to win the heart of Lydia Languish, a wealthy young woman who wants to marry for love rather than money and would have no interest in him if she thought he were rich, but that he has to overcome the objections of her wealthy and snobbish aunt Mrs. Malaprop. Thomas then tells Fag that Sir Anthony's ward, Julia Melville, is engaged to be married to Mr. Faulkland.

**Act I, scene 2** - Lydia, who is devoted to sentimental romance novels, has sent her maid Lucy to find some, but Lucy reports that all the books her mistress requested are not to be found, and returns with a poor-quality collection. Soon, Lydia's cousin Julia arrives. The two are best friends, though Julia is somewhat plainer and much more sensible than her cousin. Lydia tells Julia that she is in love with Ensign Beverley, but that her aunt has forbidden her to see him because of an offensive letter she intercepted. Meanwhile, Mrs. Malaprop herself has fallen in love with a gentleman named Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and is corresponding with him by using a pen name. Lydia admits that, in order to pique Beverley's interest, she wrote a letter to herself accusing him of seeing another girl. He hotly denied it, of course, and she had not seen him since. Lydia is determined to marry beneath her social station, and lose her fortune in the process, because that is what romantic heroines do in the novels she reads. She then asks Julia how her romance with Faulkland is going, and Julia, while acknowledging that he is definitely a slow mover and that she has not informed him of their presence in Bath, then goes on to praise the quality of his character, in addition to the fact that he saved her life in a boating accident. Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop then arrive, and Julia beats a hasty retreat to avoid having to listen to Lydia's aunt, who constantly butchers the King's English, while Lydia quickly hides her romance novels. Mrs. Malaprop scold Lydia for not seeking her consent for marriage, and Lydia insists she will never do so. She then sends Lydia to her room. Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony then engage in a conversation about how horrible it is for girls to be educated, and affirm that libraries are the seed-bed of all evil. Sir Anthony has proposed an engagement between Lydia and his son Jack (Captain Absolute), not realizing that his son is already wooing the young lady in the character of Ensign Beverley. Mrs. Malaprop agrees to the arrangement, and says that she will send away Bob Acres, a young bumpkin who had shown interest in Lydia. Sir Anthony says he will beat his son if necessary to get him to agree, and proposes that Mrs. Malaprop starve Lydia for a few days if necessary to gain her consent. Mrs. Malaprop sends Lucy with a letter for Lucius O'Trigger. After everyone else has left, Lucy schemes as to how she might enrich herself by betraying everyone's secrets to everyone else. She has taken money for helping the Lydia and Beverley get together, intends to betray them to Mrs. Malaprop when the inducement is right, has taken money from Bob Acres to deliver letters that never reached their destination, and has convinced O'Trigger that he is wooing Lydia rather than her elderly aunt.

**Act II, scene 1** - In Captain Absolute's rented quarters, Fag is telling him of his father's arrival in Bath. Fag assures him that he lied about his reason for being there, but in the process lies to his master about his conversation with Thomas. Jack discovers that Faulkland is upstairs changing, but is not yet aware of Sir Anthony and Julia's arrival. Faulkland comes down, moping about in his love for Julia, and encourages Jack to reveal his true identity to Lydia and gain the consent of his father and her aunt. Jack has no doubt that he could pull it off, but suspects that Lydia would want nothing to do with something so routine as a normal arranged marriage, public wedding, and inherited fortune. Faulkland, meanwhile, worries about the state of Julia's health, and becomes ecstatic when Jack tells him that she is not only in perfect health, but also in Bath. Bob Acres then arrives; he hates Ensign Beverley, his rival for Lydia's affections, but is quite friendly with Jack Absolute, not realizing that the two are the same man. Acres is a dim-witted country boy trying very hard to impress his social betters. Having been introduced to Faulkland, he assures him that Julia is in good health and quite happy. Faulkland, of course, then becomes depressed because she has been happy, singing and dancing while separated from him, and gets Jack to confirm that he has been anything but the life of the party while separated from his dear Julia. Faulkland leaves in despair. Bob then speaks of his love for Lydia, and tells Jack how he hopes she will be impressed by his new genteel manners and dress; Jack humors him, barely avoiding cracking a smile. Bob then leaves, and Sir Anthony arrives. He announces to Jack that he intends to give him his inheritance within two weeks - a substantial estate, and that he has arranged a good marriage for him. Jack refuses to accept the estate unless he can know the lady who comes with it, but his father refuses to divulge her identity, insisting that it really doesn't matter. Jack tells his father that his heart belongs to another, but Sir Anthony tells him to break it off; after all, this is business. Jack bluntly refuses, and Sir Anthony flies into a rage, threatening not only to disinherit him, but to exclude him from the family. He then gives Jack six and a half hours to change his mind, or else he will never speak to him again, then storms out of the room. Fag enters, and Jack vents his spleen on him and storms out of the room in identical fashion to his father. Fag then does the same to a small errand boy, completing the trio of similar exits.

**Act II, scene 2** - In the promenade, Lucy meets Lucius O'Trigger, an Irishman described by Sheridan as "chivalry on the verge of senility." He is an aficionado of dueling. She gives him a letter from Mrs. Malaprop (the language is inimitable), and he sighs with delight, believing that the writer is Lydia, a young lady of seventeen. He then pays Lucy money and gives her a kiss, an item with which he is apparently rather free. He wonders how he can get the old lady's consent, and says he is anxious for the marriage because he is so poor. After he leaves, Fag arrives, and Lucy tells him that Sir Anthony had proposed to Mrs. Malaprop that Jack marry Lydia. Fag, chuckling at the confusion this promises to cause, leaves the scene.

**Act III, scene 1** - Fag by now has told Jack that his father intends to marry him to Lydia. Jack quickly apologizes to his father for his previous rudeness and agrees to accept his choice for a wife sight unseen, though he does not inform him that he already has been wooing the lady in question under another identity. In fact, he claims never to have heard of her, and insists he is willing to marry her only to satisfy his father.

**Act III, scene 2** - The scene opens with Faulkland in Julia's dressing room, waiting for his love to return and fretting, as usual. When Julia arrives, he reproves her for having been happy while apart from him. She insists that she was merely pretending to be happy to conceal her sorrow at being

separated from her true love. He says that he often wished himself ugly so that he could be sure her affection had nothing to do with his appearance, but when she candidly admits that there are others more handsome than he, he questions the sincerity of her love for him, since true love will consider the loved one the fairest of all. The conversation continues, with Faulkland deliberately putting the worst possible construction on every assertion of love Julia makes. She finally breaks down and runs from the room in tears. Faulkland then alternately accuses himself of cruelty and Julia of coquetry and inconstancy, then leaves the house in despair.

**Act III, scene 3** - In Mrs. Malaprop's drawing room, Jack brings a letter of introduction from his father. Jack flatters her outrageously, about which she is inordinately pleased, but informs him that her niece has attached her affections to a beggarly ensign. Jack insists that he does not consider this an insurmountable problem, but Mrs. Malaprop then brings out a recent letter from Beverley, which she has intercepted. She asks Jack to read the letter, in which he describes Lydia's aunt as "an old she-dragon ... [who] deck[s] her chat with hard words which she doesn't understand." Jack sympathizes with the old lady, and suggests that she allow Lydia to continue corresponding with Beverley, even to the point of planning an elopement, at which time Jack will step in, apprehend the scoundrel, and make off with Lydia himself. Mrs. Malaprop, of course, thinks this is a wonderful idea. She then calls Lydia downstairs; Jack, fearing that to reveal himself is to lose Lydia's affections, decides to see if she recognizes him in his captain's garb. Lydia enters, complaining of her trials in having to meet with one who is not her true love. When Jack turns, she recognizes him as the man she knows as Beverley, but he quiets her by telling her that he has fooled her aunt by passing himself off as Captain Absolute. They exchange flourishes of flowery love language, in which Jack is obviously insincere, knowing that Lydia is a sucker for such talk. Mrs. Malaprop then enters at the side, and Lydia, for her benefit, insults Jack to his face, insisting that she will be true to Beverley and have nothing to do with Captain Absolute. Mrs. Malaprop responds angrily to Lydia, but Jack keeps a stiff upper lip and assures her that he still has hope of winning her over.

**Act III, scene 4** - In Bob Acres' rented lodgings, Bob is trying on his new clothes, which he thinks are the latest fashion, but which merely make him look ridiculous - as Sheridan puts it, "half country race-track jockey and half town sharper." When he asks his servant David how he looks, the latter assures him that he looks wonderful, and that the transformation is so complete that the people at home wouldn't even recognize him; indeed, even his dog wouldn't know him. After David leaves, Bob practices his dancing steps with little or no success. Then Lucius O'Trigger enters, and Bob complains that he has been displaced in his attempts to win Lydia's hand, he assumes by Ensign Beverley. O'Trigger then tells him that the only solution is to fight a duel. Bob works himself into a frenzy of bravado, and sits down to compose a letter challenging Beverley to a duel. He is ready to vent his spleen, but O'Trigger insists that all the niceties should be observed, and he dictates the letter verbatim. He agrees to witness the duel, but tells Bob that he is considering mounting a challenge himself, to a young captain who insulted his Irish heritage (unaware, of course, that both are ready to challenge the same man).

**Act IV, scene 1** - When David returns, Bob tells him about the impending duel, and David tries to talk him out of it, echoing the description of honor given by Falstaff in *Henry IV, part 1*. Bob refuses to be swayed, however, though his voice and manner belie his words, and tells David that he has sent for his good friend Jack Absolute to be the bearer of the letter containing the challenge. Jack enters, and Bob gives him the letter and asks him to deliver it to Ensign Beverley. Jack agrees

to do so, but when Bob asks him to serve as his second in the duel, Jack answers that such a thing would be improper. Bob responds that Sir Lucius will be his second, and Jack wishes him the best. Before he goes, Bob tells Jack to describe him in ferocious terms to the ensign, hoping against hope that Beverley will refuse to fight; Jack leaves, referring to his friend as “Fighting Bob.”

**Act IV, scene 2** - Meanwhile, in Mrs. Malaprop’s drawing room, she and Lydia are having an argument. The aunt is praising Jack, while Lydia steadfastly praises Beverley. Then Sir Anthony and Jack arrive. Lydia, refusing to see them, turns a chair around to face the wall and sits in it. Jack, in an obvious quandary, tells his father to leave him and Lydia alone; Lydia, facing the wall, wonders why her aunt hasn’t noticed that the real Captain Anthony is not the same man who had visited earlier in the day. Sir Anthony refuses to leave, Jack refuses to speak (knowing that Lydia would recognize his voice and the jig would be up), and Lydia, still in a snit, refuses to turn around. The result: stalemate. Jack, trying to resolve the problem, begins speaking in a disguised voice, much to the consternation of his father. Finally, he whispers to Lydia not to be surprised, but she recognizes his voice, turns joyfully, and identifies him as her Ensign Beverley. Chaos ensues. Jack finally admits the ruse he practices on Lydia, and she sulks because now there will be no romantic elopement. Sir Anthony is proud of his son’s cleverness, but Mrs. Malaprop suddenly realized that she was now face to face with the writer of the insulting letter she had intercepted. Sir Anthony begs her to forgive and forget, and she relents and agrees to do so. Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop gaily make their exit, but when Jack turns to Lydia, she is still as cold as ice. She insists that their relationship must end because of his deception, and he cajoles her to no avail. When Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop reenter expecting to find the lovers in one another’s arms, they are startled to find them at odds. Lydia stalks angrily out of the room, and Sir Anthony makes the mistake of thinking that she is upset because Jack has made improper advances - an idea that cheers him and makes him remember his own conduct during courtship.

**Act IV, scene 3** - Outside, Sir Lucius impatiently awaits Jack’s arrival, intending to challenge him to a duel. When Jack arrives, he initiates a quarrel, but Jack is so preoccupied with Lydia’s bizarre rejection of him that he pays little attention. Jack has no idea what he is talking about, but distractedly agrees to fight; the time and place are the same set by Bob Acres for fighting Beverley. Sir Lucius walks away just as Faulkland arrives. Jack tells him that Lydia has rejected him, and asks him to serve as his second in the duel with Sir Lucius. Faulkland agrees, meanwhile continuing to bemoan his shattered relationship with Julia. A letter arrives from Julia asking in the gentlest of terms for him to come to her, but he then complains that she forgave him too readily. He determines to use the duel to test her love for him.

**Act V, scene 1** - Julia is in her dressing room. Faulkland enters and tells her that he has been drawn into a quarrel and must flee the country immediately. She offers to run away with him and become his wife. He tests her by continuing to come up with new ways to talk her out of it, but she remains steadfast. Faulkland finally admits that he has been testing her and that no such quarrel existed. She is infuriated by his lack of trust (in the original script, she is angry because he proposes that she be his mistress without benefit of marriage), and insists that she can now never be his, and will never belong to another; she then exits the room with quiet dignity. Faulkland, again in despair, leaves shortly thereafter. Lydia then arrives to speak with Julia, hoping her sensible cousin can talk her out of her anger with Jack Absolute. Julia is clearly upset, but will not tell Lydia the reason for her distress. Lydia tells Julia of the trick Jack has played on her, and Julia admits she knew beforehand

what was happening. Lydia continues bemoaning her plight, not even noticing that Julia is suffering as well. Julia then sincerely exhorts Lydia not to let a true lover suffer from her emotional excesses. Mrs. Malaprop, Fag and David then burst in and tell the girls about the impending duels. All leave quickly to try and forestall disaster.

**Act V, scene 2** - Jack, on his way to the duel, meets his father, tries to hide, but is unable to conceal himself. Sir Anthony asks where Jack is going, and he says he is going to try to make up with Lydia. Sir Anthony then spots his sword, and Jack insists he is going to appeal to Lydia's romantic illusions by threatening to fall on his sword if she refuses to forgive him. After Jack leaves, David rushes on and tells Sir Anthony about the impending duels. Sir Anthony realizes he has been deceived, and they make for the dueling ground.

**Act V, scene 3** - The final scene takes place at King's-Mead-Fields, the dueling ground. Bob Acres and Sir Lucius O'Trigger arrive first, the one apprehensive and the other full of confidence. They are anticipating a fight with pistols, and Bob wants the greatest distance possible, while Sir Lucius brusquely insists that a few feet will do nicely, then asks Bob if he has any last wishes or has made a will "in case of accident." As Jack and Faulkland approach, Bob is in full panic mode, but breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Jack instead of the villain Beverley, whom he has yet to lay eyes on. Sir Lucius turns to Faulkland, addresses him as Beverley, and asks him to choose his weapons. Acres knows Faulkland, and is obviously relieved that Beverley has not put in an appearance. Jack tires to get Faulkland to fight in his stead so that Bob will not be disappointed, but Bob assures him that he need not concern himself. Jack then admits that he is Beverley, and offers to fight if Bob still wants to do so. Acres declines the honor, but offers to serve as Sir Lucius' second in his duel with Jack. They draw swords, but before they can fight, Sir Anthony arrives with David, Mrs. Malaprop, Lydia, and Julia. Sir Anthony asks the reason for the duel, and Jack admits he has no idea. Sir Lucius alludes to some vague insult, but Lydia interrupts, saying that she is willing to forgive Jack and restore their relationship. Sir Lucius, thinking she has been the source of the love letters he had been receiving, thinks she is in love with him, but Lydia denies it. Jack apologizes for the imaginary slight, Sir Lucius accepts the apology, and Mrs. Malaprop reveals that she was the author of the love letters. Sir Lucius has no interest in Mrs. Malaprop (in the original the two agree to marry), but Julia and Faulkland make up, and all leave happy.

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Cecily Cardew in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. What particular characteristics are the two playwrights mocking by the ways they portray the two girls? In what ways are they different? How do their characteristics relate to the major themes of the plays?
2. Compare and contrast Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. What particular characteristics are the two playwrights mocking by the ways they portray the two women? In what ways are they different? How do their characteristics relate to the major themes of the plays?

3. Compare and contrast Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Don Quixote in Cervantes' great novel. Both characters have been affected by romantic novels. Have they been affected in the same ways? Are the two authors communicating similar evaluations of romances through these characters? In what significant ways are the characters different, aside from the fact that one is male and the other female?
4. Discuss the complex combination of foils represented by the two young couples in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In what sense are the men foils for each other and the women foils for each other, while within each couple the woman serves as a foil for the man? In what ways does this complicated arrangement enhance the comedy of the play as well as helping to communicate its major themes?
5. Choose one of the two young couples in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and discuss what binds them together. What does Jack see in Lydia, or Faulkland in Julia? Why does Lydia love Jack, and Julia love Faulkland? To what extent does the basis for the relationship about which you choose to write help the playwright to communicate the major themes of the story? Be specific.
6. Compare and contrast the pathetic melancholy of Faulkland in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* with that of Duke Orsino in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Which is the more believable character? Why? Which playwright is more effective in satirizing the sentimental love of which his lovesick character is an exemplar? Why do you think so?
7. In Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*, the playwright makes numerous allusions to Shakespeare for comic purposes. How do these allusions help to carry forward the themes of the play? What do such tactics assume about the audience that will be viewing the play? Could a playwright today make similar assumptions? Why or why not?
8. Compare and contrast the ideas on honor expressed by David in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Falstaff in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1*. While both are intended for comic purposes, which, in its underlying purpose in the play, makes the more serious point? Why do you think this is true? Support your conclusion with specifics from both plays.
9. Compare and contrast the scenes in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in which the true identities of the young men are revealed to their lovers. What are the functions of these scenes in the respective plays? Which do you consider to be the more humorous? Why?
10. Discuss the view of love presented in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. How realistic is the picture of love painted by the playwright? Are there any positive examples of love in the play? What is Sheridan attempting to convey by the way he pictures the lovers?
11. Discuss the theme of forgiveness as it appears in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In the various incidents where forgiveness is granted, is it credible? Why is the credibility of forgiveness important to the themes of the story?

12. Discuss the social criticism present in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. To what aspects of society does Sheridan most object? How does he use his art to criticize them? Be specific, both in your enumeration of aspects of society subject to criticism and in citing quotations and incidents from the play that carry the weight of that criticism.
13. Compare and contrast the pairs of young couples in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Which set of couples is the more credible? Which author constructs the more effective satire of romantic love? Are the answers to the two questions related? Why or why not?
14. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, romance novels play a significant role in creating the mindset that ultimately leads Emma Bovary to ruin. Relate this idea of the power of literature to the treatment of the same subject found in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. In addition to the comic tone of the latter book, how does Flaubert's treatment of this powerful influence differ from that of Sheridan?
15. Compare and contrast William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*. Consider particularly certain parallel characters - the choleric foreigner (Caius and Sir Lucius O'Trigger), the maid who plays both ends against the middle (Mistress Quickly and Lucy), and the malapropism-spouting comic (Mistress Quickly again and Mrs. Malaprop). To what extent do these characters play the same roles in the two stories and how is the treatment of them different?
16. Compare the language in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* with that in his play *The Rivals*. Which, in your opinion, makes greater demands on the audience? Why do you think so? Include specific quotations from the two plays to support your conclusion.
17. Compare and contrast the characters of Joseph in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Jack Absolute in *The Rivals*. Both spend most of the play pretending to be something they are not. Which is the more sympathetic character? Which is more credible? Why? Support your answer with details from the two plays.
18. Compare and contrast the characters of Maria in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Lydia Languish in *The Rivals*. Both girls are the objects of the affections of many men. How are they different? Which is more admirable? Do you believe that they will enjoy happy marriages with the men of their choice? Why or why not?
19. Compare and contrast the characters of Lady Sneerwell in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*. Both are old battle-axes who interfere in the love lives of others and have romantic aspirations themselves. Concentrate on the key features that make them different characters. Does either woman elicit sympathy from the audience? Why or why not?
20. Compare and contrast the characters of Sir Peter in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* and Sir Anthony in *The Rivals*. Which of the two is more of a cartoon figure? Why do you think so? Does this fact add to the humor of the play or detract from its credibility? Why?

21. Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* appeared on the London stage within two years of one another. The two plays have similar plots involving conflicts between parents determined to choose their children's mates and children who have minds of their own on the subject. Compare and contrast the plot devices of mistaken identity used by the two playwrights, as both Kate Hardcastle and Captain Absolute pretend to be someone else in order to appeal to their chosen mates. Which is in your opinion more credible? Which is more humorous? Why?
  
22. In both Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*, we find characters who want to leave their country background and become part of a more sophisticated environment by changing their speech patterns, by learning either to quarrel or to swear like those to whose company they aspire. Compare and contrast the characters of Kastril and Bob Acres. Consider the nature of their ambitions, the ways in which they seek to fulfill them, and the ways in which the playwrights use them as vehicles for their satire.