

# *Rhinoceros*

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For our final project, my group got assigned our first choice, *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco.

This play was set in the 1950s in a small town in France that was neither rich nor poor. The play was first performed in 1960. Eugene Ionesco wrote it as an absurdist play. He took a serious matter and spun it off to be comedic.

Ionesco wrote this play as an anti-Nazi act. It was based on people being stripped of their individuality and uniqueness. Everyone was turning into the same thing. Not one person was different from the next. Society did that to the people of this small town by turning them into rhinoceroses. Ionesco compared that to the Nazis doing that to people, and eliminating anyone who was different.

When I read the play I didn't think of the Nazis or the 1950s. I thought about the message it was sending. I saw that Ionesco was sending a message to people about keeping your individuality. Don't be afraid to be different or to break away from the "norm."

Everyone in the play was the same, and in the end all became rhinoceroses. The only one that stayed a human was a man named Berenger; he is the only person in the town who did his own thing. He was different from everyone else. He did not give into society and act the way everyone else did.

Another thing I thought about after reading this play was how it related to me, and the time I live in now. Would this play be able to send the same message if the given circumstances were different? Would it mean anything if the play was set in our own time instead of in the 1950s?

I think it would work in any time period with a different set of given circumstances. It is a strong message that can relate to anything. Yes, it was written to relate to bad times and the Nazis, but you can change that to fit into things going on in the world today or in the 1960s, 1970s and probably in years to come.

Take a high school setting and all the peer pressure kids have. The play can be set in a high school where kids are being pressured into drugs or sex. All those who give in are the ones who turn into hypothetical rhinoceroses. And the people who dare to be their own person, well they stay who they are. That situation can be set in any decade and any place.

If you look at today's society, you see everyone striving to look the same and act a certain way because of the media and commercials, television and the news all telling us to do, say, and buy certain things. There is not a whole lot of individuality today. Even people who say they are different are still different in a group of people who dress, look, and act the same.

We chose to do our production of the play in the same time period as it was written for, in the 1950s. Even though it can be set in any time or place we all agreed that we liked the setting of it and wanted to leave it the way it was.

We wanted to focus more on sending the message than trying to change the play. I didn't think that the 1950s was a hard time period to relate to.

I want people to walk out of the play with the same message that I got from reading it. I want them not to be afraid to be different. Don't change yourself to please anyone else. Especially young kids and teenagers should see this. They should know that it is okay to be different and be who you are and no one should have anything to say about it. Don't let someone influence you to be different than what you want to be.

Sometimes you can't help but be different, for instance by being another race or ethnicity. You shouldn't be ashamed of that either. That's why the Nazis were trying to change people. They wanted anyone who wasn't like them gone. In today's time I think we have come such a long way that we should all look past each other's differences.

I would love to really do a production of *Rhinoceros* because I believe in the message and believe that everyone should know it. In this generation it is important to be your own person and be different, and I think that people of all ages should know that.

Nominating faculty: Professor Shauna Vey, Theatre 2380, Department of Humanities, School of Arts & Sciences, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

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