

It's About Us!

*By Arnold Johnston
and Deborah Ann Percy*

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It's About Us!

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DEDICATION

For Ella, Bennett, Zoë, and Stella.

STORY OF THE PLAY

A diverse group of high school drama students known as the Rainbow Project is tasked with developing a show to promote the acceptance of diversity. Throughout their rehearsals, important issues like grades, jobs, family commitments, and prejudices are all explored. But art mirrors life a little too closely, and rising tensions threaten the production. In the end, they realize that with all human enterprises, “it’s about us.” This realization allows the show to go on. This piece speaks to its target audience of adolescents and young adults in their own language, with humor, irony, and directness, and without posturing or preaching. Furthermore, it dramatizes its themes through story, characters, and dialogue that should appeal to adult audiences, too, featuring an intriguing play-within-a-play structure that underscores the relationship between onstage action and real life.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 m, 5 w)

WILLIAM: The student director, a senior at Central High School; physically disabled, wearing a leg brace.

LINDA: White female, working a part-time job; she likes to be liked.

RANDALL: African-American male, Sarah's ex-boyfriend and a high school football star.

DION: African-American male, working at Burger Heaven to save for college.

DOLORES: African-American female, self-possessed and talented, plays down her natural glamor.

MARIA: Mexican-American female, wearing sweats and baggy clothes because she is always concerned about her weight.

ANDREW: White male, dating Sarah.

SARAH: Light-skinned African-American female, dating Andrew, parents are divorced so she must baby-sit for her small sister.

TONY: White male, still privately gay.

CARLOS: Polish-Hispanic male, bright and talented, hoping to attend a university in the fall on a full scholarship.

RITA: White female whose mother's illness is interfering with her education.

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SETTING

The drama classroom at Central High School. The setting is simple, requiring only cubes that may be set up in varied spaces. When lighting is minimal or unavailable, the actors may delineate shifts of time and setting by clapping their hands or freezing the action.

TIME

The present.

COSTUMES

Characters wear modern day clothing. In the last scene, the characters wear T-shirts printed with the *Rainbow Project* logo. This provides an opportunity to involve art classes in this project and have students design the logo and print the T-shirts. Specific details such as the names of the director, students, and high school may be changed to fit the location where *It's About Us!* is being performed.

Scene 1

*(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on the drama classroom at Central High School. We see a bare stage with six cubes representing tables in the school cafeteria. There are backpacks on the floor. ACTORS of the Rainbow Project—everyone but Rita—are gathering to rehearse the opening scene from their play. **When the dialogue changes to boldface, the characters are rehearsing.** MARIA and DOLORES stand apart, looking at something on Maria's cellphone. WILLIAM enters as SFX: the bell rings.)*

WILLIAM: Okay, guys. Let's line up and start the lunchroom scene. Turn off those cellphones and put them away.

(With a bit of grumbling, the CAST put their phones in their backpacks and take out typed scripts, which they'll hold but don't need to use while they're acting.)

LINDA: Rita's not here yet.

RANDALL: Yeah. She's late again.

DION: I hear she's quitting.

WILLIAM: I'll do her lines with you until she gets here.

DOLORES: *If she gets here.*

LINDA: She'll be here. She texted me she's running a little late.

(WILLIAM, moving with some difficulty, sits at LINDA's "table." Most of the other actors sit at tables, too, while MARIA, LINDA, RANDALL, SARAH, and ANDREW line up as if in a cafeteria line, with DION behind the imaginary steam-table, serving them.)

MARIA: Do you have low-cal ranch dressing?

DION: You bet. Right over here.

LINDA: I only have enough money for french fries.

RANDALL: *(To DION.)* I just want a burger, man. Need my protein. I'll save you a place at our table.

ANDREW: *(To SARAH.)* Don't eat too much for lunch. My mom's making us her special meatloaf for dinner.

(The CHARACTERS in line take their seats around the tables. Last in line, SARAH and ANDREW pause together briefly C.)

ANDREW: *(Cont'd.)* Come on and sit with me and Tony. He's been really down about something.

SARAH: I want to say hello to Dolores. I'll see you in a few minutes. And I'll see you tonight. Dolores is going to baby-sit for my sister tonight, so we'll have the whole evening after dinner to work on our book review assignments.

(ANDREW touches SARAH's arm, and they part. Although all the characters entered without order, when they are all seated, it is obvious they have chosen to sit at separate "tables." DION and RANDALL sit up R; LINDA sits C with WILLIAM (as RITA); SARAH and DOLORES sit up L; ANDREW and TONY sit down R; CARLOS and MARIA sit down L. The characters at each table address only each other unless otherwise indicated. In staging, the pattern of crosstalk will be clear.)

DION: *(As he sits with RANDALL.)* I have to go to work at Burger Heaven after school today. Then I have to go home and do chemistry and math.

RANDALL: You keep your uniform at work?

DION: Naw—I stow it in my ride. Hard to juggle all this stuff.

RANDALL: Yeah, I just finished at the computer lab. And I've got football practice till six. Hey, man, hand me some ketchup.

DOLORES: *(To SARAH.)* Sarah, why do you want to date Andrew when there are so many fine brothers?

RANDALL: *(To DION, indicating LINDA with the ketchup bottle.)* Watch out for white girls. They just want to date athletes.

TONY: *(To ANDREW.)* I'm really fed up with all this stuff about, "It's a black thing. You wouldn't understand."

They're not the only ones who have problems.

ANDREW: Yeah. And having them go nuts because we're listening to rap or hip-hop. Like white guys don't get to do that.

LINDA: I have exactly seven dollars and fifty cents to get through the week on. And no gas in my car.

WILLIAM: Okay—I'm being Rita now. I wish I had a scholarship and didn't have to worry about how I'm going to pay for college. I wish things were easier at home.

TONY: You sound just like her.

WILLIAM: Come on. We need to concentrate.

ANDREW: Be chill, Bill.

WILLIAM: Maria—it's your line.

MARIA: *(Resuming the scene to CARLOS.)* Look at those guys over there. All their money and they dress like that.

CARLOS: I hate that pretentious grunge look.

SARAH: *(To DOLORES.)* I don't choose a man for his color. I choose a man for his style.

TONY: *(To ANDREW.)* You know they're talking about us over there, don't you? It's because you and Sarah hang out together.

ANDREW: We're not *hanging out*, Tony. She's my girlfriend.

LINDA: If I get into college, I'm going to be paying off student loans till I'm forty. No fancy car, no fancy cellphone for me.

ANDREW: Sarah's beautiful and smart. I get sick of people staring at us when we're together.

DION: You not foolin' me, Randall. You just upset because Sarah's seeing a white guy.

RANDALL: Oh, you think so? You up in here serving burgers and fries like a houseboy. They don't care anything about you!

DION: Ain't everyone on a pedestal like you. My man.

End of Freeview

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