

## *England People Very Nice*

Author	Richard Bean
Published by	Oberon, London
Published in	2009
Price	€11.99
Genre	Comedy
Length	96 pages
Summary	<p>Richard Bean's play <i>England People Very Nice</i> is a riotous journey through four waves of immigration from the 17th century to today. The framework action is that asylum seekers in an immigration centre are putting on a play about immigration to London's East End. As the French Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews and the Bangladeshis in turn enter the chaotic world of Bethnal Green, each new influx provokes a surge of violent protest over housing, jobs, religion and culture. And the emerging pattern shows that white flight and anxiety over integration is anything but new. <i>England People Very Nice</i> follows a pair of star-crossed lovers amid cutters' mobs, Papists, Jewish anarchists and radical Islamists across four tempestuous centuries.</p> <p>"England People Very Nice". 2009. National Theatre London. 13 October 2010. &lt;<a href="http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/englandpeople/">http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/englandpeople/</a>&gt;.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contemporary comedy</li> <li>• Play within a play</li> <li>• Pub is the only constant location.</li> <li>• Other locations can either be moved in when required or be created by projections or animations.</li> <li>• The street's appearance changes over time.</li> <li>• Stage directions:       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Explicit: very detailed</li> <li>➤ Implicit: utterances and songs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open time structure, time is often accelerated</li> <li>• Linear structure</li> <li>• Play consists of dialogues.</li> <li>• Many different strains of action</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every act has its own plot.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recurring characters</li> <li>• Large cast<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central conflict: integration problems due to cultural differences</li> <li>• Deals with Britishness and multiculturalism.</li> </ul>
Helpful Secondary Literature	<p>Baumbach, Sybille and Ansgar Nünning. <i>An Introduction to the Study of Plays and Drama</i>. Stuttgart: Klett, 2009. Print.</p> <p>Bean, Richard. <i>England People Very Nice</i>. London: Oberon Books, 2009. Print.</p> <p>Bishop, Pete. "England People Very Nice. National Theatre.London.2009". 2009. Video. 12 October 2010. &lt;<a href="http://vimeo.com/6428381">http://vimeo.com/6428381</a>&gt;.</p> <p>Edgar, David. <i>How Plays Work</i>. London: Nick Hern Books, 2009. Print.</p> <p>"England People Very Nice". 2009. National Theatre London. 13 October 2010. &lt;<a href="http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/englandpeople/">http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/englandpeople/</a>&gt;.</p> <p>Landesbildungsserver. "Bildungsstandard Englisch 1F Gymnasium". 2004. PDF. Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport des Landes Baden-Württemberg. 12 October 2010. &lt;<a href="http://www.bildung-staerkt-menschen.de/service/downloads/Bildungsstandards/Gym/Gym_E_1f_bs.pdf">http://www.bildung-staerkt-menschen.de/service/downloads/Bildungsstandards/Gym/Gym_E_1f_bs.pdf</a>&gt;.</p> <p>SkyArts.co.uk. "Sky Arts at The National Theatre. Sky Arts goes behind the scenes at The National Theatre to follow the preparations for England People Very Nice". 2009. Video. 12 October 2010. &lt;<a href="http://www.skyarts.co.uk/video/sky-arts-at-the-national-theatre/">http://www.skyarts.co.uk/video/sky-arts-at-the-national-theatre/</a>&gt;.</p>
Language	Sometimes rude language, several racist remarks
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translation exercises, incorporating accents</li> <li>• Students acting out scenes in the classroom</li> <li>• Short presentations, 5-10 min.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The East End</li> <li>➢ Who were the Huguenots and why did they come to England?</li> <li>➢ The Irish potato famine and its consequences</li> <li>➢ History of the Jews in England. Jewish immigration in the 1880s</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for a timeline.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for a character constellations overview.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Jack the Ripper</li><li>➤ Britain's colonial past</li><li>➤ The Commonwealth</li><li>➤ British Immigration Policy 1900-today</li><li>➤ The 'Blitz' - WWII in England</li><li>➤ England's got a new Queen</li><li>➤ Bangladesh Liberation War</li><li>• GFS (Gleichwertige Feststellung von Schülerleistungen), 20-40 min.:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Britishness</li><li>➤ Multiculturalism in England</li></ul></li><li>• Several different departments could work together and do an interdisciplinary project:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Research and discuss every aspect of the play.</li><li>➤ Make an exhibition about its historical background and the religious differences of the groups involved.</li><li>➤ Set up a stage, craft the sets and props.</li><li>➤ Design some animations, shoot film sequences.</li><li>➤ Stage the play.</li></ul></li></ul>
Teachability Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The play is suited for teaching cultural studies.</li><li>• By studying this play, students can acquire several of the competencies listed in the BaWü Bildungsstandards (Landesbildungsserver).</li></ul>
Teachability Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rude language, slang, large amount of unknown vocabulary</li></ul>
Overall Evaluation	This is a fun play, but not easy to teach. Judge for yourselves, it is worth reading!

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#### **Appendix 1:**

#### **Timeline: Dates and Facts**

##### **1500s**

The French Huguenots, Protestants who consider themselves reformers of the Catholic Church and believe the Christian faith should be followed with strict obedience. Despite persecution, the reformed religious group continues to grow in number. Tensions build between the Catholics and the Protestants and spur eight civil wars, known as the French Wars of Religion.

##### **1572**

In 1572, a wave of Roman Catholic mob violence in France against the Huguenots (Calvinist Protestants) occurs, which becomes known as the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre.

##### **1682**

There is a growing population in London. Spitalfields Market is founded and Huguenot refugees establish a major silk weaving industry in and around Spitalfields.

##### **1743**

A Protestant church is built at the corner of Fournier Street and Brick Lane. In later centuries it becomes a synagogue and is now a mosque.

##### **1763**

The silk weaving industry is saturated by the influx of Huguenot refugees entering London. Unemployment rises and provokes riots over the import of foreign silk and labour.

##### **1800s**

By 1851, over 100,000 Irishmen and women are living in London and the community continues to grow. Irish communities begin to build a dominant presence in and around London's East End docks.

##### **1845-55**

The onset of the Irish Potato Famine, caused by several years of blight to the Irish potato crop, the main source of food for most people, kills nearly an eighth of the entire population of Ireland. About a million people die of starvation and epidemic disease, and some two million emigrate.

##### **1865**

William and Catherine Booth form the Salvation Army, their purpose is to preach the gospel and offer salvation to the poor, destitute and hungry.

##### **1880**

There are now around 46,000 Jews in London. By 1900 this figure has almost trebled to 135,000, and most are living in the East End.

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#### **1888**

Unidentified serial killer who brutally kills his victims, mainly women prostitutes in the East End area, by cutting their throats and mutilating their bodies. The case has never been solved and Jack the Ripper's identity remains a mystery.

Did you know?

Two of Jack the Ripper's victims, Mary Kelly and Anne Chapman, frequented the infamous Ten Bells pub in Spitalfields.

#### **1905**

The Aliens Act is passed, for the first time introducing immigration controls. The Act gives the Home Secretary responsibility for immigration and nationality matters. Anti-Semitic elements want severe restrictions on Jewish immigration, but are defeated.

#### **1936**

In 1936, The Battle of Cable Street in the East End of London – clash between Metropolitan Police, overseeing a march by the British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Mosley, and anti-fascist protesters. William Fishman, 15 at the time, recalls: "I was moved to tears to see bearded Jews and Irish Catholic dockers standing up to stop Mosley."

#### **1940s**

Curry houses begin to appear in the East End of London.

#### **1940-41**

The Blitz begins with bombing of London for 57 nights in a row. By the end of May 1941, more than a million houses are destroyed or damaged in London, and over 45,000 civilians killed, half of them in London. Eight Wren churches are destroyed in London on a single night.

Did you know?

The Jamme Mesjid Mosque on the corner of Fournier Street once was the Great Spitalfields Synagogue and before that the Huguenots' Protestant Church.

#### **1945**

World War II ends and families attempt to return to everyday life.

Did you know?

Oi! Jimmy Knacker is a childhood street game, recalled in recent East End memoirs. Rules involve one team forming a human horse while the other team leap upon their backs – trying to keep their feet off the ground while simultaneously making the opposition collapse. Other childhood games included the everlasting favourite Knock Down Ginger.

#### **1953**

The coronation of Elizabeth II takes place in 1953.

Did you know?

The silk for Elizabeth II's coronation gown was woven at No. 14 Fournier Street.

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#### **1962**

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act means that categories of Commonwealth citizens able to enter Britain are now limited. Before the Act is passed, there is a rush of people entering the country before the doors close.

#### **1971**

Many Sylhetis (a distinct ethnic group within Bangladesh) come to London in the 1970s following the conflict with West Pakistan. The majority settle in Tower Hamlets, particularly around Spitalfields.

#### **1981**

By 1981, The British Nationality Act abolishes the 1948 definition of British citizenship and replaces it with three categories: British citizenship, citizenship of British dependent territories, and British overseas citizenship. Of these, only British citizenship provides the right to live in the UK.

#### **1990s**

The East End becomes home to some of Britain's most influential artists, The Young British Artist Movement who rise to fame with their shocking and controversial work. The movement includes iconic artists such as Tracey Emin, Gary Hume, Damien Hirst and Rachel Whiteread.

#### **2009**

Today there are over 150,000 Bangladeshi people living in London and the south east of England, most from the Sylhet region. An estimated 50,000 people work in the UK curry industry, many of them from Sylhet. East End's Brick Lane now celebrates its diverse culture with an annual festival of music, food, history, culture and fashion.

Did you know?

Brick Lane is world famous not only for its curry houses, but its graffiti artists, and is home to artists such as Banksy, D\*Face and Ben Eine.

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**Appendix 2:**  
**Characters: Information and constellations**

**Act One**

<p>Locals          Ida (pub barmaid)          Laurie (pub landlord)          Rennie (pub regular, originally from Barbados)          Norfolk Danny ♥</p>		<p>Immigrants (French)          Sydney de Gascoigne          Albert Gaskin (his son)          ♥ Camille          André (her brother)</p>
<p>Hugo          Benny } they assault Danny, Hugo is stabbed</p>		

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**Act Two**

<p>Locals          Ida (pub barmaid, third generation French)          Laurie (as before)          Rennie (as before)          Hugo (stabs Carlo)          Benny</p>		<p>Immigrants          Irish:          ♥ Mary          Patrick (her brother) } incestuous relationship          Patrick's wife, children and pig</p>
<p>Carlo (of Italian descent) ♥</p>		<p>John O'Neill          Anne (his wife) } Irish intellectuals</p>
<p>Albert Gaskin</p>		<p>Jews:          Shimmel &amp; family (arrive at the end)</p>
<p>Lord George Gordon (organises a riot)</p>		

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**Act Three**

<p>Locals</p> <p>Ida (pub barmaid, of Irish descent)</p> <p>Laurie (as before)</p> <p>Rennie (as before)</p> <p>Hugo</p> <p>Benny</p> <p>Mrs. Gaskin</p> <p>Lord Ballast ("Tufty", the dock owner)</p> <p>Ruth (his daughter) ♥</p>	<p>Elite of Anglo Jewry</p> <p>Rabbi</p> <p>Lord Rothschild</p> <p>Mr. Harry Samuels</p>	<p>Immigrants (Jews from Russia)</p> <p>Jewish Anarchist League:</p> <p>Katz</p> <p>Morrie</p> <p>Lilly</p> <p>Thomas</p> <p>♥ Aaron</p>
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**Act Four**

<p>Locals</p> <p>Ida (pub barmaid, of Irish descent)</p> <p>Harvey Kleinman (Ida's husband, Jewish, dies in the Blitz)</p> <p>Benny (their son)</p> <p>Deborah (their daughter) ♥</p> <p>Laurie (as before, later marries Ida)</p> <p>Rennie (as before, Laurie's best mate)</p> <p>Hugo Gaskin (of French descent, kills Egg Nog)</p> <p>Rabbi</p> <p>Barry (housing officer)</p> <p>Camilla (librarian)</p> <p>St John (her husband, gets mugged)</p>	<p>Immigrants</p> <p>Old Bangladeshis:</p> <p>Master Attar</p> <p>♥ Mr. Mushi</p> <p>Anjum (later his wife)</p> <p>Egg Nog &amp; family</p> <p>Shah Abdul &amp; family</p> <p>Young/fundamentalist Bangladeshis:</p> <p>Mushi's three daughters</p> <p>Naz (Abdul's son)</p> <p>Imam</p> <p>Somalis</p>
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