

Rent

Who wants to pay rent? If you could live rent free would you take the opportunity? In this case, it is not like that for these characters. They need to pay for rent, but they straight up refuse to pay it! In the musical “Rent”, I found it interesting how the story transitions from the characters worrying about paying last month's rent in the opening scene to then claiming that they weren't going to pay the rent at all in the title song, Rent. The shift in attitude stood out to me because it highlights both the humor and the seriousness of their situation. What adds to the story is how there's side stories where they struggle through breakups and illness that further show that rent isn't their top priority anymore, it's themselves. The musical also reveals a bigger message of community and survival, showing that friendship, love, and authenticity matter more than meeting society's expectations. The musical Rent highlights the significance of the shift in attitude toward paying rent, the side stories also deepen the main plot, and the larger message about unity and resilience.

In the musical's opening scene, the characters discuss paying last month's rent because they still have not done so, which sets up the story's central conflict. But when the title song “Rent” begins, the tone shifts dramatically. Instead of stressing about how to pay, the characters sing defiantly, “We're not gonna pay last year's rent / this year's rent / next year's rent.” This bold refusal flips the situation from a serious problem into a moment of humor and rebellion. While in real life, refusing to pay rent would lead to eviction, in the world of the musical, it

becomes a powerful symbol of resistance. Their defiance against their landlord, Benny, represents more than just dodging bills, it shows that they have bigger struggles to face, such as illness, heartbreak, and survival itself. By refusing to let money control them, the characters claim their freedom and prioritize what really matters in their lives. This shift from stress to defiance sets the tone for the entire musical, turning financial problems into a symbol of rebellion, independence, and the fight to live authentically despite hardship. This moment also prepares the audience to see how the side stories and the group's unity give even more meaning to their refusal, connecting individual struggles to a larger message of resilience and survival.

Adding to the fact they have to pay rent, the musical also uses side stories to add more background and perspective to show how survival is about much more than money. Roger and Mimi go through a pretty messy relationship throughout the play. They met because Mimi is their downstairs neighbor who struggles with a drug addiction and works as a dancer at the Cat Scratch Club. She happens to have HIV, just like Roger, who is a struggling musician also grieving the loss of his former girlfriend who committed suicide. They connect quickly in the songs "Light My Candle" and "I Should Tell You" which reveal the intimacy between them. The only reason why it's messy is because of Roger's fear of getting hurt and Mimi's addiction. Drugs could take Mimi's life at any time, and as a result Roger pushes her away. This tension shows up in "Another Day," when Roger resists Mimi's attempts to get close, singing, "I can't control my destiny / I trust my soul, my only goal is just to be." Mimi responds with "There's only now, there's only here / Give in to love, or live in fear," showing how differently they approach life. Despite this, they bond over having HIV. By the end, Roger wants to leave, not wanting to live through the pain of losing someone else. When Mimi nearly dies, Roger sings "Your Eyes,"

expressing his true love: “Your eyes / As we said our goodbyes / Can’t get them out of my mind.” This moment brings her back, and the group joins in “No Day But Today,” reinforcing the message that love and connection matter more than money. This side story makes the audience see that refusal to pay rent isn’t just about avoiding paying bills, it’s about choosing to value relationships and love over financial demands.

The musical *Rent* sends a powerful message about unity and resilience, revealing how the characters survive by leaning on each other. An example of this is the song “La Vie Bohème”, where the group would gather together and celebrate art, love, and freedom. They shout, “To being an us for once, instead of a them!” which shows how they reject society’s expectations and instead find identity and strength in their community. Instead of worrying about society’s expectations. They embrace who they are as people and find strength in their community. The characters also show unity when Angel becomes sick. Collin would always stay by Angel’s side while she was sick while always showing unconditional love and care as seen in “I’ll Cover You.” He promises, “I’ll be your blanket / Whenever you’re cold,” showing devotion that doesn’t fade even when Angel’s health declines. Another example is when the group would come together when Angel’s health declines. The friends would fight and drift apart but would still come together and reunite for Angel. They would visit her, support her, and be with her during her final days, showing how they value their chosen family. Even at the funeral, everyone would mourn her death together despite their constant fights. Even after the funeral, they would still have conflicts but they’d easily unite when sharing their pain and honoring Angel’s life. Despite the constant disagreements, Angel’s memory pulls them back together. Angel’s illness and death

highlights the theme of chosen family, and that their true strength comes not from money or stability, but from the love and support they share when life gets tough.

Through the shift in attitude about paying rent, the importance of the side stories and the powerful message of unity and resilience, the musical *Rent* becomes more than a story about financial struggles. Throughout the musical, they proved that they're above paying rent and truly showed that they have more difficult issues beyond paying for rent. Roger and Mimi's relationship truly proved that on account of the fact they struggle with bigger things than paying rent. And Angel's illness proves that money is better spent elsewhere to help their friend survive. The musical reminds us that true survival is not about meeting society's demands, but about living authentically, supporting one another and finding strength in their small community.