



Erasmus+ Project  
EACi – European Active  
Citizenship  
2020-1-IT02-KA229-079429



## NERO THE CAT

A one-act play

### INTRODUCTION

Good morning, everybody and welcome to our school. As you probably know, our topic for the Erasmus exchange is **fake news and fact checking**. When we started working on the project, we asked ourselves a very simple question: is fake news a problem of today or could we find it even in the past? With our history teacher we were studying the Roman Emperors: in particular, we were struck by the figure of Nero, who is universally known as a really wicked figure. But we were not satisfied, we wanted to check facts and find out the truth.

The subject of our inquiry is expressed in a **short performance**. If you follow us and use your own imagination, you will travel back in time with us.

And to quote Shakespeare, “the which if you with patient ears attend, what here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.”

-From the opening sonnet of Romeo and Juliet-

*Here's the list of characters, in order of appearance:*

1. **Nero the cat**
2. *It's master, **the computer nerd***
3. **Nero the emperor**
4. **The judge**
5. **Nero's cook, Publio**
6. **A freed slave**
7. **A fireman**
8. **A Christian**
9. **Seneca, the great philosopher**
10. **An art critic**

### SCENE 1

*Nero the cat reflects in front of the fireplace.*

**N:** Why am I called Nero? What did I do wrong to deserve this name? It is such an awful name! I don't like it at all! Why did my master choose this horrible name?

*The cat goes to talk to its master, the computer nerd.*

## SCENE 2

*The computer nerd is working on his computer when Nero arrives and sits on the desk, looking very, very sad.*

**CN:** What's wrong with you?

**CAT:** I'm really upset

**CN:** Why?

**CAT:** Why did you give me this name?

**CN:** Because it has a very strange story and it's the name of the ancient Roman emperor who lived in the first century AD.

**CAT:** But there are many terrible stories about him: this is why I can't stand my name but maybe he was a nice person after all. I have many questions but no answers.

**CN:** I see what you mean and I want to help you. Come with me, we will take a journey back into history.

**CAT:** But how can we speak to those Romans who spoke Latin? We can't speak Latin!

**CN:** Don't worry, we will use Google Translate! Back to the first month of 65 AD!

## SCENE 3

*Nero the cat and the computer nerd are teleported to ancient Rome, and they go to the Domus Aurea, the golden house where the emperor lives.*

**NERO:** Let them in!

*The cat and the computer nerd go into the room where the so-called tyrant is.*

**NERO:** Who are you? Introduce yourselves!

**CN:** We come from the future, and we want to discover the truth about you.

**NERO:** The truth? What are you talking about?

**CAT:** There are so many rumors about you and last year's... big fire

**NERO:** Ugh! I can't stand this anymore. Why are you asking me so many questions?

**CAT:** Because I am Nero the cat and I want to know the story of the man with my name

**NERO:** Huh...? Will I be a cat in the future?

## SCENE 4

*Then, the computer nerd carefully explains the situation to Nero, who is very confused. Some witnesses are found and everybody goes into the court room: they know Nero very well and they saw the great fire. The cat decides to act as a judge, a freed slave and one of Nero's cooks decide to testify for the emperor. But Seneca, a Christian and a fireman go openly against him.*

**All rise!- The judge enters**

**JUDGE:** Let's start!

**COOK:** My name is Publio and I must confess that I'm really fond of emperor Nero. He's a great artist and musician: no one can play the lyre better than him. Anyway, he can't be responsible for the fire, because on the night of the fire, at 7 pm, I was bringing him dinner and I remember that oatmeal, pork and garum were on the menu. Oh, and he finished with dried figs, his favourites.

**FREED SLAVE:** I totally agree with him. Nero is a great artist and the sweetest of men. I can't be more thankful to him: I was a slave and I'm a slave no more because he set me free. He helped the people whose houses were destroyed by the fire, he gave them new houses and opened his garden to them.

**FIREMAN:** Hey! Wait a second, can I just say something? Because of this nasty man I had to work many nights to put out the fire. I patrolled all the city with my bucket brigade, with pumps, hooks and poles, pulling down the houses to prevent the fire from spreading.

**CHRISTIAN:** If I can, I would say that Nero blames Christians for having started the fire when he can't even distinguish Christians from Jews. Even today, during his reign, we are persecuted and killed in shows and performances against terrible beasts. So I think he's guilty.

*Seneca, Nero's tutor and philosopher, takes part in the debate. Who could say something more about his old student in a better way?*

**SENECA:** I saw him grow up, I know him very well and I know that since he was a child, he has always been very arrogant, selfish and interested in his passions only, like art and music. He also had a lot of people killed, his mother and stepbrother too. Knowing what kind of person he is, I can't even imagine what he did during the fire. After all, he never really cared about people.

*Nero interrupts the debate.*

**NERO:** Enough! Stop it! Remember that I'm your emperor!

**JUDGE:** I don't know what to do...

*The cat, still undecided, resolves to return back to the present to look for more reliable sources. Back to the present!*

## **SCENE 5**

*The cat and the computer nerd return to the present and find a book by Tacitus, a Roman historian who writes about the emperors. They should trust him, but there is a BIG PROBLEM: Tacitus was only eight years old when Rome burned, so what credibility can they attribute to him? The cat and the master also peruse a book by British archaeologist Mary Beard, where she talks about the legend of three Neros.*

*Apparently, after Nero's death, 3 Neros appeared somewhere in the Roman Empire, just like when Elvis Presley died and people said he was not dead: does this mean that not everybody hated Nero after all? Finally, the computer nerd takes the cat to his friend, an art critic, who shows him some pictures in which Nero is always represented as the horrible man who caused the fire.*

#### ILLUSTRATED EXHIBITION

**ART CRITIC:** Dear cat, as you can see, Nero has always been portrayed as a monster; look at these pictures: in all of them Nero dominates like an evil giant; he enjoys watching the fire or exercising his power on his victims: the insolence of office, as Hamlet says.

*The cat believes the fake news, but the computer nerd tells him that the evidence is still not enough, and the sources a bit too biased. Nero the cat closes the case for **lack of evidence**.*

**CN:** Have you seen? **It's not easy to distinguish fake news from reality.** My dear friend, be happy, you don't have a bad name after all.

**THE END**

Thanks for your attention