

HISTORICAL FICTION
a story inspired by true
events from the past

One hundred years ago,
thousands of ragged kids had to
work selling newspapers on the
harsh streets of New York City.

THE NEWSI

CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

*Indicates a major role

***NARRATORS 1, 2, 3**

(N1, N2, N3)

CROWD: the whole class

BOOTS, ROSE,

RACETRACK, CHUBBS,

SULLY: newsies—kids

who sell newspapers

***ANI:** a 12-year-old

immigrant girl

MANAGER

LONGSHOREMAN:

worker who loads cargo on and off ships

NEW YORKERS 1 & 2

FACTORY WORKER

STOCKBROKER

WILLIAM RANDOLPH

HEARST: owner of the

New York Journal

ASSISTANT

LADY: a rich New Yorker



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What challenges did the newsies face?

Note: *The newsies had their own dialect, or way of speaking. You will encounter this dialect in the play.*

Scene One

The Brooklyn Bridge, August 1899

N1: Some 1,000 children crowd onto the Brooklyn Bridge, bringing traffic to a standstill.

CROWD: Newsboys on **strike!**

BOOTS: We demand a fair deal!

ROSE: Don't buy the *Journal* or *World* newspapers!

RACETRACK: What's a dime a day to millionaires like Hearst and Pulitzer—when t' you and me it's the difference 'tweens eatin' and goin' hungry?!

CROWD: (*whistles, hoots, and cheers*)

RACETRACK: We's united in our cause! (*pointing*) Here comes them papers now!

"Papes" was slang for newspapers.

N2: A wagon carrying a supply of the *New York Journal* is trying to get through the crowd.

N3: Newsies swarm the wagon like ants on a frankfurter.

BOOTS: Tear 'em up! Throw them papers over the side!

N1: The wagon is overturned, and the **protesters** hurl papers into the East River. The drivers take off running.

RACETRACK: You tell Mr. Hearst that we ain't givin' up!



Newsies in New York City, 1910

NEWSIES

BY MACK LEWIS

Scene Two

Manhattan, April 1898

N2: In 1898, newspapers were the only way to know what was going on in the world.

N3: The *World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer, and the *Journal*, owned by William Randolph Hearst, were the two biggest.

N1: Newspapers were sold by kids called “newsies.” They were poor and often homeless. They used the money they made to feed themselves and their families.

N2: Ani approaches the line at the *New York Journal*’s circulation office.

ANI: Is this where you sign up?

N3: A few newsies look her over.

ROSE: Wouldn’t you be better off at school?

ANI: I wish I could go to school, but I have to help my family survive.

CHUBBS: Don’t we all.

ROSE: All right. We’ll teach ya all the tricks.

CHUBBS: We buy newspapers two for a penny, but we sell ’em for a penny apiece.

ROSE: If you sell ’em all, you double your money.

RACETRACK (*walking up*): Who’s this?

ANI: I’m Ani.

RACETRACK: Hiya, Ani. My friends call me Racetrack.

N1: Racetrack pushes his way to the circulation window.

MANAGER: How many ya want?

RACETRACK: I’ll take 100.

N2: He plunks down 50 cents.

MANAGER: Sorry, kid. Price has gone up to 60 cents. But you won’t have trouble selling the whole lot of ’em when people hear this headline: America Declares War!

RACETRACK: In that case, gimme 200!

N3: Ani, Rose, and Chubbs wait their turns.

N1: They pool their money and buy 100 papers.

Scene Three

Later that day, the Bowery

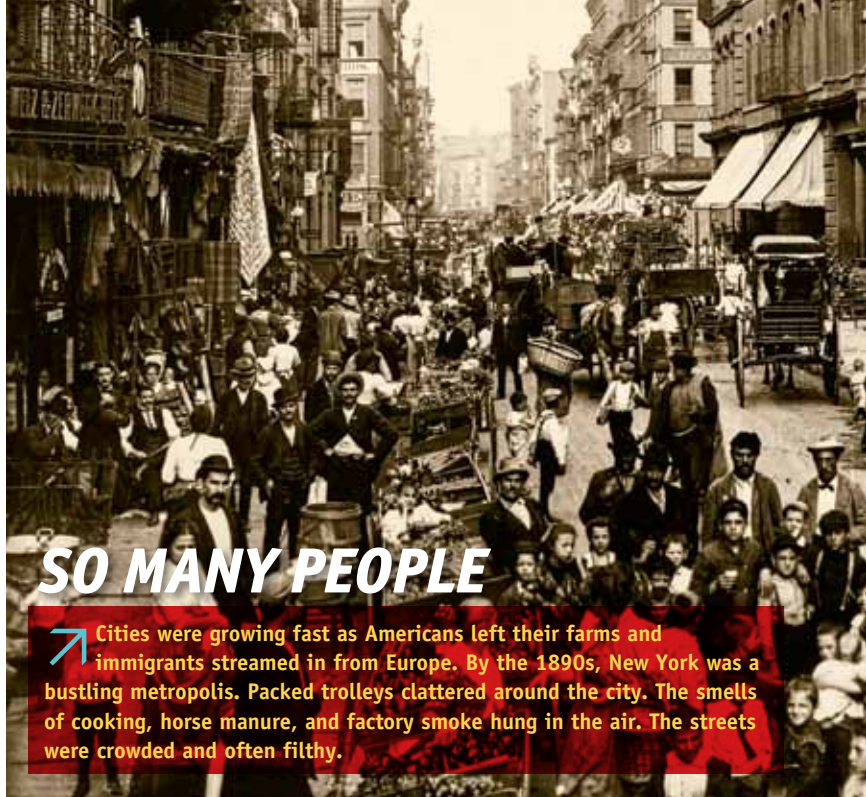
CHUBBS: These will be easy to sell.

ANI: How do you know?

ROSE: Cuz the news is good.

CHUBBS (*shouting*): Hot off the press! America at war!

ANI: War? How is that good news?



SO MANY PEOPLE

➤ Cities were growing fast as Americans left their farms and immigrants streamed in from Europe. By the 1890s, New York was a bustling metropolis. Packed trolleys clattered around the city. The smells of cooking, horse manure, and factory smoke hung in the air. The streets were crowded and often filthy.

ROSE: It is good news for us. Boring news don’t sell papers.

CHUBBS: Get yer papers here! War with Spain!

LONGSHOREMAN: War? Are you exaggerating again, kid?

CHUBBS: No, sir. It’s right here in the headlines.

N2: The man hands Chubbs a penny.

NEW YORKER 1: I’ll buy a newspaper.

NEW YORKER 2: I’ll take two!

N3: In just a few minutes, Chubbs sells a dozen papers.

ROSE: Now you try, Ani.

ANI: Read all about it! War with Spain!

FACTORY WORKER: I’ll take one. Change for a nickel?

ANI (*handing him coins*): Here you go.

N1: The worker dashes off.

CHUBBS: Next time, give him just three cents. Most fellas won’t even notice.

ANI: That isn’t honest.

ROSE: Maybe not, but that’s the dodge. C’mon, we’ll show ya some others.

CHUBBS: Look forlorn whenever ya can.

ANI: Forlorn?

CHUBBS: Crutch Morris, he always limps like he’s crippled. Kid Blink, he wears an eye patch. If the customer thinks you’re down and out, they take pity on ya and buy a pape. Sometimes they’ll buy two.

N2: Ani frowns.



CHUBBS: There's lots of dodges. Sell to folks gettin' on the trolley. Let the car pull away before you come up with their change.

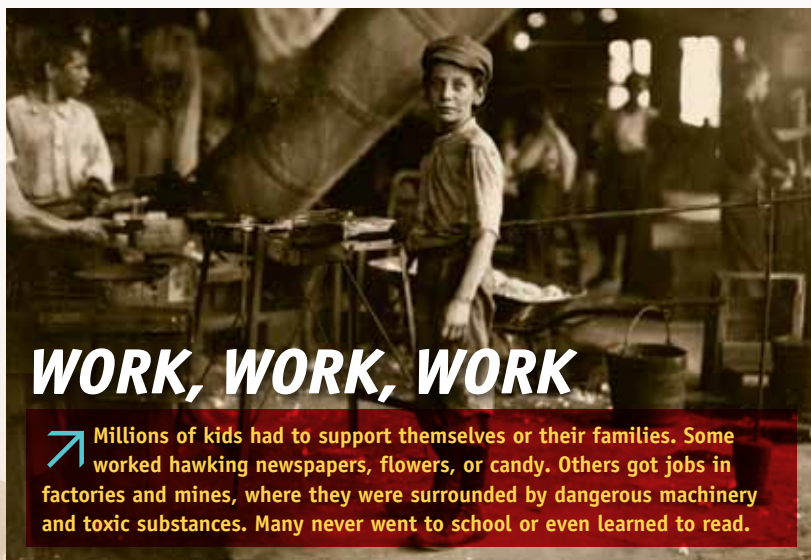
ANI: I may be desperate, but I won't cheat people.

CHUBBS: Just you wait till it's pourin' rain and the only thing in the news is a cat up a tree.

Scene Four

Canal Street, July 1899

N3: Months have passed. The war with Spain has ended.



WORK, WORK, WORK

➤ Millions of kids had to support themselves or their families. Some worked hawking newspapers, flowers, or candy. Others got jobs in factories and mines, where they were surrounded by dangerous machinery and toxic substances. Many never went to school or even learned to read.

N1: And with no war news to report, the newsies struggle to sell papers.

CHUBBS: I'm callin' it quits.

ROSE: Me too.

ANI: I still have 40 papers left. If I go home now, I'll have lost money!

ROSE: Sorry, Ani.

N2: Ani stands alone in the cold. The bundle feels heavy under her arm.

ANI: Get your *Journal* here!

N3: No one buys.

N1: A trolley clangs by. Ani slogs to the nearest stop.

ANI: Extra! Extra! Could America return to war?

N2: A face peers out from the streetcar.

STOCKBROKER: I'll take one. Change for a dime?

ANI: Sure, Mister.

N3: She digs in her pocket. The trolley bell clangs.

STOCKBROKER: Hurry up!

ANI: I'm trying.

N1: The trolley begins moving. Ani runs alongside.

N2: She reaches for the man's outstretched hand—

N3:—then watches as the car rumbles away with the stockbroker glaring at her.

N1: She looks at the dime and hangs her head.

N2: A moment later, she sees the customer from the trolley. He'd gotten off at the next stop.

STOCKBROKER: You! Girl! You owe me some change!

ANI: I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

STOCKBROKER: Sure you didn't. I know your tricks!

N3: He grabs her by the ear.

STOCKBROKER: Now fork over that dime.

Scene Five

Irving Hall, the next morning

N1: Rose, Boots, and Chubbs enter a room packed with newsies. Jack "Sully" Sullivan addresses the crowd.

SULLY: Mr. Hearst and Mr. Pulitzer promised to drop the price once the war was over. Did they keep their promise?

CROWD: No!

SULLY: They're squeezing us dry! The time has come when we must make a stand. I say we strike!



CROWD: Strike! Strike! Strike!

SULLY: Spread the word that nobody—NOBODY—sells papes. If you sees anyone sellin' da *World* or *Journal*, ya swat 'em good.

BOOTS: You mean swipe da papes?

SULLY: Yeah! Tear 'em up!

Scene Six

Broome Street, a few hours later

N2: After the meeting, Chubbs looks for Ani.

N3: He finds her curled up in an alley.

CHUBBS: Where ya been?

ANI: I was out all night trying to sell my papers.

N1: She begins to cry.

ANI: I still have 32 left. I couldn't go home and face my family. Especially after trying that stupid trolley dodge!

CHUBBS: I'm sorry, Ani. But there's good news. We're goin' on strike. We're gonna force Hearst and Pulitzer to lower the price back to 50 cents.

ANI: Strike? Now I won't make anything!

CHUBBS: Don't worry. Sometimes ya have to sacrifice a little up front to get what's best down the road.

Scene Seven

Hearst's car, the next day

ASSISTANT: The newsies' strike is hitting us hard.

HEARST: What are the numbers?

ASSISTANT: Sales have dropped by 60 percent.

HEARST: This must be hurting Pulitzer too.

ASSISTANT: They say his financial losses are colossal. But he'll only compromise if you do.

HEARST: I've worked too

hard to have this paper ruined by a bunch of brats.

N2: Hearst sighs heavily.

N3: They arrive at Hearst's offices. The driver gets out and opens the door.

N1: A crowd of newsies has gathered outside.

BOOTS: It's Mr. Hearst!

NEWSIES (all): Two fer a

penny ain't too many! Two fer a penny ain't too many!

HEARST: Now boys, I'm just trying to run my business. The war increased my costs.

RACETRACK: The war increased your profits!

HEARST (shouting): I'll give two dollars a day to anyone who crosses the **picket line!**

N2: Racetrack shows his fist to the crowd.

RACETRACK: Do it and you won't make it a block!

SULLY: How is it you can pay **scabs** two dollars but you can't pay us 10 cents?

BOOTS: Yer tryin' to break us.

RACETRACK: But we're stickin' together like glue!

N3: Hearst retreats into the building.

NEWSIES: Two fer a penny ain't too many!

Scene Eight

Central Park, the next day

N1: Ani, Chubbs, and Rose pass out leaflets.

CHUBBS: Is that yer stomach growlin'? When was the last time you ate?

N2: Ani shrugs. Chubbs hands out another **leaflet**.

LADY (reading): "Please don't buy the *World* or *Journal* newspapers." What's this?

ROSE: It's cuz we're on strike.

N3: The woman crumples it up.

ANI (crestfallen): This is not going to work.

CHUBBS: I hear circulation of the *Journal* is in the pits.

ROSE: Yesterday I saw a guy tryin' to sell papes. Some newsies tore up every page he had.

N1: A factory worker approaches them.

FACTORY WORKER: You kids stay strong.

N2: He gives them each a penny.

FACTORY WORKER: Those newspaper men should not be cheatin' children to make their fortunes.

ANI: Thank you, sir.

N3: Boots runs up, excited.

ANI: What happened, Boots?





A CHANGING WORLD

➤ The labor movement began in the 19th century as workers banded together to demand better treatment from their employers. Their efforts led to new laws that protected the rights of workers.

BOOTS: The protest has spread to the Bronx and Long Island. We’s got Yonkers and Brooklyn locked up too. Hearst ’n Pulitzer will give in soon, you wait ’n see.

BOOTS: Yeah!

SULLY: We’ll take it!

CROWD: Wooooo! Yeah! Yeah! Wooo!

Scene Nine

The Brooklyn Bridge, August 1899

N1: Newsies clog the bridge.

RACETRACK: You tell Mr. Hearst we ain’t givin’ up!

N2: The last papers go flying over the side of the bridge.

CROWD: Wooo! Wooooo! Yeah!

N3: A hush falls over them. Hearst’s car pulls up.

HEARST: Listen up! I’m offering a compromise. I won’t reduce the price to 50 cents, but if you go back to work, I will buy back all the papers you don’t sell each day. Mr. Pulitzer is offering the same deal.

N1: A murmur floats through the group.

ANI: Is that a good deal?

CHUBBS: Sure it is. On those bad news days when you can’t sell yer papes, you’ll get yer money back.

N2: Ani calls out.

ANI: I like it!

CHUBBS: Me too!

Epilogue

ANI: Being able to sell papers saved my family from homelessness. But I never did get to go to school.

ROSE: I got to go to school!

BOOTS: You’re lucky. I went to work at the docks.

CHUBBS: That was the reality for most of us newsies.

ANI: But our strike showed us that we had power.

ROSE: It showed us that we had **rights**—

BOOTS: —even though we was just kids.

ANI: It would be nearly 40 years before laws were passed protecting kids from unsafe working conditions.

ROSE: Today, it’s illegal for kids in America to work more than 18 hours on a school week. And all children have the right to an education.

BOOTS: Most of us never saw those laws pass in our lifetimes.

ANI: But our bravery helped pave the way. ●

WRITING CONTEST

Civil rights leader Roger Baldwin once said, “Silence never won rights. They are not handed down from above; they are forced by pressures from below.” Explain what this quote means and how it applies to the play. Use text evidence. Send your response to **NEWSIES CONTEST**. Five winners will each receive *Brooklyn Bridge* by Karen Hesse.

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