



NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS

present

Newsies, Jr.

Music by Alan Menken
Lyrics by Jack Feldman
Book by Harvey Fierstein

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors' production of *Newsies, Jr.* We are offering this study guide to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production and your experience at the theater. Included in this guide are a **historical note** about the story, a **synopsis** of the musical, a **list of characters**, a **vocabulary list** and **curriculum ideas**, and some **audience protocol** reminders.

We always enjoy hearing from you and your students and look forward to receiving any pictures, stories, or comments about the production after your field trip. Thank you for your support of New Mexico Young Actors. We look forward to seeing you at the KiMo!

HISTORICAL NOTE

The newsies' strike depicted in *Newsies, Jr.* is one of ten that took place in New York City between 1886 and 1948. However, the strike that occurred during the summer of 1899 was the most significant in terms of duration and outcome. The Spanish-American War in 1898 sparked a boom in the newspaper business. Circulations exploded as customers snatched up papers as fast as they could, eager for news from the front. Newspapers did everything they could to outdo one another and spent exorbitant amounts of money in eye-catching front pages and eyewitness accounts. To make up some of the money, they raised the wholesale price for the newsies from 50 to 60 cents per hundred. The newsies didn't feel the pinch as much because they were enjoying a rise in their profits from the additional demand. But by the summer of 1899, the war had long ended and circulation declined. Almost all of the papers rolled their wholesale price back to 50 cents, except Joseph Pulitzer's *World* and William Randolph Hearst's *Journal*; as the two largest publishers, Hearst and Pulitzer figured that they would be able to maintain their prices and that the newsies would continue to buy from them.

As the newsies sold fewer papers each week, the cost difference became harder to manage, and a strike commenced against these two papers. The strike lasted two weeks, from July 19 to August 2, 1899. During that time, the kids drew support from newsies all over the Northeast, as well as other young workers. Though the kids banded together, at times things became violent – scabs were attacked on the streets, their papers ripped from them and destroyed to prevent their sale. The publishers did not take the strike seriously until advertisers started making requests to get their bills adjusted. The newsies eventually came to a compromise with the publishers: They would purchase their papers at the higher price, but the publishers would buy back any papers that the newsies couldn't sell – this was more valuable to the newsies than a lower price would have been, as it allowed them to buy papers without the risk of losing money for any that went unsold.

After the successful resolution of the newsies' strike nearly two weeks after it began, two other children's strikes quickly followed in New York City: The shoe-shine kids wanted a wage increase, and messengers were opposed to the 50-cent "tax" they were being charged every week for their uniforms. An irreversible revolution of child laborers had begun!

SYNOPSIS

At dawn on a summer morning in 1899, NEWSIES – the young boys and girls of New York who peddle newspapers to customers throughout the city – chaotically shout the daily headlines. Away from the others, JACK KELLY shares his dream for a better life out west with his best friend, CRUTCHIE. Jack and Crutchie join the rest of the newsies in starting the day. They gather at the *New York World's* distribution wagon, where they pick up their daily stacks of papers from WIESEL and his goons, OSCAR and MORRIS DELANCEY. Jack offers to show the ropes to newcomers DAVEY and his kid sibling LES, and together they head out into the city.

Meanwhile, JOSEPH PULITZER, the publisher of the *World*, vows to fight declining circulation of the newspaper. He and his staff – BUNSEN, SEITZ, and HANNAH – cook up an idea, but at the expense of the newsies.

After completing a successful day of selling papers, Jack, Crutchie, Davey, and Les are chased suddenly by SNYDER, the warden of The Refuge, until they find safety in Medda's theater. MEDDA LARKIN welcomes Jack and his friends by offering her theater as a safe haven while they watch her perform with ADA, OLIVE, ETHEL, and the rest of the BOWERY BRIGADE. During the performance, Jack notices KATHERINE, a bright young reporter he had seen earlier that day. Jack offers his remarkable sketch of the performers to an impressed Katherine for use in her review.

The next morning, the newsies are outraged to learn that Pulitzer has raised the price of newspapers. Prompted by Davey, the newsies decide to form a union and strike. After a successful first day of striking, newly elected union leader Jack Kelly sends representatives to spread the word of their strike to newsies throughout New York City. Katherine begins writing what she hopes will be a front-page-worthy story about the strike. The next day, only a small group of newsies has gathered at Newsie Square to strike. Davey and Jack energize the newsies, successfully rejuvenating the movement. Katherine and her photographer DARCY arrive just in time to snap a triumphant photo. Soon after, Snyder arrives with the police to break up the strikers. They haul Crutchie away to the dreaded Refuge. A defeated Jack once again longs for a new life away from all the pandemonium. Meanwhile, unable to sleep at The Refuge, an optimistic Crutchie writes an encouraging letter to Jack.

Bruised and battered, the newsies are about to lose hope. Fortunately, Katherine arrives with a copy of her front-page story about the strike, causing them to break out in celebration. Later, Davey, Les, and Katherine find a disheartened Jack at Medda's theater, and try to convince him to return to the fight. After his refusal, the Delanceys sneak up behind Jack and drag him to Pulitzer's office to negotiate an end to the strike. Pulitzer reveals Katherine to be his daughter and offers a betrayed Jack a choice: get sent to The Refuge or renounce the strike and leave New York with pockets full of cash. The rest of the newsies from all across New York – even the intimidating SPOT CONLON and the newsies of Brooklyn – gather at Medda's theater for the rally that Davey has planned. Jack arrives, having accepted Pulitzer's deal, and is booed off the stage when he encourages the newsies to call off the strike.

Katherine refuses to let Jack give up, and they sneak into the *World's* cellar to print a paper that exposes the unfair treatment of the newsies with the help of DOROTHY and BILL. The kids eagerly distribute the pamphlet to inspire working children all over the city to join the fight. The next morning, having read the *Newsies Banner*, Pulitzer is furious at the newsies' attempt to thwart him. However, after a tough negotiation, Jack convinces Pulitzer to compromise with the newsies: The price increase will remain, but publishers will buy back any unsold papers. The strike is over! The newsies rejoice as GOVERNOR TEDDY ROOSEVELT congratulates Jack. Crutchie appears amid the celebration, followed by a handcuffed Snyder. Just as Jack is about to set out for Santa Fe, he realizes that the newsies are his family and, after all, those papers ain't gonna sell themselves.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NEWSIES of New York – RACE, ALBERT, MURIEL, NANCY, SPECS, PIGTAILS, HAZEL, BUTTONS, TOMMY BOY, ROMEO, and JO JO

JACK KELLY – a fiercely loyal and charismatic orphan who dreams of a life out west and boldly leads the Manhattan newsies

CRUTCHIE – a dedicated newsie and Jack Kelly's ever-optimistic best friend; named Casey, but known to most as Crutchie

KATHERINE – an ambitious young reporter who works hard to make a name for herself; courageously uses her voice to cover the newsies' strike

DARCY – Katherine's trustworthy photographer

MORRIS and OSCAR DELANCEY – toughs who work for the New York World; known to use their fists to make a point

WIESEL – a disgruntled manager of distribution for the World, often called "Weasel" by the newsies

LES – Davey's cheeky younger sibling who is inspired by the freedom of the newsies and loves their independent lifestyle

DAVEY – Les's straight-laced, bright older brother who acts as the brains behind the newsies' strike

JOSEPH PULITZER – a pompous businessman and Katherine's no-nonsense father; does not sympathize with the strikers, but comes to respect Jack

BUNSEN – Pulitzer's bookkeeper, helps come up with the idea to raise the newsies' price per paper

SEITZ – an editor who advises Pulitzer, but ultimately admires the kids' newspaper

HANNAH – Pulitzer’s secretary who quietly looks out for the newsies

SNYDER – the crooked and sinister warden of The Refuge

MEDDA LARKIN – a big-voiced saloon singer and star of the Bowery who offers her theater as a safe haven for the newsies

PAT – the stage manager of Medda’s theater

SPOT CONLON – the proud leader of the Brooklyn newsies with an intimidating reputation

DOROTHY and BILL – Katherine’s friends whose parents own the *New York Tribune* and *New York Journal*, respectively; they help the newsies print the *Newsies Banner*

GOVERNOR TEDDY ROOSEVELT – a well-respected, lifelong public servant whom Jack admires

THEATRICAL TERMS TO KNOW

Actor

Acts/Scenes

Balcony

Box Office

Curtain Call

Costumes

Director

Lobby

Musical Theater

Orchestra

Pit

Overture

Play

Playwright

Producer

Program

Props

Scenery/Set

Stage

Stagehand

Usher

CONTENT VOCABULARY AND TERMS

Aptitude

Auspicious

Borough

Constituents

Gratis

Highfalutin

Hoi polloi

Impudence

Ingenuity

Nom de plume

Palomino

Polio

Scab

Sweatshop

Union

Vaudeville

Vive le résistance

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION (PRE-PERFORMANCE)

1. How many of you have experienced a live dramatic performance? What did you see?
2. What are some of the differences between seeing a live performance and watching television or going to a movie?

- Theater features live actors on-stage. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.

- The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation and enthusiasm for the performers is shown by close attention and participation and applause at the proper times. The success of the play often depends on the audience.

- The atmosphere of a live performance is entirely different from your home, where the television is always available.

- It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.

- Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they play.

- There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes, and of course, the audience add to the total experience.

THEATER ETIQUETTE

Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.

Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience. Lights may go out before the performance begins and seating is very difficult after that time.

The KiMo Theatre is a historic building. Please respect and preserve the beauty of the KiMo by not bringing food and beverages (including gum and candy) into the theater. These items are permitted in the lobby only.

It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully. Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun.

There is no intermission during the performance of Newsies, Jr, which is one hour and fifteen minutes in length.

Although you may wish to say something to the actors, you need to hold your thoughts, as you will disturb their concentration. Sing or participate if and only if you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.

Listen to how the music sets the moods and affects your own feelings. Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song, dance, or joke.

Be sure to turn off all electronic devices and cell phones. Do not text during the performance. This is very inconsiderate to the performers and distracting to your fellow audience members.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (POST-PERFORMANCE)

1. Write an Epilogue: Predict what happened next in the story. Write an article in which you tell the readers what happened to Jack Kelly: does he take the job as a political cartoonist for *The World*? What happened to the other characters in the story? Be as specific as possible and keep with the spirit of the original story.

2. Discuss real life situations that reflect the moral in *Newsies*.

3. Music: Was music used in the performance? Was it live or recorded? How could you tell? When was the music used? Why? Did it help develop the plot? What type of music was used, or were different types used? Can you describe how different kinds of music would make you have different kinds of feelings? When a play is a musical, an actor must have additional skills. Can you name some? A musical costs much more to produce. Can you name some additional expenses? (e.g., orchestra, a practice piano, a score, a choreographer, etc.)

4. Sets: Describe the sets used in the performance. What props or details were used to suggest specific times or settings? How did the lighting change to create a mood, season, time of day, etc.? What materials might have been used in building the sets? How were the sets and props moved on and off the stage? Describe a simple scene (a day in school, a trip to the mall, a ride in the car or on the bus) and ask students to describe a basic set for the scene.

5. Costumes: What would you need to know to create costumes for a play (research, sewing, theatrical effects, etc.)? Why is the right costume important to the character in the play?

6. Art Activities:

- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Draw a picture of what the audience might look like from onstage.
- Re-create a scene from the play using clay forms in a box.

- Design a program cover for the play using the title, date, and an illustration inspired by the play.

- Draw an advertisement or program cover for the play.

7. Dance: Describe the kind of dancing in the performance. How is it different from the kinds of dancing you might know? What purposes could dance have in a play?

8. Language Arts:

- Choose a character that you liked and write a single day's diary for that character.
- Write a letter to a cast member telling what you liked about her or his character.
- Discuss the play. Was there a hero or heroine? A villain? The setting? Was there a moral to the story?
- In 25 words or fewer, describe the plot of the play.
- Discuss the work of a movie/theater critic. Write a newspaper-type review of the play.
- Discuss live theater. Are the actors aware of the audience? Why might an actor change his presentation because of audience reaction? Would it be easy to be an actor?
- Conduct an interview with a classmate pretending to be one of the actors and find out the actor's feelings about being on stage, memorization, rehearsals, costumes, audience, etc.
- Make a list of all the personnel needed for a play (director, actors, musicians, author, designers—set, costumes, lights, sound—stagehands, choreographer, producer, etc).

OTHER RESOURCES

Library of Congress' collection of primary source materials about the historic newsies:

<https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-newsies>

Zinn Education Project's description of the newsies strike, including archival video clip of newsies receiving papers from The World distribution wagon:

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/newsboys-strike/>

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