

HISTORICAL FICTION
a story based on true events from the past

NEWSIES

Meet the gutsy kids who fought back against their bosses—and won.

BY MACK LEWIS

Based on the true story of the Newsboys Strike of 1899

CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play. *Indicates a major speaking role.

***Stage Directors 1, 2, 3**
(SD1, SD2, SD3)

Crowd: to be read by a group
Boots, *Rose, *Racetrack,

***Curly, Sully:** newsies—children who sold newspapers
Historians 1 & 2

***Ani:** a 12-year-old girl
Manager

Longshoreman: a 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 New Yorker

As You Read How did the newsies work together to bring about change?

Scene 1

The Brooklyn Bridge, August 1899

SD1: Lights come up on a backdrop of the New York City skyline. In front of the backdrop is a set piece of the Brooklyn Bridge.

SD2: A crowd of kids is crammed onto the bridge, blocking horse-drawn carts and trolley cars in traffic.

Crowd: Newsies on **strike!** Newsies 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 (cheering): Woo! That's right! Yeah!

Racetrack: We're united in our cause!

(pointing) Here comes them papers now!



SD3: A wagon carrying a supply of *New York Journal* newspapers is trying to get through the crowd.

SD1: Newsies swarm the wagon like ants on a frankfurter.

Boots: Tear 'em up! Throw them papes over the side!

SD2: 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!

Scene 2

Manhattan, April 1898

SD3: A new backdrop shows the crowded offices of the *New York Journal*.

SD1: A line of children snakes through the office and spills out onto the cobblestone street.

SD2: Two historians enter and speak to the audience.

H1: In 1898, newspapers were the only way to find out about what was going on in the world.

H2: The two biggest newspapers were the *Journal*, owned by William Randolph Hearst, and the *New York World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer.

H1: Newspapers were sold by kids called "newsies." They were poor and often homeless.

H2: They used the money they made to feed themselves and their families.

SD3: The historians exit. Ani approaches the newsies.

Ani: Is this where you sign up?

Rose: Wouldn't you be better off at school?

Ani: I wish, but I have to help my family eat.

Curly: Don't we all!

Rose: All right. We'll teach ya all the tricks.

Curly: 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.

SD1: Racetrack pushes his way to the front of the line.

Manager: How many ya want?

Racetrack: I'll take 100.

SD2: 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!

Scene 3

The Bowery, later that day

SD3: The scene changes to a street corner in lower Manhattan. An elevated train clatters by.

SD1: The newsies gather, their newspapers stored in bags slung across their chests.

Curly: These will be easy to sell.

Ani: How do you know?

Rose: 'Cuz the news is good.

Curly (shouting at people walking by): Hot off the press! America at war!

Ani: War? How is that good news?

Rose: It's good for us. Boring news don't sell papes.

Curly: Get yer papers! War with Spain!

Longshoreman: War? Are you exaggerating again, kid?

Curly: No, sir. It's right here in the headlines.

SD2: The man hands Curly a penny.

New Yorker 1: I'll buy a newspaper.

New Yorker 2: I'll take two!

SD3: In minutes, Curly 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 four pennies): Here you go.

SD1: The worker dashes off.

Curly: Next time, give him three pennies. Most fellas won't even notice.

Ani: That isn't honest.

Rose: That's the dodge. C'mon, we'll show ya others.

Curly: Look **forlorn** whenever ya can.

Ani: Forlorn?

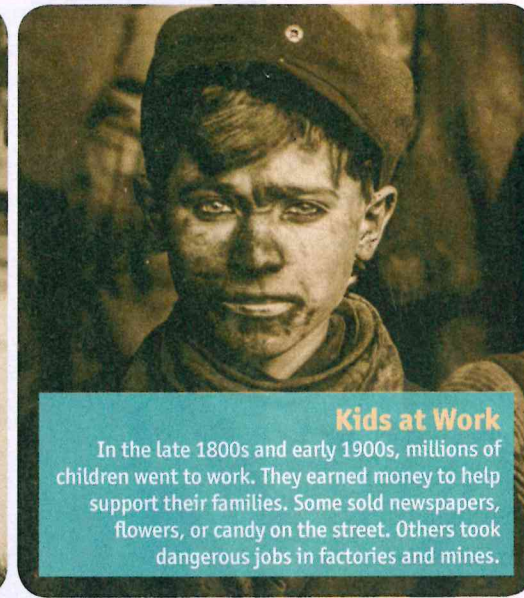
Curly: Crutch Morris, he limps like there's somethin' wrong with his leg. Kid Blink, he wears an eye patch. If the customer thinks you're down and out, they take pity on ya and buy a pape. Sometimes they'll buy two.

SD2: Ani frowns.

Curly: There's lotsa 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.

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



Kids at Work

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, millions of children went to work. They earned money to help support their families. Some sold newspapers, flowers, or candy on the street. Others took dangerous jobs in factories and mines.

Scene 4

Canal Street, July 1899

SD3: The backdrop shows a bustling street lined with food and clothing vendors.

SD1: The newsies stand along the street with their papers. People walk past them without a glance.

Rose: Since the war ended, no one wants to buy a paper.

Curly: 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.

SD2: Ani stands alone with her heavy bundle.

Ani: Get your *Journal* here!

SD3: No one buys a paper.

SD1: A trolley clangs by. Ani slogs to the nearest stop.

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

SD2: A face peers out from the trolley car.

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

Ani: Sure, Mister.

SD3: She digs in her pocket. The trolley bell clangs.

Stockbroker: Hurry up!

Ani: I'm trying.

SD1: The trolley begins moving. Ani runs alongside.

SD2: She reaches for the man's outstretched hand—

SD3:—then watches as the trolley car rumbles away with the stockbroker glaring at her.

SD1: She hangs her head.

SD2: A moment later, she sees the stockbroker 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! Now fork over my change.

Scene 5

Irving Hall, the next evening

SD3: The backdrop shows a block choked with thousands of newsies **clamoring** to get into a building.

SD1: Rose, Boots, and Curly are inside the packed hall. Jack "Sully" Sullivan addresses the crowd.

Sully: Mr. Hearst and Mr. Pulitzer promised to drop the price once the war ended. 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: NOBODY sells papes. If you sees anyone sellin' the *World* or *Journal*, ya swat 'em good.

Boots: You mean swipe da papes?

Sully: Yeah! Tear 'em up!

Scene 6

Broome Street, a few hours later

SD2: Curly walks down a deserted block looking for Ani.



SD3: He finds her curled up in an alley.

Curly: Where ya been?

Ani: I've been trying to sell my papers.

SD1: Ani starts crying.

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

Curly: 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 at all!

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

Scene 7

Hearst's car, several days later

SD2: Hearst and his assistant are riding in a car.

Assistant: The newsies' strike is hitting us hard.

Hearst: What are the numbers?

Assistant: Sales have dropped 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.

SD3: They arrive at Hearst's offices. The driver gets out and opens the door.

SD1: A crowd of newsies is 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 listen. I'm just trying to run my business. The war increased my costs.

Racetrack: The war increased your profits!

Step Back in Time

It's 1899 in New York City. You step outside and are greeted by all sorts of sights and smells and sounds. You see streets teeming with people speaking dozens of languages. You hear the clack clack clack of aboveground trains and smell the fresh foods that vendors sell from carts. You get a strong whiff of horse manure too. There are more than 150,000 horses in the city—and each horse produces about 22 pounds of manure each day.



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

SD2: 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 ya can't pay us 10 cents?

Boots: Yer tryin' to break us!

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

SD3: Hearst retreats into the building.

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

Scene 8

Central Park, the next day

SD1: The backdrop shows Central Park, filled with green grass and tall, leafy trees.

SD2: Ani, Curly, and Rose pass out leaflets.

Curly (to Ani): Is that yer stomach growlin'? When was the last time you ate?

SD3: Ani shrugs. A well-dressed woman in a fancy hat walks by. Curly hands her a leaflet.

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

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

SD1: The woman crumples up the leaflet.

Ani (disappointed): This is not going to work.

Curly: 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 pape he had.

SD2: The factory worker approaches them.

Factory Worker: You kids stay strong.

SD3: He gives them each a penny.

Factory Worker: Those newspaper men should not be cheatin' children to make their fortunes.

Ani: Thank you, sir.

SD1: Boots runs up, excited.

Ani: What happened, Boots?

Boots: The protest has spread to the Bronx and Queens. We's got Yonkers and Brooklyn locked up too. Hearst 'n Pulitzer will give in soon. You wait 'n see.

Scene 9

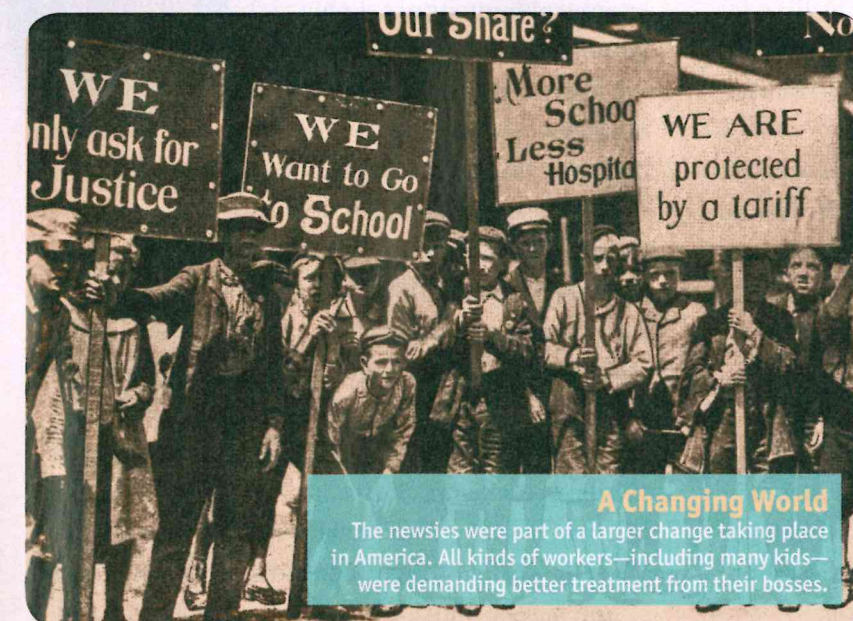
The Brooklyn Bridge, August 1899

SD2: The Brooklyn Bridge setting from Scene 1 reappears. Again, the bridge is crowded with newsies.

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

SD3: The last of a stack of papers goes flying over the side of the bridge.

Crowd: Wooo! Woooo! Yeah!



A Changing World

The newsies were part of a larger change taking place in America. All kinds of workers—including many kids—were demanding better treatment from their bosses.

Writing Contest

You are a reporter, and you're covering the Newsboys Strike of 1899. Write an article about what happened and how the strike was resolved. Include quotes from the characters in the play. Send your article to **Newsies Contest**. Three winners will each get *City of Orphans* by Avi.

Entries must be submitted by a legal resident of the U.S. age 18 and older, who is the teacher, parent, or guardian of the student. See page 2 for details.

Get this activity online.



Epilogue

SD1: The newsies stand in a line facing the audience.

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.

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

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

Rose: It showed us 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 during a school week. And all children have the right to an education.

Boots: Not all of us were around to see those laws pass.

Ani: But our bravery helped pave the way. ●