

Newsies

An inspiring read-aloud play about the Newsboys Strike of 1899

About the Story

Lexile: 840L (captions)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to write a newspaper-style article reporting on the key events, ideas, and details of the play

Key Skills: setting, text structure, key ideas and details, plot, characterization, author's purpose, theme

Essential Questions:

- How can we bring about positive change in the world?
- What is the value of working together?
- Where does power come from?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, R.10, W.2, W.9, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Video:

- "In the Time of the Newsies"

Slideshow:

- Background-builder slideshow: Journey to New York City, 1899

Audio:

- Vocabulary
- Text to speech

Recommended pairings from the Scope archives:

- *The Night of Terror*
- *The Girl Who Dared*
- "Day of Disaster"
- "Out of the Flames"
- *The Fight for What's Right*

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: The Newsboys Strike of 1899
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary Definitions and Practice
- Literary Elements: Theme Anticipation Guide
- Video Discussion Questions
- **Core Skills Workout:** Text Evidence*
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read 25 minutes

Do-Now: Theme Anticipation Guide (5 minutes)

- Project the **Theme Anticipation Guide**. As students enter the classroom, have them write down whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Take a quick poll, then ask volunteers to briefly explain their responses. Alternatively, share the **interactive version of the activity**, allowing students to respond digitally and view their classmates' responses to each statement in real time.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Share **Vocabulary: Words and Definitions** and review the words as a class. Optionally, assign the practice **activity** for homework. Highlighted words: *circulation, clamoring, forlorn, picket line, scabs, strike, trolley*

View the Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **video "In the Time of the Newsies: 1890-1915,"** which provides historical context and background knowledge for the play. Then have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** in groups or independently.

View the Slideshow (5 minutes)

- Watch the **background-builder slideshow: "Journey to New York City, 1899,"** which provides key information about the setting.

2. Reading and Discussing 45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 13 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Assign parts and read the play as a class. Finish by reading the captions aloud.

- Break students into groups to discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions. *Tip: If you're remote, you can have each group respond in a shared doc or discuss the questions in their own chat rooms; you can also make the questions an asynchronous assignment.*

Close-Reading Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- 1. What is the time span of the play? In other words, how long a time period does it cover?** (setting) *The time span is approximately one year and four months: It covers the period from April 1898 to August 1899.*
- 2. Chronologically (that is, in order of time), when do the events in Scene 1 take place in relation to the rest of the scenes?** (text structure) *Chronologically, the events of Scene 1 take place just before the events of Scene 9.*
- 3. Summarize the main conflict of the play.** (key ideas and details; plot) *Before a recent war, the owners of the two biggest newspapers increased the amount that they charged newsies—the kids who sell the newspapers to the public—for papers. The owners promised to drop the price back down after the war ended, but they didn't. Now the newsies are losing money, because it's harder to sell papers than it was during the war. The newsies fight back by going on strike and refusing to sell newspapers until their demands are met.*
- 4. What kind of a person does the playwright portray William Randolph Hearst to be?** **Support your answer with details from the play.** (characterization) *The playwright portrays Hearst as greedy and heartless. In Scene 7, Hearst is riding in a car (which suggests Hearst's wealth; cars were a new invention and most people would not have had one), complaining to his assistant that he has worked too hard to have his paper "ruined by a bunch of brats." By having Hearst refer to the newsies—children living tough lives who are just trying to get by—as "brats," the playwright characterizes Hearst as a cruel man who cares only about himself and his profits. This characterization is strengthened when Hearst offers to pay two dollars a day to anyone willing to cross the picket line; here, Hearst is again showing his disregard for the children and teens he relies on to sell the papers that he publishes.*
- 5. Vernacular is the word for the everyday speech used by people in a particular place. Why do you think the playwright chose to include vernacular in the play (such as when Racetrack says, "... when t' you and me it's the difference 'tweens eatin' and goin' hungry?!" and having characters call newspapers "papes")? How does the vernacular affect your experience of reading or listening to the play?** (author's purpose) *Students may say that the playwright used vernacular to help bring the world of the story to life—to help transport readers into the world of the newsies in New York City at the end of the 19th century.*

Answers to the second question will vary, but students may say that the vernacular helps them understand who the characters are, that it makes them feel like they are in the world of the play, or simply that it makes the play fun to read and listen to.

6. **What big idea about working together is developed throughout the play? Explain.**
(theme) *The idea that there is great power in working together is developed throughout the play. Each individual newsie has little power, but when the group agrees to go on strike to protest the increased price that the newspaper companies are charging newsies, they are successful: The newspaper companies agree to buy back any papers that the newsies are unable to sell.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Some members of the public—like the factory worker—supported the newsies’ strike and offered them encouragement. But others—like the lady who crumples up their pamphlet—did not. Why do you think some people might have been more sympathetic and supportive of the newsies than others? Answers will vary. Students might offer that some wealthy people, like the lady, were living in their own world and really didn’t understand the plight of the newsies, while others, like the factory worker, could better relate. Or, it could just be that some people were more sympathetic by nature.**
2. **In Scene 6, Curly says, “Sometimes ya have to sacrifice a little up front to get what’s best down the road.” Do you agree with Curly? Do you think it’s hard to do this? Explain.**
Answers will vary, but students are likely to say that yes, it can be hard to give up what you have right now for a better—but uncertain—situation in the future.
3. **At the end of the play, Ani says, “But our bravery helped pave the way.” In what ways were the newsies brave? The newsies were brave because they stood up to the rich and powerful owners of the newspapers and demanded better treatment. When the newsies went on strike and stopped selling newspapers, they gave up their immediate income and took the risk of not getting their jobs back at all. In addition, they took the risk of being criticized by the public.**
- **Revisit and reflect on the statements from the Theme Anticipation Guide. Discuss: Did reading the play develop, confirm, or change your position on any of the statements?**

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: The Newsboys Strike of 1899**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 17 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Recommended pairings from the *Scope* archives that explore young people in history standing up to injustice:

Drama: *The Night of Terror* (March 2020)

Drama: *The Girl Who Dared* (February 2019)

Narrative Nonfiction: "Day of Disaster" (November 2019)

Narrative Nonfiction: "Out of the Flames" (November 2018)

Drama: *The Fight for What's Right* (December 2017/January 2018)