

# Introduction

Inspired from the book "The World Rushed In" by J.S. Holiday, "Off to California" tells the story of the Morrison family from Pigeon Springs, Missouri and their overland journey to California in 1853.

For step-by-step instructions on how to perform a radio play with students, refer to the "Radio Theater Cookbook, Recipes for the Imagination," available from the Raven Radio Theater of the Air! This script is published with the following materials and information to help you prepare your students for their own radio drama presentation.

**Master CD** - a CD that contains the pre-recorded music and sound effects segments you will need to perform this play.

**Master CD** - lists the music and sound effect segments on the Master CD, their duration, and instructions.

**Character List** - tells you which characters are in the play, how many lines each one has, and which pages of the script to duplicate for each character.

**Sound Effects Suggestions** - ideas for finding or building the mechanical sound effects you will need to perform the play.

**"Get-Ready" Cards** - a master set of cue cards that you can copy onto card stock and use during the performance to cue sound effects crew.

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The Raven Radio Theater offers trainings on radio theater and storytelling.  
If you would like more information about trainings or see our catalog on-line:

[www.callingcrane.com](http://www.callingcrane.com)

The Raven Radio Theater of the Air!

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# “Off to California”

## Character List

Announcer	11 lines	Introduces the radio play to the audience
Great Grandchild	5 lines	Great grandchild of Willa
Little Boy	2 lines	Young grandson listening to story
Little Girl	3 lines	Young granddaughter listening to story
Narrator	60 lines	Willa as an 104 year old woman, storyteller
Willa	31 lines	Willa Morrison, Twelve year old girl
Zeke	39 lines	Zeke Morrison, Fifteen year old boy
Mother	98 lines	Helen Morrison
Bud	8 lines	Young boy who comes into Morrison General Store
Charlie	7 lines	Young boy who comes into Morrison General Store
Father	58 lines	Helen Morrison’s husband
Zona	5 lines	Zona Morrison, 6 year old twin
Zebbie	7 lines	Zebbie Morrison, 6 year old twin
Nephew	3 lines	Young boy working on the corral
Mr. Hallman	23 lines	Owner of Hallman’s livery stable
Mr. Johnson	31 lines	Overlander that loves to share stories and songs
Thorpe	12 lines	Leader of the wagon train

**Casting Notes:** There are 17 speaking parts in “Off to California.” Having an adult read the part of the Narrator can be very helpful as it helps establish the timing and expression of the young readers. Remember you are casting by voice alone, not by appearance. Become familiar with the script and try and match the reader to the voice of the character. The idea is to inspire the readers to bring as much life to their characters and the action of the story as possible. You will need 8 to 12 students for the sound effects crew.

# Duplicating List

Announcer	pp. 1, 19	Great Grandchild	p. 1
Little Boy	pp. 1, 19	Little Girl	pp. 1, 19
Narrator	Full script	Willa	Full script
Zeke	Full script	Mother	Full script
Bud	pp. 2-3	Charlie	pp. 2-3
Father	pp. 4-8, 18-19	Zona	pp. 4-5, 11-14
Zebbie	pp. 4-5, 12-14	Nephew	p. 9
Mr. Hallman	pp. 9-11	Mr. Johnson	pp. 11-13
Thorpe	pp. 14-16		

## Master CD Index

With the music/sound effects *master CD* for “Off to California”, you will be able to add audio texture and excitement to your radio theater production. The *master CD* includes **in sequence** the music and sound effects selections listed below.

1. Old-time radio segments
2. Theme music
3. Theme music
4. Theme music
5. Theme music
6. Birds
7. Theme music
8. Crickets
9. Theme music
10. Theme music
11. Rain with raging river
12. Theme music
13. Western Town
14. Theme music

# CLIPPITY-CLOP! SPLASH! PLOP! CRASH! BANG! WHOOSH!

## Sound Effects

**Chime** - A single tone (or several tones such as NBC's "Do - So- Me") alerts the listener to the upcoming radio drama. A glockenspiel makes fine tones but a variety of other items can work as well even a discarded bearing-ring hanging from a cord which is struck with a small wooden mallet.

**Rocking Chair** - Rock a curved piece of wood back and forth against a hard surface or squeeze the top edges of a Dixie Cup together, then rhythmically press the center together and twist back and forth with the fingers, close to the mic.

**Harmonica** - It is easy, and inexpensive, for a student or teacher to learn to play a couple of tunes on this instrument such as "Camptown Races" or "Ol' Susanna."

**Footsteps** - Walk in place or hold a pair of shoes with the hands and "walk" on a table. It is important to get a realistic rhythm to the footsteps. If walking in place, a "heel to toe" step is best but takes practice to master.

For footsteps in the general store use hard-soled shoes (leather are best) on a piece of plywood. For footsteps on gravel use a tray with medium to small gravel on it. For sloshing footsteps place several crumpled and shredded newspapers in a large wash pan (Brown paper restroom towels are better because they don't have any ink to stain the hands). Add water until you get a good "squishy" or "sloshy" sound. Simulate walking by using the palm of the hand for footsteps.

**Paper** - Paper sounds pick up well over a microphone and make a telling effect. Try different types of paper for the best sound.

**Items on Counter** - Use a real bag of sugar and coffee and a small tin can. Place each on the table loudly near a mic in time with Mother's voice.

**Door** - There was always a framed, half-size door in all the old radio drama studios. It either sat on a table top or, if larger, had castors so it could be easily moved around. The bigger the door and heavier the frame, such as one made of hardwood, the more realistic the sound it made. The handle was just a shade loose, so that it could be rattled a little as the door was opened. A variety of other door fittings were often installed on the door and frame including a lifting-type

latch, a bolt, a knocker, etc. Sometimes the door doubled for window sounds with a sash window set in the back of the boxed frame. If you build your own sound-door, or have a parent or local business donate one, it can be used over and over again in future radio drama productions. Another solution is simply to use a real door close enough to be picked up by a microphone.

A simple way to identify the general store with sound is to have someone ring a little hand bell as the door is opened or closed.

**Bag of Potatoes** - Drop a large bag of potatoes with a “thud” on the floor near a mic.

**Plates and Silverware** - Porcelain “china” plates are best for this effect. Tap and scrape a knife or fork against the plate to simulate the sound of someone eating.

**Washing Dishes** - Put some plates and a handful of silverware in a wash tub filled with water and actively “clink” them together with your hands while splashing the water.

**Striking a Match** - There are two distinctive sounds of lighting a match, the scratch and the flare of the flame. Use a large wooden kitchen match and draw it slowly across the striker about 6 inches from the mic.

**Envelope and Letter** - Take a heavy, unsealed, envelope and noisily remove a folded piece of paper from it close to a mic.

**Hoof Beats and Bridle** - Take two halves of an empty coconut shell and drum them rhythmically a tray of gravel. You can also cover the coconuts with cloth to imitate hoof beats on a soft surface.

The easiest way to imitate a bridle sound is with a whole bridle or just the bit or piece of light chain. Shake it lightly along with the hoof beats to create a convincing illusion of two horses and riders walking.

**Sawing Wood** - Use a short section of ‘two by four’ and a small saw. A dovetail saw or backsaw (the type used with a miter box) are safe to use. Begin the cut beforehand so that the saw will easily find the groove to make the sound.

**Saddle** - To make the squeaking sound of a saddle as someone dismounts take an old leather wallet and bend it back and forth close to a mic. Another way is to bind several short lengths of rubber-covered wire together, take in both hands, and twist back and forth.

**Anvil** - This is a great effect because an anvil has a distinctive “ringing” sound and immediately sets the scene of a blacksmith’s shop. A piece of metal pipe when struck will give you the desired effect such as the copper pipe under a kitchen sink’s drain. Drill a hole in the top of the pipe and hang it on a string or leather thong so that it hangs freely. Hit it several times with a hammer. The rhythm is important and should conjure up images of a blacksmith holding a red-hot horseshoe with a pair of tongs and shaping it with blows from a heavy hammer.

**Campfire** - An old standby of radio theater, this effect is created by gently crumpling a piece of cellophane. Different pieces of cellophane create different sounds so experiment to get just the right “crackle” for a campfire, grass fire, or house fire. You can add to this effect if you want by taking a small whisk broom and running your fingers along the top of the bristles while someone else snaps a thin piece of wood from time to time.

**Coffeepot and Pouring** - A great sound effect when done in tandem. Take coffeepot full of water (a porcelain, “camp-style” coffeepot is best) and rattle the lid a few times before pouring the water into a tin cup next to a mic.

**Music Box** - Use a music box or just the works for one which can be purchased inexpensively at most craft supply stores. Unfortunately once wound up, the works will not stop until it winds down. The solution is easy. Drill a small hole in the plastic case into which you can slide a nail to start and stop the little flywheel at will. Remember, however, when choosing a music box to consider the historical context of the play and pick one with an appropriate melody whenever possible.

**Wood for Fire** - Snap some sticks or thin pieces of wood near the mic.

**Digging Grave** - Use one or more small garden hand trowels and a shoe box-size container of dirt. Put some large pebbles in with the dirt to make more sound. With a mic nearby, repeatedly push the trowel slowly into the dirt, lifting some up and pouring it back, to simulate the sound of a large shovel digging in hard ground.

**Thunder** - Go to a sheet metal shop and try different pieces of scrap metal until you get one that makes exactly the sound you want (18 gauge works well). Bolt a piece of wood along the top and a piece of leather for a handle to the bottom. You can hang the thunder-sheet or have it held up by two people while a third shakes it. (Be careful when laying it down afterwards you don't make any unwanted noise.) Students who handle the thunder-sheet should wear leather work gloves as sheet metal often has sharp edges.

Another way to make thunder is to buy some lead shot from a sporting/hunting goods store (“OO-buck” is best). Put a handful into a heavy balloon and blow it up. Shake the balloon next to the mic to simulate thunder. A little practice will get it right. If you shake it too hard the balloon may break.

**Covered Wagon** - To create the effect of a wagon combine one or more sets of hoof beats on gravel with the rattle of harness, the turning of the wagon wheels, and the clanging of pots and pans. To simulate the harness fasten a small length of chain to a piece of stiff leather and rattle it or use a bridle and shake it. To make the sound of a wagon wheel, turn the crank on an old wooden ice cream maker. For the clanging pots, occasionally bang a couple of tin cups or pots together.

**Whip** - The whip sound can be made by taking two wide leather belts and taping them together at both ends. Holding the ends in each hand, push them together and then pull them apart making a snapping sound. It takes a little practice to make it work each time.

A better whip effect can be made with a “slapstick” which has two pieces of wood (roughly 18” long, 4” wide, 3/4” thick) connected at one end with a spring hinge like the ones used on the older screen doors. One piece of wood can be longer than the other and fashioned into a handle. Simply lift one piece of wood up and let it go to “slap” the other or, if made with a handle, flick it smartly with the wrist to make a consistent, realistic “crack” of a whip that is very easy to control.

# **ROCKING CHAIR**

*Wait for cue!*

# **HARMONICA**

# **FOOTSTEPS**

*Wait for cue!*

# **FOOTSTEPS (Two Sets)**

*Wait for cue!*

# **PAPER**

# **COFFEE-SUGAR TOBACCO. . .**

*Wait for cue!*

# **DOOR (Open & Close w/ Bell) FOOTSTEPS**

**FOOTSTEPS (Slow)**  
**BAG OF POTATOES**

*Wait for cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS**  
**DOOR (Open & Close w/ Bell)**

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**PLATES & SILVERWARE**

*Wait for cue!*

**DISHES WASHED**

*Wait for cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS**  
**DRAWER**  
**FOOTSTEPS**

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**MATCH**  
**ENVELOPE (Opened)**  
**PAPER (Unfolded)**

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p. 8-9

**HOOFBEATS (Two Sets)<sup>7</sup>**  
**SAWING WOOD**

*Wait for cue!*

**HOOFBEATS**  
**CREAK OF SADDLE**  
**RING OF BRIDLE**

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p. 9-11

**FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)<sup>8</sup>**  
**ANVIL**

*Wait for cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)**  
**ANVIL (Fade Away)**

*Wait for cue!*

**CAMPFIRE**

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p. 12-13

**FOOTSTEPS (Run on Gavel)<sup>9</sup>**  
**COFFEE (Poured)**  
**FOOTSTEPS (Run on Gavel)**

*Wait for cue!*

**MUSIC BOX**

*Wait for cue!*

**WOOD SNAPPED**

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# **DIGGING**

*Wait for cue!*

# **FOOTSTEPS (Slow)**

*Wait for cue!*

# **HARMONICA DIGGING**

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# **THUNDER**

*Wait for cue!*

# **WAGON**

**Hoofbeats**

**Bridle**

**Banging Pots**

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# **FOOTSTEPS (Sloshing)**

*Wait for cue!*

# **FOOTSTEPS (Sloshing)**

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**WHIP**  
**WAGON**  
**Hoofbeats**  
**Bridle**  
**Banging Pots**  
**WHIP** (watch for cues)

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**PACKAGE** (Unwrap)

*Wait for cue!*

**HARMONICA**  
**FOOTSTEPS** (Gravel)

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**OFF TO CALIFORNIA**  
**Cue Cards**

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## "Off to California"

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**1**

**FADE-IN OLD-TIME RADIO SEGMENTS**

**Announcer:** Welcome ladies and gentlemen to the Raven Radio Theater of the Air and our exciting historical adventure, "Off to California." Today's radio play was written by Joe McHugh and is brought to you by (school or sponsor).

So now it's time to sit back, listen carefully and let your imagination be your guide as we present "Off to California!"

**2**

**FADE-IN THEME MUSIC**

**Great Grandchild:** My great grandmother, Willa Leanne Denton, was born in 1841. When she died in 1945, she was 104 years old. I can still remember her sitting on her porch in her wicker rocking chair and telling us kids about her childhood, especially about her adventures coming to California in 1853. She was a natural storyteller and often made me wish that I had lived back in those exciting days of long ago. . .

**FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC**

**fade-in sound of rocking chair**

**Little Boy:** Great-grandma, tell us about coming to California in a covered wagon?

**Little Girl:** Yes, please, Nanny, tell about the story man?

**Narrator:** Well, children, the world was a much different place back then than it is today. My family owned a general store in Pigeon Springs, Missouri, when I was growing up. It was hard making a living back then, I can tell you, and money was scarce. There was me. . . I was 9. . . and Zeke, he was my older brother. . . and the twins, Zebbie and Zona. They were 8. Little Alice had died of the fever when she was 3. But everything changed the day the Breen boys come into the store. . .

**fade-out rocking chair**

**harmonica being played and then stop**

**Willa:** Why, you sure are handy with that thing, Zeke. Can you play, "Turkey in the Straw?"

**Zeke:** Not yet. I've only had this harmonica since my birthday.

**steps approach and stop**

**Mother:** (aggravated) Zeke and Willa Morrison! What are you doing a-settin' here? I thought I told you to sweep out the storeroom?

**Willa:** You should hear Zeke play his mouth-organ, Ma. He's real good at it.

**Mother:** Well, you know I like music as well as the next person, Willa, but there's a time for music-making and a time for work. With your Pa away in St. Louis, I need all the help I can get around here.

**Zeke:** You're right, Ma. Come on, Willa.

**two sets of steps fade-away**

**Mother:** (talking to herself) Now where was I? Oh, yes, Mr. Henry's order. Where did I put it? . . . Hmm, here it is.

**sound of paper being handled**

**\* sound of items being placed on counter timed to dialogue**

**Mother:** . . . two pounds of coffee\*, right. . . a bag of sugar\*, got that. . . a tin of tobacco\*

**door opens and closes with bell**

**two sets of steps approach and stop**

**Bud:** Good Morning, Mrs. Morrison.

**Mother:** Morning, Bud. Morning Charlie. And what can I do for you boys?

**Charlie:** Pa sent us to pick up his seed potatoes. You got 'em ready?

**Mother:** I think so? (calls loudly to Zeke in the back of store) Zeke, bring out that sack of seed potatoes your Pa put aside for Andy Simmons.

**Zeke:** (yelling from a distance) Right away, Ma.

**Bud:** Have you heard the big news, Mrs. Morrison?

**Mother:** And what news is that, Bud?

**Bud:** Why, about California. They've found gold there.

**Mother:** (impressed) Gold, you say?

**Charlie:** It's true. It's been in all the newspapers. A fellow named Marshall found some along the American River in a place called Coloma. President Polk says they got over 200 ounces of gold at the War Department in Washington. The Army sent it back from California.

**Bud:** Everyone's talking about going out to California.

**two sets of slow, shuffling steps approach and stop**

**Zeke:** (frustrated) Come on, Willa, hold up your end.

**Willa:** (complaining) I'm trying, Zeke. It's heavy.

**bag of potatoes being dropped on floor with heavy thud**

**Zeke:** Whew! That sack weighs more than a bucket full of buckshot!

**Charlie:** Howdy, Zeke. Howdy, Willa. What you been doing?

**Zeke:** Just working, mostly.

**Mother:** Bud says they've found gold in California.

**Bud:** (jumping in) That's right. Pa says he might head out to the gold rush himself.

**Willa:** That sounds exciting. How would he get there?

**Charlie:** By wagon, I reckon.

**Zeke:** Well, from what I hear, there's a whole lot of country to get across first. Mountains and deserts and everything. It takes all summer to make the journey.

**Mother:** And there's Indians to worry about too.

**Bud:** All the same, Pa says opportunities like this don't come along but once in a lifetime. How much I owe you for the seed potatoes, Mrs. Morrison?

**Mother:** Oh, your Pa can settle up later.

**Bud:** Thanks, Mrs. Morrison. Come on, Charlie.

**Charlie:** Bye, Mrs. Morrison. See you later, Zeke.

**Zeke:** Bye!

several steps followed by door opens and closes with bell

3

FADE-IN THEME MUSIC

**Narrator:** That's how I first heard about the California Gold Rush and when Pa got back from St. Louis he was busting with the news. He said it was all he heard about wherever he went.

FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC

fade-in clinking of plates and silverware

**Father:** Why, it sure is good to be home. There's nothing compares to your cooking, Mother. I'll cut a piece of this pie, if you don't mind?

**Mother:** That's what I made it for. Willa helped with the crust.

**Father:** Hmmm. . . (chewing sound) . . . And a mighty fine crust it is, too. Well, let me tell you what's going on in the city. I ain't never seen nothing like it. You can't buy a team of mules or a yoke of oxen for any kind of money. Other plunder, like shovels and gunpowder and boots, are as scarce as hens' teeth. They're all being grabbed up by folks going west to California. And not just men from Missouri. . . No sir! They're a-comin' in from all over the thirty-five states. They call it "gold fever" and that's a good a name for it. Why, I've met grown men who have left their families and everything just to take a shot at getting rich. And you should hear some of the wild tales that are making their way back from the gold fields.

stop clinking of plates and silverware

**Zona:** What kind of tales, Pa?

**Zebbie:** Tell us one, Pa. Please!

**Mother:** (mild scolding) Don't keep the children waiting, John.

**Father:** Well, all right. Reckon I can tell one. It seems there was this here man in California who was so busy panning for gold that he wouldn't stop to even wash his clothes. Of course, you shouldn't put a thing like that off too long, if you know what I mean.

**Zeke:** Why, he must have smelled like Aunt Millie's pig!

**Zona:** He sure would!

**Father:** (chuckling) I'm sure you're right. Anyway. . . he gets an idea to string a rope across the river so he can dangle his long-johns down into the water. That way they can get cleaned overnight while he's a-sleepin'. Well, it turns out, there's so much gold in them California rivers that, come morning, don't you know but the miner found his underwear was. . . gold-plated!

**Zebbie:** That's funny, Pa.

**Father:** Why, Mother, you don't seem to be enjoying my story none. Are you ailing?

**Mother:** (frustrated) John Morrison, don't be asking if I'm ailing. I've seen that look in your eye before. You mean to join all them other fools and head for California.

**Father:** Why, I hadn't even . . .

**Mother:** (jumping in) Don't bother denying it. I know times are hard around here but, at least we've got something. Something real that you can put your hands on, not some pipe-dream of gold nuggets as big as goose eggs.

**Father:** All right, I admit it. I have given the matter some thought, but it's not to go looking for gold. Why, I know as much about gold mining as a cat does about swimming. I'm more suited to keeping a store.

**Mother:** I agree with that!

**Father:** Then hear me out. The way I got it figured is this here "gold rush" is going to last at least five years, maybe longer. They'll be digging holes all over California like moon-struck gophers. And what are they going to need to do all this work? . . . Why, tools. . .and heavy pants. . . and waterproof boots. That's what they'll be buying. And they'll pay top dollar to get 'em, too. So I'm thinking we should sell out here and set up a store in one of them boom-towns just as things are a-gettin' started. We could make some real money. Better than we can hope to do around here, anyway.

**Zeke:** What do you think, Ma?

**Willa:** It'd be an adventure. Can we go, Ma?

**Mother:** (with hesitation) Well . . . I'm not sure. It's one thing for a single man to be a-goin' half way around the world without knowing what to expect. It could all be a bust, there are no guarantees. Besides, we don't know a thing about what lies between here and California. I just can't see dragging young children along on such a dangerous journey.

**Father:** (reluctantly) You're right, dear. I guess it just wouldn't work out.