



# RAVEN RADIO THEATER PRESENTS!

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A Radio Drama Script for the Classroom



**The Story of Mumbet**  
**Elizabeth Freeman 1744-1829**

Written by Joe McHugh

# Introduction

The play opens with the slave, Mumbet, and her sister, Lizzie, living in Sheffield, a small town in western Massachusetts in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. A committee of leading citizens begin to meet at their owners house, Judge Ashley, to craft a document to send to the King of England stating their belief that all people are born free and equal under the law. The slave Mumbet learns about this document and tests it for herself in a court of law.

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.

**Mp3 Playlist** - lists the Mp3 music and sound effect segments that is included with your script, 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 Story of Mumbet”

## Character List

Announcer	13 lines	Introduces the radio play to the audience
Daughter	13 lines	Young girl touring New England with her mother
Narrator	133 lines	Mother touring New England and teller of story (cast an adult)
Hannah	19 lines	Wife of Colonel Ashley and owner of slaves, Mumbet and Lizzie
Sedgwick	74 lines	Lawyer who helps Mumbet win her freedom
Smith	4 lines	Walter Rifkin-Smith, visiting representative of Boston patriots
Lizzie	14 lines	Mumbet’s frail younger sister
Ashley	27 lines	Colonel John Ashley, judge and leading citizen of Sheffield
Wilbermont	13 lines	Member of Sheffield Declaration Committee
Hodge	4 lines	Member of Sheffield Declaration Committee
Dyer	3 lines	Member of Sheffield Declaration Committee
Mumbet	36 lines	Slave who sues for her freedom
Callahan	4 lines	Member of Sheffield Declaration Committee
Pamela	26 lines	Wife of Theodore Sedgwick
Judge	5 lines	Judge who presides over Mumbet’s case
Canfield	25 lines	Attorney for Mr. Ashley

**CASTING NOTES:** There are 16 speaking parts in “The Story of Mumbet.” 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

<b>Announcer</b>	p. 1,17-18	<b>Daughter</b>	p. 1-2, 17
<b>Narrator</b>	entire script	<b>Hannah</b>	p. 3-8
<b>Sedgwick</b>	p. 3-16	<b>Smith</b>	p. 3-4
<b>Lizzie</b>	p. 3-13	<b>Ashley</b>	p. 4-8
<b>Wilbermont</b>	p. 4-6	<b>Hodge</b>	p. 4-5
<b>Dyer</b>	p. 4-5	<b>Mumbet</b>	p. 5-13
<b>Callahan</b>	p. 5	<b>Pamela</b>	p. 10-13
<b>Judge</b>	p. 14-16	<b>Canfield</b>	p. 14-15

## Mp3 Playlist

With the music/sound effects Mp3 files for “The Story of Mumbet,” you will be able to add audio texture and excitement to your radio theater production. The Mp3 playlist includes in sequence the music and sound effects selections listed below as they are numbered in the script. Some mp3 tracks are duplicated to make your “live” production easier.

1. Old-time radio segments and fanfare
2. Birds and light traffic
3. Theme music
4. Rain
5. Theme music
6. Theme music
7. Howling wind
8. Theme music
9. Birds and light traffic
10. Theme music

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

# Sound Effects

**Footsteps (most types)** - 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 indoors 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.

**Footsteps, Snow** - Squeeze a box of cornstarch with the fingers in the proper rhythm. Better yet, put the cornstarch in a chamois bag.

**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.

**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.

**Teapot and Pouring** - A great sound effect when done in tandem. Take teapot full of water (a porcelain tea pot is best) and rattle the lid a few times before pouring the water into a china cup next to a mic.

**Bellows** - This sound can be made with a fireplace bellows or an accordion with only the air key held open.

**Map** - Unfold a real map or a large piece of paper. Paper sounds pick up well over a microphone and make a telling effect. Try different types of paper for the best sound.

**Drawers** - Slide two pieces of wood together (put a small cross-piece on one so that the other will hit it at the end of the slide indicating the close) or find a wooden box with a sliding lid or drawer that can be opened close to the mic. Follow with handling of contents such as costume jewelry and clothing if appropriate.

**Cloth, Rips and Tears** - Rip a piece of old window shade or unbleached muslin near the mic. Remember to start the tear beforehand.

**Lighting of Candles/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.

**Wood on Fire** - Take two logs and throw one against the other, poke logs with a poker as you would logs in a fireplace.

**Gavel** - Use a real gavel and hit it against a piece of hardwood such as maple or walnut or use a regular hammer on a piece of hardwood.

*Wait for Cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS**  
**(Gravel, two people)**

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**KNOCK ON DOOR**  
**FOOTSTEPS**  
**DOOR OPENS**  
**THUNDER**

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**FOOTSTEPS**  
**DOOR CLOSES**

*Wait for Cue!*

**RUSTLING OF COATS**

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p. 4

**FOOTSTEPS (One Set)**  
**HANDLING OF**  
**COATS**  
**MAN'S FOOTSTEPS**

4

*Wait for Cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS (3 Sets Fade Away)**

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p. 5

**DOOR OPENS**  
**CARRYING OF TEA SET**

5

*Wait for Cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS**  
**POURING TEA**

*Wait for Cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS**  
**BELLOWS**

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p. 6

**MAP (Unfold)**

6

# SCRAPING OF SHOVEL

*Wait for Cue!*

## FOOTSTEPS (Approach

*Wait for Cue!*

and stop)

## FOOTSTEPS (Run)

## FOOTSTEPS (Man's)

*Wait for Cue!*

## SHOVEL DROPPED

*Wait for Cue!*

## FOOTSTEPS (Man's angry)

## FOOTSTEPS

## DRAWER OPENED

*Wait for Cue!*

## FOOTSTEPS

## RIPPING OF CLOTH

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**FOOTSTEPS**  
**RUSTLE OF BLANKET**  
**PUTTING ON CLOAK**

*Wait for Cue!*

**FOOTSTEPS IN SNOW**

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**DOOR KNOCKER**  
**(REPEAT)**

**DOOR OPENS**  
**FOOTSTEPS**  
**DOOR CLOSES**  
**FOOTSTEPS**

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**FOOTSTEPS**  
**LIGHTING OF CANDLE**  
**WOOD ON FIRE**  
**SCRAPE OF POKER**  
**HANDLING COAT**  
**FOOTSTEPS (Man's)**

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# **GAVEL**

*Wait for Cue!*

# **FOOTSTEPS (Approach and stop)**

*Wait for Cue!*

# **FOOTSTEPS**

# **FOOTSTEPS (Approach slowly and stop)**

*Wait for Cue!*

# **GAVEL (Two Bangs)**

*Wait for Cue!*

# **GAVEL (One Bang)**

# **FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)**

# “The Story of Mumbet”

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**1**

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

**Announcer:** Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Raven Radio Theater and our presentation, “The Story of Mumbet.” Today’s play was written by Joe McHugh and is brought to you by (name of sponsor).

A mother and daughter, enjoying a summer vacation together, take a driving tour through the beautiful mountains, farms, and woods of New England. They come into a small town in western Massachusetts. Parking their car, they walk down the street past the town hall and the old public library, where they turn onto a gravel walk that leads into a small cemetery.

**2**

**FADE-IN BIRDS AND LIGHT TRAFFIC**

**two steps walking on gravel**

**Daughter:** Where are we going, Mom?

**Narrator:** There’s something here I want to show you.

**Daughter:** What is it?

**Narrator:** It’s someone’s grave. Someone very important.

**Daughter:** Who is it?

**stop steps**

**Narrator:** See that group of gravestones over there, the ones set in circles facing towards the center? Well, they all belong to the Sedgwick family.

**Daughter:** Who are the Sedgwicks?

**Narrator:** A very old and important family from around here. The tallest gravestones, the ones in the middle of the circles, are the oldest. All but one of them belong to the first generation of Sedgwicks, who settled here in the Berkshire Mountains in the early 1700s.

**Daughter:** Who does the other one belong to?

**Narrator:** Someone named Mumbet. She was a slave who lived a long time ago. She was a very brave and determined woman. Here, sit down on this bench and let me tell you her story.

3

FADE-OUT BIRDS AND LIGHT TRAFFIC

FADE-IN THEME MUSIC

**Narrator:** Now, most people think there were slaves only in the South, but that's not true. There were slaves in the North, too, a good many of them before the Revolution. Mumbet's mother was from Africa. As a young woman, she was captured along with others by African warriors who raided her village. The warriors then sold her to Dutch slave traders, who brought her to America where she was sold as a slave.

Mumbet and her younger sister Lizzie grew up as slave children in Claverack, New York, about twenty miles south of Albany. Their owner was a Dutchman named Pieter Hogeboom. In 1735, his youngest child Hannah married a man named John Ashley. When Pieter Hogeboom died in 1758, Mumbet and Lizzie were inherited by the Ashleys, who were by then living in Sheffield, Massachusetts, the largest settlement in the western part of the colony.

The Ashleys owned a large house, and Mumbet and Lizzie were house slaves. They cleaned the fireplaces, cooked the food, beat the rugs, washed the clothes, tended to the children, and did whatever other chores the Ashleys wanted done. Mumbet was a robust and capable young woman, but Lizzie had always been thin and frail. The hard work was often very difficult for her.

As for John Ashley, he was an important figure in the community. He was a commissioned colonel in the local militia and was eventually elected Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. He was a decent man by nature who treated his slaves well. His wife Hannah, however, was an altogether different kind of person—demanding, vain, and mean-spirited. Poor Mumbet and Lizzie regularly were the victims of her petty frustrations and foul moods.

**Narrator:** The colony of Massachusetts had been founded in 1620 by the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. For a hundred and forty years, a steady stream of colonists arrived from England, many of them, like the first Pilgrims, escaping religious and political persecution at home. In 1773, when Mumbet was thirty years old, the colonists in America were beginning to chafe at the controls imposed on them by a faraway Parliament in England. They felt they had little or no say about issues of vital importance to them. Because of Colonel Ashley's position in the community, the heated political controversies of those revolutionary times often found their way into the Ashley home.

**4**

**FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC**

**START RAIN WHEN DOOR OPENS, STOP WHEN CLOSED**

**knocking on door, steps approach door, door opens  
several claps of thunder while door is open**

**Hannah:** Mr. Sedgwick! What a dreadful night to be out.

**Sedgwick:** That it is, Hannah. This is Mr. Rifkin-Smith. He has just arrived here from Boston.

Mr. Adams sent him to speak to the committee.

**Hannah:** It is a pleasure to meet you, sir.

**Smith:** The pleasure is mine, madam.

**Hannah:** Please, do come in out of the weather.

**steps enter house, door closes, stop thunder**

**Hannah:** It is such a foul night! I feared the roads were impassable.

**coats being taken off and shaken**

**Smith:** My old horse could find his way through the Devil's own backyard, Mrs. Ashley!

**Hannah:** (calling out to slave in other room) Lizzie, come and take the gentlemen's coats and hang them by the fire to dry.

**Lizzie:** (from distance) Yes, Mistress Ashley.

**steps approach slowly**

**Hannah:** (annoyed) Hurry up, now, Lizzie. These gentlemen don't have all evening. (to Sedgwick and Smith) I swear, but she's slow as molasses.

**steps stop, handling of coats and steps move away  
man's steps approach and stop**

**Ashley:** (cheerful voice approaches) Theodore, I was beginning to wonder what had become of you. The other members of the committee have already arrived.

**Sedgwick:** This is Mr. Rifkin-Smith, Colonel.

**Ashley:** Ah, Walter, it's good to see you again. (laughs) Don't be surprised, Theodore. I made Mr. Rifkin-Smith's acquaintance last spring when I traveled to Boston to meet with the governor. An upstanding member of the community by day, is our Mr. Rifkin-Smith, and a tireless Son of Liberty by night. Isn't that so, Walter?

**Smith:** Each must do his part in these troubled times, Colonel.

**Ashley:** Yes, well, come upstairs to the study, the two of you. The committee is anxious to get started. We are working on a declaration to be sent to the King of England proclaiming our rights as citizens of the Empire. (to his wife) Hannah, dear, have Mumbet bring tea to our guests in the study.

**three sets of steps fade-away**

**Wilbermont:** I say enough is enough! One day the government holds out an olive branch, and the very next day it's a Brown Bess musket ball. There will be a revolution, mark my words— and soon!

**Everyone:** (walla in response with here-here!)

**Hodge:** I concur with everything Mr. Wilbermont says but, gentlemen, let us consider in our work here what will happen should we gain our independence. What then? How shall we be governed? Will we simply replace one set of self-serving scoundrels with another?

**Dyer:** We shall govern ourselves, Mr. Hodge, through representative government—men honestly elected by the people and answerable to them alone.

**Sedgwick:** Then had we not, gentlemen, consider the legal status of citizens in such a state? Who, may I ask, will have the right to vote and to sit on grand juries?

**Dyer:** Property owners, I say, Mr. Sedgwick.

**Hodge:** Aye, I agree!

**Wilbermont:** Then who, Mr. Dyer, will be allowed to own property? Shall women own property? And if they do, then by your logic, shall they also be given the vote?

**Everyone:** (great confused walla)

**Ashley:** Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Please, the hour is late and we have much work to do.

**door opens, steps approach carrying tray of tea**

**Mumbet:** I have the tea, sir.

**Ashley:** Very good, Mumbet. Serve the members of the committee, and then put some more wood on the fire. Use the bellows to quicken the flame.

**steps move about/tea is poured several times followed by steps to fireplace and sound of bellows**

**Ashley:** Gentlemen, Mr. Rifkin-Smith is here on behalf of our fellow patriots in Boston. They desire us to submit a document to the King which states our position as regards the rights of the citizens of western Massachusetts. We cannot, at this time, decide such particulars as who will vote if and when we win our independence.

**Callahan:** But we should make plain our belief that all human beings are free and equal under the law. No more shall there be one set of laws for the rich and powerful and another for the common man. I trust we are all in agreement on this?

**Everyone:** (walla of approval with a few Hear! Hear!)

**Callahan:** Good. Then let us spell it out, I say, in plain text for all the world to read.

**Ashley:** Mr. Sedgwick, as clerk of this committee, can you draft language that states our firm commitment to this first and most important principle—namely that all human beings are to be considered free and equal under the law, and that the government's first responsibility is to protect the liberties of her citizens.