



RAVEN RADIO THEATER PRESENTS!

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A Radio Drama Script for the Classroom



Seven Miles to Freedom **Robert Smalls 1839-1915**

Written by Joe McHugh

Introduction

The story begins when Robert Smalls a young slave before the Civil War is being taken to Charleston to work by his new owner. Robert tries to buy his freedom from his new owner, but the Civil War breaks out and he is pressed into service as the pilot of a gunboat named the "Planter." Seeing his chance for freedom he decides to steal the gunboat one night across Charleston harbor and into the blockading Union navy.

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 Raven Radio Theater offers a wide variety of scripts and books on radio theater and storytelling. If you would like more information or see our catalog on-line:

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“Seven Miles to Freedom” Character List

Announcer	11 lines	Introduces the radio play to the audience.
Narrator	147 lines	Storyteller of the play.
Mother	11 lines	Robert Smalls’ mother, slave on southern plantation.
Robert	94 lines	Robert Smalls, slave, hero of our story.
McGee	2 lines	Southern plantation/slave owner
Caesar	21 lines	Friend of Robert Smalls
Henry	4 lines	Friend of Robert Smalls
Martha	5 lines	Friend of Robert Smalls
Hannah	5 lines	Robert Smalls’ wife
Kingman	14 lines	Robert Smalls’ owner, Charleston, SC
Senator	10 lines	Senator of South Carolina
John	27 lines	Friend and cohort of Robert Smalls
William	13 lines	Friend and cohort of Robert Smalls
Gabe	1 line	Friend and cohort of Robert Smalls
Alfred	2 lines	Friend and cohort of Robert Smalls
Sailor	9 lines	Union sailor in Charleston Harbor
Nickels	9 lines	Union commanding officer in Charleston Harbor
Harvey	4 lines	Union sailor in Charleston Harbor

Casting Notes: There are 18 speaking parts in “Seven Miles to Freedom” 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.

Character List

Announcer	11 lines	pp. 1, 17-18	Narrator	147 lines	full script
Mother	11 lines	pp. 1-2	Robert	94 lines	pp. 1-15
McGee	2 lines	pp. 1-2	Caesar	21 lines	pp. 3-5
Henry	4 lines	pp. 3-4	Martha	5 lines	pp. 3-4
Hannah	5 lines	pp. 5-6,11	Kingman	14 lines	pp. 6-7
Senator	10 lines	pp. 6-7	John	27 lines	pp. 9-15
William	13 lines	pp. 9-11	Gabe	1 line	p. 12
Alfred	2 lines	p. 13	Sailor	9 lines	pp. 15-16
Nickels	9 lines	pp. 15-16	Harvey	4 lines	p. 16

Mp3 Playlist

With the music/sound effects Mp3 files for "Seven Miles to Freedom", 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. Theme music
3. Country sounds
4. Theme music
5. Crickets w/ banjo
6. Theme music
7. Cry of baby
8. Theme music
9. Theme music
10. Harbor sounds
11. Theme music
12. Lapping water
13. Steamboat engine
14. Sailing ship
15. 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 or on the porch 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.

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.

Newspaper - Use a real newspaper and make realistic noise when turning the pages.

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.

Pouring - Pour a large glass of water into a wash pan near a mic.

Bucket pulled up with water - Take a galvanized bucket, the older the better, and drop it into a large tub of water, pull it out and let the water drip a bit into the tub.

Lantern - Use an old kerosene "hurricane" lantern. Push the lever that opens the glass globe next to a mic.

Speaking tube - Speak through the tube of a paper towel, or any tube that gives a distant far away sound.

Coat and hat

Cannon signal

Telescope - Find a retracting telescope and pull it out.

Ship's whistle / Siren - Blow across the neck of a bottle half filled with water; the less water in the bottle the deeper the sound.

p. 2-3

FOOTSTEPS (Gravel)
FOOTSTEPS
(Gravel two sets)

1

Wait for cue!

FOOTSTEPS (Wood)

p. 3

FOOTSTEPS (Wood)

2

Wait for cue!

DOOR (Open)
FOOTSTEPS (Wood)
DOOR (Close)

p. 4

POURING

3

Wait for cue!

NEWSPAPER
(Repeat)

BOX (Opened)

CIGAR (Removed)

MATCH (Strike)

**BUCKET OF WATER
(Repeat)**

Wait for cue!

FOOTSTEPS

DOOR (Open)

FOOTSTEPS

DOOR (Close)

**FOOTSTEPS
(Shuffling, many)**

Wait for cue!

FOOTSTEPS

LANTERN
(Slide one long two short)

Wait for cue!

SPEAKING TUBE (open)

SPEAKING TUBE (Close)

FOOTSTEPS
COAT AND HAT

Wait for cue!

COAT PUT ON

LANTERN
(Slide one long two short)

Wait for cue!

CANNON SIGNAL

Wait for cue!

FOOTSTEPS

FOOTSTEPS

TELESCOPE (Open)

Wait for cue!

SHIP'S WHISTLE

FOOTSTEPS (Running,

voices in the distance)

**Seven Miles to Freedom
Cue Cards**

“Seven Miles to Freedom”

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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, “Seven Miles to Freedom.” Today’s play was written by Joe McHugh and tells the story of Robert Smalls, a slave from South Carolina who through courage and determination wins his own freedom and that of others.

So now, sit back, listen carefully and let your imagination be your guide as we present, “Seven Miles to Freedom.”

2

FADE-IN THEME MUSIC

Narrator: Robert Smalls was born a slave in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1839. His master was a man by the name of McGee. Back in those days, a slave owner could hire out one of his slaves to work for someone else. Of course, whatever wages the slave made had to be given it to his master. So when Robert was twelve years old, McGee decided to take him up to Charleston to work. It was a hard parting for the young boy from his mother and the only home and life he’d ever known.

3

FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC

FADE-IN COUNTRY SOUNDS

Mother: Now, you take this food with you for the trip. It’s a fair piece up there to Charleston.

Robert: But why do I have to go, Mama? I could work in the fields like the others.

Mother: No, child, Master McGee don’t need no more field hands. That’s why he’s a-takin’ you up to Charleston. But now mind me, be sassy with your work, but not with your tongue. That way you’ll earn the master his money and he won’t sell you. If he sells you, why lordy, I might never see you again.

Robert: I’ll work hard, Mama.

McGee: (yelling from distance) Come on, Robert. We don’t have all day.

Mother: Maybe I'll find a way to come up there to Charleston someday to see you. It's a fine city, from what I hear. They got a harbor with so many ships they say it looks like a pine thicket a-floatin' on the water.

Robert: I wish I was a-goin' away to make money for you, Mama, and not for Mr. McGee.

Mother: (in an urgent whisper) Now, be careful and don't say such a thing where the master can hear you. I do so worry about you, Robert. You're not used to city ways.

Robert: I'll send word about how I'm doing whenever I can.

steps in gravel approach

McGee: Now don't get me angry, boy. Come along and get in the wagon.

Mother: You best go, son.

Robert: Bye, Mama. (as he turns to leave) Please don't cry.

two sets of steps on gravel fade-away

4

FADE-OUT COUNTRY SOUNDS
FADE-IN THEME MUSIC

Narrator: Robert's first job in Charleston was as a waiter at a fancy restaurant for five dollars a month which was paid to his owner. He then went to work as a lamplighter for the city where his job was to clean the gas street lamps in the morning and light them with a long taper at dusk. The rest of the day, he worked as a stevedore on the Charleston docks, loading and unloading ships. He lived during these years in a rough shack behind the house of Mrs. Eliza Ancrum, his master's sister-in-law.

Once he got used to it, Robert took to city living. He liked the crowds and the hustle and bustle of a thriving port. His chief pleasure was spending time with the small society of free blacks who lived in Charleston. These were, for the most part, former slaves who had been freed by their masters, or had somehow managed to earn enough money to pay for their own freedom. Whenever Robert could, he'd steal time to visit with these people and talk to them.

Narrator: Now, understand. Up until then, in his entire life, he'd never met a black person who wasn't a slave, a person who could come and go as he saw fit. A person free to keep whatever money he made and spend it on the things he wanted. It wasn't long until Robert began to imagine himself as someday being a freeman—a person who owned his own life.

5

**FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC
FADE-IN CRICKETS WITH BANJO**

approaching steps and stop

Robert: Good evening, Caesar. I brought you the molasses you asked for.

Caesar: You're a resourceful young man, Robert. Come on up on the porch and rest yourself. Have you met my cousin Henry yet?

steps on wooden stairs onto porch and stop

Robert: No, sir, I don't believe I have.

Henry: Caesar's told me about you. He claims if it weren't for you, the streets of Charleston be dark as pitch come nighttime.

Caesar: Henry's got to be the finest banjo picker this side of Jordan, Robert. He can rightly make the banjo sing.

Robert: I'm right fond of music, Mr. Henry. I most certainly am.

Caesar: (yelling into house) Martha, it's young Robert come to visit. Bring me out another glass so I can pour him some cold cider. (to Robert) Sure was a hot one today.

Robert: Did you work down at docks, Mr. Lewis?

Caesar: Sure did. The "Cornelius" come in from Boston with a load of ice. She'll be going on to South America on Friday.

Henry: Now, there's some country I'd like to see, the Good Lord willing.

door opens and closes followed by steps onto porch and stop

Martha: Evening, Robert.

Robert: Evening, Ma'am.

pours cider into glass

Caesar: Now, set yourself down and sip on this awhile.

Robert: Thank you.

Caesar: Can you read, Robert?

Martha: The boy can't read. It's against the law to teach Negroes to read and you know it.

Robert: I want to learn to read. I know some of my letters.

Caesar: (with satisfaction) See, the boy's got ambition, Martha.

handling of newspaper

Caesar: See what I've got here, Robert. Do you know what it is?

Robert: A newspaper.

Caesar: That's right, a newspaper. But what kind of newspaper?

short pause

Martha: (after short pause) Now, don't be teasing the poor thing, Caesar.

Caesar: It's a Northern paper, Robert. I got it from one of the sailors off the "Cornelius."

Robert: Can I touch it?

Henry: (laughs) He acts like it's some kind of treasure map.

Caesar: Well, maybe to him it is, Henry. It's a whole other world up North. Here. . . there's words in it from the great Frederick Douglass.

handling of newspaper

Robert: Who's Frederick Douglass?

Martha: He used to be a slave up in Virginia. But he ran away and now lives up north and he writes for the newspapers. He's a great abolitionist.

Caesar: He writes about how it ain't right for one man to own another man and how the black man has sweated and suffered to help build this country and yet he's denied the benefits of that work, the right to freedom and to vote and get fair treatment in the courts.

Robert: I mean to be free some day.

Caesar: Well, if wishing ever made a thing come true, I do believe you will, Robert. I sure do believe you will.

6	FADE-OUT CRICKETS FADE-IN THEME MUSIC
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Narrator: Robert was clever and talented and could almost always master whatever he put his hand to. McGee eventually got him hired on as a sailor on a riverboat called the "Planter" that traded up and down the Pee Dee River during the summer months.

When Robert was seventeen years old he met a girl named Hannah Jones who attended the same church. She was a slave who worked as a maid in a hotel in the city and, like Robert, she had to give all the money she earned to her owner, a man named Kingman. Well, they were young and fell in love, Robert and Hannah, and decided to get married. But back then, slaves had to get permission from their owners first before they could get married. Luckily, both Kingman and McGee agreed and the wedding took place on Christmas Eve, 1856. A year later, their daughter, Elizabeth, was born. The little infant was for Robert a source of both joy and. . . some considerable worry.

7	FADE-OUT THEME MUSIC CRY OF BABY
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Robert: Here, Hannah, let me hold the little thing. . . (to the baby) Now, now, there, what's got you all riled up?

Hannah: She's been fussy all afternoon. Must be she don't take to her daddy being gone so much.

Robert: A man's got to work in this world, little Elizabeth. There just ain't no way around it.

Hannah: You thought anymore about talking to Master Kingman?

Robert: I'm going to go around tomorrow evening and see him. I'm aim to tell him I wants to buy you and the baby's freedom.