

Coming to America: The Story of the Statue of Liberty

By Kathleen E. Bradley

Characters

Narrator

Francis

Captain

Mama

Sophia

Captain's Son

Setting

This reader's theater takes place in 1906 aboard a transport ferry, which is taking immigrants from a large ship to Ellis Island. This story is based on actual events.

Act 1

Narrator: A ferry sails through New York Harbor. The Statue of Liberty can be seen briefly through gaps in the morning fog.

Captain: Look closely now. There! Did you see her?

Narrator: Mama and Sophia gasp.

Sophia: Oh, Mama. She's beautiful—a princess! Did you see her crown?

Francis: I didn't see anything. What am I looking for?

Narrator: Mama doesn't turn to look at her son. She keeps her eyes looking forward. Her hands cover her mouth.

Captain: Hope. That's what you're looking for. And that's what your Mama sees. Now don't take your eyes off . . . there! Do you see?

Francis: Wow! Yes, I see her now. Papa said that when we see the Statue of Liberty, we've made it to America.

- Narrator:** Mama pulls her children close. They giggle with joy.
- Mama:** That's true. It won't be long before we see Papa, too.
- Sophia:** I miss Papa. It's been so long. I want to be a whole family again—instead of in pieces.
- Captain:** The statue knows how that feels. Lady Liberty also came to America in pieces. She was packed up in wooden crates.
- Captain's Son:** Two hundred fourteen crates to be exact. She was brought here on a ship called the *Isero*. My father saw it with his own eyes.

Act 2

- Mama:** Miss Liberty is a work of art. They say she was a gift from France.
- Captain:** That is true. I was but a young lad myself back in 1886. I was one of thousands who gathered to see the statue arrive aboard a grand white ship. French and American flags were waving from every hand.
- Captain's Son:** It took almost a year for America to build her pedestal. People donated money to help build it. Some of that money was tossed into the mortar when the pedestal was built. The coins can still be seen in it today!
- Captain:** Yes, she was a great effort by two countries. Nearly 600,000 rivets hold her copper sheeting together. It was the sweat of hundreds and money of thousands that placed her in New York Harbor.
- Sophia:** Francis and I read all about the Statue of Liberty on posters while we waited to board the ship in France.
- Francis:** There wasn't much else to do while we waited in the long lines. Everything about the statue means something. She's dressed in ancient Greek robes because Greece was the birthplace of democracy long ago.

- Sophia:** The seven points on her crown stand for the seven continents and seven seas.
- Francis:** They say there's a length of broken chain at her feet showing that oppression won't be allowed in America.
- Sophia:** In America, there are no kings or czars—just people like Francis, Mama, and me. We don't have to be afraid anymore. We can do what we want, say what we want, and pray how we wish.

Act 3

- Captain:** Look at our Lady Liberty. Her real name is “Liberty Enlightening the World.” Notice how she faces East toward Europe and all the lands beyond? That's no mistake.
- Francis:** So her hope is that countries all around this world will someday enjoy freedom—like America?
- Captain:** Right you are, son. The French admired America's democracy, so they hired a French sculptor. His name was Auguste Bartholdi. They asked him to create a statue as a gift to America for her 100th birthday. It took ten years to complete the statue, but she was worth the wait.
- Captain's Son:** Father, don't forget Gustave Eiffel. He designed the iron framework inside the statue so that she would stand strong for a long, long time. I want to be just like Mr. Eiffel when I grow up.
- Captain:** You will, Son. Each of our dreams can be different in America. My dream is to sail this ferry each day.
- Captain's Son:** My dream is to build an iron bridge across this harbor. Father, I will build it tall enough so that you will be able to ferry under it.

Song: America Is Going To Be My Home

Act 4

- Sophia:** Papa came here a year ago. He went to work with his brother. My uncle owns a bakery.
- Francis:** Papa says there are lines of customers waiting every morning before they even open the doors.
- Narrator:** The captain smiles at Mama.
- Captain:** Is that so? Well, that's what America is all about. It is the land of opportunity.
- Francis:** Papa says we will all need to work. I'm 12, almost 13—so I'll do the heavy work. Mama will bake. Sophia will probably just eat the cakes!
- Sophia:** Stop teasing me, Francis! Papa says I must work at the bakery, too. I will ice the cakes. Then, I'll eat them!
- Mama:** To think there will be eggs, milk, and butter—everyday.
- Captain:** Imagine that and more. Each American's imagination is just one half of his or her ticket to opportunity.
- Francis:** What do you mean?
- Captain's Son:** If you can imagine something, then it is a possibility.
- Captain:** As long as . . .
- Captain's Son:** You nurture your dream with plenty of hard work.
- Narrator:** The captain winks at his son.
- Sophia:** Mama, does that mean that I can become a seamstress one day?
- Mama:** Maybe so, Sophia. Maybe so.

- Sophia:** I'll make the most beautiful dresses!
- Francis:** And I'll become a jeweler. Mama, with Sophia's dresses and my jewels, you'll look like a queen.
- Narrator:** Mama blushes, and looks at her woolen coat and knitted scarf.
- Mama:** I think the jewels and dresses can wait. Besides, I'm not sure your Papa would recognize me in jewels and fine dresses.
- Sophia:** Papa says he will meet us once we clear through Ellis Island. Will it be long now, Captain?
- Captain:** Ellis Island is right behind Liberty Island. There it is now— Ellis Island, "The Golden Door."
- Captain's Son:**Some people call it the "Island of Tears."

Act 5

- Francis:** Why do some people call Ellis Island the "Island of Tears?"
- Captain's Son:**Because of the questions. Not everyone gives the right answers. If they don't, they are not allowed to pass through. Some of the questions can be confusing.
- Narrator:** Francis bites his lower lip.
- Francis:** Mama doesn't read or write as well as Sophia and I. What if she can't answer the questions?
- Captain's Son:**You must stay close to your mama and help her.
- Francis:** My papa makes me worry. He says because I'm 12, I could be sent back to my country alone if I fail to answer the questions.
- Sophia:** They won't send Francis back, will they?

Captain: You and your family will do fine. You are all healthy. That is what matters most to the officials. The sick ones are often turned away and sent back to their countries—heartbroken.

Narrator: The sound of a man coughing can be heard in the distance.

Captain's Son: Do you see that man over there? If he has a serious disease, he could make more people sick.

Captain: He will be spotted quickly and tagged. He is sure to be sent back.

Francis: Do you know the questions they will ask us on Ellis Island?

Captain's Son: The questions are simple. What is your name?

Francis: My name is Francis.

Captain's Son: Do you have family meeting you?

Sophia: Yes, my papa!

Mama: Hush, Sophia! Let Francis do the speaking.

Francis: My father, Samuel, will be meeting us.

Captain's Son: Who paid for your passage to America?

Francis: My father paid nine dollars for each of us. He saved for over a year.

Captain's Son: Do you have any money with you?

Narrator: Francis turns to his mother. He bites his lip. She nods to her son.

Mama: Yes, we have a modest amount.

Sophia: Sewn into the hem of our coats!

Mama: Sophia! Shush!

Captain's Son:Where will you stay in America?

Francis: We will stay with my uncle's family in their home above the bakery.

Captain's Son:Do you have a job?

Narrator: Francis looks at his mother and smiles.

Francis: Yes! We will work at my uncle's bakery.

Mama: Francis, don't worry. We can answer all those questions. We will pass the test.

Poem: Passing the Test

Act 6

Narrator: The captain docks the ferry at Ellis Island.

Captain: Now, here we are at the Golden Door.

Mama: Thank you, Captain. You and your son have been so kind to us.

Captain: My son and I wish your family all the best. But first, promise me one thing?

Mama: Yes, of course. What is it?

Captain: Before you go inside, turn and take one more look at our Lady Liberty. She will send you back two gifts—hope and determination. These gifts will help you get through Ellis Island today and will sustain you forever here in your new home of America.

AMERICA IS GOING TO BE MY HOME

Oh, I've got hope
And a ticket to opportunity
I've got hope
And a ticket to opportunity
Oh, I've got hope
And a ticket to opportunity
America is going to be my home

Oh, I've got dreams
And a ticket to opportunity
I've got dreams
And a ticket to opportunity

I've got dreams
And a ticket to opportunity
America is going to be my home
I've got plans
And a ticket to opportunity

I've got plans
And a ticket to opportunity
I've got plans
And a ticket to opportunity
America is going to be my home

PASSING THE TEST

What is your name?
Where are you from?
You will need money.
Do you have some?
Do you have family?
Where are they now?
Who paid your way
To come anyhow?
Are you quite healthy?
What are your plans?
Where will you work?
Where will you land?
Answer these questions
Answer with pride.
America's open—
Come on inside!

Glossary

czars—the rulers of Russia until the 1917 revolution

democracy—a government run by the people

ferry—a boat used to carry passengers, vehicles, or goods from one place to another

mortar—building material made of lime and cement mixed with sand and water that is spread between bricks or stones

oppression—cruel or unjust use of power

pedestal—the base of something upright (as a vase, lamp, or statue)

rivets—a metal bolt used for uniting two or more pieces of metal, wood, plastic, or other material