

## Multi-cultural Reader's Theatre

### Freedom's Wings: Corey's Underground Railroad Diary

By: Sharon Dennis Wyeth

Characters:	Narrator 1	Narrator 2
	Corey	Mama
	Elsa	Mr. Hart

The following is an adapted reader's theatre from the book Freedom's Wings. Please note that not all phrases or wording is exactly the same as the book. Excerpt taken from pages 51-54  
This portion depicts some of the difficulties slaves went through trying to gain freedom.

Narrator: It was March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1858. 9 year old Corey Birdsong and his mother fled their slave owners home a little over a week ago. They have been traveling north being careful not to be seen. They've been hiding in ditches and bushes during the day and traveling by night. Not everyone can be trusted. Who can they trust, or who might be waiting to trap them and send them back home?

Corey: Mama, that sign says Maysville, 50 miles.

Mama: Mr. Renfield tole us that be where de Ohio River be

Corey: This where we supposed to be.

Mama: Look Corey, through them trees. There's the house wid the red door.

Corey: There's too many wagons crossing, we can not cross the road without being seen.

Narrator 2: Corey and his mom hide in the brush until evening. Corey decides to start singing the robin song which is the signal to give someone with the Underground Railroad.

Corey: (Singing robin's song) Cheer up. Cheer up. (Looks at Mama) That's the signal Mama, remember?

Elsie: (Enters and looks around. Stands close to Corey and Mama, but doesn't see them)

Corey: (Sings bird song) Cheer up. Cheer up.

Elsie: (Signals back) Cheer up. Cheer up.

Mama & Corey: (Sprint across the road and disappear with Elsie into her house)

Narrator 2: Mama and Corey spend the night at Elsie's house in the cellar under her schoolhouse.

Elsie: Here is some ham and cornbread. Eat now. You can sleep while I teach today, but stay quiet.

Narrator 1: Later on that day Elsie gives Corey a gift that will help him continue reading and spelling.

Elsie: Here Corey. I thought you might like to look at one of the spelling books we use in my class.

Corey: Thank you. I have a new spelling list!!!

Narrator 2: Later on that day Elsie receives an unwanted visitor while Corey and Mama stay hidden in the tunnel underneath the school.

Elsie: (Opens door) Can I help you sir?

Mr. Hart: I'm looking for two runaways: A woman named Angel and a boy named Corey. Angel is a good seamstress and expecting a child. Her boy Corey was wearing a red shirt. I'm offering \$200 for the woman and the boy for anyone who finds them.

## **Who Will Tell My Brother?**

By: Marlene Carvell

Characters:	Narrator 1	Narrator 2
	Evan	Mother
	Father	Maggie
	Crowd	Classmates

The following is an adapted reader's theatre from the book *Who Will Tell My Brother?* Please note that not all phrases or wording is exactly the same as the book. Excerpt taken from pages 140-147  
This portion shows what difference one person can make even amidst opposition and racism.

Narrator 1: It is June 14<sup>th</sup>, 3 days before Evan's graduation. His parents are worried about all his efforts concerning the school mascot and are discussing with him a little about what might happen at the graduation.

Mother: (Voice full of worry) Evan?

Evan: There's been word of a big plan to display their rights somehow at graduation. They plan to make a banner with a painted face, and vacant eyes, and an ornate headdress. They plan to carry it proudly on the field behind the seniors so they will then have a memory of the past to carry with them.

Evan: Some, though, wish it would not be and there are many that are not proud to be part of a plan that leaves such a memory. (Sadly) I tried to stop this plan, but others have the right; and so our rights our stripped, and so it will still take place.

Father: (instructing) Evan, this is not the time or place to confront the spitefulness of those who claim the right to flaunt an Indian face for everyone to see.

Narrator 2: Today is the day of Evan's graduation. It is June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Many people are anxiously awaiting what is going to happen during the ceremony. Evan is lining up with his classmates in preparation for the ceremony.

Maggie: (anxiously, quickly coming up to Evan) Evan, Evan, what are we going to do?

Evan: (slowly) Nothing.....we'll do nothing.

Maggie: (surprised look on her face)

Evan: (looks across field)

Mother: (nods and waves at Evan)

Evan & Classmates: (march up the stage to sit in the chairs)  
(Later on during the ceremony)

Classmates: (Standing)

Maggie: (leans over to Evan and whispers) *Psst*, Evan, look!

Narrator 1: Across the field 2 boys carry a flag flaunting the Indian face.

Crowd: (Cheers as they see the flag)

Classmates: (One by one sit down and bow their heads)

Narrator 2: Slowly many classmates sit down and remove their caps to acknowledge that what they witness does not make them proud. A message has been sent loud and clear. Evan and some of his classmates have done their part to show the world that hate and shameful pride must cease to be.

## **Bright Freedom's Song: A Story of the Underground Railroad**

Gloria Houston

Characters:	Narrator 1	Andrew
	Toby	Papa

The following is an adapted reader's theatre from the book *Bright Freedom's Song: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. Please note that not all phrases or wording is exactly the same as the book. Excerpt taken from pages 93-94

This portion shows how not everyone agreed on the issue of slavery during the 1860's.

- Narrator: After one noonday dinner, Andrew, goaded beyond endurance, hit the older boy with his fists at those words against father. But he was not match for the larger, older Toby, his arms developing from days at the anvil.
- Toby: (picks Andrew up and throws him to the ground)
- Andrew: (struggles to get up, both fists are up ready to hit Toby again)
- Papa: (comes running from the house) (harshly) I will have no fighting on my place! You live in peace here, no matter what your disagreements be!
- Andrew: (defensively) He keeps telling me about all the slaves he is going to buy when he is a smith, (with authority) and he knows we don't hold with slavery here.
- Papa: (still a little harsh) We may not hold with slavery, but a man has a right to his opinions and his dreams as well, my Andrew. So leave him to his own words. You need not agree with them. Go on and check on the sheep.
- Andrew: (leaves to check on the animals)
- Papa: (sits down beside Toby) Young man, you will be a fine smith one day. You have the hands, the mind, the way of seeing things before they are fully formed. You will likely be a rich smith, a man of influence. But you would do well to look to your own work, not that of slaves. For it may be that by the time you are a smith, no slaves will be there to work for you.
- Toby: (a little defiantly) No slaves? People have always had slaves. Don't you remember that Joseph and the Children of Israel were slaves of the Egyptian pharaohs? I plan to own a great many slaves. And have a fine wife of great beauty.

Toby:

(Toby leaves leaving Papa looking shocked and surprised.)

## Witness

By: Karen Hesse

Characters: Narrator Viola Pettibone  
Harvey Pettibone

The following is an adapted reader's theatre from the book *Witness*. Please note that not all phrases or wording is exactly the same as the book. Excerpt taken from pages 24, 29, 92-93, 102  
This portion shows one couple's dealings with the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s.

- Narrator: Harvey and Viola Pettibone are a couple in their mid-fifties. They own a shop in a small town in Virginia during the 1920s. Harvey and Viola are dealing with a new group in town and debating over a period of time whether or not they will become join.
- Harvey: (Convincing) The Ku Klux are here, Vi. There's not a thing to stop them. We might as well join them. Why not? They're not low-down, like some folks say. They're good men. 100 percent American men and they might bring us some business.
- Viola: (In debate) In Texas, Harvey, those "good" men thought a certain fella was doing some act he shouldn't have. They had no proof, Harv. They beat him, anyway, held a pistol to his head, said they'd kill him if he didn't clear out.
- Harvey: (In defense) That's just a rumor. They have parades, Vi, and picnics, and speakers from all over. Wouldn't you like that? Picnics and speakers?
- (Pause)
- Harvey: They do good, Vi. They take care of their women, and liquor can't ever tear up a family with them around. (pause) Shouldn't we join, Vi?
- Viola: (shakes her head slowly) No, Harv, I don't think we should.
- Narrator: A few days later.
- Harvey: (trying to change Viola's mind) If we join the Klan, we can wipe out Bronson's grocery by next year, Vi. All the Klan members will shop here, even if they lives closer to Bronson. Bronson's made his feelings against the Klan clear. If we join up with them, ho long could Bronson last? Six months, nine?
- Viola: (Not convinced) What about all our regulars, Harv? We make this store "Klan only" we lose a lot of business. Where do you think they'll all go?
- Harvey: It doesn't matter. That little bit of business; it won't be enough to keep Bronson flush, Vi. You'll see.

Viola: I don't think so.

Narrator: A couple weeks later.

Harvey: (Defensively) How was I to know they'd be so pushy over a broom sale? Stinking stampede it was, Vi.

Viola: (frustrated) You never will learn, Harv.

Harvey: I thought putting those brooms out for one cent would be good business.

Viola: (Irritated) Twelve women taken to doc Flitt, Harv, with cuts and bruises. We'll be lucky if they don't ask us to cover the doctor bills!

Harvey: (not discouraged) Doc Flitt wouldn't charge us for that.

Viola: Doc Flitt hasn't been too happy with you lately, Harv. You and your Klan. He might just charge us double!

Harvey: Klan will see to him if he does.

Viola: (In disgust) Oh fine, Harv. You looking to drive away the one good doctor we got here? What happens if you need doctoring? (stares at Harvey)

Harvey: (Stares back at Viola, not happy) Nothing's going to happen to me, Vi.

Viola: (shakes her head in disgust)

Narrator: A number of weeks later.

Viola: Harvey Pettibone, how could you do such a thing?

Harvey: They had booze in that hotel, Vi. They were breaking the law, serving alcohol.

Viola: So you go in, dressed in those Ku Klux nightclothes of yours and you think you'll save the world from the evils of drink by raiding the place and smashing a few bottles?

Harvey: It felt so good breaking that glass, Vi.

Viola: Did it feel \$400 good, Harv? Did it?

Harvey: (rubs his stomach, sits down and sighs)