

CAROLINE'S BANNER OF FREEDOM  
A PLAY FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES, GRADES 3-8  
Based on a real people and incidents

CHARACTERS

CAROLINE PICKERSGILL, 14 years old, daughter of a flag maker

COUSIN ELIZA YOUNG, 14 years old, lives with her cousin, Caroline and her family

COUSIN BEN FEARSON, 15 years old cousin of Caroline, son of a retired sea captain, Uncle Jesse, on Baltimore's Council

UNCLE JESSE FEARSON, Retired captain of a privateer during the Revolutionary War, and uncle to Caroline, Member of the Baltimore's Committee of Vigilance and Safety. Walks with a limp after being captured during the Revolutionary War and tortured.

GRANDMOTHER REBECCA YOUNG, 75 years old, Mary's mother, Caroline and Eliza's grandmother, former flag maker for George Washington

MRS. MARY PICKERSGILL, widow, Caroline's mother and the flag maker of the Francis Scott Key flag that was the inspiration for our national anthem during the Battle of Baltimore

Non-speaking or small parts extras to play soldiers, paperboy, townspeople

PLACE

Baltimore, Maryland

TIME

1814

SET DESIGN

On the back three fourth's of the stage is a two story house, open to the audience like a doll house so the audience can see inside.

The first floor consists of a central hall with an upright piano and a staircase leading up to the second floor. To the left is a large room arranged as a shop that houses the flag maker's business. The entrance to the shop is through a side entrance to avoid sight line difficulty. On the right of the hallway is the kitchen/dining area. There is a side door entrance into the kitchen.

The upper floor has a landing with a bay window and a window seat. On either side of the landing are doors that open and close but the rooms are not seen. One door leads to an unseen mother's and grandmother's bedroom and the other unseen room is Caroline and Eliza's bedroom. All the action on the upper story takes place on the landing.

Street scenes are played in front of the house.

ACT 1  
Scene 1

*(Lights up to half light. Caroline enters from upstairs bedroom door wearing a nightgown, a cap on her head, barefoot and runs down the stairs, pauses at the last three stairs then jumps down to the hall. She goes into the flag shop and half whispers.)*

CAROLINE

Mother?

*(Runs back into the hall and then into the kitchen.)*

Mother?

*(Runs to the back of the hall and yells.)*

Mother, I forgot our goodnight kiss.

*(Mary Pickersgill (Mother) enters from the upstairs bedroom door, wearing a nightgown, a cap, a shawl and carrying a candle.)*

MOTHER

Caroline, for heaven's sake, don't yell. Have you hurt yourself? Show me. You're barefoot! Haven't I told you a thousand times to wear your slippers. There may be a stray needle on the floor and you could prick yourself and...and...

CAROLINE

I forgot.

MOTHER

You're fourteen years old, too old to use that as an excuse.

*(She opens the door to her bedroom and listens.)*

At least you didn't wake Grandmama.

CAROLINE

I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Sorry for what. Not waking your Grandmama

CAROLINE

I forgot to give you a good night kiss and knew I wouldn't sleep until I did.

MOTHER

*(Laughs.)*

Oh, silly darling. Come here.

*(Gives Caroline a hug and a kiss.)*

*(Eliza enters from bedroom door also dressed in a nightgown, cap and slippers. She is carrying a candle and a book.)*

ELIZA

Aunt Mary, I was reading and heard this horrible screeching. Is everything all right?

CAROLINE

No one was screeching. You're not reading another romance. What's this one called?

ELIZA

I do ever so love romances. It's called Sense and Sensibility.

CAROLINE

You have no sense.

ELIZA

Have more sense than you do. You have no sensibility.

CAROLINE

Who wants sensibility, sounds like some la dee dah stuff from your fancy girl's school. Miss Frou Fous's Ladies Seminary.

MOTHER

Now girls, enough, not another word. It's late and I want you both in bed. No more lit candles, they're costly and no more noise, you'll wake Grandmama. Eliza, no more reading.

*(Exits into bedroom door.)*

ELIZA

*(Whispers)*

Jane Austin

*(Mother pokes her head outside the door.)*

MOTHER

I can still hear you. Go to bed at once.

*(The girls go toward their bedroom door.)*

ELIZA

Yes, Aunt Mary.

CAROLINE

Yes, Mother.

*(Mother closes her door. There is a moment of silence.)*

CAROLINE

Jane, Jane must be a great pain. Is Jane Austin from Maryland?

ELIZA

*(Mumbles.)*

No.

CAROLINE

Then where?

ELIZA

England.

CAROLINE

England! You're mooning over a book written by our sworn enemy.

ELIZA

Jane Austin is not our enemy. She's wonderful.

CAROLINE

She's British. We fought a Revolutionary War against the British for our freedom and now they're trying to....  
*(Turns toward the bay window, a reddish glow can be seen through the window.)*

Eliza, the sky's all lit up.

ELIZA

It's August.

CAROLINE

So?

ELIZA

You know what Uncle Jesse told us. August is a good month for shooting stars.

CAROLINE

Come look! Those aren't shooting stars.

ELIZA

*(Goes to the window.)*

What is it?

CAROLINE

We'd better get----

*(Starts to yell.)*

Mother, Grandmama, come quick.

MOTHER

*(Calls from her room.)*

What? Caroline, have you hurt yourself?

CAROLINE

No. Come quickly. Get Grandmama. Something's happening.

*(Mother comes with a shawl around her shoulder and a candle, and goes over to the window where the girls are standing and look outside.)*

MOTHER

It's an out-of-control fire. I'd better wake Grandmama.

*(She goes back to the door and goes inside. You can hear her saying.)*

There's a fire, come quick.

GRANDMOTHER

Who's a cryer?

*(Grandmama enters, cap askew, large glasses perched on her nose.)*

MOTHER

No, a fire, a fire. Look.

*(She points to the window.)*

GRANDMOTHER

You don't have to yell. I'm perfectly capable of hearing.

*(She looks out the window.)*

Uhm Water brigades won't be able to stop this one. All we can do is wait and pray for rain.

CAROLINE

Isn't that in the direction of...

MOTHER

Only one place could kindle such a fire and be seen this far away.

GRANDMOTHER

The British army must have captured our capital, Washington, and are burning it.

ELIZA

Is that possible?

CAROLINE

Cousin Ben told me our Maryland boys went to protect the capital. They'd never let the redcoats take Washington.

MOTHER

You're right. It doesn't make any sense. What could the British have done to keep our American soldiers from stopping them?

CAROLINE

It must be something terrible. Let me go to Uncle Jesse's house and find out. Since he's on the Committee of Vigilance and Safety, he'll know.

MOTHER

You'll do no such thing. What a ridiculous idea? A young lady out by herself in the middle of the night.

CAROLINE

Can't we do something?

MOTHER

Be patient. It may be too early for any messengers to have gotten to him. He'll let us know in the morning.

GRANDMOTHER

President Madison had no choice. He had to ask Congress to go to war.

ELIZA

He's too old to run the country.

GRANDMOTHER

Fiddlesticks! I'm seventy-five and doing well. President Madison is only sixty-three.

MOTHER

The British have been capturing our ships for years, forcing American sailors to work without wages.

GRANDMOTHER

We had to go to war. Thirty-one years ago we fought for our independence. Is their king a slow-wit? We want to be a free country.

ELIZA

The sky's still red.

GRANDMOTHER

I'll wager they're looting the capital.

CAROLINE

Why would they do that?

GRANDMOTHER

That's how those British rascals earn a living. Spoils of war are what they call it. I call it stealing. When the British attacked Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War, we had to abandon our house. They stole all of our silver.

CAROLINE

Listen! The wind is rattling the windowpane. Thank the Lord, it's starting to rain.

MOTHER

Good. It'll put out the fire. There's nothing more we can do tonight. Time for bed. We'll need our wits about us in the morning. Come Mama. Girls, go to bed. Eliza, no reading!

ELIZA

Sometimes soldiers do terrible things to young ladies.

GRANDMOTHER

Stop sniveling.

ELIZA

Who will protect us?

MOTHER

Uncle Jesse

GRANDMOTHER

He'll be too busy taking care of his wife who's always getting the vapors over the slightest thing. Eliza stop fussing. Worrying never helps.

*(Mother and grandmother exit to their bedroom and the girls linger looking out the window.)*

CAROLINE

We won't let those British hurt us. But if they come here, will they destroy our flag? We worked so hard.

*(They hug. )*

ELIZA

Shush, they'll hear us. Do you feel like going to bed? I'm too nervous.

Let's go downstairs. We won't be heard.

CAROLINE

*(Once again she races down the stairs and jumps the last three stairs. Eliza follows, placing her book and the blown out candle on the window seat then gracefully holds her gown in a ladylike fashion.)*

Ladies always descend the stairs gracefully. That's what I was taught at Mrs. Lancombe's Seminary for proper young ladies.

ELIZA

CAROLINE

Not another lecture.

ELIZA

Gracious manners are essential for a young lady's upbringing. But if you refuse to discuss gracious deportment, what else can we talk about?

CAROLINE

Anything as long as it's not manners.

ELIZA

You know I never heard the full story of how you and your mother got that commission to make the flag.