

Character Breakdown

Newsies JR. calls for a large cast of primary, featured, and ensemble storytellers – and each has a unique personality and special role to play in the newsies' strike. Cast actors who can find ways to bring these beloved characters to life with strong, clear choices. The more specific you are with your casting, the stronger your show will be.

Remember, it's important to empower your performers portraying newsies, customers, and members of the other various ensembles. Activate their imaginations and encourage them to develop a specific movement vocabulary that corresponds with their characters as they move throughout the boroughs of New York City. *Newsies JR.* is a true ensemble piece, so play to the strengths of your actors. For example, though Katherine isn't traditionally a dancing role, if the actor cast is a strong dancer, find a way to showcase her talent.

Below is a character breakdown for *Newsies JR.* Performers playing leading roles – the **Primary Storytellers** – will most likely remain those same, single characters from the beginning to the end of the show. **Ensemble Groups** and **Featured Roles** are selected performers chosen from the larger general ensemble. Your ensemble can participate in multiple or all groups, but keep costuming (the number of costumes and changes per performer) in mind when casting these featured ensembles. All roles in *Newsies JR.* require singing, whether as a solo or in a group. Refer to the charts on pp. C7-9 for the Actor's Script pages showcasing the characters' featured lines or vocals as well as their gender (flexibility).

Primary Storytellers

THE KIDS

These young characters fight for their rights and establish their place in history. Look for performers who can tackle these roles with reckless abandon and bring a youthful energy to their characters.

JACK KELLY, the charismatic leader of the Manhattan newsies, is an orphaned dreamer and artist who yearns to get out of the crowded streets of New York and make a better life for himself out West. Fiercely protective of his best friend, Crutchie, and very loyal, Jack isn't afraid to use his voice to attain better conditions for

the working kids of New York City. Look for an actor who can command the stage with ease, possesses strong vocal abilities, and can exude Jack's tough-guy exterior and his big heart.

KATHERINE PLUMBER, an ambitious young reporter, works hard to make a name for herself as a legitimate journalist in a time when women aren't taken seriously. Quick, funny, and resourceful, Katherine should be a strong singer with excellent diction for her showstopping number, "Watch What Happens." Because Katherine and Jack possess a strong bond, consider auditioning these roles together to get a sense of the performers' repartee.

CRUTCHIE, or Casey, is Jack's best friend and a dedicated newsie with a "bum leg" from polio that causes pain, but helps sell more papers. Walking with the assistance of a crutch doesn't define the ever-positive newsie, so look for an actor who can portray Casey's goofy-sweet sense of humor and optimistic resilience. Crutchie is accustomed to modifying daily activities for their disability, so consider both the character and actor's abilities when blocking and choreographing.

DAVEY, Les's straight-laced, bright big brother, starts selling newspapers to help his family earn a living but becomes swept up in the fervor of the strike. A leader in his own right, who is learning to use his voice to uplift others, cast a strong actor and singer who can lead "Seize the Day" while smartly portraying the brains of the resistance.

LES, Davey's cheeky younger sibling, is excited by the newsies' freedom and loves their independent lifestyle. This pint-sized charmer should present as younger than the other newsies.

THE ADULTS

The following roles are adults who are allies of, or work with, the kids. Keep their status and age in mind when approaching casting. They should have a more mature energy in order to set them apart from the young newsies and their friends.

MEDDA LARKIN, inspired by the African-American vaudeville performer, Aida Overton-Walker, is a big-voiced singer and star of the Bowery (see the "Dramaturgy" document in Downloadable Resources). A proud supporter of the newsies, she offers her theater as a safe

haven for their revolution. Look for a performer who can portray this astute entertainer with great comic delivery, while standing firmly behind the newsies in their fight for justice.

JOSEPH PULITZER, a pompous businessman through and through, owns the *World* and is concerned solely with the bottom line. Katherine's no-nonsense father, Pulitzer doesn't sympathize with the strikers, but he does eventually – and grudgingly – respect Jack. For this non-singing role, cast a strong actor with a sharp and imposing presence.

WIESEL, or "Weasel," a disgruntled paper-pusher who uses the Delancey brothers as his muscle, runs distribution for the *World* and has little patience or sympathy for the newsies. Feel free to incorporate this actor into the newsies ensemble when possible.

OSCAR & MORRIS DELANCEY, toughs who work distribution for the *World*, take the side of the publishers in the strike and are known to use their fists to make a point. Look for actors who can believably portray these threatening goons. With a few smart and quick costuming changes, these two actors can also join the newsies ensemble if needed.

Ensemble Groups & Featured Roles

The **ENSEMBLE** is your show's primary group of performers from which you will pull the featured roles and other, perhaps smaller, ensembles. Be sure to select strong singers – as few or as many as your production requires – as all ensembles require group singing. Much of the storytelling in *Newsies JR.* is told through energetic choreography, so look for strong movers as well. The featured roles call for either solo singing or solo acting, or both.

THE KIDS

The youth of New York City all band together in the end to make a change in the world. These characters should read younger than their adult counterparts.

NEWSIES are the hard-working kids of New York City who go on strike for a livable wage. Find moments to showcase any talented tumblers or dancers within this group. Given the nature of this show, most other characters can double as newsies to help fill in the musical numbers. Within the newsies ensemble, consider dividing the group into featured dancers and singers in order to play to the strengths of your performers.

- **RACE, ALBERT, MURIEL, NANCY, SPECS, PIGTAILS, HAZEL, BUTTONS, TOMMY BOY, ROMEO, and JO JO** are close friends of Jack and featured newsies with specific spoken lines or solos.
- **SCABS (3)** are newsies who are hesitant to join the strike.
- **BROOKLYN NEWSIES**, the most notorious of the newsies, join the strike after the Manhattan newsies have proven their seriousness. This smaller ensemble can be selected from the larger newsies group.
- **SPOT CONLON**, the proud and unflappable leader of the Brooklyn newsies, boasts an unusually intimidating reputation.

DARCY, a photographer, works with Katherine.

DOROTHY & BILL, Katherine's upperclass friends whose parents own the *New York Tribune* and *New York Journal*, respectively, help the newsies print the *Newsies Banner*.

WORKING CHILDREN, featured in "Once and For All," represent all of the other child laborers who receive the *Newsies Banner* and ultimately become a part of the children's crusade. These working kids can be pulled from your larger newsie ensemble.

THE ADULTS

All of the following citizens of New York can double as newsies, then utilize a costume change in order to step into the following roles. When portraying an adult character, they should exude a more mature air.

SEITZ, the editor of the *World*, advises Pulitzer, but ultimately admires the kids' newspaper.

BUNSEN, Pulitzer's bookkeeper, helps Pulitzer come up with the idea to raise the newsies' price per paper.

HANNAH, Pulitzer's secretary, is a clever advocate for the newsies.

SNYDER, the crooked warden of The Refuge, a filthy and horrible juvenile reformatory, is concerned only with catching enough kids to keep their government checks coming. Look for an actor who can evoke an imposing and sinister presence.

GOVERNOR TEDDY ROOSEVELT, a well-respected lifelong public servant, inspires Jack to stand up to Pulitzer. Cast an actor with the ability to portray the maturity and stature of this well-respected leader.

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