

1775
PATRIOTS
and
LOYALISTS



THE CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

NARRATOR

Loyalists:

MERCY, age 15

HENRY, Mercy's brother, age 9

MOTHER

Patriots:

JACK, age 14

PATRICIA, Jack's sister, age 12

THOMAS, Jack's brother, age 9

Act 1

THE TIME AND PLACE

November 1775; New York City

THE SETTING

A meeting of the Ice Bears Club in a tree house in
MERCY and HENRY'S backyard.*

NARRATOR: In 1775, New York was the most important seaport on the east coast but, centered around present-day Wall Street, it was still a small town. There was plenty of open space. Kids like Mercy, Henry, Jack, Thomas, and Patricia had the room to build a tree house.

PATRICIA: Henry, I'll go if you'll go.

HENRY: But I don't want to go swimming in the winter. The water's too cold!

JACK: That's the point. The water has to be cold. We can't call ourselves "brave"—we can't even call ourselves the Ice Bear Club—if we don't go swimming in the winter.

HENRY: Then let's call ourselves something else.

MERCY: I agree with Henry. I think it's silly. Why do we have to be ice bears?

JACK: Well, we have to be something, otherwise we don't have a club.

HENRY: I know! Let's be Loyalists.

PATRICIA: My parents are Patriots. I can't be a Loyalist. I'd rather be an ice bear.

THOMAS: I don't understand what those things are.

MERCY: Patriots and Loyalists?

THOMAS: Yes.

HENRY: I don't either.

**NOTE: The club members refer to the animal we now call a polar bear as an ice bear. The name polar bear originates in 1781, after the date of this play.*

MERCY: Loyalists are loyal to England. Patriots want the colonies to leave England, and maybe form another country.

HENRY: Mother and Father are Loyalists, right?

MERCY: Absolutely.

THOMAS: Are our mother and father Loyalists?

PATRICIA: No, they're Patriots.

JACK: That's right. *We're* patriots.

HENRY: I thought we were all ice bears.

MERCY: The Patriots tarred and feathered Mr. Harris, the tax collector, last night.

JACK: I heard my father talking about that.

MERCY: Well, I saw it.

JACK: You *did*? You were there?

MERCY: No, but the customs house is just up the street. If I lean way out my bedroom window, I can see it.

THOMAS: What happened?

HENRY: What's tar and feather?

MERCY: They paint you with hot tar, then stick feathers on you.

HENRY: Yuck.

MERCY: Plus, it hurts.

HENRY: But why did the Patriots do that?

JACK: Because of the taxes. They're unfair. England expects us to pay taxes on glass, paper, stamps—

PATRICIA: Tea.

JACK: And the British closed the port of Boston.

MERCY: They had to do something.

JACK: Why?

MERCY: Because Patriots threw hundreds and hundreds of pounds of tea into the harbor. They were too cowardly to do it during the day, dressed as themselves. They painted their faces like Indians and sneaked onto the boats in the middle of the night.

JACK: They had rights.

MERCY: What rights? The right to destroy private property?

JACK: My father says that if the British control who we can trade with and who we can't, then they can control everything.

MERCY: England won't stand for it, and why should she? The king'll send more soldiers, and then everybody will lose their rights, all because of a few Patriots who want a revolution.

THOMAS: Revolution? What's a revolution?

JACK: It's a war in which the oppressed win their freedom from the oppressor.

HENRY: What's *oppressed* mean?

THOMAS: What's *oppressor* mean?

JACK: The British oppress the colonies by taxing us unfairly. The British are our oppressors. Got it?

PATRICIA: Oh, Jack, you sound just like Father. I don't understand why the Patriots and the British don't just sit down and talk about it.

JACK: Because the British won't listen to reason.

MERCY: Honestly, Jack. You know the Patriots keep provoking the British. The Sons of Liberty are radicals, every one of them. I'm not saying the British are perfect or even right in this tax business, but revolution? The British will never stand for it.

HENRY: But I thought we were all British.

THOMAS: Me, too.

JACK: Only as long as we want to be.

MERCY: See there? Who won't listen to reason?

HENRY: But look at us. Some of us want to be ice bears, some of us don't.
That doesn't mean we should break up the club and stop being friends.

MERCY: Or burn down the tree house.

JACK: Maybe we don't have anything to talk about with the British.

MERCY: Why not?

JACK: Because we want to be our own country. Not a part of England.

PATRICIA: Instead of colonies, we would have states.

JACK: Massachusetts, New York, Virginia—

PATRICIA: Georgia, Vermont, Rhode Island—

HENRY: New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania—

THOMAS: We've left some out.

JACK: North and South Carolina.

THOMAS: Georgia.

MERCY: You already said Georgia.

JACK: Maryland.

MERCY: That's only 12.

HENRY: New Hampshire!

MERCY: So the 13 colonies would become states, and those states would become a country?

JACK: Exactly.

MERCY: Suppose, say, five years from now New York decided that the new country was unjust or unfair. Would New York have the right to fight for its independence?

JACK: Well, I guess so, but—

MERCY: Would Georgia, Vermont, Pennsylvania?

JACK: I guess so, but why would they?

MERCY: Well . . . all right, take slavery.

PATRICIA: Slavery?

MERCY: My father's against slavery. He's spoken about it in church and at town meetings. What if the new country passes a law that says slavery's illegal? Some states might not agree. Then what? Wouldn't they want to become an independent country?

There is shouting from offstage.

PATRICIA: Listen!

Mercy and Henry's mother hurries onstage.

MOTHER: Mercy, Henry, where are you? I want you to come home right now!

HENRY: It's Mother! We're up here!

MERCY: She's crying! Mother, what is it?

MOTHER: Come with me! Quickly!

MERCY: What is it? What's wrong?

Mercy and Henry hurry offstage with their mother.

Act 2

THE SETTING

*Later that evening, Mercy and Henry sit glumly in the tree house.
Jack, Patricia, and Thomas enter.*

JACK: Mercy, what happened? We've been hearing the wildest stories!

MERCY: They arrested our father.

PATRICIA: Who did?

MERCY: British soldiers, that's who.

THOMAS: But I thought your father was a Loyalist.

MERCY: They kicked in our front door and took him off to jail like a common horse thief. My mother tried to stop them, but one of them pushed her down. Then my father struck the soldier, but then another one hit him in the head with his rifle butt, and they dragged him off.

PATRICIA: Oh, Mercy! Is he all right? Are you all right?

MERCY: He's home now, resting.

JACK: But *why*? Why would they arrest your father?

HENRY: They said he was a spy.

JACK: A *spy*? He's on *their* side.

THOMAS: Then how come they arrested him?

MERCY: They said they got the wrong man.

JACK: What?

MERCY: They said they made a mistake. They were looking for someone else. Can you believe that?

JACK: Can I believe the British would do something like that? Yes!

MERCY: Some Patriots came to visit him. They brought fruit and sweetmeats. Your father was one of them. They invited him to join their cause.

PATRICIA: What did your father say?

MERCY: He said he'd think carefully about it.

JACK: Listen, Mercy. This is our home. We were born here. Our parents were born here. British soldiers can't come here and kick our doors down and drag us away.

MERCY: No, no, they can't do that—but they did.

HENRY: I don't want to be a Loyalist anymore. I'm a Patriot.

MERCY (*Slowly*): You know what? I'm a Patriot, too.

THOMAS: Does this mean we're all still ice bears? Or are we Patriots now?

PATRICIA: We can be more than one thing at a time, Thomas.

HENRY: I'm still not going swimming in that cold water.



B A C K G R O U N D
O N T H E
PATRIOTS AND LOYALISTS



AS A RESULT OF THE BOSTON Tea Party, Parliament passed the “Intolerable Acts,” which closed Boston’s harbor until the tea was paid for, took away the right of the colony of Massachusetts to rule itself, and established military rule in the colony. Representatives from all 13 colonies met in Philadelphia in 1774 to discuss the situation. This First Continental Congress issued a Declaration of Colonial Rights and Grievances telling King George III that only the colonies had the right to impose taxes on themselves. In response, King George sent more British troops to Boston. The Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in May 1775. They established a Continental Army and selected George Washington to lead it. Then the Americans and British fought at Bunker Hill and Breed’s Hill. King George said that the colonies were in open rebellion and that their leaders would be hanged if caught. He also hired Hessian soldiers and sent them to America.

More and more colonists, realizing a peaceful solution with England was impossible and that a complete severing of ties with the mother country was inevitable, embraced the Patriot cause. The Loyalists, or Tories, disagreed. They wanted to continue as colonies and pledge their allegiance to the King. Tensions rose between the Patriots and Loyalists. About 80,000 Loyalists fled to Canada during the fighting, and about 50,000 aided the Redcoats as soldiers and spies.

REVOLUTIONARY READING

In the Path of War: Children of the American Revolution Tell Their Stories
edited by Jeanne Winston Adler (Cobblestone, 1998)

The Journal of William Thomas Emerson by Barry Denenberg
(Scholastic, 1998)

If You Lived in the Time of the American Revolution by Kay Moore
(Scholastic, 1998)

A Young Patriot by Jim Murphy (Clarion, 1998)



ACTIVITIES

The Pros and Cons of British Rule

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of British rule over the colonies. Did some advantages turn into disadvantages and, if so, how? Record students' responses in a chart on the board. Based on their responses, how would the class rate itself—more aligned with the Patriots or with the Loyalists?

Differing Views

Pose the following questions to students: *Have you ever disagreed with a friend about something important? What happened? Were you able to resolve and respect your differences? Have you experienced the same situation with someone you didn't know well? How did you deal with that situation?*

Word History

Have students use dictionaries to find the definitions and word origins of *patriot* and *loyalist*. Ask them to draw connections among word origins, definitions, and usage of the words to describe groups of people during the American Revolution. Challenge students to think of slang words or nicknames for Patriots and Loyalists.

A New Ending

Suppose Mercy and Henry's father hadn't been mistakenly arrested in the play? What if the Patriots had targeted him instead for his Loyalist beliefs? Turn students into playwrights; have them rewrite Act 2 using a different incident. Can they resolve the conflicts between the Patriot and the Loyalist children, or is the rift between them too wide?

A Life-Changing Event

Which of the following events do students feel is one of the most important events in American history: Boston Massacre, Boston Tea Party, the battles at Lexington and Concord, or the battles at Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill? Have them research the events. Then direct students to take on the role of a Loyalist and to imagine how that event would strengthen or make them change their views.

Benedict Arnold on Trial

Benedict Arnold, one of Washington's most valued officers, betrayed the American cause. After the war, he moved to England and died there. Have students research Arnold and uncover the reasons for his defection to the British side. Hold a mock trial in class. Let volunteers assume the roles of Benedict Arnold, witnesses for and against Arnold, a jury, a judge, a prosecuting team, and a defense team. (You might also assign the roles yourself or have students draw slips of paper to determine which character they will play.)