

1781
YORKTOWN
SOPHIE'S REVOLT



THE CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

SOPHIE JAMESON: *Young girl who lives in Yorktown*

BEN JAMESON: *Sophie's brother*

MRS. JAMESON: *Sophie and Ben's mother*

THOMAS NELSON: *Older man who lives in Yorktown*

GENERAL CHARLES CORNWALLIS: *British officer*

BRITISH SOLDIERS 1-6

BRITISH SENTRY

GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON: *Commander of Continental Army*

COMTE ROCHAMBEAU: *French officer*

MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE: *French officer*

BRIGADIER GENERAL CHARLES O'HARA: *British officer*

MAJOR GENERAL BENJAMIN LINCOLN: *American officer*

AMERICAN SOLDIERS 1-6

FRENCH SOLDIERS 1-6

*Act 1***CORNWALLIS ARRIVES**

Scene 1: July 30, 1781; The Jamesons' house, Yorktown, Virginia

SOPHIE: I'm not going. I refuse.

BEN: You can't do that, Sophie.

SOPHIE: I can, too. I'm an American. I have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Going across the river to Gloucester won't make me happy.

MRS. JAMESON: You can't stay here in Yorktown by yourselves. You have to come with me. Besides, you'll have a good time.

SOPHIE: No, I won't. You'll be with Mrs. Lange, helping her take care of her baby.

MRS. JAMESON: She needs my help. Her husband's fighting with General Washington. Her baby's been sick. She's lonely.

BEN: Our father's fighting with General Washington, too.

There's a knock on the door. THOMAS NELSON enters.

NELSON: Uh-oh. Somebody's got a stubborn look on her face. What am I interrupting?

MRS. JAMESON: Sophie's exercising her rights as an American.

BEN: She's revolting.

SOPHIE: I am not!

NELSON: What are you revolting against, Sophie? Taxes? Tea?

SOPHIE: Going to Gloucester to visit Mrs. Lange and her wailing baby.

MRS. JAMESON: Just call me King George, making my children do something they absolutely do not want to do. You're both coming with me, and that's that.

SOPHIE: I'll get into all kinds of trouble in Gloucester. You'll always be telling me to stop doing what I'm doing, or looking for me, or Ben—

MRS. JAMESON: And what should I do? Leave you here by yourselves?
No. I've promised Mrs. Lange, and I don't go back on my word.

SOPHIE: But—

MRS. JAMESON: That's enough, Sophie. Go upstairs and pack your things. Then help Ben pack.

SOPHIE (*Muttering*): And I thought we were fighting for *freedom* from tyranny.

MRS. JAMESON: Sophie!

Sophie and Ben exit.

NELSON: You might have your hands full with Mrs. Lange and her child and Sophie and Ben. I'm just rattling around in the house. Why don't you let them stay with me while you're gone?

MRS. JAMESON: Are you sure?

NELSON: I could use the company.

MRS. JAMESON: I don't know, Thomas. I feel uneasy with the British so close.

NELSON: Cornwallis will never come to Yorktown. It's a peninsula. It's too easy to cut him off by land and by sea. We're not a major port anymore.

MRS. JAMESON: I'll be gone for three days. Do you think you could stand it for that long?

NELSON: The longer, the better. I love having houseguests.

Scene 2: August 2, 1781; The Nelson house, Yorktown, Virginia

Using a telescope, Mr. Nelson looks out a window. There is the sound of shouting offstage. Sophie and Ben enter.

SOPHIE: What is it, Mr. Nelson? What's going on?

BEN: Why are all the soldiers running away?

NELSON: British ships have sailed into Chesapeake Bay. I think General Cornwallis has come to call.

SOPHIE: But why are all our soldiers running away? They should stay and fight. My father would stay and fight. So would your sons.

BEN: Maybe they're just retreating. General Washington has to retreat sometimes, and it works out for him.

SOPHIE: They're running away, they're not retreating. (*Yelling*) Cowards! Come back here and fight!

NELSON: That's enough of that, Sophie. Gather your things, quickly. Help Ben.

SOPHIE: Why? Where are we going?

NELSON: I'm taking you over to Gloucester, to be with your mother, while we can still cross the river.

BEN: But what if she's coming back here?

SOPHIE: Ben's right. What if we miss her?

NELSON: We'll just have to take the chance. Now hurry.

There's a loud knocking on the front door, then the sound of voices arguing. CORNWALLIS enters the room.

CORNWALLIS: Pardon the intrusion, Mr. Nelson. General Charles Cornwallis, here. I'm afraid you're going to be seeing quite a lot of my men and me. We're occupying your home.

SOPHIE: Oh, no you're not! You don't have the right to come in here and—

NELSON: Sophie!

CORNWALLIS: Ah, you must be one of those patriotic American firebrands I keep hearing so much about.

SOPHIE: You're not wanted here. You should take your men and go home.

CORNWALLIS: I will, soon enough.

SOPHIE: NOW.

BEN: Yeah! Get going! NOW!

NELSON: Sophie! Ben! Being patriotic doesn't mean being rude.

CORNWALLIS: If my presence is so alarming, then you may go. I won't hold you here.

NELSON: Their mother is in Gloucester. If the children could have safe passage there . . . ?

CORNWALLIS: Certainly.

SOPHIE: I'm not leaving.

BEN: Neither am I.

SOPHIE: General Washington won't let you get away with this!

CORNWALLIS: He's hundreds of miles away in New York. I don't think your general has time to worry about what's going on here. Mr. Nelson, I'd like a bath, and then I'll have my cook prepare lunch. You and Sophie and Ben will join me, I hope?

SOPHIE: I won't!

BEN: Me neither!

They run out.

CORNWALLIS: High-spirited children. Too bad your militia doesn't have their courage, Mr. Nelson.

NELSON: I don't believe I'll be having lunch with you, sir. I must look for the children.

Act 2

THE BATTLE FOR YORKTOWN

Scene 1: September 28, 1781; British redoubt (fortress) in Yorktown

British soldiers work on fortresses. Sophie and Ben carry a lunch basket to Cornwallis.

BEN: General Cornwallis isn't so bad.

SOPHIE: Benjamin Jameson! You'd better watch what you say!

BEN: He hasn't locked us in the cellar or tied us up or anything.

SOPHIE: Just you wait.

BRITISH SENTRY: Halt! Who goes there!

BEN: Ben and Sophie, with lunch for General Cornwallis.

BRITISH SOLDIER 1: Here, let's have a look at that lunch basket. You Americans might be trying to poison our general.

SOPHIE: Poison would be too good for him.

BRITISH SOLDIER 2: Oh, I've heard about you! Sophie, the patriotic American firebrand.

Cornwallis enters.

CORNWALLIS: Ah, here you are. I was beginning to think you had run off again.

BEN: Sophie wanted to, but I—

SOPHIE: The French have scared off your warships. They've blocked Chesapeake Bay. It's only a matter of time before Washington gets here, and then you'll be sorry.

CORNWALLIS: I'm looking forward to meeting your General Washington.

BEN: Hey, what are all those sharp sticks pointing out of the fort for? It looks like a crown of sticks or something.

CORNWALLIS: They're very good for keeping the enemy away. And do you see the hole in the side? That's where we'll stick the cannons. We've got ten of these forts, all in a semicircle around Yorktown. We've got more forts further out. I'm afraid you Americans will have a hard time taking Yorktown.

SOPHIE: You shouldn't be telling us these things. We might be spies.

BRITISH SOLDIER 3 (*Laughing*): Better watch out, General sir. She might be a spy.

British Soldier 4 enters and salutes Cornwallis.

BRITISH SOLDIER 4: Enemy's been sighted, sir! Marching down the road from Williamsburg! Could be 15,000 of them, or more!

The other soldiers take up their guns.

CORNWALLIS: Steady, men. Steady. Wait until they come closer. Then we'll let our cannons speak for us. Soldier, escort Miss and Mr. Jameson back to Mr. Nelson's house, please.

SOPHIE: I told you General Washington would come.

Scene 2: October 10, 1781; The Nelson house in Yorktown

There are the sounds of cannons and big guns exploding offstage. The house has been severely damaged by cannon fire. Ben, Sophie, and Mr. Nelson huddle under a table.

BEN: I wish the noise would stop!

SOPHIE: It's American noise, Ben! It's American and French cannons.

NELSON: I should have taken you over to Gloucester. Or we should have gone with everyone else and hidden in the woods or in caves.

Suddenly the noise stops. Mr. Nelson crawls to a window and looks out.

NELSON: A white flag! From the American side!

There are voices offstage. Then Cornwallis comes in.

CORNWALLIS: You're all right? Good. General Washington has asked for you. It seems he wants to knock down your house, Mr. Nelson, but not you and your guests. My men will take you as far as the town gates. We'll hold our fire until you're safely in Washington's camp.

NELSON: Thank you, sir. You're a gentleman.

BEN: I'm sorry you're on the wrong side, General Cornwallis, or I would like you.

CORNWALLIS: You and Sophie have taught me quite a lot about Americans and what they want. Miss Jameson, it was my pleasure.

SOPHIE: I'm very glad to leave you, General Cornwallis, but Ben's right. I might like you if you were on my side.

CORNWALLIS: Good luck to all of you. I doubt that we'll meet again.

Scene 3: October 17, 1781; Washington's camp outside of Yorktown

BEN: Look at your poor house, Mr. Nelson. Where do you suppose Cornwallis is staying now?

NELSON: Probably in caves, like the rest of the British officers.

SOPHIE: Do you think the guns will ever stop?

NELSON: The British aren't firing as much as before. I suspect they've about run out of gunpowder.

BEN: What happened to all those British ships that General Cornwallis was expecting from New York?

NELSON: Who knows? Maybe bad weather. Maybe there's fighting in New York.

SOPHIE: Listen!

BEN: What? I don't hear anything.

SOPHIE: Exactly! The guns have stopped.

BEN: Drumming. I hear drumming now.

SOPHIE: Look! It's a British drummer boy. There's a redcoat waving a white flag.

NELSON: A truce!

Act 3

THE BRITISH SURRENDER
October 19, 1781; a meadow outside of Yorktown

The American soldiers march in and line up on one side. The French soldiers march in and line up on the other side. GENERAL WASHINGTON and BENJAMIN LINCOLN enter and stand at one end. ROCHAMBEAU and LAFAYETTE enter and stand at the other end. Sophie, Ben, Mrs. Jameson, and Mr. Nelson stand nearby.

MRS. JAMESON: How fine General Washington looks! So tall and handsome.

BEN: Do you think General Cornwallis will see us? Do you think I should wave to him? He was awfully nice to us.

NELSON: I think you could salute him, Ben. It would be a sign of respect.

SOPHIE: Here they come. Here come the British.

There is the sound of drumming. Led by CHARLES O'HARA, the British soldiers march in. They look at the French soldiers but refuse to look at the American soldiers.

BEN: Where's General Cornwallis? I don't see him.

SOPHIE: They're ignoring us. They're refusing to look at our soldiers.

LAFAYETTE: Play "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

The Americans start to play the song. The British soldiers look at the American soldiers in surprise.

NELSON: Lafayette's taken care of that. He's forced the redcoats to look.

O'Hara turns toward Rochambeau, to surrender. Rochambeau shakes his head and points to Washington.

MRS. JAMESON: But look, the British officer's going to Rochambeau to surrender. He's turned his back on General Washington.

O'Hara goes to Washington.

O'HARA: I'm Brigadier General Charles O'Hara. General Cornwallis has taken ill. I am acting in his place.

WASHINGTON: In that case, you may surrender to my second-in-command, Major General Benjamin Lincoln.

LINCOLN: General O'Hara, your soldiers will lay down their guns, do an about-face, and march back to Yorktown.

O'HARA: Forward march! Ground arms! About face! Forward march!

The British soldiers advance. Soldier 1 throws down his gun. Soldier 2 does the same.

LINCOLN: Lay down your arms—with respect.

Soldiers 3–6 set their guns down carefully on the pile. Led by O'Hara, the red-coats march offstage. The French and Americans march out.

BEN: I feel kind of sorry for the British.

SOPHIE: What's going to happen to Cornwallis?

NELSON: Why, Sophie, I believe you like the general.

SOPHIE: I don't. I'm just feeling sorry for him for getting beaten so badly. I tried to tell him it was no use.

NELSON: She did try to warn him, it's true.

MRS. JAMESON: I can imagine. Well, let's go home, children. Let's see if there's anything left of our house.

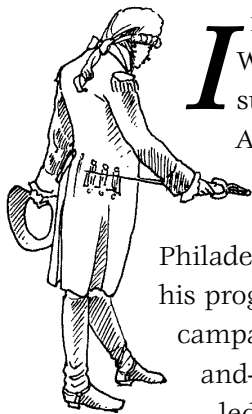
BEN: Poor Yorktown. All full of holes and broken chimneys.

SOPHIE: Poor Cornwallis.

MRS. JAMESON: The next time I go anywhere you two are going with me—no matter what.



B A C K G R O U N D
O N T H E
SURRENDER AT YORKTOWN



IN SEPTEMBER 1777, the British took Philadelphia. Washington and his troops spent the winter of 1777–78 suffering at Valley Forge. Things looked bleak for the American cause. Then France joined the Americans as an ally in 1778. Hearing this news, British commander Sir Henry Clinton marched his army from Philadelphia to New York before the French navy could stop his progress. In 1780 General Charles Cornwallis began his campaign in the South. The Americans responded with hit-and-run guerrilla tactics. In the spring of 1781, Cornwallis led his troops into Virginia, then one of the richest states. That fall he and his 7,000 British and Hessian troops settled in Yorktown, a port city on a peninsula, awaiting reinforcements and supplies by sea from Clinton in New York.

Hearing of Cornwallis's location, Washington ordered the Marquis de Lafayette to cut off the neck of the peninsula so the British couldn't escape by land. Then Washington marched his own troops south to Yorktown. On the way, they met Comte de Rochambeau's soldiers. Their combined forces totaled 16,000 men. Another 3,000 men on board a fleet of French warships sailed into Chesapeake Bay. British escape by water was now blocked.

For eight days, from October 9 to October 18, the Americans and French bombarded the British forces with heavy artillery. With ammunition running low and no reinforcements in sight, Cornwallis surrendered. Although there was more fighting, the battle at Yorktown effectively ended the war. On March 5, 1782, the British Parliament voted to begin peace negotiations with the Americans. A peace treaty between the two countries was signed in Paris, France, on September 3, 1783.

REVOLUTIONARY READING

The World Turned Upside Down by Richard Ferrie (Holiday House, 1999)

A Message for General Washington by Vivian Schurfranz (Silver Moon, 1998)

Songs and Stories from the American Revolution by Jerry Silverman (Millbrook, 1994)



ACTIVITIES

Compete and Cooperate

American and French forces fought together at Yorktown. George Washington urged both armies “to compete for honor, cooperate for victory.” What do students think Washington meant? Is it good advice? Is it something they can use, or have used, in their own lives? If so, ask students to explain.

Negotiating for Peace

On March 5, 1782, the British Parliament voted to begin negotiations for peace with the Americans. A peace treaty was finally signed in Paris, France, on September 3, 1783. Assign students to the English or the American peace negotiating team. Ask each team to think about what it wants—and thinks it can get. Then have the teams meet to discuss the terms of peace.

News from the Front

Have students take on the roles of roving reporters during the battle at Yorktown. Assign one day of the battle—from September 28, when the Continental Army first arrived in Yorktown, to October 19, when the British laid down their arms—for each student to report on. You may also let students work together in pairs or groups to report on several days’ events. Suggest that they consult various sources such as diaries, biographies, and fiction and nonfiction works. Ask the class to think of a name for their newspaper and design a masthead. If possible, ask students to “print” their articles using a computer.

Revolutionary Websites

Ask students to survey Internet websites that focus on some aspect of the American Revolution. For instance, www.PBS.org/ktca/liberty/ offers details of the surrender at Yorktown, games, and links to other related topics. Have students write reviews of the websites, including content, links, and ease or difficulty of using the site.

What Ever Happened to . . . ?

What ever happened to the British, French, and German officers who fought against and with the Americans during the Revolutionary War? Did participating in the war change their lives? What ever happened to General Charles Cornwallis? Baron Friedrich von Steuben? Marquis de Lafayette? Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau? Sir Henry Clinton? Ask students to find out what happened to these men after 1781 and to write reports on them.

The Stories Behind the Songs

Tell students to research songs that were popular during the American Revolution, especially those that were written about specific events. You might challenge them to investigate whether or not the song “The World Turned Upside Down” was actually sung at the British surrender at Yorktown. Have students bring in copies of songs—and musical instruments—and let the class perform and discuss the songs.