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**Ben Franklin
Ate My
Homework**

by

Kevin M. Mitchell

Additional Dialogue/Story Consultant: Patricia Cotter

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Ben Franklin Ate My Homework

by Kevin M. Mitchell

Characters

Flexible Cast

(Tips for smaller or larger cast options at end of script)

The Kids of Franklin Middle School:

MOLLY ZELLNER; *A normal kid who almost never does anything wrong, certainly never cheats. Obnoxiously perfect.*

VERA; *Extremely smart but a troublemaker. Knows how to push buttons and make the other kids laugh. At parent-teacher conferences, they always say “has potential.”*

HAMA; *Happy go lucky to the point that she never really knows what is going on.*

AMBER; *Really spacy.*

DREW; *The talker who has to share everything all the time.*

EVERETT; *The cool kid. To a fault.*

CALVIN; *Nerdy – never without his iPad.*

RHEA; *The jock—but thinks.*

The Historic Kids (All oddly small [pre-teen] versions of their adult selves):

ABE LINCOLN

ABIGAIL ADAMS

CALAMITY JANE

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

GEORGE WASHINGTON

PAUL REVERE

TOM JEFFERSON

The Adults (So to speak):

BEN FRANKLIN; *At his wisest, oldest, sage-est. Didn't suffer fools in his life and certainly doesn't do it in his afterlife.*

MS. JUANITA MANN; *Big. Big heart, infinite patience, amazing teacher almost to a fault, and takes everything at face value to a fault.*

PRINCIPAL NANCY; *In control. Kind of a good gal.*

IRIS THE JANITOR; *Totally weird, lives in her own world.*

The Family:

DAD; *Bill Zellner. Molly's dad.*

MOM; *Jennifer Zellner. Molly's mom.*

SANDY; *Molly's older sister, head cheerleader.*

Plus:

THE CHEERLEADERS; *2-9 teenagers on the cheerleading squad with Sandy.*

Ben Franklin Ate My Homework

by Kevin M. Mitchell

PRODUCTION NOTE: While *Ben Franklin Ate My Homework* is created as an ensemble comedy for kids, the history is for the most part accurate. When Paul Revere talks about not yet working with silver, it's because at age 11 he was just starting out. Ben Franklin's references and quotes have been researched and are true. The monologue by Calamity Jane in Scene 4 is taken from her autobiography, her own pen, about when she was a young girl traveling with her family. Other references to events are true, and the young actors who get these roles are to be encouraged to read and learn more about whom they are playing and whom they are befriending.

SCENE ONE

SETTING: MS. MANN'S CLASSROOM. The classroom is typical, though there is a prominent, large POSTER of BENJAMIN FRANKLIN hanging on the back wall.

AT RISE: Kids are settling in for first hour history, throwing paper airplanes, talking. CALVIN is on his iPad. MOLLY is sitting patiently with her backpack behind her, and we see VERA sneak a binder out of it and pass it back—the others don't know what it is. They keep passing it back and DREW, who is talking, doesn't know what it is, and passes it to AMBER, who passes it to CALVIN, who throws it in the wastebasket.

MS. MANN enters.

MS. MANN

Good morning! Today is the first day of the rest of your life, so get to the carpe diem-ing! ... Vera! Your turn to lead the pledge.

VERA STANDS up. She so doesn't care.

VERA

I sledge an a-pea-geance to the nag, four witches stand, one vacation under Todd ... yada yada yada ... play ball!

VERA SITS down and sulks.

MS. MANN

(Being positive) Okay! I hear your interpretation of our sacred oath, and I'll tell you what I think, but first a quote from Thomas Jefferson: "Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom!"

DREW

That does not sound like a fun book... unless there are cool illustrations of Ninjas fighting!

MS. MANN

(Ignoring; sweetly) Al-righty young people of our illustrious future, I know it's Friday, but we have a lot of work to do ...

VERA

Say Drew, did you know Thomas Jefferson was a ... mutant violin-eating zombie?!?

DREW reacts.

MS. MANN

He was not, Vera! Now ... I know you're all anxious to share your book reports.

She walks over to CALVIN, takes his iPad from him, pretends to look something up, and then quietly announces:

MS. MANN

Calvin, you know what's an even more exciting game than "Angry Birds"?

ALL KIDS

What?!?

MS. MANN

(Takes iPad away) Angry Teachers!

AMBER

(To EVERETT) Is she the Red Bird or the Yellow Bird?

EVERETT

Yellow. Definitely.

MS. MANN

Now that I have your undivided attention, let's put your delicate derrières on those chairs. Now who is done with their book reports on famous Americans?

MOLLY'S hand shoots up and never ever comes down.

MS. MANN

Besides Molly ... Vera?

VERA

I've read the first chapter or whatever.

MS. MANN

Oh well that's something ... wait a minute! I let you all read the first chapter in class on Monday!

DREW

I started to read the second chapter, then thought "chunky peanut butter ..."

VERA

Fascinating! Do tell!

DREW

... Yeah, chunky peanut butter! But then a bunch of weird thoughts came into my head including if it's the Death Star then how did it blow up so easily and then chunky peanut butter and why like we're not totally all eating it totally all the time!

EVERETT

Yeah, that's not too weird.

AMBER raises her hand.

MS. MANN

Yes, Amber?

AMBER

I need to be excused. (*Showing nails*) I suddenly realized I have Café Au Lait nail polish on. Obviously I need to go and put Choco-Lait on right now. Awk-ward.

MS. MANN

I think you can stick it out for another 42 minutes ... Okay, Molly, let's have your report.

MOLLY is all excited and starts digging through her backpack. VERA is trying to hold back the laughing.

MOLLY

Writing history papers is one of the areas I'm gifted in.

HAMA

(*Admiringly*) I bet it is! Especially if you say so!

MOLLY is now panicking – where is her paper?!?

MOLLY

Where's my paper? It was right here! Oh, this is the worst thing that's happened to me since you forgot to give out homework during Christmas break.

MS. MANN

(Waves book) Let's review the facts. You were all assigned a famous American to do a report on. You received the book at that person from the "Better Know Your Americans" series. I let you all read the first chapter on Monday. That took you up to when your person was about your age. All you had to do was finish the book and write a report in the next four days.

MOLLY

Mine was right here! Where did it go?!? Oh, the horror!

MS. MANN

Molly, sit down. So, Rhea, tell us what you learned ... how far did you get?

RHEA

Well, I picked Abe Lincoln ...

EVERETT

... honest?

RHEA

And tall! He was the tallest dude to be president. But he didn't do anything important.

MOLLY

Free the slaves?!? Preserve the union?!?

VERA

Create re-enactment opportunities for hobo-looking guys in Pennsylvania?

RHEA

But he didn't play basketball. I mean, if you're not playing basketball super well by 12, you're not going to be anybody in the NBA. Or the WNBA.

MS. MANN

Hama?

HAMA

I was really excited about Abigail Adams, because she was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic!

EVERETT

Um, that would be Amelia Earhart ...

HAMA

Okay, wow. That explains why I was so disappointed in the first few pages

MS. MANN

(Looks at watch) We've gotten nowhere with today's lesson and it's already 15 past discouraging ...

MOLLY

Well I can talk about mine! Ben Franklin! The most important thing is to understand where he came from, from the super very beginning! *(Ahem! Very dramatic)* If the theory of plate tectonics holds true – and I know we all think it does – millions of years ago when the continental drift began, and what would become America started to form ... then the earth cooled ... Dinosaurs came! ... a rock crashed into the planet – bam! – Dinosaurs gone. And then so—

EVERETT

A rock crashing into the planet sounds pretty good right now ...

MS. MANN

Molly, sit down. So none of you read beyond the first chapter!

MOLLY

I did! I finished Ben Franklin's biography! I really did!

MS. MANN

As I always say ...

MS. MANN & BORED KIDS

“Actions have consequences.”

MS. MANN

And those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it ... remember last month when you didn't turn in your reports on how a bill becomes a law?

SFX: Scary music.
HORROR strikes all the kids.

MOLLY

No!

CALVIN

Not after-school detention!

DREW

But the homecoming pep rally is this afternoon!

MS. MANN

Oh, look! The pity truck just left. But they left this note: “You should have thought of that before you didn’t do your homework.”

EVERETT

That’s so uncool. And I know, because I’m one of the cool kids!

AMBER

How about we have the detention ... next week?

MS. MANN

Nice try, Amber. Everyone come right back here after last bell and work on your report!

MOLLY

But Ms. Mann! I did my reading, I did my report, I did, I did!

As the kids file out, CHEERLEADERS enter and get in formation.

CHEERLEADERS

There’s no rally! There’s no game
For these kids – they’re so lame!
De – tention! (*Clap, clap*)
De – tention! (*Clap, clap*)
They won’t see our star jocks
They won’t know how they’ll be mocked!
De – tention! (*Slap butt twice*)
De – tention! (*Slap butt twice*)
(*Clap four times in sets of two, then slap butts four times in sets of two.*)
Now they have their goose cooked ...

SANDY

Why didn’t they just read their book?

CHEERLEADERS

Detention! Detention! Detention! Detention! Gooooooooooooodness these kids are in trouble!

CHEERLEADER #1

Let’s go to the pep rally early so we can get a good spot!

SANDY

Um ... we’re cheerleaders. We get the best spot!

CHEERLEADER #1

Oh right!

BLACK OUT.

SCENE TWO

SETTING: The CLASSROOM; that afternoon.

AT RISE: The kids are dejected. They are being watched over by the janitor, IRIS. The kids in varying degrees are working but mostly not. RHEA stares forlornly out the window.

RHEA

I can't believe I'm not at the pep rally!

MOLLY

(Overly dramatic; paces about) I can't believe I'm having to rewrite my report ... what happened to my report is a mystery wrapped inside a conundrum with a spoonful of honey-flavored strange put on top, then placed inside a KitchenAid blender with a heavy thumb on "puree"!

HAMA

You lost me after "what happened."

EVERETT

She's either wondering if one of us did something with her paper ... or she's sharing her recipe for honey-flavored slushies.

VERA looks uneasy.

AMBER

Guys! We need to get our work done! Or else ...

DREW

Or else what?

MOLLY

Or else something even worse happens to us!

The janitor IRIS appears. IRIS tough as nails, sucking on a tootsie roll pop—think Kojak.

IRIS

Knobby-knees here is right.

EVERETT

Oh boy. Someone left the weirdo box unlocked again.

IRIS

You guys need to get whatever it is you've been locked up in here for done, lickety-split, see? See ... this here ain't just any afternoon

AMBER

Duh -- It's Pep Rally afternoon!

IRIS

No, it's January 17th and on this afternoon over three hundred years ago one Benjamin Franklin was born. And as this is Franklin Middle School ... well let's just say I've seen some pretty mysterious stuff happen on this day. Real mysterious.

CALVIN

Like the smell coming from Principal Snodberry's office when he takes off his shoes? That kind of mysterious?

IRIS saunters over to CALVIN and gets in his face.

IRIS

Sure kid. Have your laugh. Eat your cake and then have it too, use a screwdriver when a wrench would do ... But understand this—I'm talkin' Real. Mysterious. Like make you wear your underwear on your head mysterious!

HAMA

That is an image I really don't need in my head right now, lady janitor Iris ...

IRIS

It first happened 25 years ago, on an afternoon Just. Like. This. With kids just like you, see ...

KIDS are bored, rolling their eyes. IRIS pauses; goes and turns out the light and whips out a flashlight, and shines it up under her face from her chin.

IRIS, *Continued*

It was dark to partly cloudy night with a 60 percent chance of light rain and a humidity level of 15 percent ... the pollen level was testing high for Mulberry. (*In a "newscaster voice", to audience*) Also, later at 11, there's a common cleaning product under your sink that could kill you. But FIRST ... (*Weird laugh*) ... 25 years ago, kids just like you made the mistake of uttering the phrase, "Early to bed, early to rise, blah blah blah" ... there was a huge crack of lightning followed by thunder. Then THAT POSTER came to life! Mayhem ensued. The children were never heard from again ... in unrelated news I was never able to get the chalkboard completely clean. Oh, thank goodness we have smart boards now!

EVERETT

(*To VERA*) Does the school medical plan not have a mental health provision?

VERA

I'm guessing no, as in no to that.

HAMA

What ... what happened to the kids?

IRIS

I'm thinkin' the children were eaten alive! But hey that's just me. I'm an optimist.

IRIS turns off the flashlight and turns the lights back on to some clearly rattled children except VERA. IRIS sits on a chair that is so not comfy.

IRIS

Now I'm here to watch you guys. And I'm going to sit here in this comfy chair. But my eyes are on. You.

*IRIS immediately FALLS ASLEEP.
There's silence.*

MOLLY

Like anything would happen if I said – oh wait, I'll do it one better! I'll go stand by the poster here, put my hand on it, and say—

THE OTHER KIDS

Don't do it! Iris said...Molly! Stop! Wait! I don't like to be eaten (etc.)

VERA

Molly, I know we're NOT "friends" but this is a bad idea!

MOLLY

"Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise!" Ha! See? Nothing!

*SFX: BIG thunder, lighting, sudden
LIGHTS OUT.*

VERA

That's so you.

*LIGHTS RESTORE on and BEN
FRANKLIN is standing in front of his
poster, statue-like.*

MOLLY

Okay, very funny. Who put this statue of Ben Franklin here?

AMBER

If the janitor did this to scare us ... well it might be working.

VERA

There's something odd about that statue ... (*Approaching BEN carefully*) Yes something strange ... I can't quite put my finger on it.

VERA starts to put her finger on "statue"—slowly and dramatically.

MOLLY

Don't put your finger on it!

EVERETT

Yeah you don't know where your finger's been.

VERA pokes BEN in the belly and BEN FRANKLIN HOPS to life.

BEN

Now why would you poke a man's belly, young lady?

The KIDS freak out—they scream and run around, all except VERA and MOLLY who just stand back a bit. IRIS sleeps through it all occasionally snoring.

MOLLY

Guys, guys – don't be afraid ... calm down!

VERA

Yeah. Nothing to be afraid of except I'm pretty sure Ben Franklin died oh, I don't know about a MILLION years ago.

BEN

Ah-hem. I think that you mean 225. Exactly! (*Pause; brushes eyebrows with hands; whispers*) I've had a little work done

DREW

Molly. Bad Molly.

BEN

“A slip of the foot you may soon recover, but a slip of the tongue you may never get over.”

MOLLY

Mr. Franklin! You're one of my heroes! And Here you are! Can you autograph my book?

AMBER

I like your glasses. Are they Sean Johns?

BEN

They are bifocals. And I invented them.

EVERETT

Say Ben – if I may call you Ben – You wouldn't happen to have some of your famous monetary bills lying around...you know, the hundred kind ... would ya? You know...to autograph... or just give me. In fact, two...

BEN

“An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest!”

RHEA

Boom, Everett! Face slammed! Way to put him in his place, Benny!

RHEA tries to high five/fist bump BEN FRANKLIN. He is clueless, but game. They try. It's awkward.

BEN

Oh, you mean...up and then over...

RHEA

Guess you can't high five a founding father.

MOLLY

Mr. Franklin, I'd love to interview you for my book report.

CALVIN

Hey, I'm pretty sure that's cheating!

BEN

Why, that's why I'm here! I have been watching you all from my portrait here ...

VERA

All of us? Everything?

BEN

Yes, young lady ... everything ... speaking of which: Drew, I know where your finger's been, and for goodness sake, dear fellow, carry a handkerchief!

DREW

(Embarrassed) Yes, sir ...

BEN

I frankly don't like what I've seen. You're not reading. You're easily distracted. You celebrate odd body noises that should bring you shame and embarrassment!

VERA

That's all Drew!

DREW

I can fart the alphabet!

BEN

On this anniversary of my birth I would like nothing better than to invite you all to a portal to history. This portal is rarely open but once in a great while like now -- thanks to Molly...and in great part to Iris the Peculiar Broom Pusher.

IRIS WAKES up for a moment, takes out her tootsie pop, and GRINS.

IRIS

Who's laughin' at ol' "crazy" Iris now?!? (*EVERYONE is quiet*) Okay I guess my work here is done.

IRIS FALLS back to sleep.

BEN

I will now invite each of you to invoke the name of your subject and I will use my powers of electricity...I invented that too! ... It's true because I believe "Honesty is the best policy."

AMBER

I've heard that before somewhere...who said that?

HAMA

It was Oprah!

RHEA

Homer Simpson!

VERA

Not Kanye West for sure.

CALVIN

Oh, if I had my iPad I would've known the answer before you even asked the question!

MOLLY

He said it! Ben Franklin said it! I believe it was on page 165 of my report—if I could only find the darn thing.

BEN

So Molly here is going to benefit from talking to the real deal and I'm sure her report will show it. Would you all like the same advantage?

KIDS

Yes! You Bet! Bring it on! (*Etc.*)

BEN

But now I must warn you – Molly here read the whole book, all of my life – so results may vary if perchance ...

KIDS EXCEPT MOLLY

Enough already! Now! Sure! Please! (*Etc.*)

BEN

(Dramatically) “Early to bed ... early to rise ... makes a person healthy, wealthy and ... wise!”

SFX: Big thunder followed by a flash of light and BLACKOUT for approximately 10 seconds. MUSIC SFX: Huge & Dramatic then LIGHTS UP.

MOLLY is by BEN and all the kids are by their subject ... except they are all young, as in 10-13ish.

DREW

Thomas Jefferson?

THOMAS

Yes ... why am I not in my school? My headmaster is a Scottish minister and not kind when I'm tardy, let alone absent!

HAMA

Abigail Adams?

ABIGAIL

I was just milking Clare the cow. Where's Clare?

CALVIN

Paul Revere ... was it one if by sea, two if by land or ...

PAUL

(Loudly – he always speaks loudly) One? Two? How about 11! I am the oldest of 11 brothers and sisters and I best keep track of them!

VERA

Okay, Paul, you can dial back the volume knob there ...

MOLLY

Guys! This is so great! Like the greatest ever! Grab your historical figure and start interviewing. Time's a wasting.

EVERETT

If we go fast enough we can make it to the Pep Rally!

The KIDS break off into pairs with their historical subjects and start interviewing them.

BEN

I like you, young lady. You should consider doing something important with your life. Like marrying an important man and standing behind him your whole life!

MOLLY

Oh, thank you. But I kind of have my sights set on the White House.

BEN

As a maid?

MOLLY

As president!

BEN

Goodness. In my day never, but with you I could see it ... say when you're there, how about a favor?

MOLLY

Sure, Mr. Franklin!

BEN

Let's return the wild turkey to their rightful place—as the national bird! So much better than the bald eagle, who is a bird of bad moral character.

AMBER

Can we slather it with cranberry sauce, then stick a chicken in it, wrap it in a duck, and deep-fry it?

DREW

With bacon?

BEN

There are odd children amongst me.

MOLLY

(*Very reporter-esque*) Now Mr. Franklin ... you were one of 17 children, and as a boy you were an apprentice to an older brother ...

BEN

Yes – James. He started the first newspaper in Boston, The New England Courant.

MOLLY

But he wouldn't let you write – how did that make you feel? Get in touch with your inner emotions now. Were you resentful? Did you feel victimized? Did you want to sue someone for emotional duress? If so I know a billboard with a lawyer's 800 number ...

BEN

Oh goodness, little girl, you're irritating my gout!

Meanwhile, All the KIDS have had brief and clearly disappointing conversations with their subject illustrated by lots of throwing up of the hands and shaking heads.

CALVIN

(*To BEN*) This Paul guy doesn't seem to be of any help on the basics ...

PAUL

If the basics include fancying a spoon made of copper, I can do that! I'm too young to get to work with silver ...

VERA

Yeah, my Calamity Jane here hasn't even heard of the phrase "shoot first and ask questions later."

CONTEMPORARY KIDS MINUS MOLLY

Yeah, what gives? This is hard/not helpful, they don't seem to know anything, they are worse than us, (*Etc.*)

BEN

Yes! See you brought your subjects back to life exactly where they were when you stopped reading about them, so they haven't lived long enough to achieve any of the things that have made them important people to history.

MOLLY

Boy oh boy, I bet there are a few regretting they didn't read the assignnnnnn-ment!

BEN

"We are all born ignorant, but must work hard to remain stupid!" "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail!" "Lost time is never found again!"

RHEA

Those are great sayings! Who said them?

BEN

I did – weren't you just listening?

HAMA

You should put them on Facebook, and then tweet them.

CALVIN

Then take a photo of you tweeting them, and Instagram that.

BEN

Very odd ... children

ELEANOR

I'm confused ... are we at some kind of party? Are you my cousins? Are we going for a swim? (*To EVERETT*) I love to swim, unless someone catches polio from doing it.

EVERETT

Polio? No way. I don't know how to ride a horse.

GEORGE

I cannot tell a lie ... I don't know where the stable I was just cleaning is – can you point me to it?

DREW

(*To BEN*) I cannot tell a lie ... this dude is totally rinky-stinky.

BEN

(*To MOLLY*) These children – and history itself – are now under your care. And if you'll excuse me, I need to find a place to take my air bath, so I bid adieu. (*Pause; to ALL*) Oh, and if you don't figure out how to get these children back to their spot in history in two hours, they will be stuck with you here – and a big chunk of history will be lost forever.

CONTEMPORARY KIDS

WHAT?!?

BEN

Don't fret, I leave you with parting words: "Employ thy time well, if thou meanest to get to leisure!"

SFX: thunder and lightning. BLACK OUT. The KIDS scream; LIGHTS RESTORE; BEN is gone. The KIDS look at each other confused.

VERA

What did he mean that they'd be stuck here?

CALVIN

What did he mean that history would be lost?

HAMA

What's "fret"?

AMBER

I'm lost!

DREW

(Looks out into the hall) Great. The cheerleaders are coming!

ABE

What is a cheerleader?

PAUL

Not sure ... but ... "THE CHEERLEADERS ARE COMING, THE CHEERLEADERS ARE COMING!"

VERA

Let's sneak out!

HAMA

I can't believe she said that.

MOLLY

I can't believe I agree with her. To my house!

GEORGE

Where is it? Is it dangerous?

MOLLY

It's close. We just go down Carolina Street, take a left on Virginia, and then we cross Delaware Street.

GEORGE

Let's go! Let's Go CROSS THE DELAWARE! Street.

AMBER

What about Iris?

EVERETT grabs a sheet and throws it over IRIS as if she were a bird.

ALL KIDS scramble out a window or rear door as the CHEERLEADERS parade in for another cheer. During the cheer, the scene will change to Molly's living room.

CHEERLEADERS

What happens when you don't do your assignment?

(Clap, clap)

The space-time continuum suffers realignment!

(Clap, clap)

Boo-hoo *(Clap, clap)*

Boo-hoo *(Clap, clap)*

Exactly how that happened is a real mystery

And now it looks like they've gone and screwed up history

Losers! *("L" on Forehead)*

Losers! *("L" on Forehead)*

L - o - s - e - r - s ... Gooooooooo losers!

SANDY

Random jazz hands everybody!

*There is a big finish; jazz hands involved.
BLACK OUT.*

SCENE THREE

SETTING: MOLLY'S living room.

AT RISE: MOM is in the "kitchen" off to the one side of the stage. MOLLY approaches her with the other KIDS behind her. MOM listens but doesn't look at MOLLY, as MOLLY tries to keep the KIDS at bay.

MOLLY

Mom? You don't mind if I have a few friends over, do you?

MOM

Of course not, honey! Some school friends?

MOLLY

Yes! That. Friends. Friends from school.

MOM

You don't have friends over often ... *(To herself)* Or ne-ver.

MOLLY

Yes. Very well then.

MOM

I'll microwave a bag of popcorn as a snack – how's that sound?

MOLLY

Sure ... but there might be ... *(Counts)* 14 of us.

MOM

14? Oh my. Do I know them?

MOLLY

Oh you know them ... I mean, kind of. No, but ... you've read about them ... no! Scratch that. You haven't read about them! That would be weird. Yes. So no. But no. Yes! No! Some are ...

MOM

(Whispers) Oh, are these kids bused?

MOLLY

Hmmm ... "horse drawn" is more likely ...

MOM

So like what, exchange students?

MOLLY

Yes! That's it! Exchange students! That's what they are ... yeah, foreign exchange students!

MOM

Oh, well that's nice—sometimes when kids are at a new school, they have trouble adjusting... I'll go introduce myself then ...

MOLLY

No, that's okay! Not necessary. Not

It is too late. MOM STEPS into the living room and sees all the kids except for CALAMITY, THOMAS and ABE, and is a bit startled.

MOLLY

Everybody? This is my Mom. Mrs. Zellner.

ELEANOR

Pleased to make your acquaintance, Madam. I'm Eleanor Roosevelt.

MOM

Nice to meet you Eleanor. Oh look at you all – *(Taking the KIDS and their dress)* I guess what they say about never throwing anything away is really true. I was surprised when leg warmers made a comeback and here we have...bustles.

MOLLY tries to push her MOM into the kitchen and offstage.

MOLLY

Okay! Let's get poppin' on that popcorn!

CALAMITY enters riding a tricycle. She gets off and starts working with her rope.

CALAMITY

Where are yer gosh darn horses?

MOM

Young lady! *(To MOLLY; regarding CALAMITY's cowboy get-up)* She is a lady, right? It's so hard to tell these days.

CALAMITY

Iffin' you ain't got no horses then I have to ride whatever I kin get ma hands on.

CALAMITY jumps up, lassoes PAUL REVERE, and takes him down like a calf at a rodeo.

MOLLY

Calamity! No bike riding or lassoing Paul Revere in the house!

MOM

Paul Revere? Thomas Jefferson? Eleanor Roosevelt? *(Pause)* Molly?

VERA

She'd love to talk to you...but she just got an instantaneous case of laryngitis. Right?

MOLLY

(Mouths the word) "Right."

The LIGHTS FLICKER on and off.

MOM

Okay? Who is playing with the lights?

GEORGE WASHINGTON enters.

GEORGE

I cannot tell a lie...it was Thomas Jefferson.

TOM

It wasn't I! I was exploring this unusual weapon ...

TOM Holds up a "Star Wars" like toy blaster that lights up/glows in the dark.

TOM

(To MOM) Pardon ma'm, where do you keep your gunpowder?

EVERETT

Ms. Zellner? Abe wants to help out here ...

ABE enters with an ax. The CONTEMPORARY KIDS freak out.

ABE

I'd like to chop some wood for you, ma'am.

GEORGE

I cannot tell a lie! He wants to cut down your cherry tree!

EVERETT

I cannot tell a lie – George is a constitutionally sized narc!

MOLLY takes the ax away from ABE and says, “That’s okay.” ABIGAIL steps forward holding a decorative bowl that was on the coffee table.

ABIGAIL

I understand you don’t have an outhouse?

MOM shakes her head, then ABIGAIL whispers something to MOM.

MOM

NO, you can’t go to the bathroom in my late Aunt Thelma’s Chinese Famille Rose porcelain bowl!

CONTEMPORARY KIDS

Ewwwww

MOLLY

Everyone—sit down right where you are. RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE!

All the KIDS, a bit startled by her screaming, sit down where they are.

MOM

I believe I’m getting a migraine ...

MOLLY

Mom! A word, please!

MOLLY pushes MOM off to the side kitchen entrance.

MOM

Why do I have a feeling these aren’t actually “exchange students”?

MOLLY

They are exchange students, Mom...only they aren’t “foreign” exchange students. They aren’t from a different country, they are from a different time. You better sit down.

MOM sits down. MOLLY mimes an explanation to her as the CHEERLEADERS march in to a hip hop drum beat one at a time, and do a silly dance while singing this parody to Black Eye Peas' "I Got a Feeling:"

CHEERLEADERS

We gotta feeling ... that tonight's gonna be a bad night
Molly's gonna have a bad night
That Molly's gonna have a bad, sad, night...
A feeling – boo hoo – that tonight's going to be a bad night
Molly's gonna have a bad night
That Molly's gonna have a bad, sad, night...

SANDY

(Stops it all, looks at watch) Alrighty, that's a wrap – to the pep rally!

CHEERLEADER #1

To the Fighting Franklins Football Field!

The CHEERLEADERS scream with joy and run out through the audience.

BLACK OUT.

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

SCENE FOUR

SETTING: The living room, sometime after.

AT RISE: All the KIDS (except ABIGAIL) are sitting around, having fun with each other. They are playing video games, on iPads, eating, watching TV, doing Legos, etc.

SFX: Toilet flushes.

ABE

(Stands dramatically with iPad; frustrated) OH! Mercy. If I play this for another four score and seven times, I still shan't figure out Don't Touch the White Tiles 2!

GEORGE has a big 32-oz. bag – now empty – of M&Ms.

GEORGE

(To EVERETT) These things called by the letter M are absolutely delightful! May I have another bag?

EVERETT

DUDE—you ate all of them?!? Not cool. Not. Cool.

SFX: Toilet flushes. AMBER has ELEANOR listening through ear buds and watching something on the tablet, and enjoying it very much.

AMBER

So what do you think?

ELEANOR

(Swooning) Oh dear, he's quite an attractive lad. So do you know this Justin Bieber [Or other teen idol] personally? Can you arrange a visit by him? Let him know I'm from good stock!

MOLLY is looking around, counting the kids. SFX: Toilet flushes

MOLLY

Where is Abigail?

DREW

She's in the bathroom. She keeps flushing the toilet.

RHEA

She thinks it's "fun."

SFX: Toilet flushes

ABIGAIL (*OFF STAGE*)

Oh my! This contraption positively tickles my fancy! I wonder what it's for

MOLLY

Abigail, get out of the bathroom now!

*ABIGAIL, sulking, comes out.
VERA, wearing big glasses, is sitting with
Calamity Jane.*

VERA

... and then Gloria Steinem founded Ms. Magazine ...

CALAMITY

Sounds like she's like me, because I never MISS!

*CALAMITY does "bang bang" pretend
with fingers as pistols as ... and laughs
hysterically at herself, slapping VERA on
the back so hard VERA falls out of her
chair, very dejected.*

CALAMITY, *Continued*

Say, I haven't seen that long a face since my daddy Bob saddled up the horses and moved us from Missouri to Virginia City, Montana! ME! The oldest of seven ... see ...

VERA

Oh, will you give it a break?!? I have a headache!

RHEA

I'd like to hear about it.

*During this speech, the ALL KIDS start
gathering from other places in the room
to listen.*

CALAMITY

I remember many occurrences on the journey from Missouri to Montana. Many times in crossing the mountains, the conditions of the trail were so bad that we frequently had to lower the wagons over ledges by hand with ropes, for they were so rough and rugged that horses were of no use.

TOM

Those sound ... sound like a tight scratch.

CALAMITY

Oh they were, ponytail lad. For many of the streams in our way were noted for quicksands and boggy places, where, unless we were very careful, we would have lost horses and all. Then we had many dangers to encounter in the way of streams swelling on account of heavy rains.

ABIGAIL

Heavy rains ... that can weigh you down ...

CALAMITY

Darn tootin', girl who seems like she is wearing way, way too much underwear ... On occasions of that kind, the men would usually select the best places to cross the streams; myself, on more than one occasion, have mounted my pony and swam across the stream several times merely to amuse myself, and have had many narrow escapes from having both myself and pony washed away to certain death.

EVERETT

I don't think I want to be invited to your birthday party.

AMBER

I want to hear more about the pony!

CALAMITY

He was Killer, a regular pony, girl who was in the outhouse when the good Lord was handing out brains ... anyhow, I left Montana in spring of 1866, for Utah, arriving at Salt Lake City during the summer.

VERA

Whoa. Random. I really liked your story. I suddenly have appreciation of history.

MOLLY

Well her story stops right there if we don't figure out a solution to our little "situation."

RHEA

(Hands MOLLY empty bowl) We're out of popcorn.

MOLLY

Ugh! Okay, but then we have to get to work!

MOLLY runs offstage to kitchen.

CALAMITY

Say, how about square dancing?

EVERETT

Now we're talking random.

MUSIC: Hoedown music, and they sing and dance to Jimmy Crack Corn.

HISTORY KIDS show

CONTEMPORARY KIDS how it's done. It's very awkward for most, but then they get the hang of it.

HAMA at one point takes out a harmonica and blows on it randomly and badly.

MOLLY comes back a few minutes later with popcorn, stops the music.

MOLLY

What the heck! What are you doing dancing?!? Don't you understand how much trouble we're in?!?

HAMA

Seems like we're having fun!

MOLLY tries to get the OTHERS back on track.

MOLLY

Calamity ... so you left for Utah in 1866 ... what happened in 1867? Or 1877? And when did you join the Wild West show?

CALAMITY

Well ... then ... um ... well ... gosh ... funny thing this is ... I'm having trouble rememberin'.

MOLLY

It was 1877. Tom—what did you join in 1775?

TOM

How would I know?

MOLLY

The Second Continental Congress. Eleanor—what year did you marry your father's fifth cousin?

ELENORE

Oh goodness

EVERETT

You had to go all “awkward” on us Molly.

MOLLY gathers the CONTEMPARY KIDS.

DREW

Guys, they are having trouble remembering ... because it hasn't happened yet. Get it?

MOLLY

Exactly! (*Referring to ELEANOR*) Her life is on pause. All of them – frozen at our ages.

VERA

I can't believe I'm saying this out loud, but Molly is right. Think of all the important things these kids went on to do —the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation...

MOLLY

Won wars, fought for civil rights ... (*Points to GEORGE*) This kid with the M&M bag on his head is supposed to be the founding father of this great nation!

Everyone stares at GEORGE who is caught with part of his head stuck in a bag of M&Ms. GEORGE takes it off before he trips.

GEORGE

What?

RHEA

I think we gotta get serious. We're second and goal. We have a short time to put this one through the hoop or this history will be lost ... forever ... we'll be like the Chicago Cubs of time travel.

AMBER

Even I get it now—you guys have to go back!

EVERETT

Go back, and there's no problem.

ABE huddles all the HISTORY KIDS huddle as the CHEERLEADERS enter once again.

CHEERLEADERS

Rememberin' when they were worried about the game
Now because of them history won't ever be the same
Uh-huh! (*Clap, clap*) Uh-huh! (*Clap, clap*)
What'll life be like with no adult Abe, George, or Eleanor
Only these kids could make Uncle Sam a total bore
Uh-huh! (*Clap, clap*) Uh-huh! (*Clap, clap*)
Drown your sorrows in a tippy cup
Because you have totally messed this up!
Gooooooooo dorks!

CHEERLEADERS exit.

DREW

(*To AMBER*) For “cheer” - leaders, there's like not a lot of cheer ...

HISTORY KIDS take center stage.

ELEANOR

We have an announcement to make!

GEORGE

We don't want to go back.

ABIGAIL

We want to stay here with you! I believe I'd look swimming in what you are calling “skinny jeans.”

PAUL

(*Stands on chair*) One if by PlayStation, two if by Wii—the Video Games Are Coming! The Video Games Are Coming!

PAUL high-fives his HISTORY FRIENDS.

ELEANOR

It's true. We want to stay with you!

EVERETT

Oh, great. The Problem-Mobile just drove by us and it's running all the stop signs.

VERA

(*To MOLLY, checking out clock*) Looks like we have just one hour and five minutes to convince them to go back to their time or ...

AMBER

We're in more trouble than just detention!

MOLLY

Okay, don't make me say "flux capacitor," but basically if we don't right this terrible wrong, the history of the entire planet earth will be different!

HAMA

(Whispering to MOLLY) Actually Molly, I confess a crutch on that Abe fella ... I could spend scores of time with him, if ya know what I mean. Let's let them stay!

CALVIN

(On a tablet) Okay, I've done some calculations ... if they don't go back and live their lives and do what they are supposed to do ... today we're still ruled by the British and ... most of what is west of the Mississippi is called American France, Texas to California is still under Spain's control, and – oh goodness—not sure how this plays out but – *(Pushes buttons; calculates)* There'll be no LEGO STAR WARS!

EVERYBODY screams at the horror.

ADULTS walk in PARENTS, MS. MANN, NANCY, and IRIS.

DREW

Looks like the cavalry has shown up

CALAMITY

I like the sound of that!

BLACK OUT.

SCENE FIVE

SETTING: The living room; shortly thereafter.

AT RISE: MOLLY, VERA, EVERETT and DREW are all sitting around dejected and depressed with the ADULTS while OFF STAGE we hear the rest of the KIDS laughing and screaming, having fun.

MOLLY

(Looking out the window) What the heck are they doing out there now?

EVERETT

They discovered the trampoline.

MOLLY

All humanity is surely doomed now.

VERA

(Checking her smart phone) 52 minutes.

DREW

Okay we need to work this out. I get that. But two things: If it doesn't, do you think Abigail would go to Pep Rally with me, and if so, should I wear a hoop skirt too?

MS. MANN

Consider being part of the solution and not the problem, young man!

VERA

51 minutes ...

AMBER SAUNTERS into the room from outside, followed by TOM.

TOM

Thy lady's hair reminds me of a prim spring day's bouquet of violets ...

AMBER

... Go on ...

TOM

Thy voice is musical, like a Mozart violin concerto ...

AMBER

.... Go on ...

TOM

.... Thy eyes, like the deep brown of my pants' knees after a day in the horse stall shoveling—

AMBER

(Places hand on TOM's mouth) Alrigh-ty, let's go ahead and hit the pause button.

EVERETT

Should have quit while you were ahead, Tommy.

TOM

I will, because I hold these truths to be self-evident, that all horses create an equal amount of—

AMBER

Ewww!

AMBER RUNS back outside and TOM chases after her.

PRINICIPAL NANCY

(To MOLLY, VERA, and DREW) Let me spell this out because if you don't right this, there aren't enough detentions in the world I can give you!

MS. MANN

I was just up there talking to them, and instead of being president, a couple of them wanted to grow up to be Mario Brothers!

MOLLY suddenly jumps up.

MOLLY

I know I have to fix this, EVEN THOUGH IT'S NOT MY FAULT, and I know what we have to do. We need – all of us – to do our assignment, and share them with the kids so they'll go back.

MS. MANN

Okay, I'll go round up my class!

BILL

Wait if they were in detention today – who was watching them? How did they escape? *(NANCY rolls her eyes)* Oh Iris the Janitor. Ever think of replacing her with a Roomba?

MS. MANN exits.

The rest of the CONTEMPORARY KIDS come back in.

MOM and NANCY are talking to each other.

MOLLY

... so guys, the plan is to finish our assignment. That'll fix that! Doing homework fixes everything!

CONTEMPORARY KIDS make faces.

MOM

Kids, Principal Nancy thinks it's so much bigger than that.

PRINCIPAL NANCY

You can't just finish it – they have to be spectacularly good.

HAMA

Whaaaa ...?

MS. MANN

... and you can't do that trick where you make the margins two inches wide and the font size 64 points!

EVERETT

Whaaaa ...?

MOM

You must really. Hit. Those. BOOKS!

CONTEMPORARY KIDS sigh; big gulp.

MOLLY

Well of course I can but ... really, please, look who I'm given to work with here, people! Throw me a bone!

VERA

First a confession. This is entirely my fault.

EVERETT

Vera, I believe the floor is yours – go on.

VERA

Molly, as a "joke," I took out your book report and passed it ... to Calvin.

CALVIN

Oh gosh—yeah it had words on it and stuff so I assumed it wasn't important! I threw it away. Thought there was gum in it.

MOLLY

Why did you do that, Vera?

VERA

Well I don't know—maybe because you're the smart kid. Maybe because you're always the smart kid. Maybe I'm tired of you always being the smart kid

MOLLY smiles but then the rest of the kids erupt trying to hold back their laughter. Soon they break down completely. MOLLY reacts.

VERA, *Continued*

Or at least something I'm not. But it was wrong. I'm sorry. Do you forgive me?

MOLLY

NO! But get us out of this and I'll think about it!

VERA

I will! Someone start the stirring patriotic music!

Pregnant pause.

AMBER

Hey adults, be good for somethin'!

ADULTS start a wild weird combination of humming and singing "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the Star-Spangled Banner, and the theme from Rocky. Kazoos probably come out.

VERA

Okay, guys, it's all up to us. We have to fix this.

AMBER

But we can't!

VERA

(Ala John Belushi in Animal House) Can't?!? Can't. Did Thomas Jefferson give up on purchasing the Louisiana Territory from Costco? Did Abe Lincoln give up and surrender to Geddy Lee? Did Eleanor Roosevelt give up on giving women the right to shop on Sundays? No! They didn't give up, and neither will we!

HAMA, AMBER, AND CALVIN

Yeah ...

VERA

If George can cross the Delaware River, we can cross Delaware Street! If Paul can ride to warn us the British are coming ...

RHEA

We can keep our underwear from riding up on us when we play volleyball!

MOLLY

Okay, Rhea, we're getting a bit off track. Stay focused!

VERA

Now listen, I let Molly here down, I know I did. But I say we all did. But we're not going to do it now!

Most of the KIDS are inspired—MOLLY is happy; ADULTS very scared.

EVERETT

To the school!

HAMA

We must get back to school!

RHEA

Let's hit those books!

KIDS and ADULTS besides BILL and MOM leave.

MOM

Bill, you stay here and keep our "guests" entertained ...

BILL

What will I do?

MOM

No more media, TV, or trampoline ... scare them about the horrors of modern living.

MOM exits. BILL thinks for a second, then gets a big ol' light bulb of an idea. He goes to the door.

BILL

Okay, everybody come in right now. I want to tell you about the Kardashians!

BLACK OUT.

SCENE SIX

SETTING: The Classroom.

AT RISE: CONTEMPORARY KIDS are at their desk, poring over books and finishing up their sizable reports. MOM is looking out the window. IRIS is still SLEEPING under the cover.

MOM

Okay, Dad is dropping those kids off now – everyone finish up.

MS. MANN

I wonder what your husband did with them during the past hour?

MOM

He said he taught them a song—what could go wrong?

The HISTORY KIDS are marched into the classroom to the sound of military drums, led by CHEERLEADERS humming “The Battle Hymn of the Republic ...” – until HISTORY KIDS break into song:

THE HISTORY BOYS

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the skipping of the school
Batman Lego Video Games are more fun than stinkin’ rules
And the teachers don’t do nothin’ but produce a lot of drool!
March on, oh yeah, or not!

HISTORY KIDS

... “Glory Glory what’s it to ya,
Teacher seems to be a drooler ...
We ran out the door to get us some S’Mores
And the teachers can’t find us any more

IRIS WAKES up, not sure what’s going on, but starts MARCHING around, getting into it.

THE HISTORY GIRLS

I've read enough stupid books that I don't need no more!
And learning 2 plus 2 is 5 is really quite a bore
And science is fine for louts but it's something I'll ignore!
March on, oh yeah, or not!

HISTORY KIDS

... "Glory Glory what's it to ya,
Teacher seems to be a drooler
We ran out the door to get us some S'Mores
And the teachers can't find us any more!

*BILL and IRIS enjoyed the show but
OTHER ADULTS are appalled. MOM
SNARLS at BILL.*

BILL

What?!?

MOM

Bill, must you always be one fry short of a Happy Meal?

BILL

I thought they done good! I taught them a great song! True I might not have remembered the lyrics exactly.

VERA

Now are they going to do a jig or something? Because we only have 21 minutes left now.

PRINCIPAL NANCY

Sharpen your intellectual number twos, kiddos, and let the educating begin!

*The CONTEMPORARY KIDS scramble
to get with their PARTNERS. Then round
robin style, as fast as possible, THEY
start reading facts from their reports
almost overlapping one another.*

DREW

(To TOM) You will write our Declaration of Independence, freeing us from English rule!

RHEA

(To ABE) You will become a self-educated lawyer whose powers of oratory will unite a warring nation!

HAMA

(To ABIGAIL) You will help your husband become the second president of this new country, and see your son become the sixth president!

VERA

(To CALAMITY) You'll become the greatest woman on the western frontier that anyone will ever know, inspiring girls for generations!

AMBER

(To ELEANOR) You'll help your husband become president, and you'll serve as the first chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights!

EVERETT

(To GEORGE) You will grow up to be the general who wins the war against British rule, and our first president!

CALVIN

(To PAUL) You'll yell really really loud!

PAUL

WHAT?!?

MOLLY comes over and gives him a dirty look, and CALVIN straightens up.

MOLLY

You have to do better than that, Calvin!

CALVIN

(To PAUL) You'll be one of the leaders of the Boston Tea Party, inspiring a nation to freedom, and become one of our country's first industrialists and business leaders!

The CONTEMPORARY KIDS continue to chat, and show pictures in books—the HISTORY KIDS get increasingly more interested and excited.

The CHEERLEADERS return armed with their typical snark.

SANDY

... wait. Look at them. They are working ... look at my sister Molly. Could she fix this thing? (Pause) I think she can do this ... I think my sister can do this ...

CHEERLEADERS

Go Molly, go Molly, can you get out of this folly?
Can you make a wrong a right?
Can you turn this out all right?

*CHEERLEADERS freeze along with
OTHERS. MOLLY crosses down.*

MOLLY

I don't know.

*SFX: Thunder. BLACK OUT . After a
moment the LIGHTS RESTORE.*

BEN wanders in and crosses to MOLLY.

BEN

Molly?

MOLLY

I'm always sure of everything, Mr. Franklin. I'm gifted that way, you know, one of the ways I'm gifted – there are many ways – but now ...

BEN

I've got a coin in my pocket. Heads, you're right, and tails ...

MOLLY

I'm going to bet on us. I'm going to bet on my friends. I think we're going to make it, Mr. Franklin—I think we're going to make it!

*FRANKLIN flips the coin and holds it.
MOLLY is very nervous.*

IRIS

Well, as I say, nothing interesting ever happens when adults are around, and I feel it in my bones – my bones I tell ya! – let's skedaddle ...

*The ADULTS exit. BILL & MOM stop by
MOLLY on the way out.*

BILL

No matter what happens, I'm proud of you.

MOM

... Your work ... and most of all (*Ahem*) your ability to make friends with the new and unusual ...

THEY hug.

The rest of the CONTEMPORARY KIDS are working hard convincing their counterparts, and it's working as the HISTORY KIDS are starting to realize how important it is they go back.

ELEANOR

I must stand up for civil rights ...

GEORGE

I must become the first president, lest there be a king running these states!

ABIGAIL

Married women must not be thought of as property—the cause for women's rights must be heard!

ABE

The Union must be saved!

VERA

We only have a minute to spare!

There is a shift in the LIGHTS as the weather starts to turn. The HISTORY KIDS realize their fate, and go stand by BEN.

BEN

Molly—quick, gather up the papers!

MOLLY quickly grabs them and VERA starts to help. There's a little moment when VERA hands them to MOLLY. THEY hug.

BEN shows the toss of the coin to MOLLY, who reacts. He hands her the coin.

*SFX: THUNDER, LIGHTING.
HISTORY KIDS begin waving goodbye.*

BEN

Oh no, my dear—for this to work properly I must take them with me.

CONTEMPORARY KIDS

What? We worked so hard on them! But I want to show mine to my mom, I've never written a word before, highway robbery! (*Etc.*)

DREW

Mr. Franklin—but we worked so hard on those things.

VERA

(*Hugging her paper*) My parents will never believe I am capable of something like this otherwise!

MOLLY

Ms. Mann—and the principal! What do we tell them?

This is Not the End of the Play **Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**

CASTING/STAGING TIPS

Ben Franklin Ate My Homework is written to be as flexible and easy to produce as possible.

For a Bigger Cast: The director looking to get as many actors on stage as possible can add history kids and students as walk-ons or give them a few lines. George Washington Carver, Susan Anthony, General Lee, etc., with corresponding school kids Justin, Rachel, Rudy, etc. There can be a full squad of cheerleaders up to 12 as well.

For a Smaller Cast: Those with a smaller stage with fewer children can cut the cheerleaders down to one or two or eliminate them completely. One or two of the pairs of students can be eliminated with their lines going to others or, in some cases, being cut.

Adult Parts can be played by adult actors or kids.

Songs/Dances. They can be expanded on or eliminated.

Costumes and Sets: Depending on resources, this can be as elaborate or simple as need be. Keep in mind that the kids from history are just kids, so simple black/brown pants with white shirts will work for the boys and simple dresses will work for the girls. Calamity Jane will need a cowgirl outfit, and a few hats for the boys will be a nice touch, but there's no need to dress them fully as adults of the period.

Benjamin Franklin is the only character that requires a full costume.

A poster of Franklin is also required, available for as little as \$12 online.