



For book *Meeting Mrs. Pierce*, Level X

Script Level: Grade 5 (Early)

Word Count: 1,957

### Script Summary:

Charlotte's mother is secretly involved in the Women's Suffrage Movement, even though Charlotte's father objects to it. When Charlotte is inspired by her mother and another suffragist, Mrs. Pierce, to have a protest at her school, Charlotte puts her mother's suffrage work in jeopardy, yet she sparks the spirit and forges the ties that will allow her to vote someday herself.

### Objectives and Assessment

Monitor students to determine if they can:

- consistently read their lines with appropriate rate and accuracy
- consistently read their lines with appropriate expression, including pause, inflection, and intonation
- follow along silently and listen for spoken cues

### Using the Scripts:

- Each role is assigned a reading level according to the syntactic and semantic difficulty encountered. Feel free to divide roles further to include more readers in a group.
- Discuss vocabulary and encourage readers to practice their lines to promote fluent delivery of the script.
- Have readers highlight their lines on the scripts, and encourage them to follow along as everyone reads.

### Vocabulary:

**Story words:** corsets, dawdle, gadding, namesake, paddy wagon, pestered, serviceable, suffrage

### Cast of Characters:

Grade 5 (Early)		
Narrator	Charlotte, age 21	Charlotte, age 11
Mama	Father	Mrs. Pierce
Headmistress Trotter	Elyse	Police Officer

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**Scene 1**

**Narrator:**

It was the summer of 1910, and Charlotte Hartley was curled up on the couch one Saturday, reading *Little Women* for the third time, when suddenly . . .

**Father:**

*Ah-choo!*

**Charlotte:**

Oh, Father, you startled me. Why are you home so early?

**Father:**

I've got a rotten cold. Why is your mother out?

**Charlotte:**

Um, ah, well, she was here and then . . . she had to go because . . . well . . .

**Father:**

Stop babbling, Charlotte, and tell me where your mother is. She shouldn't be out alone.

**Charlotte:**

Well, poor Elvira Foley wasn't feeling well . . . she was having another one of her spells, and Mama went to be with her.

**Narrator:**

This wasn't exactly a lie. Elvira Foley hadn't been feeling well, but she and Mama had still gone to the secret **suffrage** meeting.

**Father:**

Well, go get her, and be quick about it. There's no reason for women to be **gadding** about everywhere in creation.

**Charlotte:**

Yes, sir.

**Narrator:**

Charlotte leapt on her bicycle and sped down the road, her hair flying behind her. It was not the least bit ladylike, but she didn't care—this was an emergency. Soon, she reached the town hall and dashed through the suffrage signs until she found Mama.

**Charlotte:**

Excuse me, I'm sorry to burst in, but—Mama, father's home with a cold and he thinks you're over at Mrs. Foley's, but if he finds out where you are—

**Mama:**

He'll be furious! Of all the times for him to come home early . . .

**Mrs. Pierce:**

Now, don't you worry, Edith, come along with me. I'll have my driver bring you home in the town car in half a minute. Your husband will never know where you were.

**Mama:**

Oh, thank you, Mrs. Pierce.

**Charlotte:**

Can I ride in the town car, Mama?

**Mama:**

There isn't time to load your bicycle in the car, Charlotte. I've got to get home as fast as possible. You ride back home—and this time, I want you to ride like a lady.

**Narrator:**

By the time Charlotte got home, Mama had everything under control. She had given Father hot tea with lemon, and now he was sleeping peacefully, and Mama was singing to herself in the kitchen.

**Mama:**

You were so smart today, Charlotte. If you hadn't kept your head and brought me home right away, your father might have found me out, and that would have been the end of my suffrage work.

**Charlotte:**

But why? You're only working so that women will be allowed to vote. Why do you have to sneak around as if you're robbing banks?

**Mama:**

Well, men have a **serviceable** list of reasons why women shouldn't vote. They say women have no head for politics or business and we don't belong in public life. The husband's job is to provide for the wife and family while the woman bears the children, raises them, cares for the home, and obeys her husband in all things.

**Charlotte:**

Sounds dull.

**Narrator:**

Mama laughed out loud.

**Mama:**

Daughter, dear, I think it's time you went to a suffrage meeting.

## Scene 2

**Narrator:**

All through the summer, Mama hinted at a big surprise for Charlotte. To Charlotte, “surprise” was one of the most magical words in the English language. She **pestered** and probed, and even tried to trick Mama into giving away the secret, but she never revealed it.

But at the last suffrage meeting of the summer, Charlotte knew something was up. Mrs. Pierce was waiting with two saved seats in the front row. After the president called the meeting to order and said the Pledge of Allegiance, Mrs. Pierce struggled to her feet.

**Mrs. Pierce:**

Ladies, I'd like to introduce the fast-thinking little girl who rescued her mother last month. Charlotte, please stand up. I'm proud to say that this young lady is my **namesake**. Everyone say hello to Miss Charlotte Hartley.

**Mama:**

Mrs. Pierce is one of the founders of the suffrage movement, Charlotte. She signed the Declaration of Women's Rights at the Seneca Falls convention. She's a living piece of history, and you are named after her. Do you like your surprise?

**Narrator:**

For once in her life, Charlotte couldn't think of a thing to say. It was inspiring, finding out that she was named for an honest-to-goodness pioneer, but she also wondered how an eleven-year-old could live up to the honor.

**Scene 3****Narrator:**

Once September arrived, Charlotte realized that there was one place where being an eleven-year-old could be an advantage: at school.

**Charlotte:**

Hey, Elyse, what do you say we start a Girls' Suffrage Society? I mean, after all, girls grow up to be women.

**Elyse:**

Wow, that's a great idea. My mom goes to suffrage meetings all the time, and I know a bunch of other girls whose moms do, too.

**Narrator:**

Charlotte and Elyse began inviting the girls whose parents were involved with the movement, and then other girls began showing interest. After recruiting twenty members and convincing a sympathetic teacher to let them meet in her classroom, the Girls Suffrage Society was official.

**Charlotte:**

Our first task is to write a declaration of principles. We'll make it like the one Mrs. Pierce signed at the Seneca Falls Convention. It'll say that we demand not just the right to vote, but the right to be equal human beings.

**Elyse:**

I think that women should have the right to drive automobiles. Oh, and put in that we want to ban **corsets**.

**Charlotte:**

Okay, now everyone needs to sign it, to make it official.

**Elyse:**

Now what?

**Charlotte:**

Um . . . good question; I'm not sure what we should do.

**Elyse:**

Well, the women at our mother's meetings have plenty of ideas. They're saying that it's time to bring the movement into the streets, and so they're going to start having rallies, speeches, and protests. There will be signs and songs and everything.

**Charlotte:**

Well . . .

**Elyse:**

What? Doesn't that sound like fun?

**Charlotte:**

For some reason, my mother seems against doing anything public. She says that we shouldn't do anything so unladylike. I even reminded her about what Mrs. Pierce said: "The battle for suffrage will be won in the court of public opinion!" But no matter what, she just refused to do anything. I couldn't understand why.

**Elyse:**

Well, just because your mother doesn't want to doesn't mean that you can't. We could still have a rally or something.

**Charlotte:**

Well, that does sound like fun.

**Elyse:**

Come on, we'll have speeches, and maybe we can read our declaration. We could volunteer to do an assembly—it's perfect. We don't have to worry about attendance, because every girl in the school will have to be there.

**Charlotte:**

That's a great idea. I'll go ask Headmistress Trotter.

**Narrator:**

When Charlotte entered her office, Mrs. Trotter was sitting behind an impossibly huge carved mahogany desk. Mrs. Trotter smiled without showing any teeth.

**Mrs. Trotter:**

I understand you have an idea for an assembly, Miss Hartley.

**Charlotte:**

Well, Mrs. Trotter, a group of girls and I were wondering if we might volunteer for an assembly.

**Mrs. Trotter:**

What will this assembly be about, and what is the name of this group?

**Charlotte:**

The GSS . . .



**Mrs. Trotter:**

The what?

**Charlotte:**

The Girls' Suffrage—

**Mrs. Trotter**

Absolutely not! Suffrage is not an appropriate subject for an assembly. Parents do not send their little girls to school to have them learn such things. Goodbye!

**Narrator:**

Charlotte stood outside the office door, caught between anger and humiliation. Finally, anger won. She raced down the hallway until she found Elyse.

**Charlotte:**

We're not going to have an assembly. We are going to have a sign-carrying, slogan-shouting protest march!

## Scene 4

**Narrator:**

The GSS members gathered in front of the school just before classes were dismissed for the day. All of them carried signs and chanted slogans: "Learn about suffrage," "Support freedom of assembly," "Girls: speak your minds." Some students laughed, others booed, but some stayed to watch as if to show support.

**Charlotte and Elyse (chanting):**

Girls will be heard! Girls will be heard!

**Narrator:**

Suddenly, Mrs. Trotter marched out of the school.

**Mrs. Trotter:**

If you girls don't get inside right now, I'm going to start calling every home with a telephone.

**Narrator:**

A few minutes later, Charlotte's mother arrived, but she did not come alone. Three other suffragists, including Elyse's mother and Mrs. Pierce, came with her.

**Charlotte:**

Oh, Mama, I'm sorry—I know you said that you didn't want us doing anything public. But we just had to do this after Mrs. Trotter refused to let us have an assembly.

**Mama:**

I know that, dear. Now, do you have any extra signs that we might use?

**Charlotte:**

You mean that you're going to join us?

**Mrs. Trotter:**

What's going on? You don't mean to tell me that you are encouraging your daughters to behave this way. That's it—I'm calling the police.

**Narrator:**

One by one, Mama and the other suffragists picked up signs and fell into line behind the girls. Some of the onlookers broke into applause. It was a wonderful moment, or at least it was until the police came with two squad cars and a **paddy wagon**.

**Police Officer:**

Begging your pardon, ma'am, but you ladies are trespassing. Now, I don't want to haul you off to jail . . .

**Mrs. Pierce:**

That's good to know, Sergeant, but we certainly aren't going to stop.

**Police Officer:**

All right, all right. You ladies are under arrest. The children can go to the school detention room.

**Charlotte:**

No detention. We want jail! We want jail!

**Narrator:**

The girls picked up the chant while Mama and the other suffragists laughed so hard they almost cried.

**Police Officer:**

That does it! Everybody into the wagon.

**Narrator:**

Without breaking their line, the protesters marched into the paddy wagon. Charlotte led the way with Mama and Mrs. Pierce behind her. Never in her life would Charlotte have thought that getting arrested could be such fun.

**Scene 5****Narrator:**

The fun ended when Father arrived at the police station. He did not speak to Mama or Charlotte until they got home, and then he sent Charlotte to her room without supper. Before she fell asleep, she thought she heard father shouting, and once, a dish breaking, but mostly there was silence. The next morning, she waited until father had left before racing downstairs to the kitchen.

**Mama:**

I saved you some oatmeal. You must be starved.

**Charlotte:**

So . . . what did Father say?

**Mama:**

Well, your father said, and I agreed, that I will quit my suffrage work, and that I will never vote, even if it becomes legal.

**Charlotte:**

But Mama . . .

**Mama:**

It's all right, dear; I knew this was likely to happen when I picked up that protest sign.

**Charlotte:**

That's why you were so against public demonstrations—because you didn't want Father to find out. Oh, Mama, this is all my fault.

**Mama:**

Now, Charlotte, this is not your fault. The movement is going public, and I just couldn't hide anymore. But there is one good thing about this arrangement—it applies only to me, not to you.

**Narrator:**

Charlotte knew what she meant. She would not quit fighting for a world like the one Mrs. Pierce described, where being a person came before being a woman. And she would vote—someday, she would vote.

**Scene 6**

(This scene features Charlotte at age 21.)

**Narrator:**

Charlotte dressed with special care on the crisp morning of November 1920. After all, it was a historic occasion: women had finally won the right to vote, and Charlotte would be one of thousands to cast her first ballot. Her parents were still in the breakfast room when she got downstairs.

**Charlotte:**

Good morning, Father. Good morning, Mama.

**Father:**

Humph.

**Mama:**

You're going so early?

**Charlotte:**

It's Mrs. Pierce's idea. I'm meeting her at the courthouse.

**Mama:**

Give her my best for me, Charlotte.

**Narrator:**

Mama hugged her daughter, and then Charlotte left without a backward glance. She took a motorbus to the courthouse, and there waiting for her was Mrs. Pierce's green town car. It was nicked in a few places, but otherwise it was just as pretty and shiny as Charlotte remembered.

**Mrs. Pierce:**

We made it, my little namesake. Now, let's hurry and vote; at my age, it's not wise to **dawdle**.