



Grand-Pré National Historic Site of Canada

## **Evangeline**

### **Rationale:**

*Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* was published by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1847. The poem became universally popular. After the poem was translated into French in the 1860s, the Acadians adopted *Evangeline* as a heroine. This roleplay will provide students with the opportunity to act out the story for themselves.

**Note:** For the purposes of this lesson plan:  
- facilitator's instructions are in **bold**  
- students instructions are in regular text

### **Activities:**

**Facilitator:** **Act as narrator for this roleplay. Refer to *Evangeline Roleplay Script* to guide your performance. Divide class into groups for different scenes.**

**Scene 1:** Basil, Gabriel, Evangeline, Benedict, Father Felician (optional), three men, three women (10 -11 students)

**Scene 2:** Lt. Col. John Winslow, two British soldiers, a few men, a few women (approximately 9 students)

**Scene 3:** Evangeline, Father Felician, Gabriel, a couple of women, four rowers (approximately 10 students)

**Scene 4:** Evangeline, Gabriel, three or four sick people (5-6 students)

1. Read the example script for your group's part of the roleplay. Read the character descriptions.
2. Work together to create your own script, based on the example. **You don't have to use the exact lines of the example script.**
3. When the narrator cues your group, act your part in your group's roleplay. Mime any actions that are listed, and stay in character.
4. Your roleplay is part of a larger story. Listen quietly when the narrator or other groups are doing their scenes, so that you can hear the whole play.

**Evangeline:  
A Role Play**

**Directions for Scene 1**

**Characters:**

- Evangeline Bellefontaine:** An Acadian girl of seventeen years; gentle, courageous, and loved by everyone in the village of Grand-Pré. She will soon become engaged to her true love, Gabriel.
- Gabriel Lajeunesse:** About twenty years old, Gabriel is an honest and brave young man. He often helps his father, Basil, working in the forge. He is preparing to celebrate his engagement to Evangeline
- Basil Lajeunesse:** Gabriel's father. He is the village blacksmith . He is around 50, strong and healthy. He speaks in a loud voice, and seems very stern, but has a good heart.
- Benedict Bellefontaine:** Father of Evangeline,. He is on of the most important farmers of Grand-Pré. He owns a lot of land. He is around 50, but seems older. His health is fragile. He speaks slowly and quietly.
- Father Felician:** He is the village priest. Everybody likes and respects him. (The same student can play Father Felician in Scene 1 and Scene 3)

**3 Men of the Village (François, Pierre, Claude)**

**3 Women of the Village (Anne, Marie, Lucille)**

**Total:10 Characters (+ Father Felician)**

## Scene 1

(The lines in bold print are read by the Narrator / Facilitator, who plays the role of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poet who created Evangeline)

*Setting the scene:*

- Acadian men mime different kinds of field work, such as cutting with a scythe or raking hay.
- Acadian women, seated together, mime different kinds of house work, carding wool, sewing, etc
- Facing each other, Basil and Benedict are playing chess, while Evangeline and Gabriel, look lovingly into each others eyes a short distance away.

**Narrator-** Allow me to introduce myself. I am the poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It is with pleasure that I will describe for you here today my most recent creation, Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie. It is a rather long poem, but in a few words I will tell you the story of the courageous heroine that I have imagined. I have a group of friends with me who will help me to bring the story to life.  
**1755: a beautiful sunny day in August. At Grand-Pré, in the most fertile part of Nova Scotia, once called Acadie, life is peaceful. In the village`s biggest kitchen, three women of the village prepare for the next days big celebration...**

**(Action!)**

Anne - There! I finally finished cutting all those carrots for the stew. Do you think we have enough?

Marie - I think so. With all the turnips, the cabbage, and other vegetables, along with the pork from three pigs, that's going be a big stew!

Lucille- (sewing) I Hope that this skirt is the length that Evangeline likes. We don't often get fabric as nice as this.

Anne- (jokingly) It is pretty, but you're working so slowly that the skirt sure won't be done tomorrow for the engagement party....mabey not even for the wedding!

Lucille- (smiling) Very funny...

**Narrator- Meanwhile, out in the fields, some men are working on the harvest.**

(The men continue to mime various fieldwork throughout the scene)

François - Whew! It is hot! I think we've cut enough hay for today.

Pierre- I think you're right! (Looks at the sky) It shouldn't rain for the next few days. I think we can leave the hay out overnight without worrying too much.

Claude- (he looks off into the distance for a few seconds) What worries me is what I see out in the Bay, English ships, that makes me uneasy.

François- Hah! It's not the first time we've seen the English around here...

Claude- I'm just saying, this time, it worries me...

Pierre- Anyway, we'll see soon enough. We had better go cut some wood before supper.

François- Oh No! It's too hot for that! Let's go home and on the way we'll go for a swim in the river to cool off. That way, we'll be less likely to scare off all the pretty girls at Gabriel's engagement party tomorrow. Working in this heat, we don't smell very good!

**Narrator- So they went for their dip in the river... probably a good idea....  
meanwhile, at the home of Benedict, father of Evangeline...**

(From the beginning, Basil and Benedict have silently played chess while Evangeline and Gabriel sit facing each other, talking quietly.)

Basil- Your turn Ben! We don't have all day! We have an engagement party to plan!

Benedict- Don't try to distract me. In two minutes you will have lost the game. Evangeline, would you bring Basil a mug of cider? That ought to keep him busy.

( While Evangeline goes to fetch the cider, Gabriel approaches the table)

Gabriel- Father, it looks bad...

Basil- I haven't lost yet! Anyway, it's just a game...

Gabriel- No, I mean the arrival of the English. It looks bad...

Basil- (sighs) I know, but there is nothing we can do about it right now. Don't worry Evangeline for nothing. Think about tomorrow.

(Evangeline returns with a mug)

Basil- Thank you so much my beautiful Evangeline. My son is a lucky man to be marrying you.

Evangeline- (Looks at Gabriel) I can't help but feeling that after tomorrow, every day will be better than the last.

**Narrator- The next day, for the engagement celebration of Evangeline and Gabriel, it was indeed a fine day! The whole village turned out. Father Felician directed the ceremony which was followed by a big festival. The rejoicing continued well into the night.**

(During this narration, everybody except Father Felician gathers. Evangeline, Gabriel, and two other couples dance a round. The others surround them, singing and clapping hands.)

(When Father Felician arrives, the party stops. Everyone is instantly silent and worried that the priest will disapprove of the celebration. Slowly, Father Felician makes the sign of the cross, blessing the gathering. Everyone quickly makes the sign of the cross in return. Then the priest's stern expression is shattered by a warm smile as he claps his hands and stamps his feet to the beat of the now silent music. The party is on again.)

**End of Scene One**

## **Evangeline: A Role Play**

### **Directions for Scene 2**

#### **Characters:**

- Evangeline Bellefontaine:** A seventeen year old Acadian girl, gentle, brave and beautiful. The entire village of Grand-Pré has just celebrated her engagement to Gabriel.
- Gabriel Lajeunesse:** About 20, son of the village blacksmith, Gabriel is brave and very well respected by others. He has just become engaged to Evangeline.
- Lieutenant-Colonel John Winslow:** British Army officer in charge of the Deportation in Grand-Pré
- René Leblanc:** The village notary. He can read and write, and he understands English.
- Isabelle Boudreau:** A friend of Evangeline. Married to Pierre Boudreau.
- Pierre Boudreau:** A friend to Gabriel.
- Two English Soldiers:** (3 or 4 if the class is large)
- Acadian Men:** ( 3 or 4 extras who can be borrowed from another group.)
- Total:** Between 8 and 13 characters depending on the size of the class.

## Scene 2

**(The lines in bold print are read by the Narrator, who plays the role of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, creator of Evangeline)**

(Scene 1 ends with the festivities following the engagement of Evangeline and Gabriel.)

*Setting the Scene:*

- An open space represents the Church of Grand-Pré, with John Winslow inside
- English soldiers are outside the church, on each side of the door.
- A short distance away, Acadian men are gathered.
- Evangeline and Isabelle stand together a little off to the side.
- Everyone takes their places as the narrator reads...

**Narrator- ... and that night, everyone went contentedly to their sleep. But bad times were coming. Over the course of a few days, the soldiers prepared, then they struck!**

(The soldiers begin to rhythmically tap their musket butts on the floor, like the beat of drums. Slowly, the Acadian men file into the church, passing between the two soldiers. As soon as they have all entered, the two soldiers come in behind them and stand, shoulder to shoulder, guarding the door.)

Winslow- Gentlemen, I have received from Governor Lawrence orders concerning you. I have no choice but to obey these orders. Now, I will read them to you:  
(He reads the document) Your lands and houses, all cattle and livestock are seized by the British Crown. You can keep your money and the small belongings you can carry. You will all be taken away from this province will start a new life in other British colonies where we hope you will

become loyal subjects. In the meantime, until the ships arrive for your transport, you will be kept here. I declare you the King's prisoners

(Winslow leaves the church.)

(During the reading of the order, the Acadian men become more and more agitated. They only understand French, and the order is read in English.)

Pierre Boudreau- What did he say? I didn't understand a word of that!

Gabriel- I'm not sure, but it's sure not good news. René you understand English.....

René Leblanc- (looking stunned) I can't believe it! They're sending us all away! They've taken our land and they're sending us God knows where. And for now, we're prisoners! We can't leave the church!

Other Men- "What?!" "They can't do that!!" "This can't be!!" Etc

(They try to leave the church to find the soldiers blocking the way.)

**Narrator- While all the men of Grand-Pré are held prisoners, the women must face the sad reality. What can we bring into exile? What must we leave behind?**

Isabelle- Oh Evangeline, what is going to become of us??! Why are they doing this! (pause) Mabe they're just trying to scare us?

Evangeline- I don't know Isabelle. Nobody knows anything...

Isabelle- Did you see Gabriel yesterday? My mother said he was one of the men the British released for a while.

Evangeline- I saw him for about two minutes and it wasn't easy. The soldiers made them work all day on the harvest. They put our men back into the church before sunset. He had just enough time to tell me that my father seems weak. He just sits in the corner of the church and hardly talks at all.

Isabelle- Oh my God! It's terrible! I worry for my Pierre, you know his temper. I'm afraid he'll get angry and do something foolish...

Evangeline- I know... I know...But what can we do, except pray...?

**Narrator- But prayers were not enough. When the transport vessels dropped**

**anchor in the mouth of the Gaspereau River, the entire population of Grand-Pré were marched in a tragic procession to the shore for the loading of the ships...**

(The English soldiers order the Acadian men from the church. Evangeline and Isabelle join with them they are sent toward Colonel Winslow who directs one half of them to his right and the other half to his left, sending them to different ships. In this way, Gabriel and Evangeline are separated.

Evangeline- Gabriel! Gabriel!

Gabriel- Evangeline! (Pause) We'll find each other on the ship!!

**End of scene 2**

**Evangeline: A Role Play  
Directions for Scene 3**

**Characters:**

- Evangeline Bellefontaine:** An Acadian woman from Grand-Pré. Engaged to Gabriel when she was 17. They were separated during the Deportation. Since then, Evangeline has been searching for Gabriel.
- Father Felician:** Formerly the Parish priest of Grand-Pré village. He accompanies Evangeline on her quest for Gabriel.
- Two Other Acadian Women:** They are in the boat with Evangeline and Father Felician
- Gabriel Lajeunesse:** Evangeline's fiancé. He was separated from her by the Deportation. He moves around a great deal in Louisiana and the southern American colonies as a hunter and fur trapper.
- Two Acadian Men:** Friends of Gabriel. Hunters and trappers as well, they accompany Gabriel in his wanderings.

**Total: 7 Characters**

**(Some players from other scenes could serve as “trees”)**

### **Scene 3**

**(The lines in bold print are read by the Narrator, who plays the role of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, creator of Evangeline)**

( Scene 2 ended with the loading of the Acadians onto the ships during the Deportation.)

**Narrator- But Evangeline and Gabriel did not find each other on the ship. They were placed aboard two different vessels, each of which sailed to a different American colony. Evangeline and Gabriel, who wanted to unite their lives forever, were thus separated from each other. During the years of misery which followed for all deported Acadians, Evangeline searched for Gabriel. Courageously, she refused to give up, wandering throughout the American territories in her quest. Accompanied by Father Felician, she found herself in Louisiana, where many deported Acadians had come to settle. Perhaps Gabriel was in Louisiana....?**

#### *Setting the Scene*

- During the narration, the players take their places. We are in the “bayous” of Louisiana. This is a hot, humid region of lakes and marshes.
- There are swarms of voracious mosquitoes.

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- Evangeline, Father Felician, and the two Acadian women are in a beached boat, immobile on the shore.
- Gabriel and his two comrades will appear later in the scene in a second boat, but they are not seen at the beginning of the action.

( In Evangeline's boat, everyone is trying to fend off the mosquitoes.)

Woman 1-            These mosquitoes are going to eat us alive!

Woman 2-            I think they're going to start by driving us crazy!

Father Felician-    Our Lord had a good reason for creating every thing that exists. The mosquito, for example.....the purpose for the mosquito.....it helps to (pause). For the mosquito, God's purpose is not clear.

Woman 1-            (To Evangeline , who has been staring off into the distance since the beginning) Did you see something Evangeline?

Evangeline-        (Sighs) No, According to what that Monsieur Leblanc told me, Gabreil should have passed by here on his way back north. But When!? Today? Tomorrow? Yesterday? (Sighs) Perhaps I have too much false hope, he's probably a long way off by now....

Woman 1-            Don't get discouraged Evangeline. We will help you find Gabriel. For the moment, though, we should get some rest. Let's sleep for a while and get a fresh start later.

Father Felician-    I agree. In a couple of hours, it will be cooler, and we will be rested.

**Narrator-            They were so tired that, despite the heat and the mosquitos, they went immediately to sleep in the canoe, hidden by the trees at the edge of the lake. It was during this time that cruel Destiny determined to send Gabriel floating past, so close that, if Evangeline were awake, she could have heard her fiancé's voice...**

( Gabriel and his two companions appear, paddling their canoe. They move slowly, but do not stop. Gabriel is in the middle of the canoe while his two friends paddle.)

Gabriel-            So how is it going gentlemen?? Are your arms very tired?

Acadian men        -No I'm alright  
-I can go for another hour

Gabriel-            Are you sure? I'm well rested now.

Man 1                    Very well. If you insist, I'm not going to argue. (Passes Gabriel his paddle.)

( Gabriel paddles with gusto, and the canoe disappears)

**Narrator-**            **O cruel irony of Fate! Not more than an hour later, Evangeline and her friends awoke. Dreams had haunted the sleep of Evangeline...**

( During the narration, Evangeline and her group slowly awaken, yawning and stretching)

Evangeline-            It was just a dream, but in my sleep, I saw Gabriel. I heard his voice. It seemed so real... like he was very close to me. I still feel like he's nearby...(pause) Oh Father Felician, I am so sorry...all these illusions, you must think I'm crazy...

Father Felician-      No child, I understand.

Woman 2-              We'll find him soon enough, your Gabriel.

**End of scene 3**

**Evangeline a Role Play  
Directions for Scene 4**

**Characters:**

**Evangeline Bellefontaine:**            After the Deportation, she spent years searching for fiancé, Gabriel. Eventually she became a nun. She is now about 60, and is a nurse in a hospital in Philadelphia.

**Gabriel Lajeunesse:**                    Separated from Evangeline during the Deportation, he is now past 60. He is dying, victim of an epidemic disease sweeping the city.

**Two other patients**

**A Doctor**

**Total: 5 Characters**

#### **Scene 4**

**(The lines in bold print are read by the Narrator, who plays the role of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, creator of Évangéline)**

*Setting the Scene:*

- During the following narration, Gabriel and two other patients take their places, lying on pallets on the floor.

- They are very sick, coughing and moaning. They are near death.
- Evangeline and the doctor are off stage for the moment.

**Narrator-**            **Without even knowing it, Evangeline had nearly found her lost love in the swamps of Louisiana. Over the following years, she continued her quest; years filled with wandering and disappointment. Finally, she pledged herself to God as a Sister of Mercy. She would never forget her Gabriel, but in dedicating her life to the service of others, her pain was easier to bear. After the wars, when many Acadians had returned to live in the Acadie of their birth, Evangeline decided not to go back. Without Gabriel, that would only have worsened her loss. Evangeline instead determined to spend her last years comforting the sick in a hospital in Philadelphia...**

(Evangeline and the Doctor enter)

**Doctor-**            (Quietly) Sister Evangeline, there is nothing more we can do for the three patients in this room. They were among the twenty who came in this morning. There are more and more arriving every day. Can you please give them some comfort?

**Evangeline-**        Yes, Doctor, of course.

(She bends down near the first two patients, Gabriel being the third. At each bedside, she offers some words of comfort, and a short prayer. Finally, she turns to Gabriel; slowly, she recognises him.)

**Evangeline-**        (in shock) Gabriel? By all the Saints is it really you??

**Gabriel-**            (coughing, and speaking with difficulty) Evan...Evangeline?

**Evangeline-**        (She holds him in her arms) Oh Gabriel...don't talk...breathe...breathe. Oh God don't let him die! Leave me my Gabriel!

(She holds his head, stroking his hair. Slowly, with a shaking hand, he looks for something in his pocket, drawing forth a wedding ring. Still very slowly, he puts the ring on her finger. He smiles, his eyes close, and quietly, he dies.)

**Evangeline-** (Long pause... she looks at the sky) Till death do us part !

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