

WHAT IF P.E.O. WAS FOUNDED TODAY?

This story is about the founding of P.E.O. It takes place in the present, with the belief that if P.E.O. were to be founded today, the ideals and purpose would be the same as it was when the seven original founders began P.E.O. in 1869.

The characters include:

seven founders

two narrators

one director to act as the stage prop person (*change cards*), be the Pizza Delivery Person, and say "Action" before each scene.

The characters are dressed as college girls would be dressed today – jeans, sweatshirts, slacks, shorts, etc. Everyone carries a backpack which holds their props. The actors don't have any speaking parts; they act out what the narrators are saying.

Props:

4 large signs, placed on an easel and changed with each scene:

any college campus, U.S.A. (*used for Act I and III*)

Music Room

Mary Allen's House

Saturday, January 23

Movie clapper: black & white striped boards used to announce "Act I, Scene I, Action," and then clap. (*Available at Disney store*)

Steno pad, pencil, Bible, round table, paper (*for oath*)

4 large signs:

**P
E
O**

• (*a large period runs between each letter as narrator spells it out.*)

Large half- moon

Pizza boxes & uniform (lent from local pizza shop)

Large cardboard star

Raincoat, with lining covered with costume jewelry
and one large paper star (Mr. Crane)

Lap top computer

Paper star (Mr. Crane)

Calendar

Chair for each Founder

Roll of paper towels tied with large blue ribbon

Tennis Racket

Copies of constitution tied with blue ribbon (*enough
for everyone attending this presentation*)

Program Book

Large coin purse

White baseball caps decorated with P.E.O. and stars
and daisies.

Paper money

A lot of the acting was spur-of-the-moment. As you go through the script, you can act out your own ideas of what would be appropriate in today's world, and add or subtract props. We found that if the girls had props to deal with they were kept busy and didn't just stand around while the narrators were talking. Also, the props helped to keep things light, as this was rather a comedy rendition of the founding of P.E.O.

Narrator #1: We welcome you each here as we gather to pay tribute to the Founders of P.E.O. In planning our celebration we thought we would enact the actual founding of P.E.O. but place the scene in modern times. We decided to do this to emphasize what Alice Bird recalled when she said “we were just seven ordinary girls who did an ordinary thing in ordinary times.” We know the relevance of laying a firm foundation to perpetuate a solid friendship is no less pertinent today as it was in 1869.

So let us begin our short reenactment...

Narrator: #2: It will be short as plans were completed in less than a day.

ACT I SCENE I –

Any college campus, USA. (Director's clapper)

Actually, the campus of Iowa Wesleyan, Thursday morning, January 21, 1869

Enter: Hattie Briggs...A senior in her 4th year on campus and Franc Roads... Entering IU at age 14, Franc was the youngest founder.

(Hattie and Franc talking to each other, talking, crying, then Hattie gets the idea and all talk animatedly in excitement, using their hands.)

A small chapter of I.C. Sorosis had been organized in December about 6 weeks prior by Libbie Brooks, a friend of one of our Founders. Hattie and Franc are discussing the fraternity system and I.C. Sorosis in particular. Their close knit group of seven campus leaders had not all been asked to join and those that had would not join without the others. The logical solution as Hattie said, “Let’s start a society of our own!” one which would commemorate their cherished friendship. They went to look for Mary to see what she thought.

Narrator #2: Hattie, Franc and Mary were such intimate friends; they were known on camps as the “trimese” twins. *(Each of the three goes off and comes back with another or two.*

Narrator #1: Mary liked the idea; they then each went to find the others – Alice Coffin Ella Stewart, Allie Bird, and Suela Pearson, who were all enthusiastic.

Narrator #2: It wasn’t too difficult to find any one...there were only 2 buildings on campus, Main and Pioneer Hall.

Narrator #1: Once all together they excitedly and hurriedly made plans to organize their society that very day. What to do about their good friend, Carrie Woolson, who was studying off campus? They decided they would initiate her as soon as she returned.

Narrator #2: It is not surprising that they thought of the Music Room in Main Hall to hold that organizational meeting. They all participated in musical events and were

familiar with the room. One must have gone to make arrangement for its use. (*One raises hand as if volunteering and leaves.*)

Narrator #1: They all felt the need for some kind of ceremony, a bit of pageantry and an oath of allegiance. To Allie, fell the task of writing something suitable, something each could participate in. (*Allie volunteers, gets out pad and pencil and starts writing...goes off stage.*)

Narrator #2: with an oath they would need the Bible from the chapel. Surely someone stood guard while it was being moved so no one would become suspicious. (*someone tip toes out as if sneaking and someone stands "guard."*)

ACT I: SCENE II

The music room where the seven reconvene for the ceremonial oath cementing their friendship

(*Director's clapper "ACTION", set up round table or use cardboard topper.*)

Narrator #2: We do not know when exactly this historical event took place, but probably after the last class of the afternoon.

Narrator #1: We do know that Ella Stewart read the oath first to its authoress Allie Bird, who then read it to the other six individually. (*Ella read to Allie and Allie then goes around the circle reading to each of the others.*)

Narrator #2: We do not know the exact order in which the six were initiated. Gee, the organizer would certainly never allow that to happen today!!

Narrator #1: Four important decisions were made before the conclusion of this secret meeting in the music room. First, the society was named P.E.O.

Narrator #2: That P period, E period, O period. (*Hold up signs.*)

Narrator #1: Second - the star was suggested by Alice Coffin as the symbol for their order. (*Allie pulls "moon" out of back pack; others shake heads "no", then she pulls out the "star" and all nod in agreement.*)

Narrator #2: The star was a natural choice as all studied astronomy and had been intrigued by the vastness of the universe. The star symbolized their search for the highest and best in life.

Narrator #1: Third - Allie Bird was designated to write the Constitution and have a rough draft for their first meeting. (*Everyone points to Allie who goes to corner and starts on her laptop computer.*)

Narrator #1: Fourth - The first meeting was set for Saturday night at Mary Allen's home. (*Mary Allen gets out calendar, all mark theirs; she volunteers her house.*)

Narrator #2: Certainly a lot had been decided and accomplished in a few hours this first day, January 21, 1869.

ACT II: SCENE I

Mary Allen's Saturday January 23
(*Sign "Mary's house;" Clapper "Action "*)

Narrator #1: Since the first 15 months of minutes are missing, we are taking liberty with the details. (*All gasp, appalled.*)

Narrator #2: But know that each of the seven were members of the Ruthean Literary Society and well versed in parliamentary procedure, so amid the excitement, they knew how to conduct business. (*Someone goes around and takes password.*)

Narrator #1: Undoubtedly, the first order of business was to see that the meeting opened with a prayer and scripture as P.E.O. meetings still do today! (*One holds bible, stand and leads prayer, all bow heads.*)

Narrator #2: There must have been discussion of officers and their duties. We know the following were elected to serve six months: President - Allie Bird, Vice President- Alice Coffin, Secretary- Ella Stewart and Treasurer- Hattie Briggs. (*Allie stands to preside using a tennis racket for gavel.*)

Narrator #1: The real problem was to determine what they wished to become. So this first meeting on Jan. 23, 1869, was a significant one. It was here that the many ideas and ideals of the founders began to take form. Hundreds of suggestions were made and dozens of motions were resolved in the best parliamentary manner. (*Raise hands, shake heads in agreement, yawn, it's getting late. Pizza delivered, complete with hat and uniform. Treasurer pays with paper \$\$\$.* Passes out the pizza...4 – 5 boxes.)

Narrator #2: The founders began to sense their responsibility toward something larger than themselves and their friendship and excitedly and fearlessly thought through one step after another until a pattern of procedure emerged.

Narrator #1: There was discussion on the order of business they would follow and programs best suited to accomplishing their goal of self-improvement.

Narrator #2: It is likely Mr. Crane came with a sample pin; – they had chosen the star for their emblem and being a reputable jeweler in town, they surely requested he provide sample designs. (*Man sleazes in dressed in trench coat, hat pulled down, flashes open coat to reveal his "wares" – glittery jewels. Girls look over sample and pick P.E.O. star pin.*)

Narrator #1: At some point in the meeting, they were ready to consider the constitution which Alice Bird had been asked to prepare. She recalled in 1907 how she accomplished this task.

Narrator #2: How well I remember the day I wrote the primitive constitution. I went into the holy of holies, the spare bedroom. I recall the pleasure of selecting my finest white paper and the blue ribbon to tie it after the manner of essays of that time. Once started I could scarcely stop. The needs of all women, it seemed to me, must be embodied in that document, and such as it was, it has served as a nucleus for our needs ever since. *(She unrolls her “epistle” – a roll of paper towels.)*

Narrator #1: With deep sincerity, but also her natural sense of drama, Alice must have read this one precious page to the other six. She said of the moment.....

Narrator #2: When I submitted the little document it was adopted unanimously and as a whole – so anxious were we all to get to work and revolutionize the world! *(Thumbs up... High fives all around!)*

Narrator #1: It seems important at this point to review the exact contents of that original draft. Your table hostess will pass out to each of you a copy of that original constitution...tied with the customary blue ribbon.

Before adjourning this long, exciting first meeting, they must have discussed how they would announce their secret society to the world.

Narrator #2: According to Franc, the 7 held numerous meetings, always in the strictest secrecy to finalize their plans for this announcement.

Narrator #1: Just as would be the case today, they wanted to do something dramatic, something to draw attention to their beautiful pins, and somewhere that would be the most noticeable, and of course, they must dress alike. *(Dialogue between each other about what to wear w/hand gestures, obviously talking about clothes.)*

Narrator #2: Despite careful planning to march into Chapel in identical aprons held up by their shiny, star pin, the actual date for the exciting announcement of P.E.O. was set somewhat by chance.

Narrator #1: The P.E.O.s learned from some mysterious source that the I.C.s later knows by their Greek name Pi Beta Phi, were making blue calico dresses and planning to wear them as they went into chapel one special morning. So the founders hurriedly completed their plans and scheduled their entrance for the same morning. *(girls exit)*

ACT III: SCENE I

Processional (Director’s clapper – “ACTION”)

Narrator #2: This is the story the founders told of this morning (probably the last week of January)...”The morning came and as the hour for devotional drew nigh, a band of P.E.O.s with large white aprons with high bibs emerged from a room conveniently near the chapel door, and filed into the room ahead of the gowned I.C.s In order to accomplish this coup d’etat, the industrious P.E.O.s had sat up nearly all the night making the necessary addition to their wardrobe. *(Girls enter single file, very prim and proper, in their same jeans, sweats etc. but with large stars and decorated baseball caps – daisies, P.E.O. etc.)*

Narrator #1: Source material fails to record the reaction of the Pi Phi’s that morning as they were left following the P.E.O.s into the chapel. Undoubtedly, this was P.E.O.’s day.

Eight girls, beside the seven original, were initiated before Carrie Woolson returned to campus for spring semester, and was initiated the first weekend of March. By that time five of the seven founders had completed their last college semester, but returned in June for graduation.

Narrator #2: The constitution was read at each meeting. Article III, the statement of purpose, but now known as the Objects and Aims, is still recited at each meeting. Only a few words have been changed since the 1881 revision, 12 years after Allie wrote it.

Director: Okay “That’s a Wrap”! *Clapper*

Narrator #1: We hope you have enjoyed our enactment of the Founding of P.E.O. and learned some trivia facts along the way. We each pay tribute to the seven founders every day as we exemplify the five points of our star, the meaning of our letters and the words of our Objects and Aims.

Narrator #2: What we really celebrate today are the thousands of ordinary women like you and I who have taken P.E.O. far beyond the dreams, ideals and visions of the original seven. Ordinary teenagers like today’s college girls founded a society in which ordinary women like you and I are proud to be responsible members.

Narrator #1: Shall we rise and toast our wonderful Sisterhood: Here’s to P.E.O. and all women...past, present and future...who give to, and benefit from, P.E.O. CHEERS!!

ORIGINAL CONSTITUTION

Whereas, recognizing it to be the chief duty of every individual to Cultivate her powers; physical, mental, moral, and social to their fullest extent, we organize ourselves into a Secret Society; and adopt for our government, the following constitution and by-laws.

Article 1st

Sec. 1st The society shall be known by
the name of P.E.O.

Sec. 2nd The badge of this Society shall be a
golden star with P.E.O. in black enameled
letters in the center.

Article 2nd

Sec. 1st The objects of this society shall be General
improvement, which shall Comprehend
more especially

1st Improvement in charity toward
and interest in each other as
P.E.O.s

2nd Improvement in our charity
toward and interest in all
with whom we associate.

3rd Improvement in our manners
at home and in society.

4th Improvement in our minds by
the pursuing of such books
and pamphlets in and out
of society as shall be proper
for P.E.O.s

Article 3rd

This article was based on the chief duty, or principle
Object as it was called then. We have changed the
Original wording very little, but the original copy was
arranged differently on the page. Points 1st, 2nd and
3rd were set apart and so numbered as in Article 2
above. Then, at the end of the third point, three beautiful
clauses were added: to care for each other in trouble,
to sympathize in affliction, and to console in grief.

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From *Out of the Heart*