

GEORGE FERRIS WHAT A WHEEL!  
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Reader's Theater  
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Cast: Narrators 1-2, George Ferris, Engineers 1-2, Fair Official, Construction Workers 1-2  
Crowd Members 1-2, Mrs. Ferris

Narrator 1: George Ferris was an engineer who had big ideas. He turned his big ideas into bridges made of steel.

Narrator 2: Bridges that crossed high over rivers. Bridges that were strong and safe.

George: "I am George Ferris and I make sure of that."

Narrator 1: Before George ever imagined designing and building bridges, he lived with his family on a ranch in Nevada. A waterwheel nearby scooped up river water.

George: "I would sit for hours and watch that wheel turn."

Narrator 2: When he grew up, George remembered everything about the waterwheel. He didn't know it would help him with his big ideas. But it did.

George: "In Chicago, I heard exciting news. A World's Fair will open there."

Engineer 1: "There will be lots to see and do. Like balloon rides."

Engineer 2: "An ostrich farm. And don't forget Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show."

Fair Official: "But I want something new. Something I have never seen before."

George: "I am just the person to create it."

Narrator 1: At first, George didn't like any of his ideas. Then the waterwheel popped into his head. He drew an enormous wheel with cars on it for people to ride in.

Narrator 2: This was his biggest idea ever. George showed the engineers his drawing.

Engineer 1: "It looks like a spider's web."

Engineer 2: "No one will ride on that."

Narrator 1: But George liked his idea.

George: "I'll make it work. I'll make it strong and safe."

Narrator 2: George asked an engineer friend to help him. They drew up a daring design. A giant wheel made of steel.

Narrator 1: It looked like a bicycle wheel. The 36 train-size cars were the best part. 2,160 people could ride on the wheel at the same time.

Narrator 2: George showed his design to the fair official.

Fair Official: "A thunderstorm will blow your wheel over. Your idea is too dangerous. Anyway, you will have to pay a lot of money to build it."

Narrator 1: George wouldn't give up on his biggest idea ever. Lucky for him, many people thought he was a terrific engineer. They gave him the money and he created a new company.

George: "The Ferris Wheel Company."

Narrator 2: George reworked his plans a bit. He would show the fair official that his Ferris wheel would be strong and safe.

Fair Official: "I have a lot of questions."

George: "I have all the right answers."

Narrator 1: The fair official finally said,

Fair Official: "Have your Ferris wheel ready by opening day."

Narrator 2: Building a strong bridge took years. Could George build his Ferris wheel in only five months?

George: "I hope so."

Narrator 1: George ordered steel parts, electric lights, and a 1,000-horsepower steam engine.

Narrator 2: He ordered an extra engine in case the first one broke down. Plus, air brakes to stop the wheel in an instant, and a 90,000 pound axle, the largest made at the time.

George: "Now it's time to start building."

Narrator 1: But the temperature dropped to 16 degrees below zero. The ground was frozen. What would the construction workers do?

Construction Worker 1: "We'll blast the frozen ground with dynamite. Then we'll dig down, but I know we'll hit quicksand."

Narrator 2: In Chicago?

Construction Worker 1: "Yes! Frozen quicksand."

Construction Worker 2: "We'll heat the quicksand up and pump it out. We'll dig deep into the earth and drill into the rock below."

Construction Worker 1: "Next, we'll push in steel bars. We'll connect the bars to the legs of the two towers, and we'll build those towers up."

Construction Worker 2: "Then we'll put the giant axle into place."

Narrator 1: All this work took a long time, would the Ferris wheel be finished by opening day?

Engineer 1: "They worked hard and fast."

Engineer 2: "But not fast enough."

Narrator 2: On May 1, the fair opened. The Ferris wheel wasn't finished.

Construction Worker 1: "That won't stop us."

Construction Worker 2: "We'll finish the job soon."

Narrator 1: At the beginning of June, the Ferris wheel, without the cars, was ready for a test.

Narrator 2: Everyone wondered...

Crowd Member 1: “Will it really work?”

Crowd Member 2: “Is it safe?”

George: “Of course!”

Narrator 1: The boilers fired up. Steam pushed into the engine. The brake was released and the Ferris wheel turned.

Crowd Member 1: “The construction workers jumped on.”

Crowd Member 2: “People from all over the fair ran to watch.”

Narrator 2: Next, the workers hung the first six cars. With the extra weight, would the wheel still work?

George: “Of course!”

Mrs. Ferris: “I’m Mrs. Ferris. George is a terrific engineer. I know it will work and I’m going for a ride.”

Narrator 1: At the top of the wheel, 264 feet in the air, Mrs. Ferris jumped up on her chair and cheered.

Mrs. Ferris: “Hooray!”

Narrator 1: The last cars were hung. The lights were connected.

Narrator 2: Now people packed into six lines waiting to ride the Ferris wheel.

Crowd Member 1: “I can’t wait. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Crowd Member 2: “I didn’t think it would really work, but it’s amazing.”

Narrator 1: George and Mrs. Ferris hopped into one car. A 40-piece marching band squeezed into another.

Narrator 2: Up, up, up they went. The band played “America.”

Mrs. Ferris: “George, your biggest idea ever works!”

George: “Of course. I knew it would.”