

## Fierce Feathers.

### A true story of the Society of Friends in America.

**Tell the story simply for your Year 2 or 3 audience. Make it dramatic!**

Over 230 years ago, in 1775, there were many communities of European settlers in the American west. Some of these were followers of William Penn, and called themselves the Society of Friends, though others often call them Quakers. These Christians keep to a simple way of quiet worship. They meet in silence. They are determined to be peaceful in every situation. Many Friends went to America to find the religious freedom that was denied them back in Britain. You may have heard about the Pilgrim Fathers, and the Mayflower, their ship.

Robert Nisbet was a Quaker preacher. One weekend he had to set out on foot on Friday to arrive at a new and remote settlement by Sunday, to preach. It was a thirty mile walk, tiring and thirsty, and he slept two nights in the open. The journey was possibly dangerous too. Many of the white settlers, though not the Friends, had used guns against the native Americans, and the response with bows and arrows was swift, and often murderous.

As Robert walked, he thought about how to preach. The small community of Friends he was visiting were fearful and hard pressed, but faithful to their peaceful intentions. Every day there were stories of fierce fighting between settlers and native Americans. Robert chose a Bible verse, Psalm 91 verse 4. 'God will cover you with his feathers. Under his wings you will find refuge. Do not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day.'

On Sunday morning, as usual, all the Friends, from the eldest grandparent to the tiniest child, sat together in silent worship and meditation in the largest of their wooden cabins. It was a fresh morning, with a clear sky. The doors and windows were left open, and a gentle wind blew through. Robert read his text, and the people listened while he spent a few minutes sharing his thoughts. "God is like a mother bird. God will cover you with feathered wings and keep you safe." Silence descended: the community was worshipping. No sound arose inside the cabin. But outside soft and dangerous footfalls came into the little village.

The native American Chief followed by many Braves crept into the little group of wooden buildings. They carried war axes, scalping knives, arrows and bows. They came to kill the settlers, and drive the whites away from their land. At first they thought the tiny village was deserted, but their expert trackers noticed all footprints leading to the largest cabin. They silently surrounded the wooden building.

Then two Braves stepped across the open window. Two more, and the chief, stood in the doorway. One by one, the worshipping Friends inside noticed the presence of the attackers. The air crackled with tension. Each one looked to Robert: he motioned gently with his hands to keep still, to continue in prayer. Time stretched. The native American eyes took in the scene. They saw that the whites carried no guns. No swords. No weapons. Then the Chief murmured to his Braves in a low voice. Silently, one by one, each Brave laid his axe and weapons on the ground at the door. Each one filed into the crowded cabin. They too sat at peace with the Friends in worship.

Minutes passed, and the oldest of the Friends, a man called Zebulon, closed the meeting with a blessing. He stood, approached the Chief, and wordlessly motioned him to follow. He took the chief home, and shared his meal with him. Another of the Braves, who could speak English, told Robert 'We came today to kill you, and destroy your settlement. But you worshipped the Great Spirit in silence as we do. We couldn't kill you at worship. We've learned something today.'

The Braves gave the Friends a white feather and an arrow as signs of peace, to display from their rooftop. There was no war between them.

## Fierce Feathers: A story of peace in 32 pictures – make a class picture book

Ask each child to choose one of these cards, stick it to a piece of A4 and make a brilliant drawing to go with it. Discuss before they start! Put the whole set of 28 drawings together in a class book of the 'Fierce Feathers' story.

1. This true story happened over 230 years ago.	2. People from Britain travelled to America in ships like the Mayflower to start a new life.	3. Quaker Christians are always peaceful. They never fight.	4. Robert Nisbit was a Quaker preacher. One Friday he walked thirty miles to preach.
5. Robert slept in the open air. He worried about attackers.	6. Some settlers used guns to attack the native Americans	7. Some native Americans fought back with bows, arrows, knives, war axes and spears	8. Native Americans and white settlers were afraid of each other.
9. In the Bible, one verse says 'God will cover you with his feathers.'	10. A Bible verse says 'Do not fear the terror of the night or the arrow that flies by day.'	11. In the Friends Village, there were many small wooden huts, and one large one.	12. Friends worship God by sitting together in silence, each one has their own thoughts
13. Everyone came together to sit in the largest hut.	14. Grandparents and tiny children sat together.	15. Robert read to the people from the Bible	16. "God is like a mother bird. God's wings cover you to keep you safe."
17. Soft footfalls came into the village	18. Native American Braves carrying war axes came into the village	19. All the footprints led to the big hut.	20. Everyone inside the hut was praying.
21. The Braves surrounded the big hut.	22. A child noticed the warriors through the window.	23. Two braves stood outside the window. No escape!	24. Two braves stood outside the door. No escape!
25. Robert moved his hands to tell everyone: stay peaceful. Keep praying.	26. When the Braves saw the Quakers worshipping, they all put down their weapons outside.	27. The braves sat down and joined in the peaceful prayers.	28. Old Zebulun took the chief home and shared his dinner
29. All the Quakers and all the native Americans shared food together	30. The braves gave the Quakers a feather and an arrow as signs of peace	31. "We worshipped the Great Spirit together"	32. "We learned something today"

**Fierce Feathers: Points for discussion:**

- Why did Robert choose this particular verse from the Bible for his talk?
- What made the Braves distrust the white people?
- What do you think the chief was thinking when he decided to join in the worship?
- If you had been one of the Friends' children in the meeting, how would you have felt? How would your feelings have changed during the story?
- What did the feather and the arrow symbolise? Do you see how they fit in with the Bible verse?
- Do you know any other stories similar to this one?
- Wars are always made between people willing to fight. If we were all, like the Quakers, unwilling to fight, then what would happen?
- What does this story say to you about peace and conflict?

**Themes: teachers can bring out these themes**

Mutual recognition as humans and as worshippers

Observing the 'enemy' may evoke sympathy

Despite differences, peace is possible, war is not inevitable.

It takes courage and patience to make peace – maybe more than to fight

**Drama:**

Could pupils dramatise this story to show to younger children in assembly? Probably needs a strong narrator.