

# The Shackleton Ripping Adventure Road Show

This play is a type of melodrama acted out by a small group of actors and/or puppets.

It requires plenty of over-acting, energy and daft sound effects made by the actors (who also wear different hats and use bizarre props to represent things/animals/weather in the story).

|        |                   |   |
|--------|-------------------|---|
| Parts: | Ernest Shackleton | the polar explorer (and narrator)         |
|        | Nellie            | an American journalist (another narrator) |
|        | Emily             | Ernest's wife (sound effects)             |
|        | John Rowlett      | an old school friend                      |
|        | Tom               | a very lively actor                       |
|        | A talking penguin | an observer of events                     |

It is 1919. Ernest Shackleton has just published a book about his polar Endurance expedition and he is planning his next journey (The Quest Expedition) to the Antarctic. To raise money, he goes on a lecture tour, taking friends to help dramatise his story.

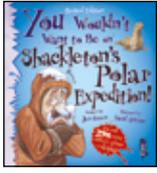
**Nellie:** Hello everyone. I'm Nellie Bly, a journalist from the United States and I came here to England to interview the famous explorer, Sir Ernest Shackleton. But he's a guy who just can't sit still so before I knew it, I was roped in to joining him on his lecture tour.

**Emily:** And Ernest certainly knows a lot about ropes. Isn't that so, darling?

**Ernest:** Knot a lot! (*He ties a knot dramatically for all to see*)

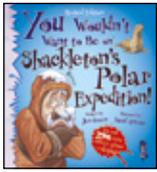
**Emily:** Ernest is my husband and I am pleased to say that knots have saved his life many times – as you're about to find out.





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- Emily: *(shivering)* Brrrrrrrrrrrr
- Ernest: To turn your heart to ice, to turn your knees to jelly, to make your blood run cold...
- Tom: Brrrrrr *(running on wildly, overacting being freezing, teeth chattering, knees wobbling etc)* Quick – I need a hot water bottle... *(exits)*
- Ernest: My Ripping Adventure began as a plan back in 1913. I advertised for willing companions in The Times newspaper.
- John: *(Very upper class, reading 'Times')* Men wanted for hazardous journey.
- Tom: *(Running on enthusiastically)* Count me in.
- John: Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger...
- Tom: Hold on a minute...
- John: Safe return doubtful.
- Tom: Get lost! *(exits)*
- John: More than likely you will! But think of the honour and recognition in case of success.
- Tom: *(Blows a loud raspberry from the wings)*
- Ernest: I had run Ripping Adventures to the South Pole before, but this was to be the first overland crossing of the continent of



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Antarctica. That's over two thousand miles of frozen deserted wilderness.

Penguin: It's not deserted – I live there... sometimes. You're right about the frozen bit. It's perishing. See you in a bit (*waddles off*)

Ernest: By the following summer, just after the outbreak of war...

Emily: Bang... boom... hack-ack-ack

Ernest: I had gathered together a crew of twenty eight men on a three-masted sailing ship named Endurance with engines ... with engines...

Emily: Oh er put-put-put-put-put.

Ernest: Designed to ram her way through polar sea ice... (*Pauses for sound effect*) Ram (*to Emily*) I said 'RAM'.

Emily: Baaah

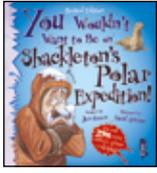
Tom: (*Running on pretending to be a ship smashing into ice*) Ram, ram, ram

Nellie: Also on board were sledges and sixty husky dogs to pull them.

Emily: Woof, woof, woof (*Long croaking noise*) Sorry, I'm just a little husky!

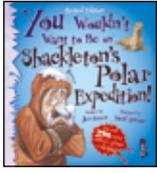
Nellie: As well as Mrs Chippy

Emily: Meow, meow



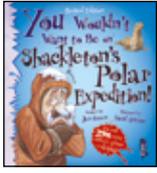
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- Nellie: The ship's cat.
- Penguin: I'm not happy about that. I don't like cats.
- John: Tough. Get back to your ice floe.
- Penguin: (*Sulking*) No one ever cares about penguins. It's not fair.  
(*Waddles off*)
- Tom: Just go with the floe! (*Becoming a sailor who sounds more like a pirate*) Ar rah, captain, we've arrived at the island of South Georgia. It looks like a whaling station, sir.
- Ernest: How can you tell?
- Tom: Because it's a station and they're weighing a whale. I suppose it's a whale-weigh station.
- Emily: Choo choo – oh, sorry.
- John: Watch out for icebergs, captain. It's jolly cold here with lots of sea ice.
- Penguin: Well I did warn you.
- Nellie: Endurance entered the Weddell Sea but huge chunks of floating pack-ice crashed against the ship.
- Tom: (*Barging on as the ship crashing through ice*) Crash, smash, crunch. Ram, ram, ram. Kersplash, kersplash, clunk, kerchunk...
- Ernest: The icebergs loomed above us on every side...



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- Tom: (Big arm movements) Loom loom loom
- Penguin: I know a joke about icebergs.
- John: Not now. This is serious. Icebergs can sink ships, you know. Have you never heard of the Titanic a few years ago?
- Penguin: Of course not. I'm a penguin.
- Nellie: Suddenly there was a grinding, a groaning, a shuddering and a shaking.
- Emily: Grind... groan... shudder... shake
- Tom: (OTT) Oh no, oh no, oh no! Captain, oh captain, our ship is firmly wedged in a great slab of ice. We're stuck – do you hear me? Stuck! Oh no.
- Penguin: Well you've got no choice then, have you? You'll have to hear my joke now.
- John: I told you, this is very serious. We're surrounded by ice.
- Penguin: You ought to try being a penguin, mate. Anyway, what's the difference between an iceberg and a clothes brush?
- All: Not now.
- Ernest: This was a serious crisis. There was nothing for it but to sit tight while our stricken ship that was locked firmly in the ice drifted northwest.
- Tom: (Hysterical) Northwest? Northwest? That's the wrong direction.



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We're moving away from land. We're doomed!

Nellie: I've got a niggling question.

Ernest: What is it?

Nellie: What IS the difference between a clothes brush and an iceberg?

Penguin: Simple. One brushes coats – the other crushes boats. If you'd asked me before, I'd have told you this would happen. Look, your ship is cracking up.

Tom: *(Running across the stage screaming)* It's not the only one! We're doomed.

Emily: The ship crammed with supplies was cracking and letting in water. The crew had to unload what they could – fast. Then they hunted for fresh food.

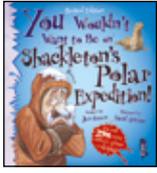
Nellie: Like penguins.

Penguin: I'm off... *(Exits)*

Ernest: With a heavy heart I gave the order to abandon ship, as the ice cracked her hull like a nut, she splintered into matchwood and sunk into the icy depths.

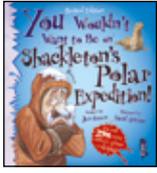
Emily: Creeeeeeaaaaak, craaaaaack, splosh, glug glug glug

Ernest: After ten months stranded on the ice, our ship had finally gone and we were marooned. Having saved the ships' lifeboats, our only hope was to drag them miles across the ice to the sea beyond.



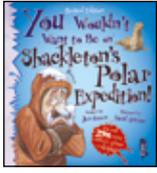
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- Tom: *(Horried)* That's impossible, captain. They're terribly heavy and I'm chilly.
- Ernest: Wrap up.
- Tom: Well, I was only saying...
- Ernest: No, wrap up as warm as you can. As many layers as you've got. This is going to be colder than the coldest thing you've ever known. Then a bit colder than that – with icicles on top. But fear not, I will look after you.
- Tom: *(Singing)* Freezer jolly good fellow, freezer jolly good fellow...
- Nellie: Camping on the ice was dangerous. The food began running out... *(Penguin runs across the stage)* What was that?
- Penguin: I was the food – running out.
- John: The only answer was to hunt seals. Their blubber made useful fuel, too. Drinking water was a problem. Melted sea ice is too salty...
- Penguin: Er excuse me... this might help. Have you thought of fruit juice? Do you know the difference between a walrus and an orange?
- Tom: *(Running on and lying on floor)* I'm a walrus. Go on, then, do tell us the difference between a walrus and an orange.
- Penguin: Put your arms round it and squeeze as hard as you can. If you don't get orange juice, it's a walrus. *(Tom looks disgusted and wriggles off)*



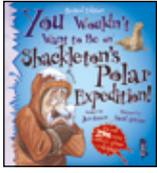
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- John: It's time to eat a penguin...
- Penguin: I'm off... (*Exits*)
- Ernest: At long last the ice started to break up and we could launch the lifeboats. Sailing them through the icy sea was treacherous. Some of the men got frostbite.
- Tom: Ouch! (*all stare at him*) It was the frost. It bit me. (*Exits*)
- Nellie: After a week at sea, everyone cheered to see Elephant Island ahead.
- Emily: Hooray!
- Tom: Ooh look, I can just see its trunk.
- Ernest: It had been 497 days since we last set foot on land. Some of my men wept with joy or giggled hysterically.
- Tom: (*Falls to the ground mixing sobs and laughs*) Boo hoo, he he he, boo hoo...
- Ernest: We upturned our lifeboats, lashed them together and sheltered under them from the howling storms.
- Emily: Hooooooooowwwwwwwl.
- Ernest: We were still in great danger from freezing to death...
- Penguin: (*Waddling on*) Excuse me...
- Ernest: Or from starving. (*John raises rifle to shoot penguin*)



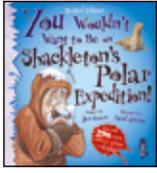
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- Penguin: I'm off... (*Exits*)
- Ernest: With no rescue likely, I decided to sail one of the lifeboats taking a few of my sailors with me. I hoped to make it back to South Georgia to raise the alarm.
- Emily: (*Sound of a siren*) Nee-nah nee-nah nee-nah
- John: While the rest of the crew crammed under the lifeboats in the constant darkness, our intrepid hero braved the stormy seas...
- Emily: Wooosh crashshshshshshshs rumble splaaashshshshshshsh hooooowl
- Tom: Oh no.... an enormous wave bears down on the tiny boat
- Emily: Gggrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr (*long pause*) Gggrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
- Tom: What's that?
- Emily: A bear.
- Tom: But why the enormous pause?
- Emily: Because that's what they have. Everyone knows polar bears have enormous paws.
- Nellie: Spoiler alert: Polar bears live at the NORTH pole – not down here.
- Ernest: Eventually, after a long and hellish journey, we arrived on South Georgia.
- Emily: Phew!



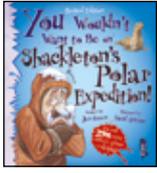
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- Ernest: But we were on the wrong side of the island.
- Emily: Doh!
- Nellie: The whaling station was a hundred and fifty miles away over treacherous mountains.
- Tom: Don't you just hate it when that happens?
- Penguin: (*Waddling on*) Maybe I can help.
- John: Where's my rifle?
- Penguin: I'm off... (*Exits*)
- Ernest: It was tough going. Eventually, after miles of trudging through snow, we came to the top of a steep snow slope – but night was falling fast.
- Emily: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah
- Ernest: Whatever was that?
- Emily: Night. It just fell.
- Ernest: There was only one thing for it. I grabbed my long rope (*does so*).
- Nellie: He grabbed his long rope... and he coiled it up tight and tied a few knots to make a sort of... (tah-dah) toboggan to whizz down the slope.
- Tom: (*Whizzing across the stage*) Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!



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- Ernest: We camped at the foot of the mountains until dawn broke.
- Emily: Smash... bang... wallop
- Tom: Eeek – what was that?
- Emily: Dawn breaking.
- Ernest: At long last we staggered to the whale station where we could eat and sleep like never before. No longer were we desperate for food.
- Penguin: Yippee!
- Nellie: The whalers set off to rescue the rest of the party still stranded on Elephant Island.
- Emily: *(Trumpeting noise – all stare)* That's meant to be an elephant, by the way!
- John: We were mightily relieved to be rescued. The expedition had been a disaster from start to finish but, incredibly, everyone had survived.
- Penguin: Including me! *(John shoots the penguin)*
- Ernest: All right, so things didn't go well that time. But hey, I'm not one to be defeated that easily. I'm going to go back for another stab at Antarctica.
- All: Oh no!
- Tom: Count me out!



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Ernest: I just need to raise a bit of cash to pay for it all. Any offers?

John: Well, seeing as I'm your old chum and I'm very rich - I'll put up a lot of the money for your next trip, Ernest. Mind you, this audience looks pretty rich, too – so pass round the hat and lock all the doors so they can't escape.

Nellie: We hope you've enjoyed this world premiere of 'SOUTH: The Stage Play in two minutes' even though we've gone on longer than we planned – with a lot going wrong (a bit like Sir Ernest's other expeditions to dangerous places!) Which all goes to show **YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BE ON SHACKLETON'S POLAR EXPEDITION... EVER!**

NB: Ernest Shackleton died from a heart attack in 1922 while on the next expedition, and he was buried on the remote Atlantic island of South Georgia.