**Ragtime Fictional Characters**

**Mother** – An upper class WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) woman who is married to Father. She lives in a racially isolated, privileged world. When her husband leaves for a long trip, she assumes responsibility for his business and for the family, and realizes she has skills and abilities she hadn’t realized before.

**Father** – Married to Mother, Father owns a fireworks company and holds traditional white views of race and class. Father also has a non-traditional yearning for adventure. Leaving his family and country behind, he expects that when he returns from his trip to the North Pole everything will be just as he left it.

**The Little Boy** – An earnest boy who has grown up in privilege; he is, however, openhearted to people different from him and has the innocence of youth.

**Mother’s Younger Brother** – In the shadow of his brother-in-law, this young man seeks a greatness of his own. He falls in love easily, with people and with ideas, acting rashly.

**Tateh** – The word “tateh” means daddy or papa in Yiddish. A Jewish father fleeing Latvia for a better life, Tateh represents the “immigrant” of the era. He is warm-hearted to his daughter, and is working tirelessly to achieve the American dream.

**The Little Girl** – Tateh’s daughter, her arrival in America is marked by sickness and hunger. She is scared of her new surroundings and loyal to her father, her only living relative.

**Sarah** - A black domestic worker in New Rochelle, Sarah is sheltered and unaware of how the world works. She is kindhearted and loving, dreaming of a life with Coalhouse. She doesn't think things through, and makes hasty, ultimately destructive decisions.

**Coalhouse Walker, Jr.** – a successful Harlem musician, Coalhouse may have been a playboy, but knows now what he wants: a life with Sarah. He is confident, optimistic, and never gives up. He believes his talents will enable him to rise above prejudices against him.

**Willie Conklin** – A Irish-American fire chief of the “Emerald Isle Volunteer Fire Company” who is racist and takes out his anger at Coalhouse Walker. The irony of his viciousness is that Irish immigrants had also suffered horribly from the prejudice of white Americans in the 19th century.
**Ragtime Historical Characters**

**Harry Houdini** – A Hungarian Jewish immigrant to America, who became an internationally famous magician, known especially for his sensational escape acts.

**Evelyn Nesbit** – The Marilyn Monroe of the turn of the century, Evelyn Nesbit was renowned for her beauty and appeared in movies and stage shows. She married Harry K. Thaw, a sadistic, drug-addicted millionaire, who beat and abused her regularly.

**Harry K. Thaw** – Married to Evelyn Nesbit, Thaw carried a vendetta against her previous lover, Stanford White. It ate at him until finally Thaw shot him publically at Madison Square Garden’s rooftop theater. “The Trial of the Century” ensued, and eventually Thaw was found insane and sentenced to a psychiatric facility.

**Stanford White** – An architect who took an interest in Evelyn Nesbit, and supported her and her family financially. When Evelyn was 16, White sent her mother on a trip, and seduced Evelyn, allegedly drugging and raping her. They continued their relationship until Nesbit was 17 and was sent to boarding school.

**Jacob Riis** – A Danish immigrant, photographer and writer, whose 1890 book *How the Other Half Lives*, exposed in statistics and images the dismal living conditions immigrants endured in America’s tenements.

**Sigmund Freud** – “The Father of Psychoanalysis”, Freud was one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. Freud outlined in many books his theories on human psychological development, the unconscious, and the benefits and effects of psychotherapy.
Emma Goldman – A Jewish Lithuanian immigrant, Goldman was quickly disillusioned with the American judicial and capitalist systems. She became a vocal anarchist, and radically spoke out in favor of birth control and against the draft. She stood up for the poor and for workers’ rights. She was jailed and later deported to Russia.

Henry Ford – An American inventor, Ford founded the Ford Motor Company, and created the first moving automobile assembly line in the world.

J.P. Morgan – An American financier who was born wealthy but increased his fortune by merging companies together to create one large company, like U.S. Steel and General Electric. He was known as a robber baron, an investor who gets richer by dishonest means.

Charles S. Whitman – The District Attorney of New York, who later campaigned against police corruption to become New York’s governor.

Booker T. Washington – A former slave, Washington rose to become one of the foremost black intellectuals in America. He advised Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Taft, founded The Tuskegee Institute to train black teachers, and created the National Negro Business League. He urged blacks to work within Jim Crow segregation, and to work towards economic self-sufficiency. Later, he was criticized for not standing up more against the violence and inequality committed against blacks in America.

*All photos from The Library of Congress