



PETER RABBIT AND FRIENDS

Based on the works of Beatrix Potter

Adapted for the stage by Gayle Cornelison

A California Theatre Center Study Guide for Teachers and Students

SYNOPSIS

Welcome to Beatrix Potter's world of the English countryside, fresh and tempting vegetable gardens, and the adventures of bunnies, cats, mice, and more! *Peter Rabbit and Friends* dramatizes four of Potter's thoughtful and heartwarming tales. In "The Tale of Peter Rabbit", delight in Peter's mischievous ways as he sneaks into grumpy Mr. McGregor's garden to feast on lettuce, carrots, radishes, cucumbers and more. Although he loses his new shoes and handsome blue jacket, Peter narrowly escapes. Upon returning home, Peter's disappointed mother tells him the story of "The Tailor of Gloucester", who works tirelessly, and with the help of three ingenious mice, creates a beautiful coat of cherry-colored twisted silk for the Mayor. Realizing how valuable his jacket was, Peter and his best friend Benjamin Bunny return to McGregor's garden to retrieve Peter's jacket and shoes, only to encounter more trouble in "The Tale of Benjamin Bunny." Finally, meet Thomasina Tittlemouse and more of Peter's friends and family in the last story "The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies." Once again, our furry friends must use their wits to escape the terrible fate that McGregor has planned for them and they hop home to live happily and mischievously ever after!

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Why is Peter Rabbit such a mischievous little bunny? Why does he disobey his mother by straying into McGregor's garden? Why does he steal vegetables once he is there?
2. Compare and contrast Peter's behavior with that of his siblings. Why are Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail so much better behaved than Peter?
3. Compare the way real children behave today to the way that the animal-child characters behave in *Peter Rabbit and Friends*. Do you think kids behave better or worse than they did a hundred years ago? How have discipline methods changed?
4. Imagine that you are Peter Rabbit's mother. What sort of punishment do you think Peter deserves for trespassing into McGregor's garden, stealing vegetables, *and* losing his new shoes and jacket?
5. When Peter becomes ill, his mother gives him tea to help him feel better. Research tea with the class. What are the health benefits of tea? How is tea significant in the history of England and of the world?

LITERATURE & WRITING

1. Beatrix Potter originally wrote "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" for a friend's young son who was ill. Write your own story especially for a friend or relative, whether they are sick or well. Create characters and a plot just for them, and then present them with your creation!
2. Beatrix Potter's characters were inspired by her pets. She had rabbits named Peter and Benjamin Bouncer, and she also kept frogs, newts, and even a pet bat! She also put some of her characters in more than one story—the character of Benjamin Bunny, for instance, appears in several of her tales. Take some of your favorite characters from *Peter Rabbit and Friends*, and write a new adventure for them. Or, if you have pets, write a story about them!
3. Read some of Beatrix Potter's stories as a class, and discuss them. They were very popular when Potter wrote them in the early 1900s, and since then, they have become some of the most beloved children's literature of all time. Why do you think Beatrix Potter's tales are still so popular today?
4. Compare the original stories you read to the play that you saw. How are the stories and the play similar? How are they different? Was the play true to the world that Potter creates in her stories?
5. In *Peter Rabbit and Friends*, most of the characters are animals that have characteristics of both humans and animals. What are some of the ways in which using an animal character to tell a story is more effective than a human

character? Think of some other stories in which the main characters are animals that have the same problems and situations as humans do.

DRAMATIC ARTS

1. Imagine that you are an actor and you are going to perform in *Peter Rabbit and Friends* as an animal character. What must you do to prepare for the role? How is playing an animal character different from playing a human character?
2. In *Peter Rabbit and Friends*, the actors wear masks when playing animal characters. What challenges does this present to the actors? How is wearing a mask different from wearing character makeup?
3. There are many characters in *Peter Rabbit and Friends* but just a few actors. Most of the actors play more than one character. When playing more than one character, they often must do a “quick-change”, which is a very fast costume change that must be done in a short time between scenes or two parts of a scene. What are the challenges for an actor playing multiple roles in a play? What are the challenges for the audience? If you were an actor, do you think playing multiple roles in one play would be fun or interesting?

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Beatrix Potter was an unusually accomplished woman for her time. She was a published author earning her own income, a talented illustrator, a respected scientist, a landowner, and a farmer. Who are some other high-achieving women who have made history? Look up the following names on the Internet and discover their accomplishments: Louisa May Alcott, Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, Elizabeth Blackwell, Sally Ride.
2. In “The Tailor of Gloucester”, the Tailor lives in the shop that he works in, and constructs all of his garments by hand, without the help of assistants or of technology (except for the clever mice!). How has the clothes-making business changed? Compare and contrast the way that modern tailors and early 20th-century tailors worked. If “The Tailor of Gloucester” were set in the present day, how do think the Mayor’s coat would be made?
3. Many places in England are significant in Beatrix Potter’s life and stories. Locate the following places on a map. London, England (her birthplace); The Lake District (where she lived for much of her adult life); Gloucester, England; Perthshire, Scotland (where she spent holidays as a child).
4. As a class, hold a mock trial for Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny to determine whether they are guilty or innocent of stealing vegetables from Mr. McGregor. Designate students to play the roles of Peter and Benjamin (the defendants), Mr. McGregor (the plaintiff), judge, counsel for the defense, counsel for the plaintiff, bailiff, jury, and witnesses, such as Peter’s mother, McGregor’s wife, McGregor’s cat, Thomasina Tittlemouse, and Flopsy, Mopsy,

and Cottontail. Be creative with witness selection--you could even call Beatrix Potter as a witness! Have each side present their case and question the witnesses, and have the jury deliberate and deliver a verdict.

SCIENCE

1. Mr. McGregor keeps a glorious vegetable garden. If you were going to keep a garden, what would you grow? Create your own garden in which you grow whatever vegetables, fruits, flowers, or other plants you like. Use your imagination! Draw a colorful picture of your garden as well, and label each thing you grow.
2. For Beatrix Potter, science and art were very closely related. She began illustrating because the only way to record her observations under the microscopes in the science labs was by drawing them. Imagine that you are scientist. Watch an animal or examine a plant, and record what you observe in a drawing or painting.
3. Why do rabbits like vegetables? Why do they hop? Have the class do group research projects on various types of rabbits and other creatures from *Peter Rabbit and Friends*. Include physical attributes, eating and sleeping habits, where they live, life cycle, defense mechanisms, and family structure. Have them prepare a narrative written report as well as a visual aid on the species that they research.
4. The farming lifestyle influenced Beatrix Potter's life and works. The character of Mr. McGregor is based on a farmer who lived near the Potter family's summer home in Scotland, and Potter herself was a farmer later in life. What does a farmer do for a living? What is a farmer's day-to-day routine? Would you want to live the life of a farmer?
5. Research the fruits and vegetables that are mentioned in the play: blackberries, lettuce, French beans, radishes, parsley, cucumbers, onions, cabbage, turnips. Divide the class into groups and assign a fruit/vegetable to each group. Have them create a visual aid with the parts labeled, as well as a written report describing the plant's life cycle, where it grows, etc.

WRITE TO CTC!

After watching the play, write us a letter about it. Tell what you liked or disliked about the story, the characters, costumes, set, or anything else you observed. Support your thoughts with examples and reasons. (*Teachers' comments are also appreciated!*)

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