

# **THE TALES OF PETER RABBIT AND OTHER FAVORITE STORIES**

A STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

## **THE TALES OF BEATRIX POTTER**

First written as a picture letter in 1893 to the young son of a friend, The tale of Peter Rabbit became the best-selling children's book of all time. At first no one wanted to publish it, so she privately printed some copies and left them at bookstores. An editor at Frederick Warne Publishers saw one of the books and wanted her to make the drawings larger and rewrite the story. She did rewrite it, but refused to make the drawings larger. It was published and made her rich enough to not depend on her parents for the first time. She was thirty six. This book was soon joined by a host of other Potter titles, each different in individual nature, yet common to them all a dry humor and decisive and satisfying conclusions. Maurice Sendack, a fan of Miss Potter, writes: "Amazingly, Peter is both endearing little boy and expertly drawn rabbit. Fantasy, rooted in the living fact: here, the fact of family, of fun, of danger and fear. . . and finally, of safety, of mother and love. Altogether the book possessed, on no matter how miniature a scale, an overwhelming sense of life, and isn't that the ultimate value of any work of art?"

Teachers and librarians have long found Potter's stories to be not only works of art, but a valuable teaching tool as well. One librarian felt that "The Tale of Peter Rabbit, . . . was many things besides a good story: nature study, an arithmetic lesson, an occasion for juvenile logic, and an introduction to the rudiments of housekeeping." All this in a book that fits in the palm of your hand!

## **ABOUT BEATRIX POTTER:**

Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) was a lonely child who lived in London. Like many children of wealthy parents, she and her brother Bertram, who was five years younger, were raised by governesses, taught at home, and rarely saw their parents. Her parents encouraged her to study art, and often took her to museums. Summers they would rent houses in Scotland, and Beatrix loved to study wildflowers and woodland animals. She had a passion for natural history and longed to live in the country. But her drawings foreshadowed what she was to become. In her late forties, she married a gentleman farmer, William Heelis. She bred prize pigs (one of which became immortalized as Pigling Bland). But she is best-known in farming circles for the Herdwick sheep which she began to breed after buying Troutbeck Farm in 1923. By then she had stopped writing and become a full time farmer. Herdwick sheep are a rare and threatened breed indigenous to the Lake District Her sheep one most of the major prizes at local shows. The Heelis's bought several more farms in order to save them from developers, and when she died in 1943, Beatrix Potter left 4000 acres of land to the National Trust. Her legacy left a part of England completely unspoiled, allowing present and future visitors to enjoy the same beautiful landscape she loved.

# ACTIVITIES

## ART

### I. Create a garden

1. Draw Mr. McGregor's garden, including plants, animals, and any other parts of the environment that you would like to include.
2. Make a shoebox diorama of one of the scenes in which Peter is in the garden.

### II. Make a mural for your classroom

1. Tell Peter's adventures in pictures and include all the characters.

## COMPUTERS

### I. Internet Projects.

1. Possible topics include Beatrix Potter, vegetable gardening, England, or rabbits.
2. Make a slide show presentation on the computer with student drawings of each of the scenes.

## CREATIVE WRITING

### I. Rewrite Peter's Adventures.

1. Write another adventure for Peter. Think of a different location and put Peter in this new environment. What trouble could he get into?
2. Concoct a different ending for the story of Peter. What changes in the story could be made that would keep Peter out of trouble?
3. Did you know that Beatrix Potter originally wrote her first story "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" as a letter to a sick child? Write the new adventure for Peter in letter form, illustrate it, and give it to someone who needs cheering up.

## GEOGRAPHY

### I. Study England

1. The setting for the Beatrix Potter tales is the countryside of England. Find England on the map and discuss its location. What was England like during the time of Beatrix Potter's life?
2. Give a blank map to students so that they can label it. Show where Beatrix Potter lived as a young girl and later in her life.
3. Research the different environments in England. Examples: Moors, Cities, Gardens, the River Thames, The Lake District.

## LITERATURE

### I. Read the stories by Beatrix Potter.

Have students write their own variations each story integrating personal experiences with nature.

# SCIENCE

## I. Gardening

1. Grow your own plant. What does it take to make a plant grow?
2. Experiment with seeds. Use different types of seed, give them different amounts of water, sunlight, warmth, and soil and check the results.
3. What is an Animal?

### Materials:

Assorted living and non-living things: various house plants; goldfish, guinea pig, snails, rocks, shells etc. After the students observe your examples, ask them to tell you how the animals are alike. How are they different. How are animals different from plants? What makes plants and animals alike? Are we plants or animals? What do human beings have in common with cats, dogs and guinea pigs?

# THEATER

## I. Barnyard Scramble.

1. Assign (secretly) every student an animal: 2 rabbits, 2 cows, 2 pigs, 2 horses, 2 ducks (two of everything). All the kids close their eyes and make the noise of their assigned animal. Without speaking, they must find and get with their partner.

## II. Create a Character.

1. In pairs, improvise a short scene between two characters from the play. Choose one of the main characters in the story. Pretend to be that character. As that character, have a conversation with Mr. McGregor, Peter Rabbit, Benjamin Bunny or one of the others.

# FOR YOUNG STUDENTS: DUCK DUCK ANIMAL

The set up for this game is just like Duck Duck Goose. Sit in a circle and choose one person to be the ducker. The ducker walks around the outside of the circle, patting everyone on his head as she passes, and saying duck. When she wants to choose someone to chase her, instead of saying "goose," she names any animal she wants, such as elephant. The player chosen chases her around the circle acting like an elephant, remembering to make the noise and movements of an elephant as he runs. The ducker runs safely to the elephant's place in the circle or is tagged and sits in the middle. If caught, the ducker remains in the middle until the next animal is caught. The elephant now becomes the ducker, but he keeps acting like an elephant as he walks around the circle until he chooses someone by saying an other animal name such as cat. The person chosen becomes a cat and chases the elephant.. Side coach the players, asking them to remember that some animals can run faster than others, some crawl. some fly, and some swim. (On Stage by Lisa Bany-Winters, 1997)

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