

STUDY GUIDE

Let Your Imagination Take You Places!

**Celebrating 20 Years
of LIVE Theatre for Youth**



**BEATRIX POTTER'S
"THE TAILOR OF GLOUCESTER"**
Mon., Dec. 8, 2014, 10:30 am

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Season 2014-2015

Dear Friends and Patrons of the Arts,

Thank you for your interest in the King Center Theatre For Youth and Outreach Program. The mission of the program is to inspire, nurture and sustain a lifelong appreciation for the performing arts among our youth theatre patrons. This is accomplished by the diverse array of entertaining and educational arts offerings.

Accompanied by study resource materials made possible by each artist and their management teams to augment the theatre experience, we hope you find the materials useful.

A live theatrical experience can leave a memorable impact even after the show is over....so, *Let Your Imagination Take You Places!*

We are looking forward to your attendance at the show.

Yours in the arts,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen".

Karen Wilson
Director
Theatre For Youth and Outreach Program

Theatre IV CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE



Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*

Book, Music and Lyrics by Paul Deiss

PLAY SYNOPSIS:

When a poppycock mayor orders a cherry-colored coat for his Christmas wedding, the poor Tailor of Gloucester works his fingers to the bone. All goes well until the tailor realizes he lacks the piece of twisted silk needed to sew on the final button. He gives his last coin to Simpkin, his faithful pet cat, confident that he will set out into the snow to purchase the much-needed "twist." But it is Christmas Eve, that one blessed night when animals are granted the gift of speech. And so, before story's end, we hear not only from Simpkin, but also from all of the mice he has trapped beneath teacups for his holiday feast - well dressed mice who have benefited for years from the tailor's elegant scraps. Natural enemies become steadfast friends and all work together to complete a coat that leaves the bedazzled Mayor - and Simpkin and his mice - speechless for a miraculously happy ending on Christmas Day.



Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*

BEATRIX POTTER 1866-1943

Almost entirely self educated, Beatrix Potter was an extraordinary woman. Known widely for her colorful and enticing children's books starring many small furry animals, Potter was also a businesswoman, a watercolorist, a sheep farmer, and even a scientist whose research on fungi was never significantly noted due to her gender (in her time, women were not to be scientists). Potter was born in 1866, always shy and immensely intelligent. Very fond of her childhood, her life was often lonely; including bouts of sickness and depression often attributed with her parents' strict and conventional Victorian control. Some of her childhood loneliness lifted at the age of six when her younger brother Bertram was born. With Bertram she found friendship and a shared interest in drawing and the study of nature. The only formal training or education that Beatrix Potter ever had was short-lived private art lessons from two different teachers. Beatrix Potter's lonely childhood extended far into adulthood, living with her parents until nearly 40 years old.



As a child, Potter was allowed to keep small pets including tame rabbits, mice and snails. From the time of her childhood, Potter displayed a natural curiosity and intelligence about all sorts of small animals. She would often roam the countryside with Bertram sketching the animals they saw and discussing their habitats.

To the outside world, Beatrix Potter was shy and reserved, saving her thoughts in a diary that she kept from the age of fifteen to about the age of thirty. To insure privacy, she wrote the journal in a secret code that she invented, writing in such a small hand that it had to be read with a magnifying glass. After her death it was years before the code was cracked.

In 1893, Beatrix Potter wrote a letter to five-year-old Noel Moore, the son of her former governess. In 1901 that letter, where the character of Peter rabbit was introduced, became a book and was published in 1902 by Frederick Warne and Co. That book created a phenomenon of children's literature that remains unparalleled.

Each time a new book was written, Beatrix Potter thought that it would be her last. The publisher remained constant in seeking new editions of the Potter tales. For almost a quarter of a century, Potter introduced many loveable characters and heartfelt illustrations in her books, her own favorite being *The Tailor of Gloucester*. Over protests from her publishers, Beatrix Potter insisted that the price of her books remain low and be kept small to make them more accessible for small children - a policy that is still in effect with each new printing.

Later in life Beatrix Potter threw herself into farming, gradually acquiring 4,000 acres and five working farms. Farming became her passion late in life, and when she died at age 77 in 1943, she arranged for a local farmer to scatter her ashes over one of her favorite fields. Not even her husband knew which field it was.

Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*

SELECTED BEATRIX POTTER SELF-ILLUSTRATED CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- The Tale of Peter Rabbit, privately printed, 1901, Warne, 1902.
- The Tailor of Gloucester, privately printed, 1902, Warne, 1903.
- The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin, Warne, 1903.
- The Tale of Benjamin Bunny, Warne, 1904.
- The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, Warne, 1905.
- The Story of Miss Moppet, Warne, 1906.
- The Tale of Tom Kitten, Warne, 1907.
- The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck, Warne, 1908.
- The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies, Warne, 1909.
- The Tale of Mr. Tod, Warne, 1912.
- The Tale of Pigling Bland, Warne, 1913.
- The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse, Warne, 1918.
- Jemima Puddle-Duck's Painting Book, Warne, 1925.
- Peter Rabbit's Almanac for 1929, Warne, 1928.

BACKGROUND: THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith. Born nearly two thousand years ago, Christians believe Him to be the Son of God. Whether Jesus was really born on December 25th, no one can say for certain. It was chosen because it already was a holiday in ancient time's - a pagan feast. It is thought that the Nativity did take place on the 25th of the month; but which exact month is uncertain and every month at one time or another has been assigned. The Roman Church picked December 25th, and though questioned for several generations by the Eastern Church, it became a universal date in the fifth century.

BACKGROUND: MISTLETOE

The tradition of hanging mistletoe in the house was started by the Druids. To these ancient Celtic priests, the plant symbolized hope and peace. When two enemies met under a sprig of mistletoe, they would drop their weapons and embrace in friendship. The modern custom of kissing under the mistletoe comes from this old ritual.



Beatrix Potter's The Tailor of Gloucester

BACKGROUND: XMAS

A widely seen abbreviation for Christmas, Xmas has a Greek origin where the word for Christ is Xristos. During the 16th century, Europeans began using the first initial of Christ's name, "X" in place of the word Christ in Christmas as a shorthand form of the word. Although the early Christians understood that X stood for Christ's name, later Christians who did not understand the Greek language mistook "Xmas" as a sign of disrespect.

BACKGROUND: THE CHRISTMAS STAR

To most Christians the Christmas star is symbolic of Jesus, who is often called "the bright and morning star." Ancient people looked upon stars as gods and created myths about them. Before there was Christmas, stars held importance in ancient religions. The Babylonians used three stars to represent a god. The Egyptians believed that certain gods controlled different stars and constellations. The six-pointed star of David became the symbol of the Hebrew nation. The North American Blackfoot Indian believed that every star was at one time a human being. The Great Bear and the Little Bear are still worshiped by the Berber tribes of Africa today. But the five-pointed star of Christmas holds center stage. Its appearance is recorded in the Bible in the New Testament which says it appeared over Bethlehem and served as a guiding light to lead the wise men to the Christ child.



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON BEATRIX POTTER

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- Children's Literature Review, Volume 19. Gale. 1990.
- An Encyclopedia of British Women Writers, Garland, 1988, pp. 370- 71.
- Illustrators of Children's Books, 1957-1966. compiled by Lee Kingman, Joanna Foster, and Ruth Giles Lontoft, Horn Book, 1968, pp. 54-64.
- Kunitz, Stanley J., and Howard Haycraft, editors, Junior Book of Authors, 2nd edition, H. W. Wilson, 1951.
- Lane, Margaret, The Tale of Beatrix Potter: A Biography, Warne, 1946, revised edition, 1968.
- Linder, Leslie, A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter, Warne, 1971.
- Potter, Beatrix, The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881-1897, transcribed from her code writing by Leslie Linder, Warne, 1966.
- Smaridge, Norah, Famous Author-Illustrators for Young People, Dodd, 1973.

Theatre IV's
Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*

ACTIVITIES

1. The Beatrix Potter stories are filled with exciting characters. Draw your favorite character or scene from *The Tailor of Gloucester*. Send your drawing to Theatre IV for our "***From Stage to Page Art Contest***." Theatre IV staff members will select several drawings to be used in future study guides. (One drawing per student. Please write name, grade, age, teacher, school, and school address clearly on the back of each drawing. Drawings will not be returned. Teachers will be notified by mail of selected drawings.) Please mail class drawings to: Theatre IV, Department of Education, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220.
2. In *The Tailor of Gloucester*, the mice are grateful for everything that the tailor has done to help them. To thank him, they finish sewing the mayor's coat. Can you think of a time that you did a favor for someone even though they did not ask for help? How did that person react? How did helping them make you feel?
3. After seeing the show or reading the book, write a new adventure for Simpkin the cat and his new mice friends. Is the tailor a part of the story? Do Simpkin and the mice get along? Do the mice have names? Are there other new characters that join in the story? Share your story with the class.
4. After writing stories, pair up with a classmate and illustrate each other's writings.

Theatre IV along with Theatre IV's ArtReach is the second largest theatre for young audiences in the nation and is the Children's Theatre of Virginia. We encourage your comments about *Beatrix Potter's The Tailor of Gloucester*, please send your letters to:

Theatre IV, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220

If you need to reach Theatre IV by phone, please call **1-800-235-8687**.

THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS:

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