

Great Arizona Puppet Theater

“Peter Rabbit” Study Guide

Objectives

This study guide can be used before and/or after seeing the *Peter Rabbit* puppet show at the Great Arizona Puppet Theater. Students will practice their compare and contrast skills as well as their critiquing skills. Students will also make their own puppets! This guide is for **parents and teachers** alike. The puppet show and this study guide are recommended for students aged 3 and up: feel free to tailor the activities to your specific class or child's needs and grade level.



Arizona State College & Career Readiness Standards

Reading Literature, Writing, and Speaking and Listening Standards:

K.SL.2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood. (*Post show discussion*)

1.SL.2. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. (*Post show discussion*)

2.SL.2. Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. (*Post show discussion*)

K.RL.3. With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story (*Post show discussion*)

1.RL.3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details (*Post show discussion, Puppet Showcase*)

2.RL.3. Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges. (*Post show discussion, Puppet Showcase*)

Arts Standards for Kindergarten through Grade 1:

TH:Re8.1.K.a With prompting and support, identify preferences in . . . age-appropriate theatre performance. (*Post show discussion*)

TH:Re8.1.1.a Explain preferences and emotions in . . . age-appropriate theatre performance. (*Post show discussion*)

TH:Cn10.1.K.a With prompting and support, identify similarities between characters and oneself in dramatic play or a guided drama experience. (*Puppet Showcase*)

Beatrix Potter & “The Tale of Peter Rabbit”

Our version of *Peter Rabbit* is based on Beatrix Potter’s classic children’s book titled *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Beatrix was born in 1866 and was raised in London. She was always encouraged to draw and she spent a great deal of time sketching animals and plants. Two of Beatrix’s earliest art models were her pet rabbits, Benjamin Bouncer and Peter Piper. She studied botany at the Royal Botanical Gardens and produced hundreds of detailed botanical drawings. Beatrix began her story writing and publishing career by designing greeting-cards and illustrations.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit is one of Beatrix’s earliest stories. She originally wrote the first version of a story in a letter to her friend and former governess Annie Moore’s son, Noel, based on her rabbit, Peter. Noel was sick, so Beatrix wrote him a letter with a few drawings and told the story about four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail, and Peter. A few years later, Beatrix revised the story and got it ready for publishing, but she couldn’t find a buyer for the book. So, she published 250 copies at her own expense in 1901. A friend of hers was given a copy and saw the potential of the book and took it back to publishers. It was picked up for publication the following year with original illustrations done by Beatrix herself. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was an immediate success and was followed by *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* and *The Tailor of Gloucester* which were also both originally letters to Noel. Beatrix had a wonderful career as an author, publishing 23 children’s books in all.

The Puppets & The Music

The puppets in our version *Peter Rabbit* are called **hand-rod puppets and rod puppets** and were made by the puppeteers at The Great Arizona Puppet Theater.

In our version, all of the rabbits are **hand puppets** (sometimes called glove puppets). Hand puppets are mostly made out of fabric and sewn together, but sometimes their heads are carved out of Styrofoam or another hard material with a whole left inside the neck of the puppet. Hand puppets are controlled using only one hand that goes up inside of the puppet. The puppeteers index and middle fingers control the head while the other fingers control the puppet’s hands. The puppets in this show were influenced by the Chinese style of hand puppetry, called pocket puppets (ex. in photo to right), and a master Chinese puppeteer coached our puppeteers on movement.



In this show, Farmer McGregor is a **hand-rod puppet**. The puppet’s head and arms were each carved from Styrofoam and covered with paper mache. The main rod goes up through the middle of the puppet and supports the body and the head, this is what the puppeteer holds on to below the stage to control the puppet. A string is used to open the puppet’s mouth. The puppeteer uses their own hand in a glove attached to the puppet’s arm to operate the puppet’s hand.

This version of the show is told entirely to **music**, with no dialogue or speaking at all. The music in the show was composed by one of GAPT’s founders, Nancy Smith. To create the show,

Nancy read Beatrix Potter's story and decided what scenes she wanted to keep in the puppet show. Then, she composed the music to tell the story. Nancy worked with her team of puppeteers to create choreography for the puppets. At the end of the process, the music and the puppet movement comes together to tell the whole story of *Peter Rabbit*.

Discussion Topics for Before the Show

Objectives: By discussing audience behavior and things to expect when seeing a live puppet show, students will benefit more from the experience of the show and know how they are expected to behave in advance. Also, students will better understand the story and the nuances of the show by discussing some of the history behind *Peter Rabbit* and what to expect when seeing the show.

- Discuss theater audience behavior. How should our behavior be different seeing a live show rather than a movie or watching TV at home? Remind students that they can laugh and react out loud to the puppets if they are prompted to, but that it is also important to be quiet and respectful throughout the show.
- Review some of the history about Beatrix Potter and the history of writing *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* with your students. Consider asking: what stories do you like to hear when you are sick? Do you like to draw like Beatrix did? What animals do you like to draw?
- Use the above information about the puppets in our show to discuss how the puppets work and how they were made. You don't have to go into complete detail, rather make it a conversation about different kinds of puppets and puppet shows. For example, ask students: What shows or movies with puppets have you seen before? How did the puppets move in those shows? How do you think puppeteers are able to bring puppets to life?

Discussion Topics for After the Show

Objectives: Students will answer questions about the plot and themes of *Peter Rabbit* and performance. Students will assess and discuss various elements of the puppet production and get an introduction to analyzing live performance.

The Plot and Themes:

- Who were the main characters? Guide your students through a review of the play's plot.
- Had you heard this story before? How was the puppet show similar to the way you have heard this story before? How was it different?
- Did Peter follow his mother's instructions? What happened because he didn't follow instructions? Have you ever done something similar?
- Which character do you relate to the most and why?
- Discuss how Peter must have felt at different points in the story. For example, he felt happy when he was eating lettuce, he felt scared when Mr McGregor chased him, etc.

The Production/Performance:

- What did you like about the show? Is there something you wish could have been different?
- How is a puppet show different from a play performed with human actors? What are puppets able to do that humans can't?
- Did you like the music in the show? Did it change how you felt during certain moments (ex. make you feel happy, scared, sad, etc.)?
- How did the movement of the puppets help tell the story?
- How would this story have been different if the characters were talking?

Tell Your Own Tale of Peter Rabbit Through a Puppet Showcase

Objective: Students will create their own finger puppets and then create their own version of *Peter Rabbit*.

Materials:

One printed pattern (found at the end of this packet) for each child
Crayons or markers
Scissors
Glue sticks or tape

Directions:

1. Print the pattern of characters from *Peter Rabbit* found at the end of this packet. Each pattern will create six characters from the story and each child should have one pattern.
2. Have students color each of the characters using crayons or markers.
3. Cut out each finger puppet, including the bar below each character with their name. You will use this bar to put the puppets on your fingers.
4. Size the bar below each puppet to your student's finger as needed and glue or tape them together so it forms a circle below the puppet.
5. Enjoy your finger puppets! Have students tell their own version of *Peter Rabbit* either solo or in groups using their new finger puppets.
6. Ask students how they relate to each character after they perform their own version of the story. Have their feelings about the characters changed?

Resources

Arizona State Standards:

<http://www.azed.gov/standards-practices/>

<http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

More about Beatrix Potter:

<http://www.peterrabbit.com/about-beatrix-potter/>

More about themes in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*:

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/tale-peter-rabbit-writing-prompt/>

<http://www.buf.no/en/read/txt/?page=pk-nokler-en>

Great Arizona Puppet Theater:

<http://www.azpuppets.org>

Please send any thoughts or appreciation letters to the Great Arizona Puppet Theater at:

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PETER RABBIT FINGER puppets

1. Color 2. Cut 3. Paste 4. Enjoy

