

Theatre IV Classroom Study Guide



Beatrix Potter's The Tailor of Gloucester

Book, Music and Lyrics by Paul Deiss

The Mice Will Play

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.



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

Beatrix Potter 1866-1943

Almost entirely self educated, Beatrix Potter was known widely for her colorful and enticing children's books. 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 and was very fond of her childhood, though her early life was often lonely. The only formal training or education that Beatrix Potter ever had was short-lived private art lessons from two different teachers.

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 her younger brother Bertram, sketching the animals they saw and discussing their habitats. 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.

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. She died at the age of 77 in 1943.

The Holiday Traditions 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.

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.



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

What is "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.



The Christmas Star

Before there was Christmas, stars held importance in ancient religions. The Babylonians used three stars to represent a god. Ancient people looked upon stars as gods and created myths about them. 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. But the five-pointed star of Christmas holds center stage, which to most Christians is held as a symbol of Jesus. 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

- Aldis, Dorothy. Nothing Is Impossible: The Story of Beatrix Potter. Atheneum. 1969.
- Bingham, Jane M., editor. Writers for Children. Scribner. 1988.
- 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.
- Peter Rabbit Web, Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd. <http://www.peterrabbit.co.uk/templates/index.cfm>

Selected Beatrix Potter Self-illustrated Children's Books

- The Tale of Peter Rabbit, privately printed, 1901, Warne, 1902.
- The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin, Warne, 1903.
- The Tale of Benjamin Bunny, Warne, 1904.
- 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 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.

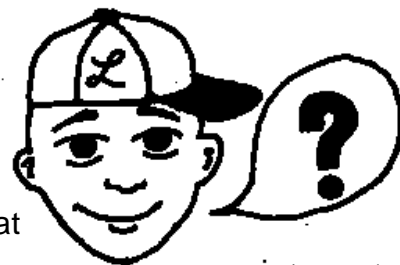
Theatre IV's Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*

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.

Secret Codes!

Did you know that Beatrix Potter invented her own secret code? Often known for being shy and reserved, she kept her thoughts in her own diary that she wrote in from the age of fifteen to about the age of thirty. To make sure the journal would remain her own private and secret book, she wrote in a secret code of her own invention, writing in such a small hand that it had to be read with a magnifying glass. It was many, many years after her death that this clever code was finally cracked!

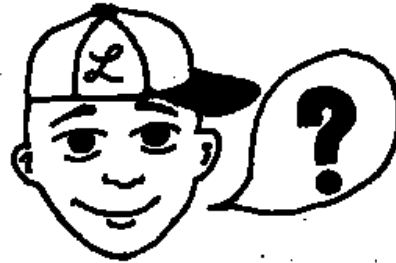


Leonardo Didja Noe

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

Lets Play A Game of Cat and Mouse!

Our friends Simpkin and Mr. and Mrs. Mouse are no Tom and Jerry but they are a barrel of laughs. Did you know that September 6, 2000 will mark the 25th anniversary of *The New Tom and Jerry Show*? The Hanna-Barbera cartoon is a favorite for a lot of Americans, young and old. Animated cuts of the duo date back as far as the 1940s. Tom Cat and Jerry Mouse both own 7 **Oscars**.*



Leonardo Didja Noe

*An Oscar is an award given to excellent actors, directors, scripts and many other related areas.

Theatre IV 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 Potters: 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**.

This study guide and the text-contained herein are the property of Theatre IV. Photocopying of the study guide is permitted. Any other use of the contents must be accompanied by the phrase: "Text used with permission from Theatre IV - Richmond, VA."

© Theatre IV