

Tales From Beatrix Potter™

A Story Theatre Play for Children

By Evan Guilford-Blake

*Inspired by the original works
of Beatrix Potter*

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*No more twist! -- Beatrix Potter from *The Tailor of Gloucester**

DEDICATION

*To the memory of Beatrix Potter.
For Roxanna and the bunnies, too numerous to name.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Some of the gentle, humorous, and well-loved characters from the writings of Beatrix Potter come alive in this gem of a story theatre play for young audiences. The play consists of adaptations of three Beatrix Potter stories: *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* (one of the Peter Rabbit tales); her renowned Christmas story, *The Tailor of Gloucester*; and *Grasshopper Belle and Susan Emmet*, Potter's adaptation of the Aesop fable. Also included are two poems from the *Apply Dapply Rhymes* and a third inspired by them. The pieces are short, the action continuous, and children in the audience are encouraged to participate by solving the "problems" of the play.

An ensemble of 5 to 22 actors plays multiple roles from rabbits, mice, insects, and a cat, to a singing scarecrow and squeaking door and gate. The play requires little or no set, has no complex technical requirements, may be presented with minimal costuming, and will tour easily. It is enhanced with familiar music and two very short original songs. The approximate performance time is 40 minutes, without intermission.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Tales from Beatrix Potter was first presented in August, 2001 at Neighborhood Playhouse, Decatur, GA, Sondra Nelson, Artistic Director. The cast included Jane Bass, Laurie Burnham, Isma'il ibn Conner, Diane Curtis and Topher Payne. The production was directed by the playwright.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(Ensemble cast of 5 to 22 actors)

BEATRIX POTTER: Englishwoman of the late 19th century, serves as a narrator.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny

PETER RABBIT: A well-known rabbit who is something of a troublemaker.

BENJAMIN BUNNY: Peter's cousin, more thoughtful and cautious than Peter.

GATE: An unusual gate that guards the entrance to Mr. McGregor's farm.

SCARECROW: Conceited protector of Mr. McGregor's farm.

Apply Dapply's Rhyme

APPLY DAPPLY: A little mouse who is always hungry.

The Tale of Grasshopper Belle and Susan Emmet

SUSAN: A wise and thrifty ant.

BELLE: Carefree grasshopper who loves to sing and dance.

DOOR: The door to Susan's house.

STORM: A loud and scary storm, with rain and thunder.

The Rhyme of Thingummy-Jig and Whatzisname

THINGUMMY-JIG: A little mouse.

WHATZISNAME: Another little mouse.

(Continued next page)

The Tailor of Gloucester

TAILOR: A kindly man who has an important task, which he may be a little too ill to finish.

SIMPKIN: The Tailor's cat, who is remarkable, and knows it.

MAYOR: A practical person who believes in rewarding performance -- good and poor.

CORNELIUS: A mouse who is a little afraid of most everything.

HENRIETTA: Cornelius' wife. Very precise and careful.

DICKENS: Their son. Smart and curious.

MARIBELLE: Their young daughter. Brave, curious about everything.

MARGARET: Cornelius' mother. Very old and a little hard of hearing.

CAROLERS: Singers who set the mood.

CASTING

Many of the roles may be played by male or female actors. If, for example, the Tailor is to be played by a female, or the Scarecrow or Simpkin by a male, just change the pronouns that refer to the character, and the cat's title becomes "Sir." While there are 22+ roles, the company should feel free to double as much as it wishes.

ESSENTIAL PROP LIST

(Any other props referred to are intended to be mimed.)

Peter's blue jacket

Mayor's coat

Tailor's sewing needle *(may be mimed)*

Simpkin's scarf

Tailor's purse

Four pennies *(may be mimed)*

Simpkin's basket with "bread," spool of cherry-colored thread

THE SETTING

A bare stage, and the imaginations of the audience. Any costumes or set pieces may be suggested rather than real.

MUSIC

The flute music specified in the script may be played by a cast member or recorded. An oboe, English horn, clarinet or even a piano or guitar may be readily substituted. See end of script for "Grasshopper Belle's Song" and "Fiddle-De-Dum."

There are two versions of the carol "I Saw Three Ships." One version has "Come Sailing *In*" while another version has "Come Sailing *By*." The one to be used, below, is a hybrid but is based on the original English nursery rhyme ("*Come Sailing By*"). It's an adapted version of the one used by Beatrix Potter herself in her original story. The music to be used, however, is the familiar music to "I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In."

I SAW THREE SHIPS COME SAILING BY
ON CHRISTMAS DAY, ON CHRISTMAS DAY;
I SAW THREE SHIPS COME SAILING BY
ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING.
AND WHO DO YOU THINK WAS IN THEM THEN,
ON CHRISTMAS DAY, ON CHRISTMAS DAY;
AND WHO DO YOU THINK WAS IN THEM THEN,
ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING?
THREE PRETTY MAIDS WERE IN THEM THEN,
ON CHRISTMAS DAY, ON CHRISTMAS DAY
THREE PRETTY MAIDS WERE IN THEM THEN,
ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING.
AND ONE COULD WHISTLE, AND ONE COULD SING,
AND ONE COULD PLAY A PRETTY FLUTE;
SUCH JOY THERE WAS AT THE MAYOR'S WEDDING
ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING.

Tales From Beatrix Potter

*(BEFORE RISE: In the darkness FLUTE MUSIC is heard.
AT RISE: We discover BEATRIX POTTER.)*

POTTER: When swift cloud shadows race over the ponds --
Where tinkling water sings to ducklings and swans --
On wide brown sands at the edge of the sea --
My little odd friends come whisper to me!

(FLUTE out. LIGHTS RISE on each actor as S/HE speaks.)

POTTER and ENSEMBLE MEMBER: Under the flowers
and wood moss they peep,

POTTER and ENSEMBLE MEMBER: And play in the
moonlight when other folks sleep,

POTTER and ENSEMBLE MEMBER: They hide in the
sweet-smelling hay in the barn,

POTTER and ENSEMBLE MEMBER: And under the
carpets and beds at the farm.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: Land of kind dreams,

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: Where scarecrows can sing!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: Where mice speak as we do!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: And ants collect string!

ALL ENSEMBLE MEMBERS: Through your green
meadows we dance hand in hand --

POTTER: My little odd friends of my green Lakeland. My
little odd friends. I have so many. Peter Rabbit - *he's* a
friend of mine; and his cousin, Benjamin Bunny. Would
you like to meet them? *(Elicit response.)* You would?
Then you shall, and many others. But, how silly of me, I
haven't introduced myself. My name is Beatrix. Beatrix
Potter. I'm from very far away, in time and place. You
see, I lived in England, many years ago, and while I was
there...I wrote stories. In fact, that's how I came to know
my friends. I wrote stories *about* them, for children who
were friends of mine, and today I'm going to tell you some.

POTTER: (*Cont'd.*) Oh — not by myself. These are my friends, too; they're going to help. And so can you!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: I'm [NAME]. Hi! (*Elicit response.*)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: Good morning [afternoon, evening], everyone. I'm [NAME]. (*Elicit response.*)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: I'm [NAME] and I'm pleased to meet you.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER: And I'm [NAME] and I'm so glad you could come.

(*ALL but POTTER turn from audience to don character.*)

POTTER: And you can help us too. Would you like to? (*Elicit response.*) Here's how you do it. You use your *imagination*. Imagination is wonderful thing. Why, with imagination, [ENSEMBLE MEMBER] can become Peter Rabbit right before your eyes. Watch. [ENSEMBLE MEMBER], please turn around. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER does, immediately becoming PETER.*) There, you see. And [ENSEMBLE MEMBER] becomes Benjamin Bunny. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER turns.*) And [ENSEMBLE MEMBER] — well, *s/he* becomes the gate to a very special vegetable garden. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER turns with a creak.*) And [ENSEMBLE MEMBER] becomes a wonderful scarecrow. (*ENSEMBLE MEMBER turns.*)

SCARECROW: BBBBBLLLLLLHHHHH!

POTTER: My, she's fierce! Now, I believe we're ready, so -- imagine. Imagine where I'm standing is a vegetable garden filled with -- let's see -- delicious carrots, of course, and lettuce and broccoli and -- what are these? Oh -- perhaps not quite so delicious onions. Can you do that? (*Elicit response.*) Good. Peter, Benjamin, tell your story.

BENJAMIN: Peter, Peter Rabbit. Come out, Peter. Let's play hopscotch. (*HE mimes a game.*) Peter?

PETER: (*Entering.*) Oh, hi, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN: Why, Peter. Why are you so glum on a fine Saturday morning?

PETER: It's my blue jacket, the handsome one your mother made me for my birthday. I've lost it.

End of Freeview

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