THE STORY
Thistle Theatre’s production combines two of Beatrix Potter’s most beloved stories: “The Tale of Peter Rabbit” and “The Tale of Benjamin Bunny.” These two stories join together to make one complete narrative (Peter’s original tale leaves the fate of his jacket unresolved). Additional characters in the production are from Potter’s “The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle” and “The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse.” The script was adapted from the original stories by Thistle Theatre’s Artistic Director, Jean Enticknap.

Synopsis: On a beautiful summer morning, the lovable hedgehog Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle merrily journeys to the fir tree home of Mrs. Rabbit. She is delivering the freshly-washed clothes of Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter. Little does she know that Peter is going to wear his clean blue jacket on a dangerous adventure in Mr. McGregor’s garden!

NAMES OF CHARACTERS
- Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle (a hedgehog)
- Mrs. Tittlemouse (a mouse)
- Benjamin Bunny (a rabbit)
- Old Mr. Benjamin Bunny (a rabbit)
- Mrs. Josephine Rabbit and her rabbit family:
  - Flopsy
  - Mopsy
  - Cottontail
  - Peter
- Mr. McGregor (a human)
- Other animal characters:
  - robin red breast (a bird)
  - a mouse
  - a cat
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beatrix Potter (born 1866 / died 1943), was born in London, England, but spent most of her adult life in Sawrey, West Morland County (England). As a child Beatrix was very lonely; her brother was away at boarding school, and she was frequently alone. She looked after many animals, had a keen interest in natural history, and wanted to become a scientist. She wrote a scientific paper but was not allowed to present it to the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew because she was a woman. She made detailed drawings of the local flora and fauna and wished to publish a book on her botanical studies. When this proved to be unsuccessful she turned to creating small children’s stories with beautiful drawings. “The Tale of Peter Rabbit” was written in 1893 and Potter herself paid to have it published in 1900 as a gift for one child. That one gift was significant as it forever changed the style of book publishing for children (introducing the idea small-batch, independent self-publishing). She went on to write 23 “Peter Rabbit Tales.” Later in life, because of failing eyesight, Beatrix stopped writing children’s books. She devoted her time to the breeding of Herwick sheep and conserving the land around her home, Hill Top Farm. She left 4000 acres of land to the National Trust to preserve the native land in Cumbria, England.

TABLETOP BUNRAKU PUPPETRY

This show is presented in Thistle Theatre’s trademark “tabletop Bunraku puppetry” style. Bunraku is a form of puppetry originating in Japan over 300 years ago. While Thistle Theatre modifies the art form using a tabletop, the concept remains the same: one, two or three puppeteers operate each puppet; the puppeteers wear black hoods and costumes to symbolize their “invisibility.” It doesn’t take long for the audience to forget the puppeteers are present and to become engrossed in the story. In Japan it may take twenty-five years for a puppeteer to be skilled enough to operate the head of a puppet. Often the head puppeteer’s face can be seen and is visible to the audience in recognition of his expertise (the other puppeteers are hooded). In traditional Bunraku, musicians accompany the puppeteers and a narrator provides the voices for the characters. No women participated in the original art form, so men also played the women’s roles. In Thistle Theatre productions, the puppeteers speak and sing the character’s words live to recorded music. Sometimes one puppeteer operates two puppets at once, or the head of one and the hand of the other. When the puppeteers aren’t on stage, which is seldom, they are backstage preparing scenery or puppets for the next scene.

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

The puppets and scenery are all hand-built by Thistle Theatre artists. The flowers and vegetables (except the giant dream carrot) were purchased at craft stores, but everything else is crafted in Thistle Theatre’s studio. The animal puppets may look like simple stuffed animals, but they are original creations made of Styrofoam, wood, poly batting and faux fur. They are weighted and constructed to maximize movement with simple direct manipulation. Mr. McGregor has a sculpt-or-mold and paper clay covered face and a “skeleton” of wood and foam. His boots are children’s rain boots (called “Wellingtons” in England). This puppet’s manipulation most closely exemplifies the traditional Bunraku style of puppetry used in Japan.
The puppeteers are Ben Burris, Heidi Persson and Gina Wilhelm. Jean Enticknap directed the show.

Samantha Redsell, who was born near the part of England where the story takes place, recorded the script early in the rehearsal process so that the puppeteers could learn the correct dialect (accent) for the rabbits. Mr. McGregor and Benjamin Bunny have Scottish accents, as that is where the show’s director imagined they were born and learned to speak. Dialect can change from one region of Great Britain to another quite dramatically.

The music was created specifically for this production. The songs are by V. Kay Pedersen and the original show score is by Mike Flint. Songs help tell the story and the music helps set the mood of each scene. Dream and nightmare segments set to music were created to give the audience a visual image for the inner thoughts of Peter Rabbit. Mike Flint brought his computer to rehearsals and tried out pieces of music to go with specific actions, and, once choices were made, the official “soundtrack” was recorded.

GLOSSARY OF ENGLISH TERMS
Here are some of the English terms you’ll hear used in the show:

- hedgerow - a row of shrubs
- gig - a light, two-wheeled, open carriage
- bonnet - a hat
- lavender - pale-purplish flowers, often dried
- Tam o’Shanter - a Scottish cap worn by men with a wide, round, flat top and pompon on top
- clogs - a shoe with a thick, usually wooden, sole
- currant buns - a raisin like fruit, baked in a small roll
- elevenses - tea and a snack at 11 :00 am
- camomile/chamomile - a plant whose dried flower heads have been used in medicinal tea

VOCABULARY
Here are some unique vocabulary words you’ll hear spoken by the characters:

- hedgehog: a very small animal with a pointed nose and a very short tail
- sow: to plant or scatter in or over the ground
- herbs: plants that have value as medicine, as an aroma, or as a way to add flavor to food
- gossip: tales or talk about the personal lives and secrets of others when they are not present
- scarecrow: crossed sticks dressed in clothes to scare birds away from crops
- sieve: a tool used in gardening to separate rocks from soil
- forage: to search for food or supplies
- rascal: a mischievous or dishonest person

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES
1. Read “The Tale of Peter Rabbit” and “The Tale of Benjamin Bunny” aloud to children.
2. Read aloud or have students read silently other tales by Beatrix Potter.
3. Ask the school librarian to make a display of all of Beatrix Potter’s books.
4. Read aloud stories about rabbits. (see bibliography for suggestions)
5. Ask students if they have ever been to a puppet show. Discuss what the show might look like, sound like, etc.
POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Set up a sensory table in your classroom with diverse smells and textures from the story (lavender, cotton, fur, velveteen, chamomile tea, etc.).
2. Sow parsley seeds and watch them grow in your classroom.
3. Have a tea party with currant buns or Peter Rabbit shaped cookies.
4. Have students create the characters from the play out of clay.
5. Lead a discussion group on “right” and “wrong”, using examples from the puppet show as a springboard for conversation (eg. Peter's breaking into McGregor's farm and stealing from him).
6. Have students extend the tales of Peter by writing and illustrating their own books. Students can create their own new small characters or add to the stories already written. *(book bindings ideas provided—see page 5)*
7. Peter has lost his jacket! Draw and color a new jacket for him. Don't forget his shiny brass buttons. *(picture provided—see pages 6 and 7)*

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: RABBIT TALES


By the time the velveteen rabbit is dirty, worn out and about to be burned, he has almost given up hope of ever finding the magic called Real.


Ignoring the jeers of the other bunnies, Ruben Rabbit goes about the fancy prancing and dancing he loves, and eventually gains recognition for it in a contest.


Chronicles the adventures of Peter and Mrs. Rabbit and their many friends and neighbors in the Briar-patch and beyond.


After much romping and frolicking, Rabbit returns safely home again.


Two rabbits begin a satisfying correspondence, unaware that they already know and dislike each other.


While munching on lettuce in the Pringles' garden, Bella the rabbit is carried away by a cat and ends up in a neighboring meadow, where she discovers other rabbits and a safer place to feed.


Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins and their fifteen children (a rabbit family) work together to plant their garden.


A collection of thirty-six stories about the adventures of a wise rabbit and his animal and human friends.


When rabbit finds two turnips he gives one to a friend.


Two rabbits, seeking carrots for the first lunch in their new home and receiving a variety of food from their animal neighbors, are at first reluctant to sample anything they have never eaten before.


The inhabitants of a rabbit village in seventeenth-century Flanders discover the biggest carrot in the world and try to dig it up.


Bunny, who hates bedtime, sets off to explore the nighttime world and concludes that his bed is the best place to be at night, despite the wonderful things he finds outside.


The adventures of two rabbits after they escape from a rabbit factory.


After one last foray far from his home, an aging rabbit decides he prefers to rest in his own garden and let his children and grandchildren bring him good things to eat.
BOOK BINDINGS

Either of these two bindings will work well with Activity #7.

The Accordian Spine instructions
1. Take a 9x12 piece of paper and fold it in half 3 times. Unfold. You should have 8 even sections 1 1/2x9 or 1 1/8x12.

2. Refold paper so it looks like an accordian.

3. Put paper in each valley.

4. Fold accordian together and staple.

5. Fold in half a piece of paper 2 1/4x12 or 3x9 depending on how you are binding your book. Glue over staples so they don't show.

Fold-a-Book Instructions
1. Fold in half lengthwise.

2. Fold in half again so that the 4 short edges match.

3. Fold in half again with double folded edge matching up with the 4 raw edges.

4. Open the sheet up and fold in half lengthwise.

5. Cut along the center crease from the folded edge to the crosswise crease.

6. Open the sheet again and fold lengthwise again.

7. Push the end sections together and it will fold itself up.

8. Four section are formed. Fold all section together into a little book.
Draw a new jacket for Peter -- provided by Thistle Theatre -- for post-show activity #7
Peter’s jacket as a scarecrow—provided by Thistle Theatre— for post-show activity #7