



Disney  
and  
CAMERON MACKINTOSH  
present

# MARY POPPINS

**BROADWAY'S SUPER HIT MUSICAL**

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A MUSICAL BASED ON THE STORIES OF P.L. TRAVERS  
AND THE WALT DISNEY FILM

ORIGINAL MUSIC AND LYRICS  
BY RICHARD M. SHERMAN AND ROBERT B. SHERMAN

BOOK BY JULIAN FELLOWES

NEW SONGS AND ADDITIONAL MUSIC AND LYRICS  
BY GEORGE STILES AND ANTHONY DREWE

CO-CREATED BY CAMERON MACKINTOSH

## STUDY GUIDE

PREPARED BY DISNEY THEATRICAL GROUP  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

# INTRO - WELCOME

## Anything can happen if we recognize the magic of everyday life.

Author P.L. Travers understood this special kind of magic when she published her first book, *Mary Poppins*, in 1934. The tale of the mysterious **nanny** who teaches a troubled family to appreciate the important things in life went on to become one of the most recognized and beloved stories of all time. Thirty years later, Walt Disney released the film based on Travers' stories: a unique mixture of animation and live action that has become a classic.

Now *Mary Poppins* flies over audiences and lands on a Disney Broadway stage, complete with new songs and breathtaking theatrical magic. Beyond its wild special effects and unforgettable characters, the message behind *Mary Poppins* remains an important one for young people to understand, especially today: that hope and optimism can be powerful tools in the face of hard times.

The story concerns the Banks family. Mr. and Mrs. Banks are involved with other things and cannot give their children, Jane and Michael, the attention they need. Jane and Michael, in turn, are misbehaving to get attention. The "winds of change" are literally blowing, and *Mary Poppins* arrives on their doorstep. Using a combination of magic and common sense, she teaches this distressed family how to value each other again.

In *Mary Poppins*, the factory owner John Northbrook tells Michael that money has a *worth* (for example, one dollar or, in London, one pound) but it also has a *value* (or what the money can do to help others). *Mary Poppins* teaches the Banks family (and the audience!) to value the important things in life: family, friendship and imagination. In *Mary Poppins*, Mary sings, "Anything can happen if you let it." *Mary Poppins* is about discovering the extraordinary world around us, even when things look bleak. This guide is designed to help you explore the extraordinary world of *Mary Poppins*.

**"BROADEN YOUR HORIZON  
OPEN DIFFERENT DOORS  
YOU MAY FIND A YOU THERE  
THAT YOU NEVER KNEW WAS YOURS"**

- *Mary Poppins*



Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins



Original Broadway cast of *Mary Poppins* in rehearsal

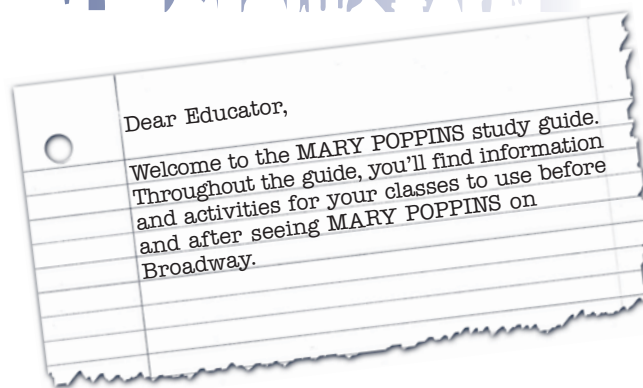
Who exactly is *Mary Poppins*? That's for you to decide. The author Feenie Ziner calls *Mary Poppins* "fiercely independent, unpredictable, the very essence of the creative spirit" (as quoted in *A Lively Oracle: A Centennial Celebration of P.L. Travers*, edited by Ellen Dooling Draper and Jenny Koralek). Above all, *Mary Poppins* teaches us to find the magical in the everyday. In her hands umbrellas fly, carpet bags hide endless treasures and a day at the park becomes a journey to a new world.

**Nanny:** a person employed to take care of children in a household

**Throughout the *Mary Poppins* guide, look for definitions of words you may not know!**

# INTRO

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Look for these symbols throughout the guide:



**HOT SEAT!** With the Hot Seat, any exercise can suddenly become a theatrical game. Classmates take on the roles of characters from *Mary Poppins*, and audience members get to see what they are thinking!

Throughout the guide, you will see **“quotes”** from *Mary Poppins* the Musical. Discuss how these quotes are connected to the exercises.



**VARIATIONS:** Look for *Mary Poppins*' umbrella for suggested variations on exercises and activities!

**A note on Learning Objectives:** Each exercise will include **Learning Objectives** (located at the side of the page). These objectives are adapted from National Standards and the New York City Blueprints for the Arts. See the Resources section for web site links.

# INFO SHEET

## >> Story Synopsis

### ACT ONE

Bert, a man of many trades, introduces us to Cherry Tree Lane (“Chim Chim Cher-ee/Cherry Tree Lane”). He has a feeling that something is about to happen. He stops in front of No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane, where things are not going well. Jane and Michael Banks are constantly misbehaving, and Katie Nanna, the latest in a long line of nannies, has had enough. She leaves, and Mr. Banks asks his wife to place an advertisement in the newspaper for a nanny, but the children take matters into their own hands and write their own ad (“The Perfect Nanny”). Just as Mr. Banks is about to leave for work, Mary Poppins arrives; she fits the children’s requirements exactly. Mary Poppins is strict but fair; she keeps the children focused with a combination of common sense and magic (“Practically Perfect”).

Against their wishes, Mary Poppins takes the children on a walk to the nearby park. There they meet Bert, who is busy creating his latest works of art. Bored with the park and wary of Bert’s ragged clothes, the children try to escape their new nanny. Mary Poppins urges them to look beneath the surface of every day life to see the magic there; suddenly the parks bursts into brilliant colors and the statues come to life and dance with them (“Jolly Holiday”).

The Banks children are not the only ones feeling out of place. Back at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane, Mrs. Banks feels that she is disappointing both her husband and her children. She is throwing a party, but she really doesn’t know the guests. She longs for the days when she was an actress on the London stage (“Being Mrs. Banks”).

The household prepares for Mrs. Banks’ party (“A Spoonful of Sugar”), but even with Mary Poppins’ magic, the event is a disaster as no one shows up.

Mrs. Banks is left feeling more lost than ever.

**Conniving:** to scheme and plot

“A FATHER, A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER, A SON  
THE THREADS OF THEIR LIVES ARE ALL RAVELLING UNDONE  
SOMETHING IS NEEDED TO TWIST THEM AS TIGHT  
AS THE STRING YOU MIGHT USE WHEN YOU’RE FLYING A KITE.”

- Bert

Mary Poppins takes Jane and Michael on a trip to visit their father at his workplace, the bank (“Precision and Order”). At the bank, Mr. Banks has a choice: to give a loan to Herr Von Hussler, a **conniving** businessman who cares only about money, or John Northbrook, a factory builder who cares for his workers. An innocent question from Jane prompts Mr. Banks to remember the ideals and values he once held (“A Man Has Dreams”). He decides to take a chance on Mr. Northbrook and gives him the loan.

On the way home from the bank, the children and Mary Poppins run into the Bird Woman, feeding the birds in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Jane is still worried about outer appearances and shuns the beggar woman, but Michael offers to give the Bird Woman money (“Feed the Birds”).

Mary Poppins, Jane, Michael and Bert meet Mrs. Corry, the mysterious owner of the unusual “talking shop,” where people actually purchase words along with gingerbread. The children are surprised to hear that Mrs. Corry knew their father when he was a boy (“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious”).

Things begin to go very wrong for Mr. Banks. Von Hussler has gone to another bank and is making millions, and Mr. Banks is being blamed. Under great stress, he yells at the children. In turn, Jane and Michael are furious with their father and in their anger, fight over their toys. The toys magically come to life and teach the children a lesson they will never forget (“Temper, Temper”). Recognizing that the children are not yet open to learning, Mary departs with a note which says, “au revoir,” or “till we meet again.”



Gavin Lee as Bert

# INFO SHEET

## >> Story Synopsis

### ACT TWO

The house is bustling again, this time because a nanny is returning to No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane. However, the visitor is Miss Andrew, Mr. Banks' old nanny, and not Mary Poppins. Miss Andrew is a cruel and harsh woman who believes that children should be punished on a regular basis with a horrible medicine that tastes like cod liver oil ("Brimstone and Treacle"). In a panic, the children escape the house and run to the park where they meet Bert, who explains that the cure for every ill can be found at the end of a kite string ("Let's Go Fly a Kite"). Their kite flies up into the London sky and when it returns, Mary Poppins is on the other end. She returns home with them and defeats Miss Andrew in an **epic** battle. Mr. Banks has also been hiding from Miss Andrew ("Good for Nothing"), and is relieved to see Mary Poppins again.

Whisked up to the rooftops, Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael meet Bert and his fellow chimney sweeps ("Step in Time"). The sweeps dance across the rooftops of London and into the Banks' house, wishing good luck to Mr. Banks and shaking his hand as they go.

Mr. Banks' boss, the Bank Chairman, wishes to see Mr. Banks immediately. Mr. Banks fears the worst, but Bert reminds him that his family is more important than his ambitions ("A Man Has Dreams/A Spoonful of Sugar Reprise"). Mr. Banks leaves for the bank and Mrs. Banks wishes she could go with him. Mary Poppins and the children encourage her to do what she believes is right ("Anything Can Happen If You Let It").

At the bank, Mr. Banks defends his actions in front of the Board of Directors, who tell him that he was right all along: Herr Von Hussler's schemes have fallen through and their competition has been ruined, while Northbrook's factories have made a healthy profit. They promote Mr. Banks, who tells them that from now on his family comes first. As Mr. and Mrs. Banks walk along the streets of London, they are joined by Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael, Bert, Mrs. Corry. The whole universe spins above their heads, like a giant umbrella. Her job done, Mary Poppins leaves, perhaps to help another family in need. Although Jane, Michael and their parents are sad to see her go, they are glad that they have finally found each other.



Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins, Katherine Leigh Doherty as Jane, Alexander Scheitinger as Michael, Gavin Lee as Bert, and the original Broadway cast

**Epic:** imposing or impressive

# INFO SHEET

## >> Meet the Characters

**BERT:** A one-man-band, a sidewalk artist, a chimney sweep and a kite salesman, Bert also narrates the story, introducing the audience to the inhabitants of No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane. Above all, he is a friend to Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael.

**MR. GEORGE BANKS:** A bank manager, Mr. Banks is father to Jane and Michael. He tries to be a good provider, but often forgets how to be a good father.

**MRS. WINIFRED BANKS:** A former actress, Mrs. Banks struggles to find herself as a woman as well as a wife and mother.

**MICHAEL & JANE:** The Banks children, Jane and Michael, are bright and precocious. However, they misbehave to get attention from their parents.

**KATIE NANNA:** The last in a long line of nannies for the Banks children before Mary Poppins arrives, Katie Nanna can't stand any more of Jane and Michael's pranks and leaves No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane.

**MARY POPPINS:** Jane and Michael's new nanny, Mary Poppins uses magic and common sense to show the Banks family how to appreciate each other again. Full of hope even when things look bleak, she tells them "anything can happen if you let it."

**POLICEMAN:** This local policeman brings Jane and Michael home after many of their adventures and becomes fond of Michael's kite.

**ADMIRAL BOOM:** The Banks' friendly neighbor on Cherry Tree Lane.

**MISS LARK:** Another neighbor on Cherry Tree Lane.

**WILLOUGHBY:** Miss Lark's dog!

**MRS. BRILL:** The Banks' cook, she rules the kitchen at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane.

**ROBERTSON AY:** Clumsy but good-hearted, the Banks' footman has trouble following instructions.

**THE PARK KEEPER:** A stickler for rules and regulations, the Park Keeper watches over the park near the Banks' home.

**MRS. CORRY:** Mysterious and very old, Mrs. Corry runs the "Talking Shop" where people buy conversations and gingerbread. She knew Mr. George Banks when he was just a boy.

**VALENTINE & WILLIAM:** Two of the children's special toys.

**NELEUS:** A statue in the park, the Greek Neleus was abandoned by his father, Poseidon, god of the ocean.

**THE BIRD WOMAN:** She sits in front of St. Paul's Cathedral every day, selling bags of crumbs for feeding the pigeons.

**VON HUSSLER:** A conniving businessman who cares for money above all things.

**JOHN NORTHBROOK:** An English factory owner who cares more for his workers than for making money.

**MISS ANDREW:** When Mary Poppins disappears, Mrs. Banks calls on Miss Andrew, George Banks' old nanny. Miss Andrew is cruel and demanding.

**THE BANK CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Banks' boss.



Alexander Scheitinger as Michael and Delaney Moro as Jane

# INFO SHEET



Now that you've met the characters in *Mary Poppins*, meet some of the people who might have worked in an upper class or upper middle class English home in 1910.

**THE BUTLER:** Often the oldest servant in the house, he was in charge of the family silver, china and glassware and answering the door to callers. He assisted at all the family's meals, standing behind the chair of the master of the house, awaiting his next command. His responsible position meant that he had the highest salary.



**THE HOUSEKEEPER:** The housekeeper was in charge of maintaining order and cleanliness in the house. She looked after all the household stores, ensuring that everything was in good condition. All of the other female servants reported to her, and she would work closely with the butler to see that everything ran smoothly.



**THE VALET:** He was second in importance to the butler. The valet assisted the master with his clothing. He would also take care of all travelling arrangements when the master decided to go abroad. If valets had a good relationship with the head of the house, their job would be made much easier.



**NANNY:** Children from wealthy families would spend very little time with their parents. Instead, a nanny would be employed to look after them. Although the nanny's job was very important, they were not paid very much. She was given a comfortable bedroom in the family's house, and allowed more days off than the other staff.



**THE FOOTMAN:** Reporting to the butler, the footman's job was to clean and refill oil lamps, clean cutlery, polish silver and copper plate and set the dining room table for dinner. He would also accompany the man of the house as he paid calls. It was very important that footmen kept on the good side of both the butler and the valets in the house.



**THE HOUSEMAID:** The housemaid was responsible for many tasks with kept the household running. She swept the rooms, cleaned the fireplaces, polished the brass, mended clothes and washed dishes. She would usually be younger than the housekeeper, and her wage not as high, but her position was not the lowest in the house.



**CHIMNEY SWEEPS:** Although not employed by the family on a permanent basis, many Edwardian families would regularly pay chimney sweeps to clean their chimneys. It was a dangerous job with many health and safety risks, such as: breathing problems, falling and breaking bones.



**THE COOK:** In consultation with the lady of the house, the cook chose and prepared the dishes for each day's meals. She also oversaw the kitchen area, ensuring that there was enough food, and that this was well kept. Her position was very important and she had a lot of influence - if you upset the cook, you might not get any dinner!



**SCULLERY MAID:** The scullery maids were often the youngest girls in the house. Their jobs included washing dishes, pots, and pans, preparing fires and lighting the stove in the mornings. Because work was hard, low paid, and there was little time off, they took every opportunity to have fun behind the bosses' backs.



# INFO SHEET

## >> A “Dangerous Brilliance:” The Life of P.L. Travers

Like the magical nanny she created, P.L. Travers never explained. Throughout her career, people often asked her where the idea for

Mary Poppins came from, but she never really told. She believed in mystery, mythology and folk tales – she believed in questions, not answers. For P.L. Travers, life was a never-ending quest for the truth.

Born Helen Lyndon Goff, she grew up with stories. She was born in Australia on November 9, 1899 into a world with no TV, no radio, no movies or Internet.

She especially loved the stories of the Brothers Grimm and began to create her own fantastical tales at an early

age. One night when Helen was ten, she was left in charge of her two younger siblings during a driving thunderstorm; her mother had walked into the storm, distraught, and they didn't know if she would return. To comfort the younger children, Helen began to weave intricate and magical stories about an enchanted horse, allowing the children to fill in the blanks of the tale.

Although she entered her teens wanting to be an actress and a dancer, Helen soon realized that writing held more power for her. She loved to express herself through storytelling. As a young actress, she had changed her name to Pamela Travers, and she loved to see it in print. In February of 1924 she left for London, England, the home of poets, playwrights and famous storytellers. “There, at last,” she said, “I was where I wanted to be” (as quoted in *Mary Poppins, She Wrote: The Life of P. L. Travers* by Valerie Lawson (Simon & Schuster, 2006)).

### A “DANGEROUS BRILLIANCE”

While in London, she wrote for Australian newspapers, describing her adventures abroad. She soon met the poet George William Russell, nicknamed AE, who became a close friend and mentor. He told her that she had a “dangerous brilliance.”



P.L. Travers

“It’s no good asking her. She knows everything, but she never tells,” said Jane.”

– from *Mary Poppins* by P.L. Travers

It was Russell who introduced her to the inner meaning of fairy tales and mythology and, in a moment that would change her life, suggested that she write about a witch. Something about a magical teacher – a combination wise old woman and fairy godmother – appealed to Travers. She took all of her experience and imagination and poured them into a solitary figure, blown into London by a mysterious wind.

### “NOT CHEERY AT ALL”

In 1926, Travers had written the first *Mary Poppins* story, “*Mary Poppins and the Match Man*,” about a young *Mary Poppins* meeting Bert the Match Man for an afternoon tea in one of his sidewalk chalk drawings. She built on that original story, creating a world around her mysterious nanny that combined magic and ordinary life.

Who is *Mary Poppins*? Travers’ biographer Valerie Lawson wrote, “The original *Mary Poppins* was not cheery at all. She was tart and sharp, rude, plain and vain. That was her charm; that – and her mystery.” *Mary Poppins*, published in 1934, was very popular, and Travers began writing a series of books about the family who lived at No. 17, Cherry Tree Lane.

### THE DARK JOURNEY

Throughout her life, Travers explored the connections between life and storytelling. Fairy tales, she wrote, “live in us, endlessly growing, repeating their themes, ringing like great bells. If we forget them, still they are not lost. They go underground, like secret rivers and emerge the brighter for their dark journey” (as quoted in *Mary Poppins, She Wrote: The Life of P.L. Travers* by Valerie Lawson (Simon & Schuster, 2006)). In *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, she writes of a mystical crack in the fabric of reality that opens between New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day in which all the fairy tale characters come out to play.

P.L. Travers died in 1996 at the age of 96. Her journey was over, but in many ways it had just begun. At the first day of rehearsal for *Mary Poppins*, Cameron Mackintosh said to the company, “I’m sure Pamela Travers is here, today, in spirit! And you can be sure she has plenty of notes for us already!” (from “Out of the Blue: The Comings and Goings of *Mary Poppins*” by Brian Sibley).



# INFO SHEET

## >> The Magical Teacher

*Mary Poppins* is a modern myth: the tale of four heroes – the Banks family – who are schooled by a magical teacher.



Alexander Scheitinger and Ashley Brown

For thousands of years, people have told stories of gods, genies, and spirits: magical teachers who have granted humans special knowledge and insights. Heroes sometimes need guidance from supernatural mentors to continue their journey. What else is “Supercalifragilisticpealidocious” but a magic word? What else is “A Spoonful of Sugar” but advice from a magical being on how to live a better life? As Brian Sibley and Michael Lassell write in *Mary Poppins: The Story Behind the Journey from Books to Broadway*, “Mary, like many

modern fairy tale characters – not to mention mythic beings – fills some longing, some need, some desire in us all...Like many of her fellow figments of imagination, from *Goldilocks* to *The Little Mermaid*, she teaches us real and valuable lessons about life.”

Many of these magical mentors have been women: oracles, wise women, and even witches who nurture male and female heroes alike and pass knowledge down through the ages. In Greek mythology, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, helped many heroes by making them use their common sense, just as Mary Poppins does for the Banks family.

What is common sense? It’s what we know deep in our hearts to be true, not what we read in books or what others tell us. Athena shows the hero Perseus how to kill the Medusa, not by magic, but by forcing the monster to gaze upon its own reflection in a mirror. Teachers like Mary Poppins show us how to see the magic in everyday life. It’s wonderful to read about magical occurrences in books, or see them happen on stage. But magic can be an old woman feeding the birds on the steps of a cathedral, or a father teaching a son to fly a kite.

Of course, all the enchantment and good advice a magical teacher can give can only go so far. In the end, it is the hero who must make the journey alone. Now it’s up to the Banks family to take the next step.

“Who of us doesn’t want a Mary Poppins in our life? Someone to love us unconditionally, to be magical but not too sappy, to enchant us and to make everything right, and then to leave us to do it on our own.”

– Thomas Schumacher (Sibley & Lassell, 2007)



Ashley Brown and Gavin Lee



### VARIATIONS:

Compare Mary Poppins with some modern magical guides such as Ms. Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus* series, or Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which & Mrs. Who from *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L’Engle.

# INFO SHEET

## >> From the Page to the Screen to the Stage

No one had ever seen anything like it. When the Disney film *Mary Poppins* was released in 1964, audiences saw live actors dancing with animated creatures, characters jumping into sidewalk drawings and a magical nanny flying above the London skyline. As David Tietjen, author of *The Musical World of Walt Disney* wrote, “It was a total synthesis of all that was Disney – animation, music, special effects, outstanding art and superb casting and acting.”

Walt Disney had been introduced to the world of *Mary Poppins* by his daughter and spent many years persuading writer P.L. Travers to let him adapt her stories for the screen. Once she gave Disney the film rights, he knew that the story needed the best in movie magic and music (he brought in the songwriting team of Richard and Robert Sherman).

Disney was sure that, along with its visual delights, *Mary Poppins* had to be about the characters. “We had to come up with a need for *Mary Poppins* to come to the Banks family,” said Richard Sherman. At first they thought of having the father be away at war, but then they had a better idea. “He would be emotionally absent,” said Sherman. “We made it a story about a **dysfunctional** family. And in comes *Mary Poppins* – this necessary person – to heal them” (as quoted in “Becoming *Mary Poppins*: P. L. Travers, Walt Disney, and the Making of a Myth” by Caitlin Flanagan, *The New Yorker*, December, 2005).

The film garnered 13 Academy Award® nominations, and won in five categories (Best Actress, Best Song, Best Score, Best Film Editing, and Best Special Effects). After such a massive success, talk of a sequel was natural. After all, P.L. Travers had written many stories about her supernatural nanny. However, a sequel was never made.

Years later, following the Broadway success of *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney Theatrical Group’s President Thomas Schumacher partnered with Producer Cameron Macintosh to bring the beloved nanny to life on stage. Drawing from the classic film version for inspiration, they assembled a dynamic creative team to combine the original film score with new songs as well as additional stories from Travers’ other *Poppins* tales. In an unusual pairing of past and present, composers George Stiles and Anthony Drewe were brought in to work with the film’s original songwriters, Richard and Robert Sherman to merge new tunes with the existing movie score. Additional members of this innovative creative team included writer Julian Fellowes, Director Richard Eyre, Choreographer Matthew Bourne and Designer Bob Crowley.

**Dysfunctional:** abnormal or impaired functioning

“WIND’S IN THE EAST  
THERE’S A MIST COMING IN –  
LIKE SOMETHING IS BREWING  
AND ‘BOUT TO BEGIN...”

- Bert

*Mary Poppins* had flown from the silver screen to the musical stage. In 2007, *Mary Poppins* received seven Tony® nominations including Best Musical. Designer Bob Crowley was recognized with the Tony Award® for Best Scenic Design for a Musical for his magical sets.



Mary Poppins arrives on the East wind at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane

# INFO SHEET

## >> TWO TEAMS CREATE THE MUSIC FOR MARY POPPINS:

**RICHARD M. SHERMAN & ROBERT B. SHERMAN**  
and  
**GEORGE STILES & ANTHONY DREWE**



Richard and Robert Sherman had music in their blood. Their father, Al Sherman, had been a songwriter on Tin Pan Alley, that famous New York City street where hundreds of songwriters worked at their pianos day and night creating a sound like crashing tin pans. And their grandfather had been Court Composer and Conductor for Emperor Franz-Josef of Austria-Hungary in the early 1900s. Richard and Robert Sherman would follow the “family business” by spreading their joyous music around the world.

The Sherman brothers were born in New York City to Rosa and Al Sherman (Robert was born in 1925, Richard in 1928). After several trips across country, the family finally settled in Beverly Hills, California in 1937. Both boys were **intensely** interested in music, but it wasn’t until their father challenged them to write a song together that they began to work as a team.

By the early 1960s, Richard and Robert had become the main song writers for Walt Disney. In 1961, they wrote several songs for the Disney movie *The Parent Trap*. Then in 1964, they began

work on *Mary Poppins*. They had to find ways to fit songs into P.L. Travers’ stories. Richard Sherman said, “From the beginning, we saw this in musical terms. We wanted to do a full blown musical fantasy of the first magnitude...” (as quoted in *The Musical World of Walt Disney* by David Tietjen).



Richard and Robert Sherman

“Do you boys know what a nanny is?”  
“Yeah, it’s a goat.”  
“No! An English nursemaid!”

- Walt Disney talking to Richard and Robert Sherman about *Mary Poppins* (Sibley & Lassell, 2007)



George Stiles and Anthony Drewe

George Stiles and Anthony Drewe had admired the Sherman brothers all of their lives. This song writing team had worked together with Cameron Mackintosh on the musical *Just So Stories*. At Mackintosh’s suggestion, they wrote a song called “Practically Perfect” for *Mary Poppins*, not realizing that the Sherman brothers had written a song with the same title that never made it into the film! When work began on the *Mary Poppins* stage production, the two song writing teams began to **collaborate**, creating new songs and expanding some of the original songs with new dramatic context. “By the end of the process,” said Richard Sherman, “it was sometimes hard to remember who wrote what and when.”

**Intensely:** having great strength, strong feeling  
**Collaborate:** to work together



# CLASS PROJECT

>> *Bring Mary Poppins to life!*



## Note to Educators:

Disney Theatrical Group is dedicated to providing meaningful theatrical experiences for students of all ages through its timeless Broadway productions.

This Study Guide serves as a springboard to learning about and enjoying *Mary Poppins* and the theatrical process in general.

The following pages include activities designed to give students a better understanding of the story's themes and the play's artistry - preparing them for an informed experience of the show. We encourage you to use it as a resource both BEFORE and AFTER your visit to the live performance. The Study Guide can be an invaluable tool to help:

- \* Foster Creativity and Discussion
- \* Develop Interactive Projects
- \* Reference to Curriculum-Linked Activities

Each activity promotes deeper learning in various disciplines (Theatre, Language Arts, Music, Visual Arts, Math, etc.) and references related learning standards at the side of the page. Use these activities to help bring the show to life even beyond the stage.





# CLASS PROJECT

>> A good way to assess any story is through the 5 W's:



“ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IF YOU LET IT  
LIFE IS OUT THERE WAITING, SO GO AND GET IT”

- The Ensemble

## WHO? (CHARACTER)

Who are the different characters?

## WHAT? (PLOT)

What happens to the characters during the story?

## WHERE? (SETTING)

Where does the story take place?

## WHEN? (TIME PERIOD)

When in history does the story take place? When during the day or the year?

## WHY? (THEME, MOTIVATION)

Why do the characters act and behave as they do?

WHO  
WHAT  
WHERE  
WHEN  
WHY

# WHO?

## >> Characters can see the world in different ways

### THE HOT SEAT!



A story can change depending on who tells it. People see the world from different viewpoints; a group of people might see the same event from completely different **perspectives**.

You've gotten a chance to meet the characters at *Mary Poppins* and learn about their development. Now it's your turn to become the

characters by expressing their viewpoints in words and styles that you help to create.

**STEP ONE:** Set up the "hot seat": a single chair in front of your classroom.

**STEP TWO:** One by one, each member of your class or group should take a turn in the "hot seat." When it's your turn, choose one of the characters from *Mary Poppins* (for a full list of characters, see page 6). Introduce yourself in the voice and manner of the character you have chosen.

**THE "RASHOMON" EFFECT:** *Rashomon* is a 1950 Japanese film directed by Akira Kurosawa. The film, based on two stories by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, uses a unique narrative structure to tell its story: a crime is committed and seen by four witnesses. Each witness recounts what happened; however, each version of the story is different, colored by the person's opinions and character.

**Perspective:** a mental view or outlook



Rebecca Luker as Mrs. Banks

**"BEING MRS. BANKS  
WHAT DOES THAT ENTAIL?  
FACING TESTS OF CHARACTER  
I ALWAYS SEEM TO FAIL"**

- Mrs. Banks

**STEP THREE:** Below find some important events from *Mary Poppins*. Ask the "characters" in the "hot seat" questions about how these events affect them.

EVENTS:

- KATIE NANNA LEAVING
- MARY POPPINS ARRIVING
- VISITING MR. BANKS AT THE BANK
- FIGHTING OVER THE TOYS
- PREPARING FOR MRS. BANKS' PARTY
- MISS ANDREW ARRIVING
- MR. BANKS BEING FIRED FROM HIS JOB
- MEETING WITH VON HUSSLER
- MEETING WITH NORTHBROOK

After the class or group has interviewed several "characters," discuss how the characters' viewpoints differed. How were they alike? Was there a point in the story when most of the characters' viewpoints were the same?



#### VARIATIONS:

- Describe *Mary Poppins* and the other characters in the show: write down 10 adjectives describing *Mary* and the other characters, then use your adjectives to write a paragraph description of each character. How can your descriptions help inform your improvisations?
- Instead of acting out the characters' viewpoints, write about them in diary entries.
- How would the characters respond to events in your life? How would they respond to current events happening today?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will write in response to literature. ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will use literary devices to enhance style and tone. THEATRE: Student will recognize and create a variety of vivid characters in improvisation, scenework and plays

WHO  
WHAT  
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WHEN  
WHY

# WHO?

“When will you learn to look past what you see?”



## >> First Impressions

- Mary Poppins

### LOOK BENEATH THE SURFACE TO SEE THE REAL PERSON UNDERNEATH!

When Jane first meets Bert in *Mary Poppins*, the musical, she is disgusted by his outer appearance, his dirty face and raggedy clothes. Later in the musical, she and Michael are able to look beyond Bert’s exterior and see the good person beneath his shabby clothes.

Theatre has many first impressions. When the curtain opens, we see the set and lights, and we hear the music. We then “meet” the characters and make first impressions of their personalities. As the show continues, we learn more about the characters and either change our opinions or reaffirm what we first thought.

What were your first impressions of the characters in *Mary Poppins*? Did your opinion change throughout the show? Consider what happened to change your opinion.

Below write one sentence describing your first impression of the characters in *Mary Poppins*. Then write one sentence describing if your impression changed as you learned more:

### FIRST IMPRESSION

### FINAL OPINION

BERT

MARY POPPINS

JANE & MICHAEL

MRS. BANKS

MR. BANKS

MISS ANDREW



#### VARIATIONS:

- You’ve recorded your own first impressions of the characters and how they change. Describe the characters’ first impressions of each other and how they change throughout the story.
- Consider a time in your life when your first impression was wrong.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will provide details of fictional character; ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will write in response to literature; ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Uses a variety of techniques to convey a personal style and voice (e.g., stream of consciousness, multiple viewpoints)

“ IF YOU REACH FOR THE STARS  
ALL YOU GET ARE THE STARS  
BUT WE’VE FOUND A WHOLE NEW SPIN  
IF YOU REACH FOR THE HEAVENS  
YOU GET THE STARS THROWN IN ”

- Mary Poppins

WHO  
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# WHAT?

## >> What Happens in *Mary Poppins*?

**Get up on your feet and jump into *Mary Poppins*’ story!** Break your class or group into smaller groups of 2 or 3 people. Each group can choose or be assigned one of the events in *Mary Poppins* (to refresh your memory, check out the plot summary on pages 4 and 5).

**Create an emotional portrait:** Using gestures, facial expressions and body language – but no words – express the emotions of your event from *Mary Poppins*. You can even use sounds – but no words! Can the audience guess what event you are portraying?

**Create a tableau:** Create a tableau, or frozen moment in time, from your event – with no words. Can the audience guess what event you are trying to portray?

**Create an improvisation:** Each group will have two minutes to improvise its events from *Mary Poppins* with full use of language, facial expression, gesture and body language. Don’t worry about recreating lines from the musical – the idea is to reveal the emotions behind that moment in the story to your audience.

**Hire a director:** After the initial round of improvisations, a director can be assigned to each scene. Another student joins the group. It will be his or her job to lead the scene, advising the actors on the best way to make the story clear for the audience.

**Hire a playwright:** Assign one student to be the playwright. Another student joins the group; it’s her or his job to write out the lines after the improvisations in proper dramatic format, complete with character names and stage directions.



Jane Carr as Mrs. Brill

### VARIATIONS:

- Perform your improvisations in order of the events in *Mary Poppins*. Are there other scenes or moments necessary to bridge the gaps between your events?
- Take photos of your tableaux and place them in order in a book, creating a picture book of *Mary Poppins*’ story.
- After performing your scene or moment once, switch roles. How does your performance in the first scene inform your new role?



### THE HOT SEAT!

Questions from the “audience” may clarify or redirect a scene. Fellow students might stop a scene in the middle and place characters on the “Hot Seat” to be questioned. During a “Hot Seat” pause, characters can ask each other questions as well.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will narrate a sequence of events; THEATRE: Students will recognize and create a variety of vivid characters in improvisation, scenework and play; ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will write in response to literature; THEATRE: Students will create appropriate physical gestures and facial expressions that serve a character



WHO  
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# WHAT?

>> Create scenes from *Mary Poppins* with statue games!

Anything can happen in *Mary Poppins*; the ordinary mixes with the extraordinary, and a simple walk in the park can become a magical adventure! When Jane and Michael visit the park with Mary Poppins, statues come to life and begin to dance!

A statue is a carved or molded three-dimensional figure, usually of a person or animal. Statues are often created as tributes to famous people from history or mythology. Actors love to use statues as the inspirations for theatre games and exercises because statues represent people in fixed attitudes and emotions, frozen in a moment of time and easy to study. "Statue Games" can help actors break a story down into specific moments and hone acting tools like facial expression, gesture and body language.

**Try these Statue Games with your group or class:**

**Choose a character** from *Mary Poppins* without telling the audience who it is. From your body language, facial expressions or gesture, can the audience guess whom you are a statue of?

**Portray a character** from *Mary Poppins* using only your body. Try it with only a facial expression, or only a gesture. After all, statues don't always show the full body.

**Choose another myth**, from any culture, and create a series of tableaux to tell its story.

**Choose a famous statue** such as the Statue of Liberty, the Sphinx of Giza or Rodin's "The Thinker." Recreate the statue's pose as closely as possible. When the teacher or audience says "UNFREEZE," imagine what the statue might say.

“ I've waited for my chance to take a walk on a sunny day for half a century. I thought Mary Poppins would never arrive. ”

– Neleus



**WHO WAS NELEUS?** In Greek mythology, Neleus was the son of the sea god Poseidon and Tyro, a mortal woman. Neleus had a twin brother named Pelias. Like Michael and Jane from *Mary Poppins*, Neleus felt neglected by his parents. His mother abandoned him on a mountain when he was just a baby, and he was raised by a maid.



Michelle Lookadoo, Shekitra Starke, Kathleen Nanni

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS:** Students will provide details of fictional characters; **THEATRE:** Students will recognize and create a variety of vivid characters in improvisation, scenework and plays; **THEATRE:** Students will create appropriate physical gestures and facial expressions that serve a character; **THEATRE:** Students will use non-verbal communication to enhance and support their performances

WHO  
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# WHAT?

“ A FATHER, A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER, A SON  
THE THREADS OF THEIR LIVES ARE ALL RAVELLING UNDONE  
SOMETHING IS NEEDED TO TWIST THEM UP TIGHT  
AS THE STRING YOU MIGHT USE WHEN YOU’RE FLYING A KITE ”

- Bert

## >> What Happens in the Books, Movie, and the the Musical of *Mary Poppins*?

How do different art forms approach the same story? *Mary Poppins* is that rare tale that has appeared in a variety of art forms: books, a live feature film, and now a Broadway stage musical.

### Let's break down what each art form does:

**NOVELS ARE** extended fictional stories created in written form. A novel's story, setting and characters are limited only by the writer's imagination. The written form is a perfect way to describe a character's emotions and thoughts in depth and detail. Time is flexible as writers can leap years, periods and eras. The written form allows the reader to create powerful images in his or her imagination, and lets the reader re-read passages (or the entire book).

**MOVIES ARE** dramatic stories recorded by either film or video. Usually, a live-action film like *Mary Poppins* would be limited by the constraints of human reality, but Walt Disney and his creative staff solved this by combining live-action with animation (moving drawings) and special effects. A movie has a visual component which allows viewers to see into the mind and creativity of the actors and film-makers.

**MUSICALS ARE** live theatrical productions which **interweave** song and story. Unlike a movie which is documented in time and never changes, each performance of a musical is unique. A musical is three-dimensional, and because it's happening live right in front of the audience, anything can happen!



Mark Price as Robertson Ay

**Interweave:** to weave or blend together

How are these art forms different? How are they similar? How do their opportunities and their limitations dictate how the story can be told? What does each medium provide that the others do not? Use this space below to write on the differences and similarities between these three art forms. Use your notes to fill in the Venn Diagram on the next page!

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WHO  
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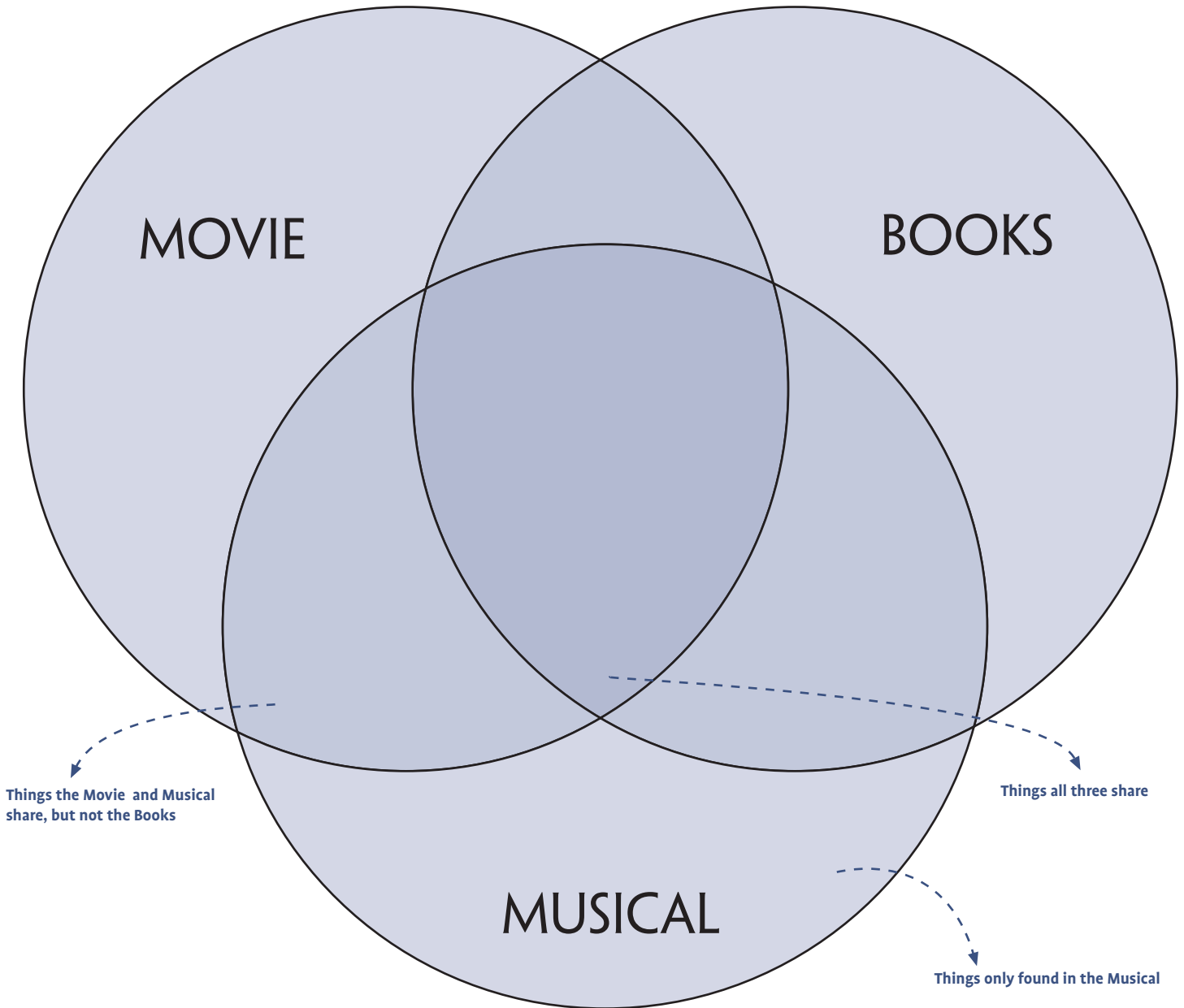
# WHAT?



## >> What Happens in the Books, Movie, and the Musical of *Mary Poppins*?

Try to read the books, see the movie and experience the musical version of *Mary Poppins*. Use the Venn Diagram below to compare these three different versions of the same story. Where are they different? Where are they the same?

Use this diagram as the launching point for a discussion about the opportunities and limitations of each art form. In your opinion, which one tells the story best?



**LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS:** Students will understand how informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions create and communicate meaning; **ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS:** Students will know how the ways that works of art evoke emotions through the use of selected media; **THEATRE:** Students will understand the various settings and reasons for creating dramas and attending theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.

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# WHAT?

## >> Report the News on Cherry Tree Lane



### The Cherry Tree Lane Gazette

Vol. I No.1

*Mary Poppins* takes place in London, England in 1910, a time before text-messaging, the Internet, television or radio. People got their news through newspapers. During the time of *Mary Poppins* there were dozens of newspapers published in London, each one with a different style and viewpoint, read by people from all walks of life.

Create a neighborhood newspaper for the street where the Banks family lives. Study the front page of a modern newspaper to see what your front page might include, such as the date, a motto, weather and a masthead.

Ideas for articles can include:

**CURRENT EVENTS:** Use Library or Internet research to study what was happening in the world in 1910 with such topics as:

- THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY
- CLASS DISTINCTIONS
- THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN SOCIETY
- THE ECONOMY & COMMERCE
- THE PLACE OF BRITAIN IN THE WORLD
- THE PLACE OF THE NANNY IN BRITISH SOCIETY

Choose one factor from the list above (or another of your choosing) and write an article describing how that factor affects the characters in *Mary Poppins*.

**“YET NOW IN OUR MIDST THERE’S WELL, I CAN’T EXPLAIN BUT SOMETHING IS UNSETTLING IN CHERRY TREE LANE ”**

- Mr. Banks

**INTERVIEWS:** Create fictional interviews with different characters from *Mary Poppins*. First, write out a series of questions you would ask one of the characters, then answer the questions in the “voice” of the character (this can also be done in pairs, with one person writing the questions, the other writing the answers in the “voice” of the character. These interviews can be improvised and then transcribed.

Choose an event from the musical and describe it in article format; include quotes from different characters.

You can interview the characters on how they feel about events in the musical, including the arrival of Mary Poppins, the arrival of Miss Andrew, Mr. Banks losing his job, Mr. Banks getting a promotion.



Daniel Jenkins  
as Mr. Banks

WHO  
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# WHAT?

## >> Report the News on Cherry Tree Lane (cont.)



### The Cherry Tree Lane Gazette

Vol. I No.1

#### FEATURE ARTICLES:

**Advice Columns:** Give advice as if from Mary Poppins and Mr. Banks. Split your class in half. One half can write letters to Mary Poppins or Mr. Banks, asking for advice on such topics as: “Chores: Why or Why Not?”, “Is Homework Important?”, “Should Parents play with their Kids?”, “How Should We Treat Our Toys?” The other half might write responses in the voices of Mary Poppins or Mr. Banks.

**Pro and Con:** Use the topics from the Mary Poppins/Mr. Banks advice columns above to create a “Pro and Con” column. Split your class in half. One half will write brief paragraphs about the “pro” aspects of schoolwork, chores around the house, parenting, and teaching. The other half will write from the negative, or “con” position. Place the paragraphs side-by-side for comparison; what can you learn from points on either side?

**Advertisement from Bert:** Describe Bert’s various skills as a sidewalk artist, chimney sweep, one-man band and kite salesman.

**Crossword puzzle:** Develop a puzzle or word search with words and terms from *Mary Poppins*.

**The Winds of Change:** Create a weather report – is it good weather to fly kites? What are the winds of change coming to Cherry Tree Lane?

**Horoscopes:** Imagine what the stars hold for the characters in *Mary Poppins*?

**Comic strips:** Design a comic strip or one-panel comic portraying a scene from *Mary Poppins*.

#### EDITORIALS:

Unlike a newspaper article which is just supposed to present the facts, an editorial expresses the opinion of the editors on important timely matters. Possible ideas for “The Cherry Tree Lane Gazette” editorials:

1. Should Mr. Banks encourage Mrs. Banks to be an actress?
2. Are nannies good for the English home?
3. What is the most important lesson the Banks children learn from Mary Poppins?
4. Your suggestions?



#### VARIATIONS:

Rather than writing a newspaper, use video to create a newscast from Cherry Tree Lane, or recording equipment to create a radio broadcast. If recording equipment is not available, you can simply perform your newscast for your classmates or an audience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will provide details of fictional characters; ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will write in response to literature; THEATRE: Students will understand how informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions create and communicate meaning

WHO  
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# WHAT?

“STRETCH YOUR MIND BEYOND FANTASTIC DREAMS ARE MADE OF STRONG ELASTIC”

- Jane and Michael

## >> What Happens When We Use Our Imagination?

### PLAYING WITH STORIES

#### WHAT HAPPENS? WHERE DID SHE GO?

P.L. Travers said, “I often wonder why people write and ask me to explain this and that. I’ll write back and say that Mary Poppins didn’t explain and neither can I, or neither will I. So many people ask me, ‘Where does she go?’ Well, I say, if the book hasn’t said that, then it’s up to you to find out” (quoted in *Women Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, Random House, 1998).

A story has a beginning, a middle and an end, but a character’s life goes on after the last page, or after the curtain falls. Take up Travers’ challenge. Where DOES Mary Poppins go? What happens after the curtain falls? Write a story describing what happens to the characters after the end of the musical.

#### UPDATE THE STORY

What if the story of *Mary Poppins* happened today? Write your own adaptation of *Mary Poppins*, updating the story to the present (no longer than three pages). How would it change? Use library and Internet resources to research the history of **au pairs** and nannies today. Who might Mary Poppins be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How about Jane and Michael? Mr. Banks, Mrs. Banks, or Bert? Think about the families in your own community – what type of family might she visit, and why?

**Au Pair:** a young foreign visitor, employed to take care of children in exchange for room and board.

#### CREATE IMAGINARY WORLDS

When Mary Poppins takes Bert and the children into the magical world of the paintings in the park, it’s a leap of imagination. Every time we look at a landscape painting or photo, we might imagine what that world must be like beyond the confines of the picture frame. We imagine what it must be like to be IN the painting or photo.

Study some landscape paintings or drawings. Write a story about what it would be like to be in the painting. Create your own landscape drawings. Now give them to other students in your class or group. They will write about what it must be like to be in your drawing.

#### VARIATIONS:

Adapt your new stories into short, 2-5 minute plays and perform them in front of your class or group



character sketches (Miss Andrew, Bert) by Bob Crowley

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will write a narrative account, such as a short story; ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Student will suggest interpretations of literature; THEATRE: Students will create scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history; VISUAL ARTS: Knows how the qualities and characteristics of art media can be used to enhance communication of experiences and ideas

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# WHAT?



## >> What Happens to Us Every Day Makes Us Who We Are

### CREATE YOUR OWN MUSICAL TALISMAN

Sometimes everyday words just won't do. Think about slang or made-up phrases that only you and your friends share. Everyone should have his/her own special word to help them through hard times.

Richard Sherman, one of the *Mary Poppins* songwriters, said of the song "Supercalifragilisticexpealidocious," "When Mary Poppins takes the children through the chalk drawing from the world of reality into the world of fantasy, we wanted the children to have something to bring back with them, a **talisman**.... As kids, we went to summer camp, and we recalled...a special long word similar to the one used in the film...it gave us a word that no adult had" (quoted in *The Musical World of Walt Disney* by David Tietyen).

Jane and Michael have their special word – now it's your turn to create your own musical talisman!

A **talisman** is a keepsake that is said to have magical powers. Supercalifragilisticexpealidocious is a word-talisman that the Banks children and Mr. Banks use to make themselves feel better.

**STEP ONE!** Think of a singular event in your life, a joyful moment you will always remember. Write a one sentence description of that day or event:

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#### VARIATIONS:

Describe your word to another student or someone else in one sentence

“WHEN TRYING TO EXPRESS ONESELF IT'S FRANKLY QUITE ABSURD TO LEAF THROUGH LENGTHY LEXICONS TO FIND THE PERFECT WORD A LITTLE SPONTANEITY KEEPS CONVERSATIONS KEEN YOU NEED TO FIND A WAY TO SAY PRECISELY WHAT YOU MEAN”

- Mary Poppins

**STEP TWO!** Write down five adjectives or describing words you would use to describe that special moment (try to include at least two multi-syllabic words!)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP THREE!** Now, break up your words. Write them again below, breaking them up between syllables:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
e.g.	won	der	ful	ly	_____	_____
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

**STEP FOUR!** Finally, choose sections of the words you broke up in Step Three and piece them together into one long, special magical word talisman that means something only to you. Every time you say your word, you'll think of that special time in your life.



Ashley Brown

With my umbrella in hand, I always know  
**WHERE I am!** (Turn the page...)



LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will make connections between characters in literary work and events or people in his/her own life: THEATRE: Students will use non-verbal communication to enhance and support their performances

WHO  
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# WHERE?

## >> INFO SHEET: London

In many ways, *Mary Poppins* can be seen as a magical **travelogue** of London in 1910. Throughout the story, we see London's parks, shops, banks, the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, even the city's rooftops! Since *Mary Poppins'* story is so **ingrained** in the city, learning about some of London's landmarks will make seeing *Mary Poppins* a richer experience.

### The Parks:

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, London's neighborhoods were arranged to create a balance between buildings and open, leafy spaces that still exists today. London's industry was growing at a rapid pace, and people of all classes needed places to go to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and reconnect with nature. Most of London's small parks were built during the 1820s. The parks were laid out with larger evergreen trees and shrubs along the outer belt to create a **secluded** feeling. The interior of the parks were set with grass, paths, flowerbeds and statuary.

### St. Paul's Cathedral:

The current St. Paul's Cathedral is actually the fourth to occupy this same site. A Cathedral of St. Paul has looked over London since 604 AD. The Cathedral that towers over the London skyline today was designed by the architect Sir Christopher Wren and built between 1675 and 1710 after the third cathedral had been destroyed in the Great Fire of London. Since the first service took place there in 1697, St. Paul's Cathedral has become a **focal** point for the history of London and England. The funerals of Winston Churchill and the Duke of Wellington took place here; peace services were held here after both World Wars. Millions have visited St. Paul's: to worship, to sit in its peaceful interior, and to feed the birds that still flock its steps.

**Travelogue:** a description of travels  
**Ingrained:** deep rooted, firmly fixed  
**Secluded:** isolated, shut off  
**Focal:** relating to a central point  
**Sweep:** a nickname for a chimney sweep

“All that it takes is a spark then something as plain as a park becomes a wonderland”

- Bert

### The Rooftops:

“NOWHERE IS THERE A MORE 'APPIER CREW THAN THEM'S WOT SINGS, 'CHIM CHIM CHER-EE, CHIM CHER-OO'”  
- Bert

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rooftops of London were the chimney sweeps' kingdom! As long as we have heated our homes with fire, there has been a need to clean out chimneys of soot, and chimney sweeps have always come to the rescue. During the Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, more and more people built tightly packed houses in cities and urban centers. And with houses came chimneys! In 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, many young boys were employed as chimney sweeps because it was easier for them to get inside the chimney. Many became sick and died from this difficult work.

Have you ever heard the phrase “to light a fire under” someone to make them work faster or harder? That comes from the young chimney sweeps - sometimes a young sweep was too scared to go into a chimney, so his boss would light a fire in the fireplace underneath him! Being a chimney sweep was a dangerous job, but an important one. Dirty chimneys could easily cause fires and back up with deadly smoke.

Eventually, the creation of instruments that would allow someone to sweep the chimney without actually being inside allowed older men like the character of Bert to take over the job. In many places in Great Britain, it's still considered good luck to shake hands with a sweep. Chimney sweeps are sometimes hired for weddings so they can shake hands with the bride and groom before the ceremony; in fact, **sweeps** today often make more money at weddings than they do cleaning chimneys!



Library of Congress



WHO  
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# WHERE?

“ALL YOU ‘AVE TO DO IS LOOK ANEW  
THEN YOU’LL UNDERSTAND WHY...  
IT’S A JOLLY HOLIDAY WITH MARY  
MARY MAKES YER HEART SO LIGHT”

– Bert



## >> The Objects Around Us Can Seem Magical If We Let Them

### MAGICAL PROPS

Mary Poppins enables the Banks family to experience the magic in everyday life; in her hands, common objects become infused with magical power. Actors can also work magic on objects in the theatre, called “props.” Short for “properties,” props are objects used by actors on stage that cannot be classified as scenery or costumes (such as keys, glasses, or a book). They are usually held in the hands in some manner or kept on the body. Props can help reveal a character’s status or occupation, or illuminate an important moment in a scene.

By using them again and again in rehearsal, actors endow props with an emotional power for the audience; in an actor’s hands, a stick can become a magical staff, a wooden sword can become a deadly weapon of steel, or a simple bowl can become a family heirloom.

### HOW DID THEY DO THAT?

Theatre artists are problem solvers. The creators of *Mary Poppins* were given many interesting problems to solve, such as: How do you make a nanny fly? How do you make a bed appear out of thin air? How do you bring toys to life? Movie artists can use computerized special effects to create magic, but theatre artists must make the magic happen right in front of a live audience!

There are hundreds of magical special effects in *Mary Poppins*, and just like a magician, we can’t tell you how the “tricks” are done.

When Mary Poppins first comes to the nursery, she reveals a large sheet. Spreading it out on the floor, a bed seems to magically appear beneath the sheet! This is a breathtaking effect, but one that has been a part of theatre since Shakespeare’s day. How do you think they did it?



Write one sentence describing how these ordinary items become extraordinary in *Mary Poppins*:

**The Umbrella:**

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**The Carpet Bag:**

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**The Bottle of Medicine:**

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**The Kite:**

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**The Statues:**

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**The Toys:**

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**The Urn:**

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### VARIATIONS:

- **Write a short story** (not more than 2 pages) about a magical object. First, choose an object that you see or use every day: the more ordinary the better! Hold it in your hand or watch it for a while. What magical properties could it hold? How can it help, or harm, human beings?
- **Create your own** “magical object” prop based on your story.
- **Improvise a short scene** in which you experience your prop’s magical aspects.
- **Before seeing** *Mary Poppins*, think about how you would solve some of the theatrical “problems” in the show, such as making a nanny fly or pulling large items out of a small carpet bag.
- **Make a list** of any other props you remember from *Mary Poppins*. How did the actors instill them with emotional power?
- **Research** the history of stage magic. Discover how the “tricks” in *Mary Poppins* were performed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Identifies and researches cultural, historical, and symbolic clues in dramatic texts; ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Knows that “supernatural helpers” are an archetype found in literary texts; THEATRE: Demonstrate an understanding of the skills required to be a prop master

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## >> Create the World of the Story on Stage!

### IMAGINE THAT... you're a set designer!

It's your job to create the physical world of the play or musical – to show the audience WHERE the story takes place.

ASSIGNMENT: Create a set for one of the following scenes in *Mary Poppins*:

- No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane
- The Park
- The Rooftops
- The Bank

Where do you begin?

#### 1. ORIGINAL SOURCES:

**THE DISNEY FILM:** Watch the 1964 Disney film version of *Mary Poppins*. Take notes as you watch. How do the filmmakers portray the Banks family's home? The Park? The London rooftops? Use your notes to write a paragraph description of how these places appear in the movie.

**P.L. Travers:** Set designer Bob Crowley was influenced by Mary Shepard's illustrations for P.L. Travers' original *Mary Poppins* book.



Illustration by Bob Crowley

“Part of a designer’s job is to have ideas. You present one to the director and if he doesn’t like it, you show up with another and another and another. Sometimes ninety percent of a designer’s work doesn’t appear in the final production. For *Mary Poppins*, we kept looking for new ways to create the magic of the books and the film.”

– Bob Crowley (Sibley & Lassell, 2007)

Here are some examples of how P.L. Travers described the settings in her books. Close your eyes as someone reads these passages to you. What emotions do they evoke? What colors do you see? Patterns? What do you hear? Smell?

**THE PARK:** “Over the Park lay a cloud of sunlight as thick and as golden as syrup. No wind stirred the heavy leaves. The flowers stood up, very still and shiny, as though they were made of metal.

“Down by the Lake the benches were empty. The people who usually sat there had gone home out of the heat. Neleus, the little marble statue, looked down at the placid water. No goldfish flirted a scarlet tail. They were all sitting under the lily leaves – using them as umbrellas.

“The lawns spread out like a green carpet, motionless in the sunlight. Except for a single, rhythmic movement, you might have thought that the whole park was only a painted picture.”  
– from *Mary Poppins in the Park* by P.L. Travers

**NO. 17 CHERRY TREE LANE:** “If you want to find Cherry Tree Lane all you have to do is ask the Policeman at the cross-roads. He will push his helmet slightly to one side, scratch his head thoughtfully, and then he will point his huge white-gloved finger and say: ‘First to your right, second to your left, sharp right again, and you’re there. Good morning.’

“And sure enough, if you follow his directions exactly, you will be there – right in the middle of Cherry Tree Lane, where the houses run down one side and the Park runs down the other and the cherry-trees go dancing right down the middle.”  
– from *Mary Poppins* by P.L. Travers

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## >> Create the World of the Story on Stage! (cont.)

Open your eyes and brainstorm ten adjectives or descriptive words that these passages call to mind for you:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. RESEARCH:

Using library and Internet resources, research Edwardian homes and design. Find five photos (at least one in color) of what real homes, parks and rooftops looked like during Edwardian era London.

For information on these special places, visit these web sites:

#### **Brick and Brass: Edwardian Style**

[www.bricksandbrass.co.uk/deshist/edward/edward.htm](http://www.bricksandbrass.co.uk/deshist/edward/edward.htm)

This web site offers comprehensive information on the architecture, design, and history of houses in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This section presents details of the Edwardian style.

#### **The official site for London parks:**

[www.yourlondon.gov.uk/parks/](http://www.yourlondon.gov.uk/parks/)

#### **Sites about Peter Ellenshaw:**

Peter Ellenshaw created the matte paintings for the 1964 Disney film *Mary Poppins*. When using a matte in a film, certain sections of the scene are blocked out while the live action is filmed. These sections are later replaced by the matte painting. The matte paintings Ellenshaw fashioned for *Mary Poppins* created the illusion that Mary Poppins, Bert and the children are dancing with the chimney sweeps on the Edwardian rooftops!

To see a gallery of Ellenshaw's work, including his work for the *Mary Poppins* movie, visit this website:

[www.piersidegallery.com/artists/ellenshaw/](http://www.piersidegallery.com/artists/ellenshaw/)



Illustration by Bob Crowley

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## >> Create the World of the Story on Stage! (cont.)

### 3. Now, get to work!

Divide your class or group into smaller groups of three to five students. Each team should get a cardboard box to house its diorama/model. Other materials can include:

- Crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- Glue or tape
- Scissors
- Scrap pieces of fabric
- Modeling clay
- Real plants
- Color photos of plants and trees
- Popsicle sticks
- Other materials...be creative!

Combine your descriptive words and your research and, alone or in groups, create a three-dimensional model of what your set might look like.

#### Questions to consider:

What is crucial to convey in this scene?

What does your setting reveal about the scene? What does your setting add to the scene?

Who are the characters in the scene and what are they doing?

Once all the teams are finished, each group should present its model to the class or group. Constructive criticism can be given: how do the models enhance the scene? How might the team change its set design to better tell the story of *Mary Poppins*?



#### VARIATIONS:

After you've created your set design, compare your work with Bob Crowley's vision of No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane in *Mary Poppins*. How are they similar? How are they different? Discuss how Crowley solved the problem of showing both the interior and exterior of the house. How did you solve it?



Inside of No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane by Bob Crowley

Time waits for no one! Time to learn about the **WHEN** of the story!

(Next page to find out...)



Ashley Brown

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## >> In Theatre, Lighting Illustrates Mood as well as Time of Day

**IMAGINE THAT... you're a lighting designer!** It's your job to use light to create times of day or the weather, to show the audience where to look during the scene, and to mirror the emotions or actions of the characters.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Create a **lighting plot** for *Mary Poppins*! Use the set model you created for *Mary Poppins* on page 28 to experiment with lighting effects.

### You'll need:

- 2 or 3 flashlights of varying sizes
- Cellophane sheets of different colors

Use the flashlights shining at different angles and the cellophane creating different color combinations on your set model. Write down descriptions of your experiments:

- 1. Different times of day:** How could you make morning look different from evening?
- 2. Different seasons:** How could you make winter look different from spring?
- 3. Different emotions:** Light can not only show us different times of day or different times of the year, but can also work with the sets and costumes to tell us about the inner lives of the characters. Choose two differing scenes from *Mary Poppins*. How can you use lighting to show the joyful arrival of Mary Poppins compared to Mr. Banks' dreary walk from the bank after he has been fired?

**Lighting Plot:** a blueprint to communicate the lighting design.

**“WHERE THERE'S 'ARDLY NO DAY NOR 'ARDLY NO NIGHT THERE'S THINGS 'ALF IN SHADOWS AND 'ALFWAY IN LIGHT ON THE ROOFTOPS OF LONDON COO, WHAT A SIGHT!”**

-Bert



Michael McCarty and ensemble

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** **THEATRE:** Students will investigate and analyze theatre design components; **THEATRE:** Students will explore the relationship between color and light in the design process; **THEATRE:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the skills required to work as a lighting designer

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“THOUGH YOU’RE JUST A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH, BERT UNDERNEATH YOUR BLOOD IS BLUE”

- Mary Poppins

## >> Characters Are Affected by Their Status

### THE STATUS LADDER

We’ve seen how different viewpoints can change the way we see the world. Something else that can change the way we see the world, and how others see us, is status. Status is a person’s position in society. In Edwardian England, status was pretty much set in stone; your position when you were born was the same throughout your life. But your status can be different depending on whom you relate to: Mary Poppins’ status is high compared to the children (she is their mentor and caregiver) but Mr. Banks can fire her (she is his employee). Think about your own status within the community of your school, and how that can change depending on whom you relate to (fellow students, teachers, administrators, parents).

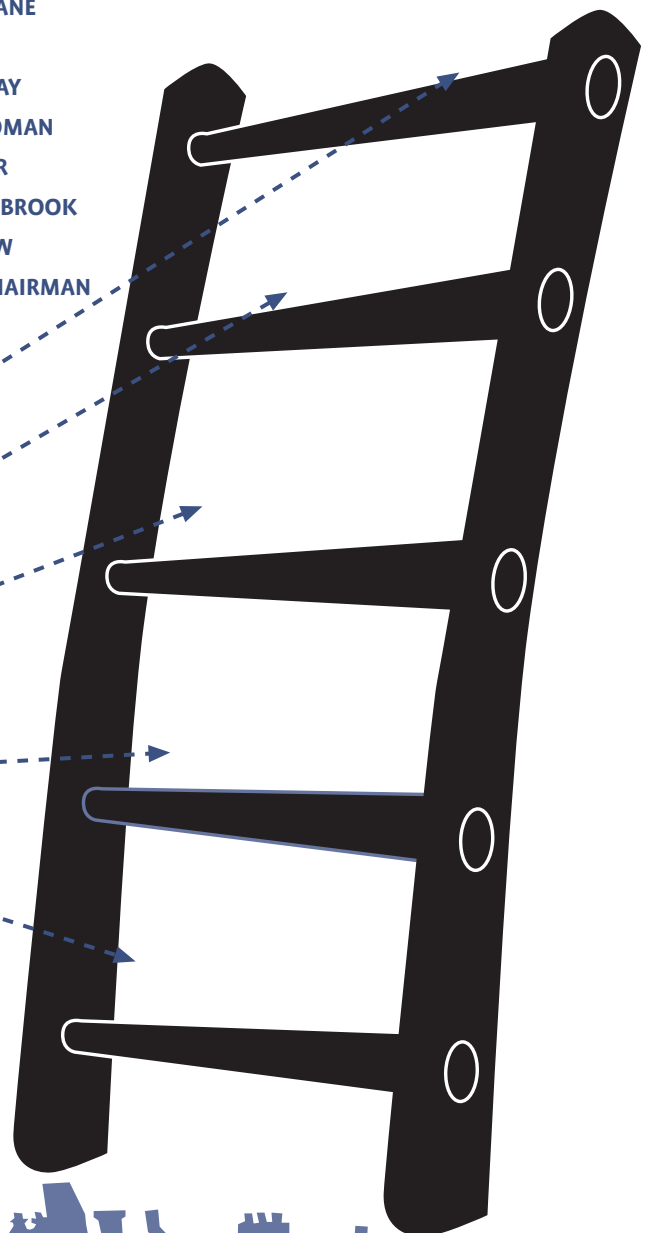
At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English society was built on the vision that everybody had his/her place in the ladder of society, and those on the lower rungs of the ladder served those higher up. As you’ll see, there were even servants to raise the children of the wealthy. It was a time when having a nanny became a status symbol; the middle classes hired nannies even if they couldn’t afford them.

British society during the Edwardian period was divided into the following general classes:

- **Upper class:** Royalty, the nobility, and the very rich
- **Upper-middle class:** The wealthy, bankers, lawyers, doctors, merchants and manufacturers.
- **Lower-middle class:** A growing class in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, consisting of shop keepers, managers, civil servants and small manufacturers.
- **Working class:** chimney sweeps, farmers, factory workers, shop employees, house servants, clerks.
- **Lower class:** The homeless and destitute were still a grave and growing concern during the Edwardian Era.

Place the characters from *Mary Poppins* on this status ladder. Which of the following factors might you use: economics, age, community respect, impact on Michael and Jane? Keep in mind that some names may be on the same rung:

- BERT
- MR. BANKS
- MRS. WINIFRED BANKS
- MICHAEL & JANE
- MRS. BRILL
- ROBERTSON AY
- THE BIRD WOMAN
- VON HUSSLER
- JOHN NORTHBROOK
- MISS ANDREW
- THE BANK CHAIRMAN



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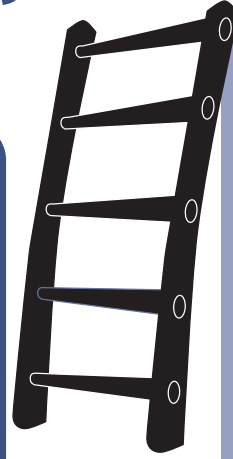
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## >> Characters Are Affected by Their Status (Cont.)



### VARIATIONS:

- Think about how class and status affect the characters and story of *Mary Poppins*. Consider how Mr. Banks' status changes whether he is at work or at home
- How are we affected by class and status today?
- Where did you place Mary Poppins on the ladder? Discuss how Mary Poppins fits on the status ladder. Does she fit at all? Why or why not?
- In *Mary Poppins*, John Northbrook convinces Mr. Banks to invest in his new factory. With what you've learned about the Edwardian Era, consider what Mr. Northbrook might be making in his new factory. Split your class into two groups. One group will brainstorm what could be made in Northbrook's factory. Once that decision is made, the other group will decide if the new factory is worth investing in.



### HOW DO ACTORS USE STATUS TO INFORM THEIR CHARACTER?

Actors often use status as the foundation for acting exercises and improvisation. Whether they know it or not, people react in different ways depending on what they perceive as their "place" in a situation. These gaps in status can create great tragedy or hysterical comedy. As Keith Johnstone writes in his book *Impro* (Routledge, 1987), "Once you understand that every sound and posture implies a status, then you perceive the world quite differently, and the change is probably permanent. In my view, really accomplished actors, directors and playwrights are people with an intuitive understanding of the status transactions that govern human relationships."



## THE HOT SEAT!

Here's a fun theatre game to illustrate the importance of status in defining character:

1. Pass out enough standard playing cards for each member of your class or group. Each member should receive the card, but not look at it, then hold the card, face out, on his or her forehead.
2. The group is given one minute to wander around the classroom. Holding the cards on their foreheads, members cannot see their own cards, but can see everyone else's. Members are instructed that the cards represent the status ladder: face cards (Ace, King, Queen, Jack) represent Upper class; higher number cards (10, 9, 8, 7) represent the Upper-middle class; middle number cards (6, 5, 4) represent the Lower-middle and Working classes and the lowest cards (3, 2) represent the Lower class.
3. Imagine that you're at a party. Class members should react to other members of the group according to their "status" as shown on the card. How do you treat someone from the Upper class? Upper-middle class? Middle class? Lower class?
4. Members should gauge how others are treating them.
5. After several minutes, stop the exercise, but do not look at your cards yet.
6. Members are instructed to line up according to what you think your status is from the reactions of your fellow classmates, with high status at the one end of the line and lowest status at the other.
7. After getting in line, look at your cards. Are you where you thought you should be? Are you surprised at others' reactions? How did you treat other people? Should a person's status matter in terms of how we treat them? Did it in the exercise?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: students will identify and research cultural, historical, and symbolic clues in dramatic texts; HISTORY: students will understand the Industrial Power of Great Britain in the early 20th century; THEATRE: students will assume roles that contribute to the action of dramatizations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and/or history

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## >> Reality Check: Nannies

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, something unique happened in Great Britain. Rather than raising their children themselves, as parents had done for centuries, mothers and fathers from rich and middle class families handed over their children to special caregivers, called “nannies,” who were hired to address childrens’ every need, from food and education to discipline. As in *Mary Poppins*, fathers were expected to work while mothers were expected to entertain guests and lead the staff of servants.

### Why did this happen?

#### “Whether it was a coat, or a child...”

During the Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, both population and wealth dramatically increased in Great Britain. In 1830, the average English family had six or seven children, and this number was even higher for the wealthy. More children created a need, and more money created the means to hire more servants to watch the children. As Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy in his book *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* writes, “If the rich had anything that needed looking after – whether it was a coat or a child – then there was a servant to do it.”

### Ruler of the Nursery

As nannies became more and more popular among the wealthy and middle classes, their power in the household increased. The nursery was their kingdom and they ruled it with a firm hand. The nursery was always removed from the rest of the house; many times, as in *Mary Poppins*, it was on the top floor, or near the servants quarters. Nannies controlled every **aspect** of the child’s life; children would see their parents for only a short amount of time each day. Nannies controlled the child’s clothing, books, food, medicine, and discipline, and so exerted a great deal of influence over the lives and personalities of their charges.

Aspect: part or feature

“A NANNY SHOULD GOVERN  
A NANNY SHOULD RULE”

- Mr. Banks

### “As made my childish days rejoice”

Nannies could be very cruel, like the character of Miss Andrew in *Mary Poppins*. But when nannies were kind, the connection between them and their children could be very close. The writer Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote *Treasure Island* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* wrote about his own nanny in *A Child’s Garden of Verses*:

“And grant it, Heaven, that all who read  
May find as dear a nurse as need,  
And every child who lists my rhyme,  
In the bright, fireside nursery clime  
May hear it in as kind a voice  
As made my childish days rejoice.”

**DID YOU KNOW?** Nannies also passed on stories. Why do you think they’re called “Nursery Rhymes?” Remember, there was no television, no Internet in 1910; although people read books and newspapers, stories told through the oral tradition were still a popular way to pass on morals and traditions. Who might be the storyteller in your family?

### NANNIES TODAY

Nannies are more popular today than ever! In these stressful times when both parents need to work long hours, or single parents raise children, parents are still looking for help in raising and appreciating their kids, and nannies like “Supernanny” Jo Frost are there to help Mom and Dad cope!

There are many different web sites that describe the duties and responsibilities of a modern nanny. Use the Internet to research how different countries define these roles.

### What was Brimstone and Treacle?

Yuck! Mean nannies like the character of Miss Andrew would sometimes give their charges a foul-tasting mixture of sulphur and molasses, originally thought to cure illness, but often used as a punishment for misbehaving children.



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## >> Nanny vs. Nanny: Miss Andrew vs. Mary Poppins in a Fight to the Finish

*Mary Poppins* is also about the battle between two conflicting viewpoints, two philosophies on how to raise children during the Edwardian era: the extremely strict and sometimes cruel ideas of Miss Andrew and the more tolerant, although not lax, approach of Mary Poppins.

**MISS ANDREW** believes that children learn best when they are in extremely structured environments. She believes in strict accordance with rules and discipline.

**MARY POPPINS** believes in showing children their potential by letting them think for themselves and using fun and games to make hard tasks easier.

Split your group into 3 sections. While one section will represent **MARY POPPINS**, another section will represent **MISS ANDREW** and a third will represent the **BANKS FAMILY**.

1. The Banks Family will brainstorm five qualities they believe they need for a nanny:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

2. The groups representing Mary Poppins and Miss Andrew will brainstorm 5 reasons why their philosophy of child-rearing is the best:

**MARY POPPINS:**

**“AND EV’RY TASK YOU UNDERTAKE  
BECOMES A PIECE OF CAKE. A LARK! A SPREE!  
IT’S VERY CLEAR TO SEE THAT A  
SPOONFUL OF SUGAR HELPS THE MEDICINE GO DOWN”**

“My approach best helps children develop into good people because...”

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**MISS ANDREW:**

**“BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE AND CARBOLIC SOAP  
THESE ARE THE TOOLS OF MY TRADE  
WITH SPOONFULS OF SUGAR YOU DON’T HAVE A HOPE  
OF SEEING THAT CHANGES ARE MADE”**

“My approach best teaches children to be disciplined and organized because...”

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Create a debate between Mary Poppins and Miss Andrew. The **BANKS FAMILY** sits in the middle of your classroom, with the **MARY POPPINS** group on one end of the room, and the **MISS ANDREW** group on the other. Taking turns, members of each group will read statements about why they are the best nanny. When each group is finished, the **BANKS FAMILY** group will decide which side has won the debate by deciding which nanny best fulfills their needs.



Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins

Ruth Gottschall as Mrs. Andrew

I never explain! It’s up to you to find out **WHY** the characters act as they do!

(Next page to find out...)



Ashley Brown

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will organize ideas for oral presentation. ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will listen to and understand persuasive messages. **HISTORY:** Analyzes the influences specific ideas and beliefs had on a period of history and specifies how events might have been different in the absence of those ideas and beliefs. **THEATRE:** Recognize and create a variety of vivid characters in improvisation, scenework and plays

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: MUSIC: Students will understand how expressive devices are used in music from diverse genres; THEATRE: Students will understand how dialogue is used to discover, articulate, and justify character motivation; LANGUAGE ARTS: Students will use strategies to enhance listening comprehension (e.g., takes notes; organizes, summarizes, and paraphrases spoken ideas and details)

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## >> Why Do Characters Act the Way They Do?

*Mary Poppins* is an example of musical theatre. The essence of musical theatre is the merging of song and story, where songs help to move the story forward and let us know more about the characters' thoughts, feelings and/or actions. As Robert Sherman said, "Writing songs for *Mary Poppins* [the movie] was a songwriter's dream. Each song we did had a purpose, a reason for being. Whether it is to build characterization or to carry the action, there is a purpose for each song" (as quoted in *The Musical World of Walt Disney* by David Tietyen (Hal Leonard, 1990)).

Use this chart to write down what we learn about the characters through their songs, and how the songs move the story forward:

**“If a song isn’t necessary to tell the story, it shouldn’t be in the film.”**

- Richard Sherman (Sibley & Lassell, 2007)



### THE HOT SEAT!

Rather than writing these answers down, students can get in the “hot seat” and describe their emotions and thoughts to the class in character.

### CHARACTER/SONG

### INSIGHTS

1. THE COMPANY/“CHERRY TREE LANE”

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. THE BANKS FAMILY/“THE PERFECT NANNY”

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. MARY POPPINS /“PRACTICALLY PERFECT”

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. MRS. BANKS /“BEING MRS. BANKS”

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. MARY POPPINS, BIRD WOMAN/“FEED THE BIRDS”

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. THE COMPANY /“SUPERCALIFRAGILISTICEXPIALIDOCIOUS”

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. THE TOYS /“TEMPER, TEMPER”

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. MISS ANDREW /“BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE”

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. MR. BANKS/“A MAN HAS DREAMS”

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. MARY POPPINS, MRS. BANKS, JANE, MICHAEL/  
“ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN”

10. \_\_\_\_\_

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## >> Dance Can Tell Us About the Characters

### CREATE A DANCE LANGUAGE

The famous modern dance innovator Martha Graham once said, "Throughout time, dance has not changed in one essential function. The function of dance is communication." Dance can show audiences the inner thoughts and emotions of a character, as well as relationships among people.

Cameron Mackintosh saw dance in *Mary Poppins* as a way to recreate the magical animation from the 1964 film: "It was never going to be either possible or desirable to put on the stage the film's brilliant and innovative mix of live action and animation. Once again it was Pamela (Travers) who gave me the clue of how to proceed. Peppered through all her stories and conversations were references to dance, which is the perfect theatrical form to deliver all the magical journeys outside Cherry Tree Lane."

Matthew Bourne, along with Stephen Mear, choreographed *Mary Poppins*. A choreographer creates dances, working with the dancers to shape their movements throughout the playing space. The word choreography comes from two Greek words: "khoros" or "dancing, and "graphia" or writing. So "choreography" is literally dance writing – using dance to tell a story.



Gavin Lee and the Original Broadway Cast



“Cameron has called me a ‘London choreographer’ and he’s right: London is in me.”

– Matthew Bourne, *Mary Poppins* choreographer (Sibley & Lassell, 2007)

**1. Identify moments** in *Mary Poppins* where characters showed the emotions below. What specific dance movements, gestures or body language did the characters use to portray these emotions?

**2. Create your own dance language.** Improvise and record (either through video tape or written descriptions) dance movements for the following emotions. Remember, your goal is to get this emotion across clearly to an audience:

JOY

SADNESS

DESPAIR

WONDER

LONELINESS

ANGER

COURAGE

**3. Choose one of the scenes** from *Mary Poppins* you improvised on page 16. Create a short dance based on the actions and emotions of that scene. Expand your work into a short dance with a beginning, middle and an end based on one of the characters in that scene, using either music from the show or found music. Be sure to show the character's arc of growth through your dance. How does the character change in the scene, and how can you show that through movement?



LEARNING OBJECTIVES: **DANCE:** Students will create a short dance with a beginning, a middle and an end; **DANCE:** Students will identify movement components in a dance phrase; **DANCE:** Students will speculate on the intent of the dance and whether it was successfully communicated; **DANCE:** Students will respond to dance verbally and in writing.

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## >> Dance Can Tell Us About the Characters (Cont.)

### Get up on your feet!

Did you know? Tap dancing evolved from Hardshoe and Irish Clog dancing with the introduction of metal taps around the year 1910 – the same year in which *Mary Poppins* takes place.

In *Mary Poppins*, Bert and the other chimney sweeps tap dance their way across the rooftops of London – and now you can, too!

It's ok if you don't have tap shoes – you can move your feet and make the right sounds in any shoes.

### Try out these steps:

**Shuffle** – Balance on your left foot while you brush the ball of your right foot forward and then back to create two sounds. Step onto your right foot and try it with your left.

**Flap** – Balance on your left foot while you brush the ball of your right foot forward. Instead of brushing it back, put it down. Now your left foot is free to brush forward and step. Try it again!

**Try doing 8 counts of each step** - Alternating feet, or putting your heels down in between each brush or step. Instead of to the front, try shuffling or flapping to the side or back.

### Also in 1910...

Ballroom dancing was popular in England, and the traditional waltz step was modernized.

The waltz is usually a partner dance, but you can do the steps by yourself, too!

Classic waltz music is written in  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter, which means in sets of three beats\*. Therefore, the basic waltz movement is made up of three steps:

1. Step your left foot forward.
2. Step your right foot forward and to the right.
3. Bring your left foot over to meet your right foot.
4. That's it! Repeat, starting with your right foot.

How many different sets of three can YOU create? Can you move in different directions? Can you change the placement of your feet? Be creative!

\*The song "Chim Chim-Cheree" is written in  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter and is a great song with which to practice.



Gavin Lee and Ashley Brown

“ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IF YOU LET IT  
WHAT GOOD IS A WHISTLE  
UNLESS YOU WHET IT”

- The Ensemble



# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## HOW DO THE ARTISTRY AND THEMES OF *Mary Poppins* CONNECT WITH YOUR WORLD?

**Visit a rehearsal:** Visit a working rehearsal of a professional, amateur or school theatrical production. Discuss the work and collaboration needed to mount a production.

**Compare:** P.L. Travers often said that “thinking is linking.” She believed that everything is “linked” or connected: all the stories we have told for thousands of years, and, as she wrote in her essay “Only Connect,” “the individual and the community, the known with the unknown...the past to the present and both to the future.” How is *Mary Poppins* linked to other plays or musicals you have seen? How is it linked to other Disney Broadway shows like *The Lion King*, *TARZAN*® and *The Little Mermaid*? Compare *Mary Poppins* with a musical produced at your school. How were the productions different? How were they similar? Realize that nearly every Broadway performer began his/her career in school productions!

**Compare, pt. 2:** *Mary Poppins* takes place in England. Using online resources, study the theatre from another country and culture. Compare it to theatre you have seen. Compare it to *Mary Poppins*.

**Collaborate:** Ask a local theatre professional to work with your class or group on either a student production or integrating theatre within the curriculum.

**Go to the park:** Like Jane and Michael in *Mary Poppins*, look at the parks in your neighborhood with new eyes. How can you help to make your parks clean? Join an organization that helps to maintain local parks, or begin such an organization yourself with your class or group.

**Tour the New Amsterdam:** Did you know that the New Amsterdam Theatre where *Mary Poppins* is playing was once called the “House Beautiful”? Can you tell why? Take a tour of the New Amsterdam Theatre to find out more about this beautifully restored theatre. Compare the architecture within the New Amsterdam to theatres you have seen, including your school auditorium.

**Think about the ideal teacher:** What are qualities you would like to see in an ideal teacher or role model? What qualities do the special people in your life have that match those of Mary Poppins?

**Meet a real Mary Poppins:** Invite a nanny or an au pair to come to your classroom and speak about his/her training, experience, philosophy, and how he/she became interested in child rearing. Was Mary Poppins, either the original books or movie, an influence on his/her career choice?

**Imagine you are a family looking for a new nanny.** What might you look for in a nanny? Write down 5 characteristics of a good nanny or babysitter. Write a short a short paragraph as a newspaper advertisement for your perfect nanny, just as Jane and Michael did.

**What do you value?:** In *Mary Poppins*, the factory owner John Northbrook tells Michael that money has a monetary worth (for example, one dollar or, in London, one pound) and also a value, that is, what the money can do to help others. What do you value? Friends, family, possessions? Consider the difference between value and worth?



Original Broadway Cast



# RESOURCES

## TEXT

*Mary Poppins* by P.L. Travers (Harcourt Children's Books, 2006)  
*Mary Poppins Comes Back* by P.L. Travers (Harcourt Children's Books, 2006)  
*Mary Poppins Opens the Door* by P.L. Travers (Harcourt Children's Books, 2006)  
*Mary Poppins in the Park* by P.L. Travers (Harcourt Children's Books, 2006)  
*Mary Poppins From A to Z* by P.L. Travers (Harcourt Children's Books, 2006)  
*Mary Poppins in the Kitchen* by P.L. Travers (Harcourt Children's Books, 2006)  
*Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane* by P.L. Travers (Dell, 1983)  
*Mary Poppins and the House Next Door* by P.L. Travers (Delacorte, 1989)

*Mary Poppins, She Wrote: The Life of P. L. Travers* by Valerie Lawson (Simon & Schuster, 2006)

*A Lively Oracle: A Centennial Celebration of P.L. Travers, Creator of Mary Poppins*, edited by Ellen Dooling Draper and Jenny Koralek (Larson Publications, 1999)

*Women Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* (Random House, 1998)

*The Musical World of Walt Disney* by David Tietyen (Hal Leonard, 1990)

*The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* by Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy (Hodder and Stoughton, 1972)

*London: The Biography* by Peter Ackroyd (Doubleday, 2000)

*London: A Social History* by Roy Porter (Harvard University Press, 1998)

*The Baby-sitters Club* series by Ann Martin (Scholastic, 1995)

*Supernanny* by Jo Frost (Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 2005)

*Impro: Improvisation and Theatre* by Keith Johnstone (Theatre Arts, 1987)

*Walking London's Parks and Gardens* by Geoffrey Young (McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books, 1999)

## RECORDINGS

*Mary Poppins Original London Cast* (Walt Disney Records, 2005)

## VIDEO/DVD

*Mary Poppins, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, directed by Robert Stevenson (Walt Disney Video, 2004)

## INTERNET

The official site of Disney on Broadway's *Mary Poppins*: [disney.go.com/theatre/marypoppins/](http://disney.go.com/theatre/marypoppins/)

A park-by-park description of London's greenery: [www.london-sightseeing-guide.com/parks.htm](http://www.london-sightseeing-guide.com/parks.htm)

The London Parks & Gardens Trust, a charitable organization dedicated to preserving London's parks and spreading the word about the history of London's green spaces: [www.londongardenstrust.org/](http://www.londongardenstrust.org/)

A very comprehensive site detailing the history of London, including a great deal of information on the Edwardian Era: [www.storyoflondon.com](http://www.storyoflondon.com)

“ WITH YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND  
YOU’RE A BIRD IN A FLIGHT  
WITH YOUR FIST HOLDING TIGHT  
TO THE STRING OF YOUR KITE ”

- Mr. Banks

### National Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) offers a compendium of K-12 standards and benchmarks adapted from the standards texts of professional subject-area organizations and the standards of selected states.

[www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp](http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp)

### The New York City Department of Education's Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts: Theater

The Blueprint establishes a framework for theater arts education for every child in New York City and acknowledges the collaboration between schools and the New York theater community to forge this plan. [schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/oaospimages/theaterbpfull.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/oaospimages/theaterbpfull.pdf)



## About Disney Theatrical Group:

**DISNEY THEATRICAL GROUP (DTG)** operates under the direction of Thomas Schumacher and is among the world's most successful commercial theatre enterprises. DTG produces or licenses live entertainment events that reach a global annual audience of more than 20 million people in more than 40 countries. DTG produces and licenses Broadway musicals around the world, including *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, Elton John & Tim Rice's *Aida*, *TARZAN*® and *Mary Poppins*, a co-production by Disney and Cameron Mackintosh. Recently, Disney Theatrical Group launched the professional touring stage version of Disney's *High School Musical*, which is scheduled to reach 60 cities through 2008, and coming soon to Broadway is a stage adaptation of the beloved Disney classic, *The Little Mermaid*. DTG also delivers live entertainment around the world through its license to Feld Entertainment, producer of *Disney on Ice* and *Disney Live!*, including *High School Musical: the Ice Tour* and *Playhouse Disney Live!* both of which launch this fall. In addition, DTG licenses musical titles for local school and community theatre productions through Music Theatre International.

## About The New Amsterdam Theatre:

Located in the heart of Times Square in New York City, The New Amsterdam Theatre boasts a rich history and unique architecture. Nicknamed "The House Beautiful," for its art nouveau style, The New Amsterdam was built in 1903 by Abraham Lincoln Erlanger and Marcus Klaw, and designed by architects Herts and Tallant who produced designs for many of New York's featured playhouses.

The theatre opened with its first production in 1903, a production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It went on to host the Ziegfeld follies from 1913 to 1936, which gave birth to many famous Ziegfeld stars including Lillian Lorraine, Marilyn Miller, Fanny Brice, W.C. Fields, Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor and Olive Thomas; whose ghost is rumored to still haunt the theatre. The Great Depression soon took a toll on the theatre business and caused the New Amsterdam to temporarily close and reopen a year later as a movie theatre, playing classic movies for many years following. The first movie premiered at the theatre was none other than Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, starring Mickey Rooney as the character of Puck. In 1993, as part of the 42nd Street Development Project, The Walt Disney Company leased the theatre and completed an unprecedented renovation and overhaul of the landmark building, which became the home for live Disney theatrical productions.

The official reopening of the New Amsterdam Theatre was on April 2, 1997, with a limited engagement of a concert version of *King David* followed by the world premier of the Disney Film *Hercules*. Disney's stage version of *The Lion King* opened in the theatre on November 13, 1997 and became an instant sensation. The New Amsterdam Theatre was the home of *The Lion King* for almost nine years until recently when the show moved to the Minskoff Theatre to make way for the stage production of the Disney classic, *Mary Poppins*. The Tony Award®-winning production of *Mary Poppins* opened on Broadway in November 2006 and continues to thrill audiences at The New Amsterdam Theatre.

The acquisition of the New Amsterdam Theatre by the Walt Disney Company not only returned theatergoers to this historic New York City landmark, but became a turning point in the rejuvenation of Times Square; the hub of the world's entertainment industry. Its beauty and splendor is sure to awe-inspire theatre audiences for years to come.

## Study Guide Created By:

**PETER ROYSTON (Writer)**

**TIM THAYER (Designer)**

**PETER AVERY (Education and Outreach Director)**

**KEN CERNIGLIA (Dramaturg & Literary Manager)**

Additional information about Disney Theatrical Group can be found at [www.disneyonbroadway.com](http://www.disneyonbroadway.com)  
Contact the Education Department at Disney Theatrical Group, ATTN: Education, 1450 Broadway, Suite 300, NY, NY 10018, 212-827-5400



Gavin Lee and the original Broadway cast



Gavin Lee and Ashley Brown

### Song Credits

p. 2, 13, 16, 22, 37 “Anything Can Happen,” p. 9 “Practically Perfect,” p. 14 “Being Mrs. Banks,” p. 20 “Cherry Tree Lane (Reprise),” p. 32 “Cherry Tree Lane Part 1,” p. 33 “Brimstone and Treacle Part 1” Music by George Stiles. Lyrics by Anthony Drewe. © 2005 Wonderland Music Company, Inc. (BMI), Cameron Mackintosh Limited. All Rights Reserved. Lyrics reprinted by permission.

p. 4, 8, 18 “Prologue/Chim Chim Cher-ee,” p. 23 “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,” p. 24, 25, 30 “Jolly Holiday” Music and Lyrics by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman. Additional Music by George Stiles. Additional Lyrics by Anthony Drewe. © 2005 Wonderland Music Company, Inc. (BMI), Cameron Mackintosh Limited. All Rights Reserved. Lyrics reprinted by permission.

p. 24, 29 “Chim Chim Cher-ee (Rooftop Duet),” p. 33 “A Spoonful of Sugar.” p. 38 “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” Music and Lyrics by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman. © 1963 Wonderland Music Company, Inc. (BMI). All Rights Reserved. Lyrics reprinted by permission.

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