



NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS Present:

Disney's MARY POPPINS, JR.

Based on the stories of **P. L. Travers** and the **Walt Disney** film
Music and Lyrics by **Richard M. Sherman** and **Robert B. Sherman**
Book by **Julian Fellowes**
New Songs and Lyrics by **George Styles** and **Anthony Drewe**
Co-Created by **Cameron Mackintosh**
Directed by **Paul Bower**
Choreographed by **Michelle Eiland**

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors' production of *Mary Poppins*. We are offering this study guide as a way to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production and your experience at the theater. Included in this guide are a historical note about the story, a synopsis of the musical, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and curriculum ideas, and some audience protocol reminders. We always enjoy hearing from you and your students and look forward to receiving any pictures, stories, or comments about the production. Thank you for your support of New Mexico Young Actors. We look forward to seeing you at the KiMo!

HISTORICAL NOTE

Pamela Lyndon Travers (1899—1996) published her first in a series of eight books featuring the character Mary Poppins in 1934. The seven books that followed were published between 1935 and 1988. At the urging of his children, Walt Disney sought the rights to produce the Mary Poppins story as a film. After twenty years of discussion and meetings with P. L. Travers, Disney was finally granted the rights and the film premiered in 1964. It was a huge success, winning five out of thirteen Academy Award nominations, and was soon cemented as one of Disney's all-time classics. Original songs such as "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious," "Spoonful of Sugar," the oscar-winning "Chim Chim Cher-ee," and Walt Disney's favorite, "Feed the Birds," continue to be hit musical theater songs today. The story was made into a musical in 2004, where it premiered in London, and then opened on Broadway in 2006, playing 2619 times at the New Amsterdam Theatre. The popularity of the story continues with Disney's 2018 release of the critically-acclaimed, *Mary Poppins Returns*, a sequel to the 1964 film.

MARY POPPINS SYNOPSIS

It is autumn, 1910, in Edwardian England. The family of George Banks is revealed to be in a state of dysfunction. Katie Nanna, the current nanny to Jane and Michael Banks, suddenly quits, much to the dismay of the housekeeper, Mrs. Brill, and the houseboy, Robertson Ay. George Banks enters and sings of the importance of order and discipline in his house. Just as George is dismissing the children's advertisement for a new nanny as foolishness, Mary Poppins magically appears. It's obvious that Mary will be a no-nonsense, albeit whimsical, nanny to the Banks children as George departs for work and Mary is escorted to the nursery.

Bert, the local chimney sweep and friend to Mary, welcomes the kids and Mary to the park. What the kids thought would be a boring walk turns out to be a day filled with color and magic. The trio returns home to No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane to an impatient and distracted George. At the same time, Mrs. Brill is helping Winifred Banks prepare for a party when the clumsy Robertson Ay drops the cake on the floor.

Mary appears, repairs the cake, and teaches the children that in “every job that must be done there is an element of fun.”

After visiting George at his job as a bank investor, the children and Mary take a walk by the town cathedral on their way to Mrs. Corry’s talking shop and meet the local Bird Woman feeding the pigeons. At Mrs. Corry’s shop, everyone enjoys Mary’s creativity with letters as she introduces a new word, Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

Back at the Banks home, George fears he may lose his job over a bad deal and Mary decides to leave the family for a while in order to give them time to heal. Mary has been absent six weeks when the nasty Miss Andrew appears as the new nanny. The children run away from the clutches of Miss Andrew and join Bert for kite flying back in the park. Mary reappears and accompanies Jane and Michael back to Cherry Tree Lane, where she will give Miss Andrew a taste of her own medicine.

Mary and the children find themselves on the rooftop, where they join Bert and his fellow chimney sweeps in an encouraging song. The sweeps deliver a message to George that he is to meet with the bank chairman that evening. Touched by the sentiment of his children and the support of Bert and Mary, George begins to have a change of attitude. He realizes his “bad” deal was made with the consideration of people over profits. Fearing the worst, George meets with the bank chairman and learns that his deal turned out to be a success. He earns a promotion and states that his family will now take priority over his work. Everyone has learned a lesson in what is most important in life and Mary departs for good, having finished her task with the Banks family.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Bert, a chimney sweep and good friend of Mary

George Banks, a banker; father to Jane and Michael

Winifred Banks, mother to Jane and Michael

Jane Banks, high-spirited Banks’ daughter

Michael Banks, excitable Banks’ son

Katie Nanna, the Banks’ fed-up nanny

Mrs. Brill, housekeeper for the Banks family

Robertson Ay, houseboy to the Banks family

Mary Poppins, the new, exciting Banks’ nanny

Bird Woman, an old woman who feeds the birds

Miss Smythe, the bank secretary

Chairman, head of the bank

Von Hussler, shady business owner

John Northbrook, honest businessman

Extras: **Clerks, Sweeps, Park Strollers**

Honeybees, Vagrants

VOCABULARY

The following are some words that are associated with *Mary Poppins*:

Act	Plot	Set	Props	Downstage	Upstage
Director	Producer	Program	Riddance	Sovereign	Paragon
Stalwart	Efficiency	Caliber	Disposition	Spectacles	Domestic
Tidy	Mischievous	Virtue	Patently	Temperamental	Silhouette
Agog	Jaunty	Saunter	Promenade	Busker	Nincompoop
Impertinent	Ledger	Investment	Pounds	Shillings	Pence
Transaction	Adequate	Assess	Tuppence	Ambition	Lexicon
Atrocious	Precocious	Abyss	Halitosis	Rival	Impudent
Brimstone	Treacle	Carbolic	Whingeing	Insolent	Accrue
Destitute	Motley	Larval	Recompense	Superficial	

LESSON IDEAS

Classroom Discussion (Pre-Performance)

1. *How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What did you see?*
2. *What are some of the differences between going to the theater and watching television or going to a movie?*
 - Theater features live on-stage actors. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
 - The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation for the performers is shown by close attention, participation, and applause at the proper times. The success of the production often depends on the audience.
 - The theater is a very special place. Its atmosphere is entirely different from your home, where the television is always available.
 - It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
 - Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they portray.
 - There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes, and of course, the audience add to the total experience.

Curriculum Connections (Pre or Post-Performance)

Language Arts

- Read one or more of the original *Mary Poppins* books by P. L. Travers as a class. How does the musical differ from the story in prose? What are similarities?
- Define metaphor then consider the metaphors in *Mary Poppins*: “A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.” “The threads of their lives are unraveling undone.” “Precision and order, cogs in a wheel.” Ask the students move around the class while interpreting the metaphors, either literally or symbolically. Have the students create physical tableaux to represent the metaphors.
- Investigate etymology, the history of words. The character Mrs. Corry states: “And where do you think words come from in the first place?” before Mary introduces the crazy word, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. Choose a few words from the vocabulary list above and research their etymology.
- Explore the relationship of protagonists and antagonists in classroom stories and draw a comparison to relationships in the musical, such as Mary and Miss Andrew, George and Von Hussler, Mary and Bert, Jane, Michael, and George Banks.
- Write a sequel to the musical. What happens to the Banks family after Mary departs? How long does George stay in his job at the bank? How does the children’s experience with Mary affect them as they grow older?
- *Mary Poppins* is filled with a lot of words that may be unfamiliar to your students, or may no longer be common. Share some of the vocabulary above with your students. Define and spell the terms. Discuss how language changes over time as new words are introduced and old words go out of fashion.

Science

- **Physics:** Explore kite flying as a class. What are the physics involved in keeping a kite in the air? How should a kite be designed in order to fly? Why is spring the best kite-flying season? Take your class on a kite-flying adventure on your school playground.
- **Chemistry:** Mary gives Jane and Michael some sweet liquid that she calls “medicine” after the children are reprimanded by Winifred Banks. Conversely, Miss Andrew threatens to give the children “Brimstone and Treacle” in order to keep them in line. Ask your students to determine what gives medicine a bad taste. Is there a chemical property that makes it unappealing? Define brimstone and treacle. Create some “medicines” as a class experiment using common household drinks and sweeteners, including various combinations of juices, teas, and spices.

Art

- Create a class mural of the musical. Include scenes from the story such as London, the living room at Cherry Tree Lane, and the park.
- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Re-create one of the scenes using clay forms in a box or using cardboard. Label the areas that correspond to the scene in *Mary Poppins*.
- Draw an advertisement or program cover for the musical.
- Design stage scenery for *Mary Poppins* or another story that you would like to see on stage.
- *Mary Poppins* is full of stage magic, such as pulling a long hat stand out of a small bag or perfectly restoring a cake that has fallen onto the ground. Discuss how these tricks might be achieved on stage. What makes a magic trick successful? Why is stage magic necessary in *Mary Poppins*?

Music, Dance, & Film

- Ask the students to identify musical instruments that they heard in the musical. Discuss other instruments that could have been added for greater effect.
- Can you identify any recurring musical themes or motives in the music?
- How did the music express the action or emotion of the story (tempo, volume, range of notes, etc.)?
- Did you hear any incidental music (purely instrumental music that functioned as background music for a scene change)?
- Discuss how dance adds to the storytelling of a musical.
- Schedule a movie day and show all or part of the 1964 Disney film, *Mary Poppins*, or the 2018 release, *Mary Poppins Returns*. Compare and contrast the films and the musical.

Math

- Create a budget for a theatrical production. List all of the expenses involved (set design and materials, professional musicians, lighting design, props, costumes, theater rental, scripts, royalties, etc.). Discuss ways that a theater company might raise money to cover all of the expenses.
- Using a spreadsheet, create a rehearsal schedule for a theatrical production. Discuss how much time it might take for the cast to learn all of the staging and dancing. How many hours a day/week/month does it take to put on a production?

History/Social Studies

- *Mary Poppins* is set in 1910, the Edwardian era in London. King Edward VII was on the throne from 1901 to 1910. Research this era. What were some of the customs and styles of this time period?
- Class Structure in Edwardian England
You may perform the following exercise in order to understand class structure in 1910 London.

- A. Create a social class ladder with the following classes:
 1. Lower Class (the homeless and destitute)

2. Working Class (chimney sweeps, farmers, factory workers)
3. Lower Middle Class (shop keepers, managers, civil servants)
4. Upper Middle Class (wealthy bankers, doctors, lawyers)
5. Upper Class (Royalty, nobility, the very rich)

- B. Label enough name tags for the class with the numbers one through five. Create one number per tag and have an even amount of each number. The number one can represent the highest social class and the number five can represent the lowest social class.
- C. Randomly distribute the tags to each student, asking them to wear the name tag.
- D. Ask the students to walk around the room interacting with one another based on the number and social class they represent.
- E. Pause and switch the number representation. Now the number one represents the lowest social class and the number five represents the highest social class. Allow the class to interact with each other a second time.
- F. Finish the activity with a class discussion. How did you treat each other based on social status? Was anyone comfortable or uncomfortable portraying a particular social class? Analyze the challenges of living in a society with such a clearly defined social structure. What are modern implications?

Variation: Place the name tags on the students' backs so that they do not know what social class they represent.

Theater Etiquette

Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.

- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience while trying to get comfortable in your seat. Lights go out before the curtain goes up and seating is very difficult after that time.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully.
- The KiMo Theatre is a historic building. Please respect and preserve the beauty of the KiMo by not bringing food and beverages (including gum and candy) into the theater. These items are permitted in the lobby only.
- There is no intermission during the performance, which is 75 minutes in duration. Be sure to use the restroom before the performance begins.
- Although you may wish to say something to the actors, you need to hold your thoughts, as you will disturb their concentration.
- Sing or participate if you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.
- Listen to how the music sets the mood and affects your own feelings.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song, dance, or joke.

- Be sure to turn off *all* electronic devices and cell phones. Do not text during the performance. This is very inconsiderate to the performers and distracting to your fellow audience members.

SOURCES

Book

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This study guide was compiled by Billie J. Little, a former Board member of New Mexico Young Actors, Inc., and Paul Bower, Executive Director of NMYA. Some of the curriculum connection ideas provided by Music Theatre International. Copyright 2020. All Rights Reserved.