Study Guide
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Disney and Cameron Mackintosh’s Mary Poppins is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre
As you take your students on the exciting journey into the world of live theatre we hope that you’ll take a moment to help prepare them to make the most of their experience. Unlike movies or television, live theatre offers the thrill of unpredictability.

With the actors present on stage, the audience response becomes an integral part of the performance and the overall experience: the more involved and attentive the audience, the better the show. Please remind your students that they play an important part in the success of the performance.

A FEW REMINDERS...

audience etiquette

BE PROMPT
Give your students plenty of time to arrive, find their seats, and get situated. Have them visit the restrooms before the show begins.

RESPECT OTHERS
Please remind your students that their behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. Live theatre means the actors and the audience are in the same room, and just as the audience can see and hear the performers, the performers can see and hear the audience. Please ask your students to avoid disturbing those around them. Please no talking or unnecessary or disruptive movement during the performance. Also, please remind students that cellphones should be switched off completely. No texting or tweeting, please. When students give their full attention to the action on the stage, they will be rewarded with the best performance possible.

GOOD NOISE, BAD NOISE
Instead of instructing students to remain totally silent, please discuss the difference between appropriate responses (laughter, applause, participation when requested) and inappropriate noise (talking, cell phones, etc).

STAY WITH US
Please do not leave or allow students to leave during the performance except in absolute emergencies. Again, reminding them to use the restrooms before the performance will help eliminate unnecessary disruption.
Dear Educator,

Live theatre is a place for people to gather and experience the joys, triumphs, and sorrows life has to offer.

The Syracuse Stage education department is committed to providing the tools to make learning in and through the arts possible to address varied learning styles and to make connections to curricula and life itself. It is our goal in the education department to maximize the theatre experience for our education partners with experiential learning and in-depth arts programming. Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Lauren Unbekant
Director of Educational Outreach

2016/2017 EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH SPONSORS

Syracuse Stage is committed to providing students with rich theatre experiences that explore and examine what it is to be human. Research shows that children who participate in or are exposed to the arts show higher academic achievement, stronger self-esteem, and improved ability to plan and work toward a future goal.

Many students in our community have their first taste of live theatre through Syracuse Stage’s outreach programs. Last season more than 15,500 students from across New York State attended or participated in the Bank of America Children’s Tour, artsEmerging, the Young Playwrights Festival, the Franklin Project, Young Adult Council, and our Student Matinee Program.

We gratefully acknowledge the corporations and foundations who support our commitment to in-depth arts education for our community.
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 folktales — 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 Grim 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; their 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)).

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”.

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.

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 invisible 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 that lived at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane.

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 mysterious 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 2006 at the age of 96. Her journey was over, but in many ways it had just begun. At the first day of rehearsals for *Mary Poppins* in the West End, 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 already!” (from *Out of the Blue: The Comings and Goings of Mary Poppins* by Brian Sibley).
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 street where hundreds of songwriters worked at their pianos day by day 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 the 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 Magic of Walt Disney by David Tietyen).

George Stiles and Anthony Drewe had admired the Sherman Brothers all their lives. This song writing team had worked together with Cameron Macintosh on the musical Just So Stories. At Macintosh’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 dramatic context. “By the end of the process,” said Richard Sherman, “It was sometimes hard to remember who wrote what and when.”
SYNOPSIS

All is not well at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane in London. The Banks children, Michael and Jane, are misbehaving again and their nanny informs Mr. and Mrs. Banks that it is time to place a newspaper advertisement for someone to replace her. The children write their own ad, and out of the blue, Mary Poppins arrives. She fits their requirements perfectly. She even seems to have a magic about her.

Mary Poppins and Bert, a chimney sweep-sidewalk artist-one-man band-kite-salesman take the Banks children on adventures that transform the streets of London into magical landscapes. But when Mr. Banks has trouble at the bank where he works, he yells at the children, who again misbehave, and Mary Poppins leaves just as mysteriously as she arrived.

The children suffer through the cruelty of Miss Andrew, a very mean nanny until Mary Poppins returns, bringing with her more magic for the kids and for Mr. Banks a new understanding that his family comes first. Now that all is well on Cherry Tree Lane, Mary Poppins leaves to care for another family in need.

P.L. Travers’ many stories about magical nanny Mary Poppins had already entertained millions of children before it found its way to the screen in the beloved 1964 Disney musical film with Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke. Andrews’ Mary Poppins, a good bit sweeter than Travers’ plain and practical nanny, made her a movie star. The stage version, which opened on London’s West End in 2004 and Broadway in 2006, blends songs from the film with new material. With a handful of new characters and a re-worked story, the show recaptures some of the tartness of the original creation without losing any of the charm that made the film so memorable.
**Characters**

**Bert**: A one-man-band, a sidewalk artist, 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 Nana**: The last in a long line of nannies for the Banks children before Mary Poppins arrives, Katie Nana 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 conversation and gingerbread. She knew Mr. George Banks when he was a boy.

**Valentine and 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 making money.

**Miss Andrew**: When Mary Poppins disappears, Mr. Banks calls on Miss Andrew, George Banks’ old nanny. Miss Andrew is cruel and demanding.

**The Bank Chairman**: Mr. Banks’ boss.
During the 19th century and into the 20th 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 children’s 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 in the 18th and 19th centuries, population and wealth dramatically increased in Great Britain. In 1830, the average English family had six 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 Gaythorne-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 popular among the wealthy and middle class, 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.

“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 write 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 that lists my rhyme,
In the bright, fireside nursery clime
May hear in it 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; 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 children.

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 this role.
Report the News on Cherry Tree Lane

Mary Poppins takes place in London, England in 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 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.

CURRENT EVENTS: Use library or internet research to study what was happening in the world during the Victorian age 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 of Mary Poppins.

INTERVIEWS: Create fictional interviews with different characters from Mary Poppins. First write a series of questions you would ask one of the characters, then answer the questions in the “voice” of the character. These interviews can be improvised, then transcribed.
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 subject 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 column above to create a “Pro and Con” column. Split your class in half. One half will write brief paragraphs about the “pro” aspect 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 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 become 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 suggestion?

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.
elements of drama

PLOT
What is the story line? What happened before the play started? What do the characters want? What do they do to achieve their goals? What do they stand to gain/lose?

THEME
What ideas are wrestled with in the play? What questions does the play pose? Does it present an opinion?

CHARACTER
Who are the people in the story? What are their relationships? Why do they do what they do? How does age/status/etc. affect them?

LANGUAGE
What do the characters say? How do they say it? When do they say it?

MUSIC
How do music and sound help to tell the story?

SPECTACLE
How do the elements come together to create the whole performance?

Other Elements: Conflict/Resolution, Action, Improvisation, Non-verbal communication, Staging, Humor, Realism and other styles, Metaphor, Language, Tone, Pattern & Repetition, Emotion, Point of view.

Any piece of theatre comprises multiple art forms. As you explore this production with your students, examine the use of:

WRITING
VISUAL ART/DESIGN
MUSIC/SOUND
DANCE/MOVEMENT

ACTIVITY
At its core, drama is about characters working toward goals and overcoming obstacles. Ask students to use their bodies and voices to create characters who are: very old, very young, very strong, very weak, very tired, very energetic, very cold, very warm. Have their characters interact with others. Give them an objective to fulfill despite environmental obstacles. Later, recap by asking how these obstacles affected their characters and the pursuit of their objectives.

INQUIRY
How are each of these art forms used in this production? Why are they used? How do they help to tell the story?
elements of design

**LINE** can have length, width, texture, direction, and curve. There are five basic varieties: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, and zig-zag.

**SHAPE** is two-dimensional and encloses space. It can be geometric (e.g. squares and circles), man-made, or free-form.

**FORM** is three-dimensional. It encloses space and fills space. It can be geometric (e.g. cubes and cylinders), man-made, or free-form.

**COLOR** has three basic properties: **HUE** is the name of the color (e.g. red, blue, green), **INTENSITY** is the strength of the color (bright or dull), **VALUE** is the range of lightness to darkness.

**TEXTURE** refers to the “feel” of an object’s surface. It can be smooth, rough, soft, etc. Textures may be **ACTUAL** (able to be felt) or **IMPLIED** (suggested visually through the artist’s technique).

**SPACE** is defined and determined by shapes and forms. Positive space is enclosed by shapes and forms, while negative space exists around them.
Sources and Resources:


Mary Poppins Opens the Door 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 Cherry Tree Lane by P.L. Travers (Dell, 1983)


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

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

The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny by Jonathan Gathorn-Hardy (Hodder and Stoughton, 1972)
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
OCTOBER 19 – NOVEMBER 6

DISNEY AND CAMERON MACKINTOSH’S MARY POPPINS
NOVEMBER 26 – JANUARY 8

DISGRACED
JANUARY 25 – FEBRUARY 12

AIN’T MISBEHAVIN’
THE FATS WALLER MUSICAL SHOW
MARCH 1 – 26

HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE
APRIL 5 – 23

DEATHTRAP
MAY 10 – 28