



MARY POPPINS

STUDY GUIDE | 6–8th GRADE



COLORADO SPRINGS

Fine Arts Center

at COLORADO COLLEGE



MARY POPPINS

The ***Fine Arts Center at Colorado College*** is excited to welcome you to the show, ***Mary Poppins***, where you will discover the importance of family, kindness and imagination. Here is a letter from Mary Poppins herself!

Dear Fabulous Theatre Guests,

I'm absolutely delighted you're coming to see Mary Poppins! It's going to be a practically perfect performance filled with music, magic, and maybe even a spoonful of sugar. Before the curtain rises, I have a few important reminders about theatre etiquette—just to keep things running as smooth as a flying umbrella.

Stay seated during the show.

The stage is full of surprises, and you won't want to miss a single moment. If it's an emergency, let a teacher or adult know.

Use the restroom before the show starts.

If nature calls during the performance, try to wait until intermission—unless it's urgent, of course.

Keep the chatter to a minimum.

I love laughter (especially at my clever jokes), but talking to your neighbor during the show can be distracting for everyone—including me!

Applause is encouraged!

When the show ends, clap your heart out. The cast has worked hard, and your cheers mean the world to us.

I can't wait to see your smiling faces in the audience. Let's make it a magical experience for everyone!

**Cheerio,
Mary Poppins**





MARY POPPINS



SYNOPSIS



In the heart of London in 1910, the Banks family is having a tough time. Jane and Michael Banks are two curious and energetic children who keep scaring away their nannies! Their father, Mr. Banks, works at a big bank and believes everything should be neat, proper, and serious. Their mother, Mrs. Banks, used to be an actress and is trying to find her place in the busy world of grown-ups.

Everything changes when a mysterious and magical woman named Mary Poppins arrives with her umbrella and a big bag full of surprises. Mary Poppins isn't just any nanny, she can fly, slide up banisters, and turn chores into games! With the help of her cheerful friend Bert, a jack-of-all-trades, Mary takes Jane and Michael on amazing adventures: jumping into paintings, dancing with chimney sweeps, and learning how to see the world in a whole new way.

As the children explore with Mary, Mr. and Mrs. Banks begin to notice that magic isn't just about tricks, it's about love, kindness, and being together. Mr. Banks learns that being a good father means more than just working hard, and Mrs. Banks discovers her own strength and voice. By the end of the story, the whole Banks family learns that "anything can happen if you let it!"

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS:

- In small groups or as a full class, discuss these questions to start thinking about themes in the show.
- What does kindness look like?
- When was someone kind to you? How did that make you feel?
- How are you kind to others?
- What is something you enjoy doing with your family?
- Who is important to you in your life? Family? Friends? Why are they important to you?
- Have you seen the movie Mary Poppins or read any of the books?
- How might a stage version of Mary Poppins be different than the movie? Can you do things in a movie that you can't do on stage and visa versa?
- What do you like to imagine? Do you like to make up stories?
- How does imagination make something fun?





MARY POPPINS

CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS

Mary Poppins is a magical nanny who arrives just when the Banks family needs her most. She's smart, kind, and can fly with her umbrella! She teaches everyone how to have fun while learning important lessons.

Bert is Mary's cheerful friend who works many jobs—he's a chimney sweep, a painter, and more! He loves to sing, dance, and help Mary bring magic to the world.

Jane Banks is the older Banks child. She's curious, clever, and sometimes a little bossy. She loves adventures and learns a lot from Mary Poppins.

Michael Banks is Jane's younger brother. He's playful, silly, and full of energy. He enjoys going on magical journeys with Mary and Bert.

Mr. Banks is the father of Jane and Michael. He works at a bank and thinks everything should be serious and proper. But he learns that spending time with family is the most important thing of all.

Mrs. Banks is the mother of Jane and Michael. She used to be on stage as an actress and is trying to find her place at home. She loves her children and wants to help her family grow closer.

Mrs. Brill is the cook in the Banks household. She's a bit grumpy but has a good heart and keeps the house running.

Robertson Ay is the houseboy who helps out at the Banks' home. He's clumsy and forgetful, but always tries his best.

Katy Nana is the Banks children's nanny before Mary Poppins arrives. She's tired and frustrated because Jane and Michael are always getting into mischief.

Admiral Boom is a retired navy officer who lives next door to the Banks family. He treats his house like a ship and even sets off fireworks to mark the time!

The Policeman is a kind and helpful officer who tries to keep things in order. He helps bring Jane and Michael home when they wander off.

Miss Lark is a fancy lady who lives next door to the Banks family. She loves her little dog, Willoughby, and treats him like royalty!

The Bird Woman sits on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral and sells birdseed to people passing by. She's gentle and kind, and she reminds everyone—especially the children—that caring for others, even little birds, is an important part of life.





MARY POPPINS

The Park Keeper is in charge of keeping the park neat and tidy. He likes rules and order, and doesn't enjoy too much silliness.

John Northbrook works at the bank with Mr. Banks. He's kind and wants to help people who need money to build things and make their lives better.

Von Hussler is a businessman who wants to make money fast, even if it means being unfair. He tries to convince Mr. Banks to invest in his tricky ideas.

The Bank Chairman is the boss at the bank where Mr. Banks works. He's very serious and wants the bank to make smart choices.

Mrs. Corry owns a magical shop filled with words and surprises! She's colorful, cheerful, and a little mysterious.

KEY THEMES AND VOCABULARY

Importance of Family: Before Mary Poppins arrives at the Banks' house, Mr. Banks is overly concerned with work, Mrs. Banks has little confidence in herself as a mom and a wife, and the children don't believe their parents love them. Through magical adventures and fun lessons, Mary Poppins shows the Banks family how to listen to each other, show kindness and and they learn the importance of being together.

Kindness: Jane and Michael learn that kindness can happen in big and small ways. One of the most magical moments in the play is when the Bird Woman teaches the children to feed the birds. A small gesture of kindness can make a big difference.

Imagination: Mary Poppins teaches the children that with a little imagination, anything is possible! Chores can become games, a walk can be a colorful adventure, and rules can become big dreams. Imagination helps people to learn, grow and connect with one another.

Imagination vs. Conformity: Mary Poppins teaches the children that with a little imagination, anything is possible! Chores can become games, a walk can be a colorful adventure, and rules can become big dreams. Imagination helps people to learn, grow and connect with one another. Mary Poppins challenges the rigid, rule-bound world of the adults by introducing creativity and wonder.

Personal Growth and Self-Discovery: Jane and Michael mature through their adventures, learning empathy, responsibility, and courage. Mrs. Banks reclaims her voice and independence, while Mr. Banks reevaluates his priorities and values.

Social Expectations and Identity: The story subtly critiques societal roles, especially gender roles and class expectations in Edwardian London. Mrs. Banks' struggle between being a wife/mother and her past as an actress reflects the tension between personal identity and social norms.





MARY POPPINS

OTHER FUN AND INTERESTING WORDS YOU WILL ENCOUNTER:

Brimstone and treacle: Medicine commonly used in Victorian times (a clue as to how old Miss Andrew is!). Brimstone is another name for sulphur; treacle is a medicinal mixture used as antidote to poisons, including snakebites.

Cod-liver oil: A supplement high in Vitamins A and D, which comes from the liver of cod fish. Given to children because of Vitamin D's usefulness in preventing rickets, a disease of the bones.

Neleus: A statue in the park. A character from Greek mythology; the son of Poseidon (God of the Sea) and Tyro (a Greek princess).

Plinth: The heavy base used to support a statue.

Rococococious: A play on the word "Rococo," an 18th-century artistic period ("Late Baroque") characterized by its ornateness, elegance, and as Mary Poppins suggests, its flourishes.

Spit-spot: An expression like "chop-chop;" basically, "hurry up."

Sovereign: A supreme ruler, like a king or queen.

PART 2: THE WORLD OF THE PLAY WHAT TO LOOK FOR

SETTING OF MARY POPPINS

Mary Poppins takes place in London, England in the year 1910, during the Edwardian Era. It was a time when people dressed formally, traveled by horse-drawn carriages, and lived without modern technology like phones or computers.

Most of the story happens at the Banks family's home on Cherry Tree Lane. It's a nice house with a nursery, a busy kitchen, and a bit of chaos—especially before Mary Poppins arrives.

Once she does, everything changes. Mary Poppins is a magical nanny who can fly, slide up banisters, and turn chores into games. With her friend Bert, she takes the children on exciting adventures through places like:

- The park, where statues come to life
- A sidewalk painting, which becomes a colorful world
- St. Paul's Cathedral, where the Bird Woman sells birdseed
- The rooftops of London, where chimney sweeps dance under the stars

These settings show how everyday places can become magical with imagination and a little help from Mary Poppins.

The Edwardian Era: The Edwardian Era was from 1901-1910. King Edward VII ruled England. It came right after the Victorian Era and before World War I. People dressed very fancy, rode in horse-drawn carriages, and lived in big houses if they were rich. But not everyone had a lot—many people worked hard and didn't have much money.



MARY POPPINS

DURING THIS TIME:

- Big machines and factories helped make things faster.
- Trains and ships were used to travel and trade.
- Electricity and telephones were becoming more common.
- People cared a lot about manners and how they looked.
- Children started going to school more often, and learning became important.

During the Edwardian period, British society 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 20th century Britain, consisting of
- Shopkeepers, managers, civil servants, and small manufacturers.
- Working class: Chimney sweeps, farmers, factory workers, shop employees,

- House servants, and clerks.
- Lower class: The homeless and destitute, which were a grave and growing
- Concern during the Edwardian era.

Rise of the nanny: During the 19th century and into the early 20th century, something unique happened in Great Britain. Rather than raising their children themselves, 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.

Did you know Mary Poppins was a book, movie and a stage show? The book was first written by P.L. Travers. Mary Poppins’ adventures were written across 8 books in 1933. In 1964, Disney adapted the stories into a movie. In 2004, the story was adapted for the stage by Disney and Macintosh.

About P.L. Travers: P.L. Travers was the author who created Mary Poppins. She was born in Australia in 1899 and later moved to England. Her real name was Helen Lyndon Goff, but she used the name P.L. Travers when she wrote books. She loved stories and had a big imagination. Her books about Mary Poppins became so popular that they were turned into a movie and a stage musical!





MARY POPPINS

PART 3: AFTER THE SHOW

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In small groups or as a full class, discuss these questions after seeing the show.

How did Mary Poppins make a difference in the Banks' family lives? What were they like before she arrived? How did their lives change because of her visit?

- What did Mary Poppins help the family discover?
- Is there someone in your life who has made a difference? How did it make you feel?
- What was Mr. Banks like before Mary Poppins arrived? What was he like afterwards?
- What was Mrs. Banks like before Mary Poppins arrived? What was she like afterwards?
- What were Jane and Michael like before Mary Poppins arrived? What were they like afterwards?
- Both Mary Poppins and Mr. Banks are strict. But how are their approaches different?
- Why does it matter that the Bird Lady feeds the birds?
- What lesson did Jane and Michael learn from the Bird Lady?
- How do you use imagination in your own life? In what ways can you use it more?

- Why did Mary Poppins leave at the end of the story?
- How did the stage version differ from the movie? How was it similar?
- What social norms did you see challenged in this show? Which characters were challenging those norms?
- How did Mary Poppins go against the norm?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Status Game

In this activity, students will explore the classes of the Edwardian Era and be able to identify characters in the show according to their class.

Discuss the various class types from the Edwardian Era. Write each of them down on a piece of paper. Pass one out to each student and tell them not to look at it but to place it on their forehead so that others can see, but not the student themselves. Have students get up and walk around. As they pass by others, encourage them to react to them. How would you treat someone in the upper class, middle class or lower class? If the student themselves starts to understand what class they are, they can start acting like that class.

After several minutes of playing, ask students to place themselves in a line across the room from lowest class to highest, again without looking at their paper. Ask them to justify why they placed themselves there. How were others reacting towards them?



MARY POPPINS

Reveal the papers and allow students to respond to where they placed themselves. Were they correct?

Then, either discuss or print out the characters in Mary Poppins and have students place each one on the spectrum of classes. Why did they choose that spot? What in the story makes you think that? How did other characters respond to them in the show? How did they dress? What did they do for a living?

*Both the Edwardian Era classes and the Mary Poppins character list can be found in this guide.

Let's Go Build A Kite

Much like creating a paper airplane, students will work to design a kite. In the theatre, the kite is rigged, meaning that there are special materials to make it fly. The theatre also does not have wind and rain like the outdoors does. Students are encouraged to think about the elements in the outdoors while creating their kite. What materials do they need? What shape does it need to be? diamond, box, sled, delta.

Think about lift, drag, weight, and thrust.

Lift is the force that pulls an airplane up into the sky. It happens when air moves faster over the top of the wings than underneath. That difference helps the plane rise!

Thrust is the force that pushes the airplane forward. It comes from the engines (or your hand if you're throwing a paper airplane). Without thrust, the plane wouldn't move!

Drag is the force that slows the airplane down. It's caused by air pushing against the plane as it moves. It's like when you walk into the wind—it pushes back!

Weight is the force that pulls the airplane down toward the ground. It's caused by gravity. Planes need enough lift to fight against weight so they can stay in the air.

With pencil, markers and paper, students individually create their own kite.

If time and materials allow, have students create their kite and test it outside on a windy day!

Kindness Letters

Kindness is powerful, as we learned in the show. In this activity, students will reflect on kindness in the show and in their own lives and write a letter of kindness towards another.

Mary Poppins has many demonstrations of kindness. With the class, make a list of all the ways the characters in Mary Poppins or Mary Poppins herself showed kindness. Talk about kindness in their own lives as well.

Write a letter: Is there a teacher or worker in your school who shows kindness on a regular basis? As a full class or individually, write a letter to that person thanking them for what they do. Then deliver the letter!





MARY POPPINS

FURTHER RESOURCES

Mary Poppins Education Series: www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL90E7F7094B88D11F

This 10-part series on YouTube covers everything from the literary inspiration for the Broadway musical, its music, movement, and characters to playing Jane and Michael Banks.

P.L. Travers's Mary Poppins series: Read the books that were the inspiration for the film and Broadway show. The musical was adapted from the first three of the eight books in P.L. Travers's series. Here is a list of them all:

Mary Poppins (1934)

Mary Poppins Comes Back (1935)

Mary Poppins Opens the Door (1943)

Mary Poppins in the Park (1952)

Mary Poppins From A to Z (1962)

Mary Poppins in the Kitchen (1975)

Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane (1982)

Mary Poppins and the House Next Door (1988)



Edwardian Promenade: www.edwardianpromenade.com

Novelist Evangeline Holland has a website dedicated to this era in history, as well as a portal for the popular television shows *Downton Abbey* and *Mr. Selfridge*, which partially take place during this era. Use the search function on the right side of the page to locate specific topics of interest, such as Edwardian women's or men's fashion. The Resources page has a section on Edwardian era-themed films.



