



MARY POPPINS

STUDY GUIDE | 9–12TH 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**





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SYNOPSIS



Set in London, England in 1910, Mary Poppins follows the story of the Banks family, who are struggling to stay connected. Jane and Michael Banks are bright, spirited children whose behavior has driven away a long line of nannies. Their father, Mr. Banks, is a strict and orderly man focused on his career at a prestigious bank, while their mother, Mrs. Banks, a former actress, is searching for purpose within the expectations of domestic life.

Their world is turned upside down with the arrival of Mary Poppins, a mysterious and magical nanny who brings wonder, discipline, and imagination into their home. With her enchanted umbrella and bottomless carpet bag, Mary Poppins introduces the children to a world beyond the walls of Cherry Tree Lane. Alongside her friend Bert, a cheerful and resourceful jack-of-all-trades, she leads Jane and Michael through unforgettable adventures—leaping into sidewalk paintings, dancing across London’s rooftops, and discovering joy in the everyday.

As the children grow through these experiences, their parents begin to change as well. Mr. Banks realizes that being present and emotionally supportive is just as important as providing financial stability. Mrs. Banks rediscovers her confidence and individuality. Through Mary Poppins’ influence, the entire family learns that true magic lies in kindness, imagination, and being together.

By the end of the story, the Banks family is transformed—reminded 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 from the movie?
- What about the book? How is the action in a book different from a movie or the stage version? What freedom does a book give you that the stage or a movie can’t?





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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.

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.





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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.





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

During this time: Mary Poppins is set in London, England, during the year 1910, a period known as the Edwardian Era. This historical backdrop reflects a society steeped in tradition, class divisions, and emerging social change. The city is portrayed as both orderly and bustling, with cobblestone streets, horse-drawn carriages, and iconic landmarks like St. Paul's Cathedral and Big Ben.

The primary location is Cherry Tree Lane, home to the Banks family. Their house is a symbol of upper-middle-class life. It is structured, respectable, but emotionally distant. Inside, the nursery and kitchen serve as key spaces where transformation unfolds, especially after Mary Poppins arrives.

Beyond the home, the story ventures into magical and metaphorical spaces:

- The park, where statues come to life, blurring the line between reality and fantasy
- A sidewalk painting, which becomes a gateway to a whimsical countryside adventure
- London's rooftops, where chimney sweeps dance under the stars, offering a new perspective on the city below





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These settings aren't just physical—they reflect the emotional journey of the characters. As Mary Poppins introduces wonder and imagination, even the most ordinary places become extraordinary, reinforcing the story's central theme: that magic exists wherever you're willing to see it.

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. The Edwardian Era included:

- 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





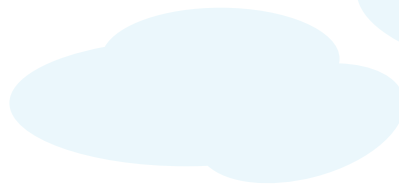
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in 1899 and later moved to England. Her real name was Helen Lyndon Goff, but she used the name P.L. Travers when she wrote books. She loved stories and had a big imagination. Her books about Mary Poppins became so popular that they were turned into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

About the songwriters: Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman are legendary songwriters best known for their work with Disney, including two Oscars for Mary Poppins, over 150 songs for Disney films and theme parks, and the iconic “It’s A Small World.” Their career also spans hits like “You’re 16,” Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and stage productions such as Mary Poppins and Over Here!

About the producer and creator: Cameron Mackintosh has produced more musicals than anyone in history, including Les Misérables, The

Phantom of the Opera, and Cats, which remain global successes. He launched acclaimed new versions of Les Misérables and Phantom for their 25th anniversaries, and his revival of Miss Saigon broke booking records in London. His co-production of Mary Poppins with Disney continues to enchant audiences worldwide, alongside other hits like Little Shop of Horrors and Follies. Knighted in 1996, Mackintosh also owns several historic West End theatres and co-owns Music Theatre International.





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? What is this significance to the themes of the show?
- How do you use imagination in your own life? In what ways can you use it more?
- What can a change in perspective do for your own circumstances?
- 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





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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?

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.

The Art of Adaptation:

In this activity, students will understand the difference in mechanics between stories in novels and stories on stage by adapting their own scene from P.L. Travers book.

Discuss with the class:

What is the difference between stories in books and stories on stage? How are the techniques different when showing character, plot, and conflict? What freedom does a book have that the stage doesn't and visa versa? Discuss different elements of storytelling including narration, dialogue, and dramatic action when exploring how to adapt literature for the stage.

Next, using this excerpt from Mary Poppins by P.L. Travers below, have students write a script format, adapting it from the text. What parts do they need to turn into stage directions? What does a script look like?

When finished, have them act out each other's scripts and see if they understand what is happening in the scene. Did the adaptation translate? What did they keep? What did they take out?

MARY POPPINS EXCERPT:

Then the shape, tossed and bent under the wind, lifted the latch of the gate, and they could see that it belonged to a woman, who was holding her hat on with one hand and carrying a bag in the other. As they watched, Jane and Michael saw a curious thing happen. As soon as the shape was inside the gate the wind seemed to catch her up into the air and fling her at the house. It was as though it had flung her first at the gate, waited for her to open





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it, and then had lifted and thrown her, bag and all, at the front door. The watching children heard a terrific bang, and as she landed the whole house shook.

“How funny! I’ve never seen that happen before,” said Michael.

“Let’s go and see who it is!” said Jane, and taking Michael’s arm she drew him away from the window, through the Nursery and out on to the landing. From there they always had a good view of anything that happened in the front hall.

Presently they saw their Mother coming out of the drawing-room with a visitor following her. Jane and Michael could see that the newcomer had shiny black hair—“Rather like a wooden Dutch doll,” whispered Jane. And that she was thin, with large feet and hands, and small, rather peering blue eyes.

“You’ll find that they are very nice children,” Mrs. Banks was saying.

Michael’s elbow gave a sharp dig at Jane’s ribs.

“And that they give no trouble at all,” continued Mrs. Banks uncertainly, as if she herself didn’t really believe what she was saying. They heard the visitor sniff as though she didn’t either.

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!





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.



