J.M. Barrie’s

**PETER PAN:**

A Study & Play Packet for Students

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for the 2014 UMass Amherst Department of Theater production of *Peter Pan*
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Illustration by Mabel Lucie Attwell, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, 1921
J.M. Barrie’s *PETER PAN*:
Welcome to the Never Land!

Long before a friendly, redhead little boy was made popular by the animated Disney film, there was J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*: a lonely, mysterious orphan who wanted only to escape the sadness and boredom of adulthood by forever remaining a little boy in the magical Never Land. *Peter Pan* is the story of this little boy’s adventures with his band of Lost Boys and the Darling children, whom Peter tempts into flying away from home one evening: Wendy, John, and Michael. Together the children plays games, tell stories, and battle the pirates—especially the sinister Captain James Hook—who hunt them.

Illustration by Mabel Lucie Attwell, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, 1921
More than just a story of endless youth, *Peter Pan* explores the relationships between parents and children, as well as the human tendency to long for the innocence and freedom of childhood.

**Peter Then and Now**

Peter made his first public appearance on January 1st, 1902 with the publication of Barrie’s novel *The Little White Bird* (though Peter himself was only in one chapter). The play *Peter Pan* premiered on the London stage nearly three years later, in 1904. In the following years Barrie wrote an epilogue scene for the play entitled *When Wendy Grew Up*, and published *Peter and Wendy*, a novel adaptation of the play. Peter made his way to Broadway in 1905, and finally to Hollywood in 1924.

As you can see, many movies, plays, and books have told Peter’s story over the years. But one version helped make Peter the star he is today: the 1955 Disney cartoon. Since this beloved film was released, children have come to see Never Land as a safe “playground” and Peter as a harmless, carefree boy--neither of which are true, according to Barrie’s original stories. The Peter of early stage productions and books was an impish, somewhat dangerous character whose moods and loyalties shifted in unpredictable ways; and the Never Land was a wild place of danger and intrigue inhabited by cutthroat—though lovable—characters.
The production you are going to see at UMass Amherst was crafted with special attention to Barrie’s original characters and themes. It promises a wild romp through a dark, shadowy—though by no means less exciting and wondrous—Never Land, with the company of many a strange companion.

**But Who Was Barrie?**

Sir James Matthew Barrie was born on May 9th, 1860 in Scotland, to a family of little income. When Barrie was six years old, his older brother died in an ice-skating accident, remaining forever in their mother’s eyes “the boy who would never grow up.” Perhaps this idea of an eternal child later served as inspiration for Barrie’s famous character, Peter Pan. After his brother’s death, Barrie tried to take over the role of “favorite” in their mother’s life. This relationship certainly helped foster Barrie’s interest in women’s identities—how we understand women’s roles like “mother”, “wife”, “sister”, “leader” and “worker” in society. We can see these questions at work in Barrie’s portrayal of female characters like Mrs. Darling, Wendy, Tiger Lily and even Tinker Bell.

After graduating from the University of Edinburgh, Barrie worked as a journalist, then moved to London to pursue a career as a playwright. He was quite successful, as we see from the enduring legend of his most famous play, *Peter Pan*.

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1 Sources:
BBC Two [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00mr8yj/profiles/j-m-barrie](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00mr8yj/profiles/j-m-barrie)
While living in London, Barrie befriended the Llewelyn Davies family during his frequent walks in Kensington Gardens. The five boys, George, John, Peter, Michael, and Nicholas, became the inspiration for Peter Pan and several of the characters are named after the boys. When Arthur Llewelyn Davies (the boys’ father) passed away, Barrie
financially supported the family, and later—upon Sylvia Llewelyn Davis's death—became guardian of one of the boys.

Barrie himself died on June 19, 1937. In his will he left the copyright for *Peter Pan* to the Great Ormond Street Hospital, which later authorized an official sequel: *Peter Pan in Scarlet* by Geraldine McCaughrean, which was published in 2006.
J.M. Barrie’s *PETER PAN*: Character List

**Peter Pan:** The title character. Peter ran away from home when he was just a baby because he wanted “always to be a little boy and to have fun.” His age is uncertain, but he is young enough to still have all his baby teeth. He is captain of the Lost Boys, the nemesis (enemy) of Captain James Hook, and is very mischievous and competitive.

**The Darling Family**

**Wendy:** The eldest of the three Darling children, Wendy becomes the first-ever Lost Girl, and Peter and the Lost Boys think of her as their mother. Wendy is in love with Peter, though he cannot return her affections. Wendy is a strong, clever, and organized girl, though she seldom has a chance to do more in the Never Land than clean and mend socks. How unfair!

**John:** The middle Darling child, John likes to pretend to be a gentleman and is very concerned with rules and doing things properly. He and Peter never quite see eye-to-eye on life.

**Michael:** The youngest Darling child, Michael is full of energy and enjoys his role as “baby” in the makeshift Lost Boy family.

**Mr. Darling:** The Darling children’s father. He loves to be admired and is somewhat dramatic.

**Mrs. Darling:** The Darling children’s mother. She has a kiss trapped in the corner of her mouth that Wendy can never get, but that Peter, in the novel, flies away with in the end. Perhaps Mrs. Darling once flew away with Peter when she was a little girl. If so, she has forgotten…

**Nana:** The Darling’s nurse. She is a Newfoundland dog and an excellent (if strict) caretaker for the children.

**Liza:** The Darlings’ maid. Often referred to as “the servants” by the Darling family.

**Jane:** Wendy’s daughter.
The Lost Boys

**Tootles**: Tootles is very brave, but also very unlucky, for he often misses adventures. He is humble and sweet.

**Slightly**: Slightly believes he can remember life before becoming a Lost Boy and is consequently rather conceited.

**Nibs**: A happy and self-confident boy.

**Curly**: Curly is so often in trouble that he now takes the blame for everything, even if it is not his fault.

**The Twins**: Peter is uncertain of what twins are, so he decided that The Twins must do everything exactly the same. They must even dream the same dreams!

**Tinker Bell**: Peter’s fairy. Like most fairies, Tink is so small that she can only have one emotion at a time. She is in love with Peter, but Peter does not realize the depth of her feelings until she saves his life.

The Pirates

**Captain James Hook**: The fearsome pirate captain, a proud graduate of Eton College in England. Instead of a right hand, which was cut off in a fight with Peter and fed to the crocodile, he has a terrible iron hook. He is Peter’s mortal enemy. But he does love flowers and sweet music!

**Smee**: a surprisingly happy little man and a “Nonconformist”. He is arguably Hook’s best friend.

**Starkey**: The most “gentlemanly” of the pirates. Starkey was once a schoolteacher. He is now Captain Hook’s first mate, but many of his duties are passed on to Smee out of Hook’s personal preference.

**Bill Jukes**: Who is completely tattooed from head to foot.

**Cecco**: A “good-looking Italian” pirate.

**Noodler**: Whose hands are on backwards.
**Cookson:** The ship’s cook.

**The NeverLanders**

*Tiger Lily:* The NeverLander princess. A bold warrior whose friendship Peter wins when he rescues her from pirates in the lagoon.

*Tiger Lily’s Band:* Tiger Lily’s friends and fellow warriors.

*Mermaids:* Who are beautiful but *not* very pleasant.

*Crocodile:* In a fight with Captain Hook, Peter cut off Hook’s hand and fed it to the crocodile, who enjoyed the taste so much that he has hunted Hook ever since, looking for another taste. Fortunately for Hook, the crocodile also swallowed a clock; the ticking noise warns of the crocodile’s approach. Be sure to listen for the *tick-tock*…
**J.M. Barrie’s PETER PAN:**

**Plot Synopsis**

**Act 1: The Nursery**
The play opens in the nursery of a middle-class London family, the Darlings, around the year 1905. Mr. and Mrs. Darling are on their way out to a party. Once they have left and Wendy, John, and Michael are asleep in bed, Peter Pan sneaks into the nursery with his fairy, Tinker Bell, in order to find the shadow he left behind on one of his previous “visits”. He finds his shadow, but is unable to reattach it to his body. Wendy wakes up and sews Peter’s shadow back on for him. He then persuades her to fly away with him to the Never Land to be a mother for his band of ragtag Lost Boys. Wendy agrees; Peter teaches the Darling children to fly and they leave for the Never Land.

**Act 2: The Never Land**
The Lost Boys anxiously await Peter’s return. Wendy has gotten lost, and jealous Tinker Bell tricks the Lost Boys into shooting her. They do, but she is saved, for the arrow strikes the acorn button that Peter had given her. Meanwhile, Captain Hook and his pirates discover the Lost Boys’ home, but are chased away by the crocodile. Peter and the Boys build a little house around Wendy. When she wakes, they convince her to be their mother.

**Act 3: The Mermaid’s Lagoon**
Some time later, the children are playing in the lagoon. Peter and Wendy watch as the pirates Smee and Starkey place Tiger Lily on Marooner’s Rock to drown. Peter rescues Tiger Lily by imitating Hook’s voice. Hook arrives on the scene; a fight between the Pirates and the Lost Boys ensues. Peter and Wendy are left stranded on the rock. Wendy is able to escape tied to the tail of a kite. Things look bleak for Peter, but he manages to sail off in the nest of a passing Never Bird.

**Act 4: The Home Under The Ground**
Wendy, embracing her role as the Lost Boys’ mother, feeds them an imaginary supper and tells a story about the almost-forgotten Mr. and Mrs. Darling. She becomes worried that if they stay away much longer, their nursery window will be barred against them, as Peter’s was. Wendy decides to return home and the Lost Boys choose to go with her. Only Peter refuses to go. Above ground, Hook’s pirates have defeated Tiger Lily’s band in battle. Hook’s men capture the children; has his pirates take them to the Jolly Roger while Hook himself slips poison into Peter’s medicine. Tinker Bell warns Peter of Hook’s plot and saves him by drinking it herself. Peter appeals to children everywhere to save Tink’s life: What will become of her? He sets off for the ship with the grim vow: “Hook or me this time”.
**Act 5, Scene 1: The Pirate Ship**
Hook and the Pirates are about to make the children walk the plank, but Peter rescues them. The Lost Boys and pirates fight. Hook and Peter confront each other and do battle. Peter and the children are victorious, and Hook is sent straight into the belly of the crocodile.

**Act 5, Scene 2: The Nursery**
The children return to their grieving parents and are welcomed home. The Lost Boys are adopted into the Darling family. Though Wendy and Mrs. Darling beg Peter to stay, he refuses and flies away—but not before promising to come back for Wendy once a year at Spring Cleaning time.

**When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought**
Many years have passed. Wendy is all grown up with a daughter of her own, Jane. Peter returns. Wendy is heartbroken that she is now too old to fly away with Peter to the Never Land, but she allows Jane to go with him for Spring Cleaning.
J.M. Barrie’s *PETER PAN*: Activities and Discussion Topics

**Before Seeing The Show: For Teachers**

- Have your class read the novel *Peter Pan*, or read it with them in class.
- Have the students look up unfamiliar words.
- Have your students make up back-stories for the characters based on details Barrie provides in the book.
- Discuss the concept of protagonists vs. antagonists.
- Discuss the story’s central ideas or themes.

**Discussion Questions For Students**

- One of the show’s major themes is Growing Up: Peter refuses, but the Lost Boys and the Darling children want to. Why do you think Peter doesn’t want to grow up? Are you afraid to grow up, or are you excited? Why? What do you think being a child is all about? What do you think being an adult means? Why is it important to grow up?

- Peter does not like to be touched. Why might this be? Is this rule, something he just made up, or is he really serious?

- Are Hook and his crew entirely bad, or are they good guys who have just had bad breaks (hint: think about Hook’s monologue)? Are Peter and the Lost Boys entirely good? Is anyone in the play entirely good or bad, or do they exist somewhere in between?

- Consider the magical creatures of the Never Land (fairies, mermaids, etc.). Are they good or bad or do they not belong in either category? Why?

- Do any of the characters remind you of people you know? If so, who, and why? Have you seen friends or classmates behaving like Peter, or like the other characters?
• Do you have sympathy for Peter and his choices? That is, in the same situations, would you react the same way (or almost the same way)? Can you relate more to Peter or to the Darling children? Why?

• How did the costumes help distinguish the different characters? In what ways did they help show each character’s personality?

Games & Activities

• ACTING GAMES. Acting is, in the simplest of terms, playing with purpose and making choices. Many of those choices are about movement. So let’s play some acting games to explore those physical choices and how they relate to storytelling:
  - **Freeze!**
    - Two students are “onstage”.
    - The pair improvises a scene. They continue until someone in the audience calls out “Freeze!”
    - The student who called “Freeze!” then “tags out” one of the actors and imitates the position of the actor he or she has replaced. The actors then improvise a new scene based off of the pose (s)he is in.

  - **Party Quirks**
    - One student plays a party host. Three other students, the party “guests”, must each choose a physical quirk or odd character trait (e.g. one person is walking through mud, another is an old lady, another has lost his glasses and can’t see). The host must then guess what each person’s quirk is.

• NEVER-MAPPING. The Never Land is different for each person. Draw or describe what your own Never Land looks like. Where do you live on the island? Who are your friends? Do you have a nemesis? Are the people in your Never Land friends and family from real life, or imagined? What sort of magical creatures might exist in your personal Never Land? Note: This can also be a full-class or small group project. Draw or paint a map!

Research questions for older/advanced students

- The play was written and (is set) in the early 1900s. What was British society like at that time? How is that apparent in the play? What are the major differences between that setting and our own society? Do the
societal differences between then and now make the play no longer relevant, or do they make the play more relevant? How?

- Research the sociological concept known as “Peter Pan Syndrome” -- plenty of material online. Does this seem like a legitimate phenomenon? What might be some examples of the Peter Pan Syndrome in society (hint: think pop culture)? Cite specific scenes from the play or novel to support your argument.

Illustration by F.D. Bedford, *Peter and Wendy*, 1911