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An Educator's Guide To...



# The Velveteen Rabbit

Before Nintendo there was the Jack in the box; before skateboards there was the Skin Horse; and before Toy Story there was *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Return to simpler time in Margery William's poignant story about a nursery filled with toys and their dreams of being real. Join the curious rabbit, the wise, old skin horse and even the rappin' Jack-in-de-box as they sing and dance their way into your heart.

This musical adaptation by Stages Productions features all the nursery magic and tenderness that made *The Velveteen Rabbit* one of the most popular children's stories of all time.



Throughout the study guide, this symbol means that specific Sunshine State Standards are being addressed that directly correlate activities to FCAT testing. As new standards are created and approved by the Florida Department of Education, this may change. The Standards listed here are currently the most up to date. Please visit [www.floridastandards.org](http://www.floridastandards.org) for more information.

## THE THEATRE IS A SPECIAL TREAT

Let us concentrate for a moment on a vital part of youth theatre: the young people. Millions of youngsters attend plays every season, and for some the experience is not particularly memorable or entertaining. The fault may lie with the production – but often the fault lies in the fact that these youngsters have not been properly briefed on appropriate theatre manners. Going to the theatre is not a casual event such as flipping on the TV set, attending a movie or a sports event. Going to the theatre is a SPECIAL OCCASION, and should be attended as such. In presenting theatre manners to young people we take the liberty of putting the do's and don'ts in verse, and hope that concerned adults will find this a more palatable way of introducing these concepts to youngsters.

### MATINEE MANNERS

By PEGGY SIMON TRAKTMAN

The theatre is no place for lunch,  
Who can hear when you go "crunch?"  
We may wear our nicest clothes  
When we go to theatre shows.  
Do not talk to one another  
(That means friends or even mother)  
When you go to see a show,  
Otherwise you'll never know  
What the play is all about  
And you'll make the actors shout  
Just to make themselves be heard.  
So, be still - don't say a word  
Unless an actor asks you to...  
A thing they rarely ever do.  
A program has a special use  
So do not treat it with abuse!  
Its purpose is to let us know  
Exactly who is in the show  
It also tells us other facts  
Of coming shows and future acts.  
Programs make great souvenirs  
Of fun we've had in bygone years  
Keep your hands upon your lap

But if you like something you clap  
Actors like to hear applause.  
If there is cause for this applause.  
If a scene is bright and sunny,  
And you think something is funny  
Laugh- performers love this laughter  
But be quiet from thereafter.  
Don't kick chairs or pound your feet  
And do not stand up in your seat,  
Never wander to and fro -  
Just sit back and watch the show.  
And when the final curtain falls  
The actors take their "curtain calls"  
That means they curtsy or they bow  
And you applaud, which tells them how  
You liked their work and liked the show.  
Then, when the lights come on, you go  
Back up the aisle and walk - don't run  
Out to the lobby, everyone.  
The theatre is a special treat  
And not a place to talk or eat.  
If you behave the proper way  
You really will enjoy the play.

## THE STORYTELLER

### Margery Williams Bianco

In a 1925 essay, "Our Youngest Critics," Margery Williams Bianco claimed to derive great satisfaction in writing for children because they are both "deeply appreciative and highly critical." Although she wrote in several genres and for adolescent and adult audiences as well, her reputation rests almost completely on one book for children, *The Velveteen Rabbit*. (1922) Also called *How Toys Become Real*, the book celebrates the love and loyalty of a child for his stuffed rabbit and the idea that only through love can people become truly alive.

Born in London on July 22, 1881, Margery Williams was introduced to literature at an early age by her father, a barrister and distinguished classical scholar. Margery Williams later said, "My father believed children should be taught to read early and then have no regular teaching until they were ten years old. My favorite book in my father's library was Wood's *Natural History* in three big green volumes, and I knew every reptile, bird and beast in those volumes before I knew the multiplication table."

Margery Williams married Francesco Bianco in 1904 and together they had a son, Cecco and a daughter Pamela. The Bianco family lived in Turin, Italy until 1921 when they settled in the United States. She wrote more than 25 stories over the next 23 years but none more popular or endearing as *The Velveteen Rabbit* which was published in 1922.

Bianco died on September 4, 1944, after an illness lasting only three days. Although some present-day critics consider Bianco's writing dated, many praise her storytelling abilities and her insight into the child's mind. Her writing is a product of a time when children's literature presented an ethos that many children and critics find unrealistic today, an ethos combining love, beauty, health, and the natural goodness of the child's world views. In this sense her writing represents the end of an era. There is more to her work, however, for important insights are revealed through Bianco's acceptance of the aesthetic perceptions and imagination of a child.

Creating a story that children will like results from seeing the world from a child's perspective, and that is what Bianco was able to accomplish. The purity of her childlike vision is frequently praised by critics. She is often compared to Hans Christian Andersen for her skill as a prose stylist, combining humor, charm, poignancy, and wisdom in clear stories. And though her work is sometimes seen as overly sentimental today, it is often praised for its honest presentation of the viewpoint of a child.

## THE MESSAGE

From Dr. Sheldon Cashdan's critically acclaimed book:

### *The Witch Must Die: How Fairy Tales Shape Our Lives*

In Margery Williams's classic children's story *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a young boy has a strong attachment to one of his playthings, a stuffed rabbit. Cooped up in his room during the course of a protracted bout with scarlet fever, he turns to the Velveteen Rabbit for comfort and companionship but is forced to give up the toy for hygienic reasons: his doctor fears the Rabbit may harbor scarlet fever germs and orders it destroyed. The stuffed animal is relegated to the trash heap, but it continues to occupy a cherished position in the child's emotional life and is treasured long after he gets better.

One of the compelling features of *The Velveteen Rabbit* is that it is told from the perspective of the Rabbit, thus offering insight into the emotional significance that transitional objects have for their owners. Early in the story, The Rabbit engages another plaything in the nursery, the Skin Horse, in a discussion about what it means to be real.

*"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buss inside you and a stick-out handle?"*

*"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL."*

In reading Williams's story, it is obvious that "Real" has two meanings. On the one hand, it connotes being alive, being part of living, breathing objects. The other meaning – the one the Skin Horse seems to have in mind – has to do with being cherished and valued. The Skin Horse confesses that he is "Real" because at one time in his life he was loved by the boy's uncle. The fact that he lives in a nursery rather than a pasture doesn't alter this. This is the meaning of "Real" that the Rabbit comes to realize is important.

*Weeks passed, and the little Rabbit grew very old and shabby, but the Boy loved him just as much. He loved him so hard that he loved all his whiskers off, and the pink lining to his ears turned gray, and his brown spots faded. He even began to lose his shape, and he scarcely looked like a rabbit any more except to the Boy. To him he was always beautiful, and that was all that the little Rabbit cared about. He didn't mind how he looked to other people, because the nursery magic had made him Real, and when you are Real shabbiness doesn't matter.*


The Rabbit's sentiments, a reflection of the boy's sentiments, are shared by all children: a desire to be loved and cared for no matter what. When there is no one who can provide the companionship and affection a child craves, when loneliness is a constant companion, transitional objects take up the slack.


The dynamics that make *The Velveteen Rabbit* resonate in the hearts of children are the same dynamics that drive the plot of *Toy Story*. The Disney film also tells of a boy and his relationship to a transitional object again told from the advantage point of the object. Children who read or listen to fairy tales intuitively recognize the connection between the magic objects in these stories and the transitional objects in their own lives. *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Woody and Buzz Lightyear are merely part of a long line of transitional objects that children cherish and revere.


## THE ACTIVITIES

### BEFORE THE PLAY:


1. Read *The Velveteen Rabbit* to your students. Explain to them that there are many adaptations of this story. The play the students see will not be exactly like the book they have read or the video they have seen. Discuss the differences between the play and book. Upper grades may want to compare and contrast the movie *Toy Story* to the book of *Velveteen Rabbit*.

 **TH.C.1.1.2 (PreK–2)** The student understands how we learn about ourselves, our relationships and our environment through forms of theater (e.g., film, television, plays, and electronic media)

 **TH.E.1.2.2 (3–5)** The student understands the artistic characteristics of various media and the advantages and disadvantages of telling stories through those artistic media.


 **LA.A.2.2.7 (3–5)** The student recognizes the use of comparison and contrast in a text.


2. Ask your students to discuss the difference between television and live theatre. It is important that they know about “theatre etiquette,” or manners. Refer to the poem “Matinee Manners” listed above.

 **TH.E.1.2.3 (3–5)** The student understands theatre as a social function and theatre etiquette as the responsibility of the audience.


3. Have the students learn the following vocabulary words and listen for them during the play. See how many words they can recall and how the characters used them in the context of the play.


aspiration	faithful	legion	reel	surround
bracken	flushed	loathe	safari	trenches
burrow	flustered	mantel	scarcely	Trojan Horse
clockwork	glorious	mechanical	shabby	utilizing
deeds	heroic	military	splendid	vast
difficult	ideal	mysteries	superior	velveteen
ensure		nursery		weary

 **LA.A.1.1.3 (PreK–2)** The student uses knowledge of appropriate grade-, age-, and developmental-level vocabulary in reading.


 **LA.A.1.2.3 (3–5)** The student uses simple strategies to determine meaning and increase vocabulary for reading including the use of prefixes, suffixes, root words, multiple meanings, antonyms, synonyms, and word relationships.

4. Have the students look and listen for patterns during the play. See how many patterns they can recall and how they were used in the context of the play. Encourage students to be aware of patterns that may occur in music, dance, scenery, costume fabric and dialogue. Students may also notice architectural patterns in the theatre.

 **MA.D.1.1.1–(PreK–2)** The student describes a wide variety of classification schemes and patterns related to physical characteristics and sensory attributes, such as rhythm, sound, shapes, colors, numbers, similar objects, and similar events.

 **MA.D.1.2.1–(3–5)** The student describes a wide variety of patterns and relationships through models, such as manipulatives, tables, graphs, and rules using algebraic symbols.


5. Discuss the elements that make *The Velveteen Rabbit* a fairy tale (happened long ago, there is magic in it, characters live happily ever after, etc). Discuss the key story elements such as character, setting, plot, theme and point of view.


 **LA.E.1.1.3–(PreK–2)** The student knows the basic characteristics of fables, stories, and legends.

## AFTER THE PLAY:


### Part I

1. Ask your students to write letters, or draw pictures, to send to the cast of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. What did they like about the play? Who was their favorite character? What did they learn from the story?


 **LA.B.1.1.2 (PreK–2)** The student drafts and revises simple sentences and passages, stories, letters and simple explanations that: express ideas clearly; show an awareness of topic and audience; have a beginning, middle and ending; effectively use common words; have supporting detail; and are in legible printing.


 **LA.B.1.2.3 (3–5)** The student produces final documents that have been edited for: correct spelling; correct use of punctuation, including commas in series, dates, and addresses, and beginning and ending quotation marks; correct capitalization of proper nouns; correct paragraph indentation; correct usage of subject/verb agreement, verb and noun forms, and sentence structure; and correct formatting according to instructions.


2. Have the students choose their favorite scenes from *The Velveteen Rabbit* and act them out for one another. Be creative by assigning a director, actors, prompter and by making and using props and scenery.


 **TH.A.1.2.1 (PreK–5)** The student creates imagined characters, relationships, and environments, using basic acting skills (e.g., breath control, diction, concentration, and control of isolated body parts).

3. The better children are at detecting rhymes, the quicker and more successful is their reading progress. "When children rhyme, it really draws attention to the fact that words have parts," according to Sally Shaywitz, a professor of pediatrics and brain research at Yale University. In Stages Productions adaptation of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, there is a rapping Jack-in-the-box. Have the students listen for the rhymes and word play during the show. Back in class, have them re-create Jack's song or write their own rap or poem.

 **LA.E.2.1.2 (PreK–2)** The student recognizes rhymes, rhythm and patterned structures in children's texts.

 **LA.B.2.1.2 (PreK–2)** The student uses knowledge and experience to tell about experiences or to write for familiar occasions, audiences, and purposes.

 **LA.E.2.2.2 (3–5)** The student recognizes and explains the effects of language, such as sensory words, rhymes, and choice of vocabulary, and story structure, such as patterns, used in children's texts.

 **LA.D.1.2.1 (3–5)** The student understands the nature of language. The student understands that there are patterns and rules in the syntactic structure, symbols, sounds, and meanings conveyed through the English language.

4. Internet fun. Go to the following link for an outstanding Teacher CyberGuide by Michelle Adams. The guide includes language art, reading, writing and creative art activities for all grades.  
<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/velv/velvtg.html>

## Part II

### Relevant Themes :

1. Love
2. Friendship
3. Being alive or real versus being a toy or fake

1. Have the students consider a world without love. Have a group discussion about what that would be like. How would people act? How can love improve things:
  - a. In your classroom?
  - b. In your neighborhood?
  - c. On a global scale?
  
- ✍ **LA.C.1.1.3 (PreK–2)** The student carries on a conversation with another person, seeking answers and further explanations of the other’s ideas through questioning and answering.
  
- ✍ **LA.C.3.2.5 (3–5)** The student participates as a contributor and occasionally acts as a leader in a group discussion
  
2. One of the major themes in the play concerns friendship. Have a conference in your classroom on the value of friendship.
  - a. What qualities do real friends possess
  - b. How was the friendship between the boy and the velveteen rabbit a two way street?
  - c. Why does friendship hurt sometimes? Is it worth it?
  - d. Which characters in The Velveteen Rabbit would make the best friends?
  - e. Ask the students to talk about their favorite toy and what makes it so special.
  
- ✍ **LA.C.1.1.3 (PreK–2)** The student carries on a conversation with another person, seeking answers and further explanations of the other’s ideas through questioning and answering.
  
- ✍ **LA.C.3.2.2 (3–5)** The student asks questions and makes comments and observations to clarify understanding of content, processes and experiences.
  
3. Have the students compare the toys from the boy's nursery to their favorite toys. Discuss the differences and similarities between a toy and something real.
  - a. Why won't Jack-in-D-Box or Lieutenant Lionheart ever be real? Refer to the Skin Horses line about people who break easily or have sharp edges or are more concerned with their own personal glory.
  - b. The moral of the story teaches us that only through love can people become truly alive. Do you agree? Be sure and explore all types of love, not just between people. For instance; the love of country, for the environment or a personal cause.



- c. When The Velveteen Rabbit asks if he is real, the Skin Horse explains; "Generally by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints, and pretty darn ugly." Discuss the concept of physical beauty versus inner beauty. Is it possible that as outer appearance fades, we become more beautiful? (grandparents, etc.)

✍ **LA.E.2.1.1–(PreK–2)** The student uses personal perspective in responding to work of literature, such as relating characters and simple events in a story or biography to people or events in his or her own life.

✍ **LA.E.2.2.3–(3–5)** The student responds to a work of literature by explaining how the motives of the characters or the cause of events compare with those in his or her own life.

## The Art of FCAT

Contributed by Patricia Linder

✍ **Visual and Performing Arts Field Trips provide an excellent source of support for the development of skills necessary for success on the FCAT. We invite you to use these instructional strategies to enhance FCAT preparation through your theatre field trip.**

### Theatre Activities

#### FCAT Cognitive Level 1

Read the story (or play) your field trip performance is based on.

Name the main character.

List all the characters.

Identify the setting.

List the story events in the order they happened.

Describe a character (or setting).

Explain the problem (or conflict) in the story.

Explain how the actors used stage props to tell the story (or develop characterization).

Discuss how the blocking, or positioning of the actors on stage affected the performance.

Discuss how unusual technical elements (light, shadow, sound, etc.) were used in the performance.

Draw a picture of a character.

Illustrate or make a diorama of a scene from the performance.

Draw a poster to advertise the performance.

Work with other students to act out a scene.

Demonstrate how an actor used facial expression to show emotion.

Write a narrative story to summarize the plot of the performance story.

Use a map and/or timeline to locate the setting of the story.

Make a mobile showing events in the story

## FCAT Cognitive Level II

Would the main character make a good friend? Write an expository essay explaining why or why not. Create a graph that records performance data such as: female characters, male characters, animal characters or number of characters in each scene, etc.

Compare/Contrast a character to someone you know or compare/contrast the setting to a different location or time.

Solve a special effects mystery. Use words or pictures to explain how “special effects” (Lighting, smoke, sound effects) were created.

Image the story in a different time or place. Design sets or costumes for the new setting.

You’re the director. Plan the performance of a scene in your classroom. Include the cast of characters, staging area, and ideas for costumes, scenery, and props in your plan.

Create a new ending to the story.

Did you enjoy the performance? Write a persuasive essay convincing a friend to go see this production. Write a letter to the production company nominating a performer for a “Best Actor Award.” Explain why your nominee should win the award.

Create a rubric to rate the performance. Decide on criteria for judging: Sets, Costumes, Acting, Lighting, Special Effects, Overall Performance, etc.

## THE PRODUCER

**STAGES PRODUCTIONS** is a professional theatre ensemble that specializes in bringing classic fairy tales to over 150,000 young people each year throughout the Southeast.

STAGES' show credits include critically acclaimed performances of: *Cinderella*, *Let Freedom Sing*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* as well as a series of Green shows that teach water conservation, recycling and natural disaster preparedness. Be sure to join us for our 24<sup>th</sup> season featuring *Mother Goose*, *Santa’s Holiday Revue*, *School House Rock*, *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *The Ugly Duckling*.

STAGES PRODUCTIONS is dedicated to making drama an integral part of education, and lesson plans help incorporate these plays into the student’s curriculum. Thank you for supporting this mission by choosing a STAGES PRODUCTIONS play!

## THE REFERENCES

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