Peter Pan and Wendy

Summary brief:

The book opens with the proclamation: "All children, except one, grow up." The narrator does not specify who this lone exception is, and it isn't until the end of the chapter that readers finally meet him. [Peter Pan](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Peter_Pan) breaks through the "film" that hides his home of Neverland from London. He blows in through the Darling family's third-story window, shedding leaves all over the nursery carpet.

Before that, however, the chapter flashes back through all the key stages in the formation of the Darling family, from [Mr. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mr._Darling)'s proposal of marriage to the births of the three children. In the process, both adults are mocked. Mr. Darling values money highly. Although he is "frightfully proud" of [Wendy Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Wendy_Darling) when she is born, he has to convince himself they can afford to keep her by totaling up every shilling she will cost him in terms of food to doctor's visits. He goes through the same process when his sons John and Michael are born, but it gets harder and harder to justify each additional child's expense. The last-born, Michael, barely squeaks through. Because of the exorbitant amount of milk the children drink, the Darlings are even forced to economize on the cost of keeping a nanny. The children are tended not by a human nurse but by a Newfoundland dog named Nana.

Despite Mr. Darling's exaggerated fears of poverty, the family is thriving—until the title character of the book shows up. "There never was a simpler, happier family until the coming of Peter Pan," the narrator comments.

The narrator states that [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling) first hears of Peter Pan when she was "tidying up her children's minds," a nightly process that the book satirically claims all mothers do. She asks Wendy about him, and Wendy insists that Peter perches at the end of her bed at night and plays to her on his pipes.

One night Mrs. Darling is sitting in the nursery watching her children and falls asleep, dreaming of what she believes is the imaginary world of Neverland. She awakes to find a boy dropping through the window, accompanied by a strange darting light. He is dressed in skeleton leaves. Although he appears to be the same age as Wendy, he still has all his baby teeth.

Analysis brief:

Readers acquainted with [Peter Pan](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Peter_Pan) from Disney cartoons and modern movies may be surprised by the tone of the book. It is sardonic rather than cutesy or sentimental. Peter Pan is not the same sunny figure depicted in popular culture either. The story about him that [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling) recalls from her childhood is that he is a kind of psychopomp, a pediatric version of the Grim Reaper who acts as a guide for the souls of dead children. In readers' first glimpse of him, the narrator notes the unusual fact that Peter still has all his baby teeth. He makes a feral gnash of those teeth, provoked to anger when he sees that Mrs. Darling is grown up. That anger is unsettling, too.

However, Peter is also described as being friendly, and even when the chapter is mocking the responsible characters such as Mr. and Mrs. Darling, it does so without any sense of malice. An example of this is the financial panic [Mr. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mr._Darling) experiences after the birth of his children. He doesn't hate them or want to harm them. He dithers only about whether he can afford to keep them, as if a father has the option of returning his children for a refund.

The one thing that both the Peter Pan of [Barrie](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/author/)'s book and the Peter Pan of popular culture do share is not wanting to grow up. The narrator repeatedly intimates that being a child is superior to being an adult. The depiction of Mr. Darling reveals this. He is ridiculed for placing as high a value on money and respectability as he does the love of his wife and children.

Although the chapter treats her more gently, Mrs. Darling is also used as an example of how limited adults are. Although initially she says she has no idea who Peter Pan is, later she comes to recall stories she had heard him about him as a girl. With the innocent, open, unbiased mind of a child, she had believed that Peter was real. "But now that she was married and quite full of sense she quite doubted whether there was any such person," the narrator relates. The catch is that the sensible adult is wrong and the child she used to be was right. Peter Pan is quite real.

Summary and analysis part by part:

Summary part 1:

When [**Wendy**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) is a little girl of two, she understands from a wistful comment of her mother’s that she will not stay a child her entire life. Like all children she will one day become an adult.

Analysis Part 1:

Wendy’s mother is troubled, if only a little, by the way her child will disappear into an adult, but two-year-old Wendy accepts the inevitability peacefully.

Summary Part 2:

[**Wendy**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy)’s mother, [**Mrs. Darling**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling), is pretty and imaginative, with some mystery about her. The mystery seems to reside especially in one corner of her mouth, where a “[**kiss**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/symbols/the-kiss)” – a sort of dimple –seems to hide itself even from loved ones, including [**Mr. Darling**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mr-darling). Mr. Darling does not mind that he can never have the kiss in the corner of her mouth. Instead he is satisfied to know that his wife respects him – for his knowledge of economics, among other things.

Analysis part 2:

Mrs. Darling’s “kiss” is not an ordinary kiss. The term seems to be an invention of Barrie’s, and it indicates both something visible, the elusive charm of a smile, and something invisible, a kind of childlike freedom from ordinary life. In one corner of her mouth, at least, Mrs. Darling remains free and wild. She kisses her husband—an action of a grownup—with the other corner.