***Peter Pan and Wendy***

***Chapter 11***

***Wendy’s Story***

***Synopsis:***

Wendy begins telling the boys her story, which turns out to be about her parents. She tells them how the Darlings had three children, and after Mr. Darling tied Nana up outside, “all the children flew away . . . to the Neverland, where the lost children are.” As the story progresses, she tells them how “our heroine” knew that Mrs. Darling would leave the window open until the children returned. When the boys implore Wendy to tell them whether the children ever do come home, she jumps forward in time. In the story, Wendy and her brothers are in London, discovering the window to their nursery still open; they fly in and reunite with their parents. 10 As the story ends, Peter’s negative reaction to the story is evident, and he tells Wendy that she is wrong about mothers. He reveals that his own mother never left the window open for him, and when he flew back “moons and moons later,” she had another son. John, Michael, and Wendy decide that they need to go home, and Wendy is taken aback by Peter’s cold response to this decision. The lost boys then turn on Wendy, but Tootles warns that he will kill anyone who “does not behave to Wendy like an English gentleman.” The other boys comply, knowing that Peter would never keep a girl hostage. Afterward, Peter tells Wendy that the redskins will lead her through the woods and that Tinker Bell will lead her across the sea. The boys are sad to see their mother go, which prompts Wendy to suggest—hoping Peter will accept —that the boys come with her and her brother back to London, feeling confident that her parents would adopt all of them. When the boys ask Peter if they can go, he obliges, but soon after, he tells Wendy that he will not be going with them and feigns indifference toward their impending departure. Wendy says that he can perhaps find his mother, but Peter resists, still believing that he does not need one. Peter hastily says goodbye, commanding Tinker Bell to lead the way; however, before the group takes off, they learn that the pirates have attacked the redskins. Knowing a battle is coming, they anxiously look to Peter to protect them.

***Critical Analysis:***

The bedtime story [Wendy Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Wendy_Darling) tells the boys isn't make-believe. It is the story of her own family, and how she and John Darling and Michael Darling came to Neverland, leaving their parents and Nana behind. But five-year-old Michael has started to forget all of this. "I think I knew them," Michael says, the narrator adding, "rather doubtfully."

Suddenly Wendy wonders whether their mother is mourning their absence, so when John and Michael say they want to go home, she agrees. She asks [Peter Pan](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Peter_Pan) to make the arrangements, and is a little upset when he agrees so readily. Neither one wants to show the other how sad they are at the thought of this parting. But in fact Peter is deeply upset and so are the lost boys, who respond by threatening to keep Wendy prisoner rather than lose their mother. Tootles stands up for her, saying that he will attack the first person who does not treat her like an "English gentleman." Peter agrees. "He would keep no girl in the Neverland against her will," he says.

Everyone—except [Tinker Bell](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Tinker_Bell), who is delighted Wendy is leaving—is so sad that Wendy offers to take them all with her, promising that her parents will adopt them all. But Peter refuses to go. That is when they hear the sounds of battle above them. The pirates have come to kidnap Wendy, and [Tiger Lily](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Tiger_Lily)'s tribe is fighting as fiercely as they can to prevent it. Peter grabs his sword and gets ready to join in.

One of [Barrie](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/author/)'s central beliefs about children is that they are heartless. He believes they are so preoccupied with themselves that they rarely if ever stop to consider how their actions might affect others. When Wendy is telling the story of how she and her brothers left their parents behind, she tries to arouse the sympathies of her audience for her "unhappy parents." The lost boys all groan aloud, but only because they know Wendy expects it of them. "They were not really considering the feelings of the unhappy parents one jot," the narrator says.

Even Wendy is not immune to this callous disregard for what her parents might be suffering. She is simply pleased that her story has gotten a good reaction. "Off we skip like the most heartless things in the world," the narrator says. "We have an entirely selfish time." It is only when children want their parents again for something that they remember they exist.

Every character in this chapter demonstrates Barrie's belief in the self-absorbed egocentrism of children. Peter, angry that Wendy is leaving, blames her parents, so he starts hyperventilating on purpose because of his belief that "every time you breathe, a grown-up dies." He cares nothing for Mr. and [Mrs. Darling](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Mrs._Darling)'s heartache at losing their children, and he cares nothing about their lives either.

The lost boys care more about themselves than they do Peter, whom they are ready to abandon the moment Wendy tells them her parents will adopt them. They even put their needs ahead of Wendy's, because for a moment at least, they are ready to keep her with them by force. She may be the same age as they are, but she is their surrogate mother—and as a mother, her desires don't matter as much as theirs. Even Peter's refusal to make her stay if she doesn't want to stems less from genuine concern for her than from his own wounded pride.

But Barrie's insistence that children are heartless is not a condemnation. On the contrary the author found this self-absorption fascinating and even charming. As his biographer Andrew Birkin wrote, Barrie saw this as a sign of childhood's essential innocence. "He exulted in their contradictions: their wayward appetites, their conceit, their ingratitude, their cruelty, juxtaposed with gaiety, warmth and the sudden floods of emotion," Birkin wrote.

One neuropsychologist believes Barrie was way ahead of his time in understanding how children's brains work. Rosalind Ridley is a researcher at Cambridge University in England who has pointed out that Barrie's portrayal of [Peter Pan](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Peter-Pan/character-analysis/#Peter_Pan) shows he fails to comprehend that other people might have thoughts and feelings like his. Psychologists call this "theory of mind," and it's something real children take some time to develop. The difference is that eventually they manage the feat, and Peter never does—at least not in this chapter.

***Summary and analysis part by part:***

***Summary part 1:***

[Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy)’s a story is about a couple called [Mr.](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mr-darling) and [Mrs. Darling](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/mrs-darling), who had three children and a dog named [Nana](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters). When Mr. Darling tied Nana in the yard, the children flew away to Neverland. Wendy asks her listeners to think about the heartbroken parents, but the boys don’t really care about them. The next thing that happens in the story, says Wendy, is that the three children return to their parents’ home, but they are already grown-up. Their parents are there waiting for them with the window open – so “great is a mother’s love.”

***Analysis Part 1:***

Wendy’s great mystery is the apparent ease with which she moves between the roles of the child and the adult. She believes in the love of mothers, and she also believes in the indifference of children – in their right to leave without a word, to stay away for a lifetime, and to receive love in return. In Neverland she is both a child, because she has left, and a mother, because she loves unconditionally.

***Summary Part 2:***

The children are delighted by the story: as the narrator says, it allows them to do as they please in the safety of unconditional love. But [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) hates it. “You are wrong about a mother’s love,” he says to [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy). He once felt about mothers as she did, he says; but when he returned to his old house one day, after many years of adventuring, his window was locked and there was a strange boy in his old bed.

***Analysis part 2:***

Perhaps Peter’s mother did forget him; but it is more likely that Peter stayed away for a hundred years, that it wasn't even his own family that lived there any longer. And even the ideal story about a mother’s love cannot do away with the future. Peter’s heartbreak about mothers may really be a knowledge of endings and a refusal to accept them.

***Summary part 3:***

[Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) is stricken with fear, and she decides that she and her brothers must return home that very night. She is not sure [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan) is right about mothers, but she is afraid nonetheless. Peter is very hurt, but he pretends not to care. He heard that breathing very fast kills grown-ups, so he breathes as fast as he can. The lost boys are sad to lose Wendy, too, and even consider keeping her hostage until the gentle-hearted [Tootles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters) intervenes. Peter politely arranges for the tribe to guide them to shore, and for [Tinker Bell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/tinker-bell) to accompany them back to England.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Though Peter may seem to be acting merely petulant, his position is a tragic one. By telling Wendy that mothers are inconstant and unreliable, Peter has made his own mother of the moment inconstant and unreliable – at least with respect to him. He has been abandoned again. Perhaps Peter’s heartlessness is not a form of inexperience, as it is for other children, but a defense against it.

***Summary part 4:***

When [Wendy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/wendy) sees the boys’ disappointed faces, she invites them to come with her. She assures them that her parents will adopt them all. They joyfully accept the offer – all but [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/peter-pan/characters/peter-pan). Wendy can see that he is miserable, but he pretends to be cheerful, and says goodbye with a chilly politeness. They are just about to go, when aboveground they hear the beginning of an awful battle between the pirates and the tribe.

***Analysis Part 4:***

With each moment, Peter seems more and more adult. What is childlike about forced politeness? The politeness is a form of excellence, but it is an excellence very far from the impulsive self-absorption of a child. It seems at times that Peter did grow up after all, in his own way.