

Text A: Beatrix Potter

The room was neat and clean – just like most girls' rooms, but on several tables there were sketch books and cages with small rabbits, mice, a bird, and a guinea pig. Would your mother allow you to keep so many pets in your bedroom? Well, Beatrix Potter's mother did. She knew that Beatrix loved to draw pictures of animals. Her pictures looked almost real when she finished drawing them.

Why do you think she dressed animals like people? What made her put a bonnet on a duck and a coat on a rabbit? When you see animals dressed like people, how does that change your view of the animals? Beatrix Potter saw animals as her friends. What in Beatrix Potter's background would cause her to treat animals as true friends?

Helen Beatrix Potter was born on July 28, 1866, in West Kensington, England. Her father was a barrister (lawyer) and the family was wealthy. Because Beatrix spent so much time alone, she learned to entertain herself. She loved animals and was a keen observer. She often drew pictures of her animals. She also drew leaves and fungi, wild animals, and insects when she went with her family to their summer vacation home or when she went to visit her grandparents in the country.

When she was seventeen, her mother hired a companion, Annie Carter, for Beatrix. Annie was only three years older than Beatrix. She taught German to Beatrix. The two of them became very good friends. Annie Carter left after two years to marry, but they were able to keep up their friendship because Annie moved to a little house not too far away from Beatrix. It was, in fact, because of Annie's eight children that Beatrix began writing stories for children.

Noel Moore, Annie's eldest son, was often ill and Beatrix wrote letters to cheer him up. When she could not think of anything interesting to tell him, she wrote and illustrated a story about Peter, a rabbit who wandered into Mr. MacGregor's garden. The Moore children received many such letters and saved all of them. The girls even tied a yellow ribbon around their stack of letters. They loved Beatrix and her stories. When she visited she brought mice in a cage or rabbits in a basket and turned them loose in the living room.

Later, she decided to print a children's book, and she remembered the Peter Rabbit story that she had written for Noel. Beatrix borrowed from Noel the letter that had the rabbit story in it. She rewrote it and added more pictures. The publishers to whom she showed it did not think a little book with black and white pictures would succeed so she arranged for it to be printed privately.

Finally in 1902 Frederick Warne agreed to publish *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* with new colored pictures which Beatrix had reworked. It was a huge success. She showed them more of her stories and worked with Norman Warne, her editor, on several more books.

When she was in her forties, she met William Heelis, a lawyer working in the Lake District in 1913. He was raised in the farm country and helped her purchase some new property. Three years later, he asked Beatrix to marry him. They married and lived in Sawrey. She worked on her farm and enjoyed her privacy.

After her marriage, she wrote less because she was busier and busier with her farm work; also her eyesight was failing and it was hard for her to do the detailed paintings for the illustrations. Over the next fifteen years she produced a few more books; the last was published in 1930 and was written specially at the request of her American readers. On December 22, 1943, she died from bronchitis. Her ashes were spread over her beloved farm. She left her 4,000 acres of land to the National Trust to be preserved for future generations. She also left many wonderful stories for future generations to enjoy.