



PARKER ARTS PRESENTS

Disney and CAMERON MACKINTOSH'S

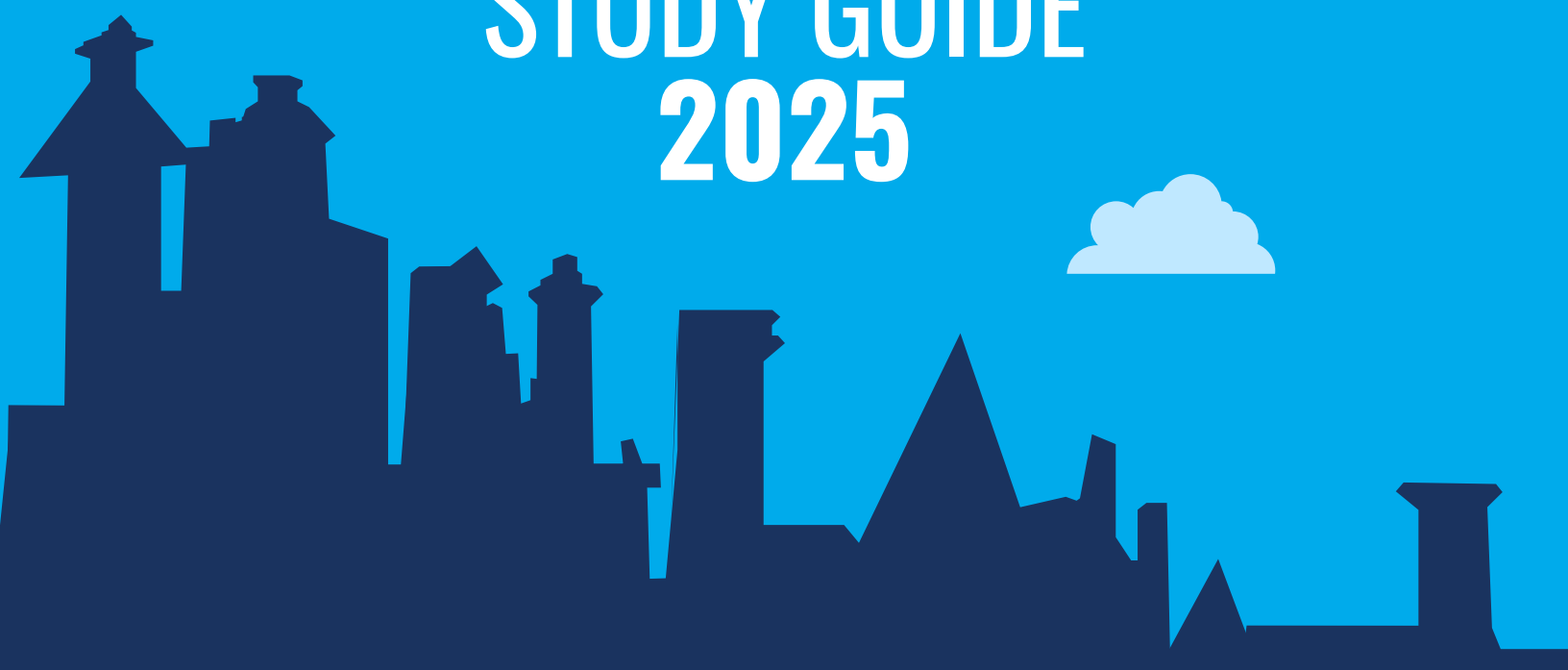
MARY POPPINS

THE BROADWAY MUSICAL

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A Musical based on the stories of **P.L. Travers** and the **Walt Disney Film**.
Original music and lyrics by **Richard M. Sherman** and **Robert B. Sherman**.

STUDY GUIDE 2025





STEP IN TIME! STEP IN TIME!

In 2024, the Disney musical film *Mary Poppins* celebrates sixty years of delighting audiences of all ages and the practically perfect literary character Mary Poppins turns 90, having appeared in her first novel in 1934!

Whether you are familiar with the books of P. L. Travers or know the magical nanny through Julie Andrews' Oscar-winning performance, you will discover something new and exciting in this enchanting musical from Disney Theatricals and Cameron Mackintosh, the producer of *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon* and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Mary Poppins will set your spirit soaring up through the atmosphere, up where the air is clear, as you visit (or revisit) the Banks family of Number 17 Cherry Tree Lane and watch the prim and proper nanny with a heart of gold and a magic wink in her eye set things right in this topsy-turvy household.

Whether you hum along to "Jolly Holiday," reach for a tissue during "Feed the Birds," or discover new musical theater standouts like "Anything Can Happen," *Mary Poppins* will touch your heart.

And of course, whether you can say it backwards or not, we know that you will have a supercalifragilisticexpialidocious time at *Mary Poppins*!



SYNOPSIS

ACT TWO

Mrs. Banks has hired Miss Andrew, George's cruel childhood nanny, also known as "The Holy Terror", as a replacement for Mary Poppins. When he sees her, Mr. Banks runs away in fear. Dismayed at Jane and Michael's behavior, Miss Andrew announces that the only solution is strict discipline and bad-tasting medicine ("Brimstone and Treacle"). Jane and Michael run away into the park and Bert tries to cheer them up with a kite ("Let's Go Fly a Kite"). The kite flies out of sight and they cannot pull it down from the sky. Mary Poppins descends the kite string.

Mrs. Banks worries about the children's disappearance and the state of her relationship with Mr. Banks. The children return to find the household under the tight control of Miss Andrew. Mary Poppins frees Caruso, Miss Andrew's lark, from his cage, and the two women engage in a battle of wills. A giant birdcage appears and traps Miss Andrew, flying away into the sky.

When Mr. and Mrs. Banks discover that Mary Poppins is back, Mr. Banks confesses to Mary Poppins that he may lose his job. She agrees to stay on, regardless of his ability to pay her. Mrs. Banks informs him that his job is not as important as their family.

In the nursery, the children express their desire that Mary Poppins stay as long as possible. Michael is swept up the chimney, followed by Mary Poppins and Jane. They find Bert, covered in soot, on the rooftop and he introduces them to the life of the chimney sweeps ("Step in Time").

George receives a summons to the bank, where he fears he will be fired. George admits it may be time to sell his mother's China vase, which is then broken in an accident. He discovers gingerbread stars from Mrs. Corry's shop, which he used to hide from Miss Andrew, among the shattered pieces. He blames Mary Poppins for the destruction of his life, and Bert encourages to look at his life in another way ("A Man Has Dreams"). The children, who have watched this encounter, say good night to their father and give him the sixpence that Mr. Northbrook gave them at the bank. As the children return to bed, Mary Poppins leaves the kite where George can see it. He picks it up and leaves for the bank.

In the nursery, the children, Mrs. Banks and Mary Poppins question their future ("Anything Can Happen"). Mrs. Banks follows her husband and Mary Poppins flies away with the children over the rooftops of London. On his way to the bank, Mr. Banks gives the coins that Jane and Michael gave him to the Bird Woman. George learns that his actions actually saved the bank from Von Hussler's schemes, and he is given a promotion, with Mrs. Banks at his side. Mary Poppins and the children take a magical tour of the stars.

Mary Poppins says good-bye to the children one last time and flies away. Mr. and Mrs. Banks return home from the bank and pledge to become a loving family that does not need Mary Poppins to keep them in line ("Finale").



CHARACTERS

Mary Poppins: A magical nanny who is prim, proper and practically perfect in every way.

Bert: A Cockney jack-of-all-trades (chimney sweep, painter, lamplighter, busker) who has developed a special relationship with Mary Poppins.

Jane and Michael Banks: Two young children who desperately need a nanny to show them the importance of proper behavior, discipline, compassion and the power of their imaginations.

George Banks: Jane and Michael's father. A no-nonsense banker who has placed his career and financial status before his family's happiness.

Winifred Banks: Jane and Michael's mother, a former actress. She is a dedicated wife and mother who has become trapped in a lifestyle of pretending to be something she is not by fitting in to "respectable" social circles.

Katie Nanna: The Banks' nanny at the beginning of the play who is cross and unfriendly.

Mrs. Brill: The Banks' cook and housekeeper. She is perpetually put-upon to pick up the slack when things go wrong around the house.

Robertson Ay: The Banks' dimwitted, clumsy servant.



The Inhabitants of Cherry Tree Lane:

Admiral Boom: An old man with a tendency to express everything using nautical language.

Miss Lark: An old woman with a lap dog, Willoughby. She and Admiral Boom have a flirtatious relationship.

Neleus: A young man with a dolphin from Greek mythology.

Mrs. Corry: Ageless woman who operates a magical candy store that sells gingerbread decorated with real stars from the sky.

Fannie and Annie: Mrs. Corry's daughters.

Bird Woman: A kind old woman who tends to the birds outside of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Bank Chairman: Mr. Banks' supervisor at the bank.

Herr Von Hussler: A businessman seeking a loan from Mr. Banks' department at the bank, whose business proposal is based on profits alone.

Mr. John Northbrook: A businessman seeking a loan from Mr. Banks' department at the bank, whose business proposal is based on decent, hardworking men seeking a better life.

Miss Andrew: The oldest, cruelest nanny in the world. Was Mr. Banks' nanny when he was a boy. Extremely fond of bad-tasting medicine as a punishment.



PRODUCTION HISTORY

THE FILM

The 1964 Disney film was not the first attempt to bring *Mary Poppins* to life onscreen. In 1949, an hour-long television special on CBS starred well-known character actress Mary Wickes (*White Christmas*, *The Music Man*, *Sister Act*) as Mary Poppins and E. G. Marshall as Mr. Banks. Her stern portrayal of the character is much closer to the character in the books than that of Julie Andrews.



After 20 years of negotiations with author P. L. Travers, Walt Disney finally convinced her to grant him the rights to turn her books into a musical film in 1964. The film, with a score by the Sherman Brothers and starring Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke, went on to win numerous awards and become one of the most beloved Disney films of all time. Travers disagreed with many of Disney's choices in the final film and delayed production several times by threatening to revoke the rights.

Mary Poppins was nominated for 13 Academy Award in 1965 and won five, a record for any Disney film since. Julie Andrews won the Oscar for "Best Actress", "Chim Chim Cheree" won for "Best Original Song" and other wins included "Best Film Editing", "Best Visual Effects" and "Best Score".

In 1983, a Soviet musical miniseries based on the Travers books was created for Russian television entitled *Mary Poppins, Goodbye*.

In 2004, a short animated film called *The Cat That Looked at a King* was created to accompany the 40th Anniversary home video release of *Mary Poppins*. Set in the modern day and starring Julie Andrews in live action sequences, it features a journey into a chalk painting, like that in the 1964 film.



In 2013, a fictionalized film account of the tumultuous relationship between Walt Disney and P. L. Travers, entitled *Saving Mr. Banks*, was released. It combines biographical accounts of Travers' early life in Australia with the story of the creation of the *Mary Poppins* film. The film starred Tom Hanks as Walt Disney and Emma Thompson as Travers



Special Note: Emma Thompson's performance as Travers garnered BAFTA, Golden Globe, and Screen Actors Guild nominations for "Best Actress"!



PRODUCTION HISTORY

THE STAGE MUSICAL

After years of offers to allow her to grant the rights for a stage musical version of *Mary Poppins*, in 1993 P. L. Travers met with super-producer Cameron Mackintosh (*Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*) to discuss the possibility of a new version for the theatre.

She agreed to grant the rights, with the stipulations that all of the show's creators must be British, the script should be based more directly on her books and that any new music that was not in the Disney film not be composed by the Sherman Brothers.



In 2004, the London production had its world premiere, featuring a new book by Julian Fellowes ("Downton Abbey"), several songs from the 1964 film and new music and lyrics by George Stiles and Anthony Drewe. It was co-directed by acclaimed British director Richard Eyre and choreographer Matthew Bourne (best known for his revolutionary deconstructed ballet versions of *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker* and *Carmen*).

The London production was nominated for nine and won two Olivier Awards (the British equivalent to the Tony Awards in America). Laura Michelle Kelley won for "Best Actress in a Musical" (as Mary Poppins), and Matthew Bourne and Stephen Mear won for "Best Theatre Choreographer".

The musical opened on Broadway in November 2006 at the New Amsterdam Theatre and starred Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins and Gavin Lee as Bert. Lee had previously originated the role of Bert in the London production.

The Broadway production was nominated for seven Tony Awards in 2007 and won the Tony for Best Scenic Design (Bob Crowley). It was also nominated for six 2007 Drama Desk Awards, winning the awards for "Best Actor in a Musical" (Gavin Lee) and "Best Scenic Design" (Bob Crowley).

In 2009, the musical number "Temper Temper" was replaced by "Playing the Game", and all subsequent productions around the world use the latter song.

Also, in 2009, Laura Michelle Kelley took over the title role on Broadway at the same time that well-known American musical actor Christian Borle (*Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Smash*) took over the role of Bert.

The Broadway production closed in March 2013, becoming the 30th longest-running musical in Broadway history.



P.L. TRAVERS AND MARY POPPINS



Born Helen Lyndon Goff in 1899 in Australia, P. L. Travers (a pen name derived from the name of her late father Travers Goff) had a colorful life before ever being approached by Roy and Walt Disney to make a film version of her *Mary Poppins* books in the mid-1940s.

After her alcoholic father, a bank manager, died of tuberculosis in 1905, her mother and sisters moved to Bowral, New South Wales. While attending boarding school, she began writing poetry and pursued a career as an actress. After she moved to England in 1924, she assumed the pen name P. L. Travers and started creating the characters who would soon populate her children's books.

In her youth, she lived a colorful, globetrotting life. She studied poetry with the leaders of the new Irish national literature movement and even worked in the United States studying Native American mythology and folklore. She was also an avid follower of Zen Buddhism.



Upon the 1934 publication of *Mary Poppins*, Travers became an international success, following up the original volume with seven sequels over the next 50 years. While she wrote many other children's books and nonfiction works, none achieved the success that her *Mary Poppins* books did.

She had a number of brief romantic affairs through her life, including one with Irish literary giant George William Russell. In 1939, Travers adopted a son, Camillus Travers Hone, the biological grandson of a biographer of poet and playwright W. B. Yeats.

Beginning as early as 1938, Walt Disney pursued the rights for a film adaptation of Travers' *Mary Poppins* stories. She refused him for over 20 years, finally agreeing to meet with him and the film's collaborators in California in 1961 as a "consultant" on the film, largely because she was in danger of financial ruin. These encounters are dramatized in the 2013 film *Saving Mr. Banks*.



P.L. TRAVERS AND MARY POPPINS

Her main objections to the film version were that she felt Mary Poppins' character had been "softened" too much, she did not like the music composed by the Sherman Brothers for the film and was absolutely opposed to any use of animation in the telling of her story. Ultimately, Disney overrode her objections once he purchased the rights from her, claiming final cut privilege.



The tension between Travers and Disney was so strong by the time of the world premiere of the film that Disney did not even invite her to the event. She had to ask to be added to the guest list. She was supposedly so angered by the final version of the film that she wept openly during the screening. Even though the film secured her financial future and reinvigorated her fame for the rest of her life, she always regretted her decision to sell her beloved character to Disney. When asked for permission to create a sequel to *Mary Poppins*, she refused and would not change her mind.

Travers was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in 1977 and died in 1996. But Travers continued to write until the end of her life; the last two *Mary Poppins* novels were published in 1982 AND 1988.

The character of Mary Poppins, as written by Travers, is often cold, intimidating, stubborn and unsympathetic. Her hardness is intended to cut through the nonsense attempted by the Banks children, in an attempt to civilize their uncouth ways. However, she does take the children on a number of magical adventures in which they are exposed to compassionate, open-hearted friends, relatives and associates of Mary Poppins, all of whom seem to be as ancient and timeless as she is. She denies any involvement with frivolity in the children's presence, but always acts in their best interests, protecting them from harm in the natural and supernatural worlds.

Mary Poppins' true identity is never disclosed, although there are intimations through the books that she may be a shooting star or a "fairy tale come true." She is referred to as "The Great Exception," meaning that she has retained the memory of being an infant and possesses special abilities that humans lose as they grow older, including being able to talk to animals. She also remembers the eternal world from which we are born into existence on Earth.

Fantasy author Neil Gaiman's 2004 short story *The Problem of Susan* not only attempts to redeem the character of Susan Pevensie from C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but he refers to an apocryphal, posthumous work by Travers in which Mary Poppins is revealed to have been Jesus' nanny.



DID YOU KNOW?

THE DISNEY FILM

- *Mary Poppins* was the first film the Walt Disney Company ever released on DVD format.
- The word “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” was officially added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 1986.
- Julie Andrews was left hanging in mid-air during one particularly long camera setup. The stagehands unwittingly lowered her wire harness rather rapidly. “Is she down yet?” called a grip. “You bloody well better believe she is!” fumed Andrews. [From www.tcm.com]
- The opening shot of *Mary Poppins* sitting on a cloud contains a gag originally used in Disney’s *Dumbo*. While Poppins checks her makeup, her carpetbag slides “through” the cloud. She catches it repeatedly just before it falls to oblivion. The stork delivering *Dumbo* does the same thing with his bundle.
- The child actors who play Jane and Michael were not told that Dick Van Dyke would also be playing Mr. Dawes, Sr., in the bank scenes.
- Van Dyke suggested to Walt Disney that he double in the role of Mr. Dawes, Sr. He even offered to play the role for free. Disney made him audition for the role, and when Van Dyke was cast, also made him make a financial donation to the CalArts film school.

-Julie Andrews was hesitant to accept the role of Mary Poppins, hoping that she would be asked to recreate her stage performance as Eliza Doolittle in the film adaptation of the musical *My Fair Lady*, which cast Audrey Hepburn as the Cockney flower girl instead. Andrews went on to win the Academy Award for “Best Actress in a Leading Role” as *Mary Poppins* in a year that saw the two films competing for Oscars.

Interestingly enough, she was not asked to play Eliza Doolittle, her performance in *Mary Poppins* is what convinced the producers of *The Sound of Music* (1965) to cast her as Maria von Trapp, another singing governess (with decidedly fewer magic powers).



Special Note: Dick Van Dyke (as Mr. Dawes, Sr. in *Mary Poppins*) returns as a special cameo in Disney’s 2018 film *Mary Poppins Returns* as the character’s son, Mr. Dawes, Jr!



DID YOU KNOW?

THE BOOKS

- In the books, Jane and Michael have three additional siblings: the twins, John and Barbara, and youngest sister Annabel, who is born in the middle of the second book, *Mary Poppins Comes Back*. While Jane and Michael are the primary characters in the books, the other children do accompany Mary Poppins on adventures as well.



- *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was written in 1943 to compete with the publication of the third *Mary Poppins* book, *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*.

- The illustrator of the *Mary Poppins* books, Mary T. Shepard, was the daughter of E. H. Shepard, the famous illustrator of the *Winnie the Pooh* and *Wind in the Willows* books. In 1981, the “Bad Tuesday” chapter of *Mary Poppins* was edited by Travers to alter some negative ethnic stereotypes that were deemed offensive in the latter 20th century. These characters were replaced by animals from around the world.



- Emma Thompson, who stars as P. L. Travers in the 2013 film *Saving Mr. Banks*, also appears as a magical, *Mary Poppins*-esque governess in the *Nanny McPhee* series of films, based upon the *Nurse Matilda* books by Christianna Brand.



Q&A WITH MADISON FALKENSTINE

We asked our very own Mary Poppins, Madison Falkenstine, to share her experiences in the role with Parker Arts audiences. Here is what she had to say about preparing for her role, the importance of the story and the magic that Mary Poppins exudes.



Q: How did you feel when you heard that you would be playing Mary Poppins in this production?

A: "I was absolutely ecstatic when I received the phone call! Mary Poppins is a role I've always wanted to play, so getting to do this is a dream come true.

Q: This is a story about magic, the magic of the imagination, the magic of a kind gesture, the magic of dreams. Does that magic share anything in common with the magic of the live theatre?

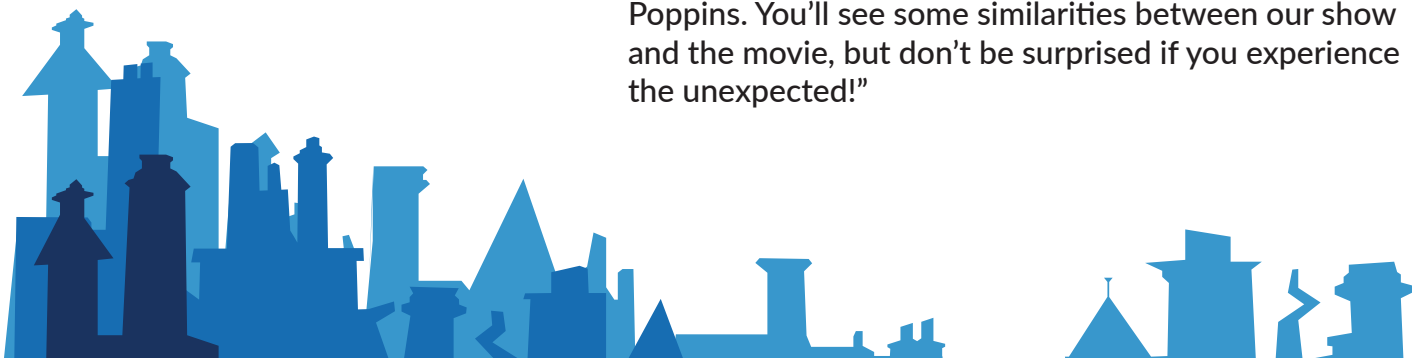
A: "Theatre is a profoundly human art form that thrives on storytelling, empathy, and connection. At its heart, theatre is about stepping into someone else's shoes—whether as an actor, director, or audience member—and this act of imaginative transformation is a magical way to learn compassion. I feel that this idea is at the heart of Mary Poppins, as we learn that there is magic all around us every day, and truly, anything can happen if you let it!"

Q: How do you approach an iconic role like this, which many audience members may not only be familiar with but have a deep emotional attachment for, based on Julie Andrews' cinematic portrayal?

A: "It's always a little intimidating to step into a role that is as iconic as Mary Poppins. Audiences truly do have a deep emotional connection to Julie Andrews' performance of the role, so I think it's important to find ways to acknowledge that interpretation. However, I'm really excited to put my own unique spin into the character and find new ways to bring her to life."

Q: What would you say to prepare audience members for this production? Should they leave their expectations at the door, particularly since this is a live play and not a movie?

A: "We hope you'll walk out of the theatre humming the songs we all have come to know and love from Mary Poppins. You'll see some similarities between our show and the movie, but don't be surprised if you experience the unexpected!"



VOCABULARY

Collateral *noun*

something pledged as security for repayment of a loan, to be forfeited in the event of a default.

Accrue *verb*

(of sums of money), be received by someone in regular or increasing amounts over time.

Sovereign *noun*

a supreme ruler, especially a monarch
references n. a letter from a former employer testifying to someone's ability for a job.

(Un)tidy *adjective*

arranged neatly and in order

Faulty *adjective*

having or displaying weaknesses

Ambition *noun*

a desire and determination to achieve success, especially with hard work

Mongrels *noun*

dogs of no definable type or breed

Atrocious *adjective*

extremely bad or unpleasant

Precocious *adjective*

(of a child) having developed abilities at an earlier age than usual

Heirloom *noun*

a valuable object that has belonged to a family for several generations

Scheme *noun*

a large-scale, systematic plan for putting a particular idea into effect

SHOW QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. In the play, Jane and Michael are wary of Bert when they first meet him because of the way he's dressed. Ultimately, Bert becomes one of their best friends. Consider a time in your life when your first impression was wrong.

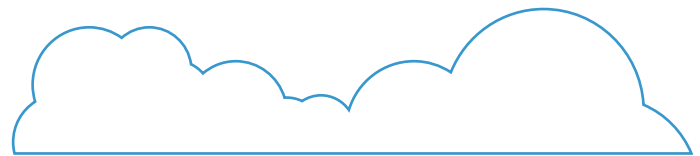
2. In the script for *Mary Poppins*, it indicates the actor playing Mary must fly during the performance. How do you think the actor is able to fly around the theatre space?

3. Compare *Mary Poppins* with some modern magical guides such as Ms. Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus* series, or Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which and Mrs. Who from *A Wrinkle in Time*.

POST SHOW QUESTIONS

1. In musicals, songs often give insight into a character's motivations or why they're behaving a certain way in the story. During the song "The Perfect Nanny," the Banks family sings about the different ideas of what it thinks the perfect nanny should be. How were their ideas different? Why do you think they wanted different qualities in their nannies? If you could create the perfect parent or child, what qualities would you give them?

2. In the play, Mr. Northbrook hands the children each a coin and Michael says he knows its value: sixpence. Mr. Northbrook says, "No, that's its worth. Its value's in how you spend it. Do good, and may you have good luck." What does that statement mean? What actions do you think have the highest value?



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the pressures that drive Mr. Banks to behave the way he does to his family? Is he a sympathetic character?
- Watch the 1964 Disney film of *Mary Poppins* and compare it to the stage production. Are there scenes that you feel are more effective onstage than onscreen? Do the two versions have the same emotional impact? Why or why not? This is not a question to determine which version is better, but rather to examine their similarities and differences.
- Have you ever had a “Mary Poppins” in your life? Who was it? What impact did they have in making you who you are today? What would your life be like without that influence?
- On one hand, Mary Poppins is as no-nonsense and strict as Miss Andrew. On the other, she introduces the Banks children to a new, magical way of seeing the world. What lessons does she teach the Banks family as far as balancing these two aspects of life?
- What are your first impressions of each of the characters in *Mary Poppins*? How does they compare/contrast with your final impressions of them at the end of the play?
- Write a new chapter for a version of *Mary Poppins* that takes place in 2025. What challenges do the children she must protect face in the 21st century? Where does she find magic in the world of today?

THE CHARACTERS' STATUS IN SOCIETY

At the beginning of the 20th century, British society was built on the vision that everybody had their places in the ladder of society, and those on the lower rungs of the ladder served those on the higher ones. As you'll see in the show, there were even servants to raise the children of the wealthy. It was a time when having a nanny became a status symbol. The middle class hired nannies even if they couldn't afford them. British society during the Edwardian period was divided into the following general classes:

- Upper class: royalty, the nobility and the very rich.
- Upper-middle class: the wealthy, bankers, lawyers, doctors, merchants and large manufacturers.
- Lower-middle class: a growing class in early 20th century Britain, consisting of shop keepers, managers, civil servants and small manufacturers.
- Working class: chimney sweeps, farmers, factory workers, shop employees, house servants and clerks
- Lower class: the homeless and destitute.

Place the characters from *Mary Poppins* in one of the above categories.

Which factors might you use to place them: economics, age, community respect? Remember some names may be in the same category. In which category would you place Mary Poppins? Does she fit into any of the categories? Why or why not?

Bert Mr. Banks Mrs. Winifred Banks Michael & Jane Mrs. Brill
Robertson Ay The Bird Woman Mrs. Corry Von Hussler Mr. Northbrook
Miss Andrew The Bank Chairman

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