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The Tale of Peter Rabbit

Beatrix Potter · *1902 · original English text (Project Gutenberg #14838)*

‘Now my dears,’ said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, ‘you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor.’ The hosted text is Potter’s original English, Project Gutenberg #14838, a short complete tale. For grades K–2.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens when a child is warned and goes in anyway, and how should a school read this short tale without turning it into a mere scolding or a mere romp?

“'Now my dears,' said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, 'you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs.”

The opening

Peter is told not to go into Mr. McGregor’s garden. He goes. He loses his shoes and his jacket, is most dreadfully frightened, and gets home to chamomile tea, while his sisters have bread and milk and blackberries. Teach the warning, the disobedience, the fear, and the getting home, for grades K–2. The hosted file is short and complete. Keep Potter’s single quotation marks and wording.

KEY CHARACTERS

Peter Rabbit
The child who is warned, goes in, is frightened, and gets home

Old Mrs. Rabbit
The mother who forbids the garden, goes to the baker’s, and puts Peter to bed

Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail
The good little bunnies who gather blackberries

Mr. McGregor
The gardener whose garden was already the scene of their father’s accident

A WARNING, AND A GARDEN

> *“'Now my dears,' said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, 'you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs.”*
>
> The opening

Grades K–2

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01 A Mother’s Warning

THE OPENING

Mrs. Rabbit sends the children into the fields or down the lane, and not into Mr. McGregor’s garden. Their father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor. Then she takes a basket and an umbrella and goes to the baker’s.

- The first sentence is exact. Keep the single quotation marks as printed.
- The father’s fate is told in one grave, small clause. Do not make it comic, and do not linger on it.
- She buys a loaf of brown bread and five currant buns.
- This file is the short complete tale, PG #14838, not a later padded retelling.

> *“'Now my dears,' said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, 'you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs.”*
>
> The opening

02 Peter Goes In

THE GARDEN

Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail, who were good little bunnies, go down the lane to gather blackberries. Peter, who is naughty, runs straight to Mr. McGregor’s garden and squeezes under the gate.

- The contrast is Potter’s own: good little bunnies, and Peter who is naughty.
- Teach the disobedience as the tale writes it, without a long sermon.
- The garden is a real garden: lettuces, French beans, radishes.
- For grades K–2.

> *“'Now my dears,' said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, 'you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs.”*
>
> The opening

03 Most Dreadfully Frightened

THE CHASE

Peter is seen, and he rushes all over the garden, for he has forgotten the way back to the gate. He loses one shoe among the cabbages, and the other amongst the potatoes.

- The sentence is exact, including “amongst the potatoes.”
- Fear, not only mischief, is the middle of the tale.
- He lost the shoes, then ran on four legs and went faster.
- Do not turn Mr. McGregor into a figure of fun only.

> *“Peter was most dreadfully frightened; he rushed all over the garden, for he had forgotten the way back to the gate. He lost one of his shoes among the cabbages, and the other shoe”*
>
> The chase

04 A Jacket and Shoes Left Behind

THE ESCAPE

Peter gets out, but not with everything he brought in. The lost clothes remain in the garden, and they will be used. Getting home is not the same thing as getting home whole.

- The cost is small and exact: shoes, a jacket.
- Teach consequences without cruelty in the lesson.
- The tale is very short; finish it.
- Quote Potter, not a cartoon.

> *“Peter was most dreadfully frightened; he rushed all over the garden, for he had forgotten the way back to the gate. He lost one of his shoes among the cabbages, and the other shoe”*
>
> The chase

05 Chamomile Tea

THE CLOSE

Peter is put to bed. His mother gives him chamomile tea. Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail have bread and milk and blackberries. The last contrast is quiet, and it is enough.

- Do not invent a longer moral than Potter wrote.
- Keep the names Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail.
- K–2. The hosted text is complete at a few pages.
- Not a later film or a merchandising script.

> *“'Now my dears,' said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, 'you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs.”*
>
> The opening

A Warning | Disobedience | Fear | Getting Home | A Small Cost

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The tale opens with Mrs. Rabbit’s warning: the children may go into the fields or down the lane, but not into Mr. McGregor’s garden; their father was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor. Keep Potter’s single quotation marks.
2. This is Potter’s original English, 1902, PG #14838, a short complete tale. For grades K–2. Not a later film.
3. Peter is most dreadfully frightened and loses his shoes among the cabbages and amongst the potatoes.
4. The close is chamomile tea for Peter, and bread and milk and blackberries for the others. Do not invent a longer moral than Potter wrote.
5. The father’s fate is one grave clause. Do not make it comic, and do not linger on it.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text (Project Gutenberg #14838), Project Gutenberg #14838, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-tale-of-peter-rabbit/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.