



*Peter Pan* by JM Barrie  
Adapted by Jeff Pitcher

**A Guide to the Play**  
by Mark Claxton



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## How to Use This Guide

This study guide is intended for anyone who would like to enhance their appreciation and understanding of Globe Theatre's production of Jeff Pitcher's *Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie*. The guide contains background information about the origins of the Peter Pan story, but also explores the artistic vision and choices behind this particular production.

When deciding how best to make use of the guide, ask yourself this question: If you were to participate in a backstage tour, would you prefer to meet the actors, see the sets, and chat with the director before the show, or afterwards? That may inform your use of this guide, which is intended at least in part to take you 'behind the scenes' and can serve equally well as preparation for the show, or as further exploration after you've already experienced it.

**Teachers** who are preparing their students to experience *Peter Pan* can provide them with the Questions for Discussion ahead of time -- or simply allow them to experience the play and then use the questions or other sections of the guide to launch discussion in the classroom. The recommended resources at the end of the guide may also be useful for further exploration.

I hope this guide is both helpful and enjoyable to read. I welcome your comments and suggestions at [markdavidclaxton@sasktel.net](mailto:markdavidclaxton@sasktel.net).



## The Three Births and Many Rebirths of Peter Pan

Scottish writer J.M. Barrie must have sensed that he was on to something when he first wrote about a one-week-old infant named Peter Pan who flew out of his English nursery and made friends with fairies.

Peter's story is only one of many that appeared in Barrie's 1902 novel *The Little White Bird*. Two years later, Peter Pan was born again, this time as an older child and the central character in Barrie's play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*.

The play enjoyed great success in the United Kingdom, eventually reaching stages in the United States and around the world. If audiences never seemed to tire of Peter Pan, his creator was even more devoted. In 1911, Barrie published the novel *Peter and Wendy*, which expanded on the fast-growing Peter Pan mythos and included a bittersweet ending with a grown-up Wendy's encounter with Peter. This additional chapter, a version of which first appeared as a surprise extra scene during one of the play's performances in London, has since become common in stage and screen versions of the story.

J.M. Barrie went on to write other well-regarded plays, but few literary characters of the 20th century have taken hold of the popular consciousness like Peter Pan. He and his realm, "the Never Land," continue to appear in new adaptations for theatre and film, and his eternal battle with Captain Hook and problematic relationship with Wendy have inspired many fantasy and children's writers to create new stories based on the originals.

Meanwhile, Barrie himself has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly and not-so-scholarly interest, as biographers and literary critics explore the life and mind of Peter Pan's creator. Widely reported to have a highly boyish personality himself, Barrie also carried the emotional scars of a family tragedy. When he was six years old, his 13-year-old brother David was killed in a skating accident. Barrie confessed in later autobiographical writing that he often felt the need to try and replace David in his mother's affections, but never succeeded. For both of them, David remained frozen in time as a 13-year-old boy.

The adventures of Peter Pan and his Lost Boys are also based largely on Barrie's make-believe games with the five sons of close friends Arthur Llewellyn Davies and Sylvia Davies. Barrie became guardian of these 'lost boys' after Arthur and Sylvia both died of cancer within a few years of each other.

Jeff Pitcher's adaptation of *Peter Pan* first appeared on stage in 1998 with Western Canada Theatre in Kamloops, B.C.. Pitcher is a founding member and the Artistic Director of Theatre Newfoundland Labrador.

## Belief and Make-Belief in Globe Theatre's Peter Pan

More than 100 years after it first took the stage in London, England, the story of Peter Pan continues to capture young and old imaginations, primarily because it contains themes that apply to readers and viewers of any age and generation. The world around us may change, but we all still face the dilemmas that come with "growing up," and we all sometimes wish we could fly back to the worlds we created when we were young.

One of the prominent themes in director Ruth Smillie's approach to *Peter Pan* is the idea of imagination and how our ability to "make believe" changes as we grow older.

Smillie was inspired last summer by a pair of boys who were marching along her street, clearly lost in their imaginative world.

"They were so engaged in what they were doing," Smillie recalled. "I heard one friend say to the other, 'We have to save the president!' They were completely into it: they had nothing to back them up, no costumes or anything else, but at that moment, they were the CIA, or security guys. They were deeply into it."

*Peter Pan* creator J.M. Barrie was often described by friends and acquaintances as peculiar for his child-like demeanour and his love for make-believe with children. It is that very connectedness with a child's mindset, though, that Smillie has always loved about Barrie's most famous creation.

After experiencing the story as a child, and again as a mother, Smillie's aim as a director is to help her cast achieve the same level of "absolute commitment to the world of pretend" that she saw in the two would-be secret agents she encountered on her street.

"I read them parts of the book and pointed out that Neverland is the invention of the (Darling) children, and it's a place they believe in utterly," Smillie said. "So to them, a stick is a sword, and you will not convince them otherwise. If they believe it's a sword, it's a sword."

"We're all trying to connect with that capacity of a child to be fully present in the world of make-believe."

Of course, the truest believer of all the make-believers is the boy who wouldn't grow up.

"The only child in Never Land who can't tell the difference between real and make-believe is Peter Pan," Smillie explained. "All the rest of them can tell the difference -- but he's their captain, so he gets to decide."

## The Language of Fairies and Flight: The Movement and Music of Peter Pan

As the choreographer for *Peter Pan*, Johanna Bundon has been working with the cast and crew on a number of interesting challenges. One of the obvious questions was how to make Peter and the Darling children "fly" to Neverland.

"This has been the big question from people -- 'Are there wires? Are there trapezes?' And no, there are not," Bundon explained during a break in rehearsals. "We're just using bodies and space."



Bundon has been working with the actors to focus on "the language of flight" -- to convey, through their relationships with each other and their surroundings, such details as the texture of the clouds, gusts of wind, and air currents.

"This is what we've been playing with -- something that you would normally show in a vertical relationship, how do you show it in a lateral relationship?"

Bundon has also been working with actor Jonelle Gunderson, who faces the challenge of portraying Tinkerbell with no actual words to say other than "Tink."

"She's almost entirely physical as a character," Bundon said. "So we've been creating movement phrases that say, 'You silly ass,' or 'I'm a defiant little creature.'"

Composer Allan Rae has created a musical score that assigns phrases to each of the bodily joints Gunderson uses as she expresses Tinkerbell's thoughts.

"We've actually scored her body as you would score a piano piece, treating every joint as if it has a different tone," Bundon said. "So a turn of the head may be a '2'.

"So we're kind of talking in code to each other. That's been really fun, to watch how the other actors play off of this physical character."

A whole different kind of physicality comes into play in Bundon's work with the pirates of Neverland. It was Allan Rae who first suggested that the pirates' music and movement be marked with a hip-hop sensibility.

"You can't ignore that offer!" Bundon said. "So how do you facilitate the rhythmic dimensions of rap or hip-hop in the pirates' bodies? There's a whole element of call-and-response that is specific to hip-hop and to sailors' songs, so that's been fun."

Throughout the rehearsal process, one of Bundon's overarching goals has been to emphasize the differences between the inhabitants of our world and those of Neverland by helping the actors develop distinct physicalities.

"There are the pirates versus the lost boys, and their physicalities are different," Bundon said. "Then there's the language of Peter, which is also different from the lost boys.

"Peter has something that's very unique, closer to the world of Tinkerbell, a fairy quality or magic quality."

## Inner Tubes and Baubles: Neverland Couture

You've been charged with designing the set and costumes for a play that takes place not just in different locations, but in entirely different worlds: the play's characters are among the most famous and beloved in the Western world, and everything you design must be portable, quickly removable, lightweight, and above all, *imaginative*.  
Where does one begin?

In the world of theatre, most staging, design and performance decisions are guided by the vision of the play's director, and *Peter Pan* was no exception. Costume/set designer Karyn McCallum began her work with a brainstorming session with director Ruth Smillie.

"I took my lead from Ruth's approach that everything is a projection of the imagination of childhood," McCallum explains. "Every place the children go is a place that has come from their imaginations, so it's a world they could manufacture themselves."

As such, many of the costume elements, props and set pieces used by the actors in the Neverland scenes are echoes of the "real world." It was McCallum's inspiration to centre many of the materials around a bicycle theme.

"The lost boys are really projections of the children," she said. "All of their hardware, on their shoes, their belts, they're made of inner tubes. That's the material they have at hand, things they could have in their back yard."

The natural inhabitants of Never Land are afforded slightly more exotic wear, since, as McCallum notes, "Peter's in a different world, he's from a different place in the imagination, as are the pirates."



Even the pirates, though, are clad with all of the unfettered imaginativeness of children at play.

"Smee is handy with a needle and thread and has sewn lots of pockets," McCallum says. "Cookson has lots of different patterns on his clothing, along with all kinds of shiny things and baubles."

And Captain Hook?

"Hook is a costume designer's dream," McCallum says. "The ultimate fantasy pirate." When designing for an in-the-round stage such as Globe's, McCallum says a close working relationship with the lighting designer (Louise Guinand) is critical, particularly in creating floor designs that will support the lighting's intended effects.

"The pallet on the floor is more strongly linked to the lighting than in other theatres," McCallum says. "The lighting will be the most dramatic element. It really builds the atmosphere, so it's important to have a pallet (Guinand) can work with on the floor." Working in the round also means that set pieces can't interfere with audience sight lines or the performers' choreography.

"Things that work best are things that are integrated with the action," McCallum said. "Some things have been in flux since rehearsals began, simply because I've seen at times that the action would be better served with an alternate choice."

"This is the tricky thing with a multi-locational set. The locations have to be represented, but the pieces have to be versatile, and they have to be off stage in a minute."





## A Conversation with Harry Judge

*Before beginning rehearsals, what kind of research did you do into the character of Peter Pan?*

I read some passages from the play, and a little from the book, but I didn't do much. I wanted to come clean to it when playing an iconic character like this. The preparation for me was more a sense of making myself open and available, coming to it with a sense of youthfulness and innocence and naïveté -- and belief. I had to be willing to find the part of me that will believe wholly in anything.

*Peter is a mysterious, enigmatic figure in the original stories. As an actor, how do you 'get inside' such a character?*

What's interesting about this character is, a lot of the questions the other characters have about him, he has about himself. The answers he gives are inventions. Even he doesn't know fully who or what he is. I've had to embrace this uncertainty about him, and just live fully in the inventions he gives in the moment. He's trying to make the inventions real for others, but also trying to make them real for himself. When I was preparing for the audition, I was really surprised at how tragic a character he is. I hadn't ever thought of Peter Pan that way. The fact that he chooses to stay alone to stay young. I found that very emotional.

*Is there a particular physicality you're working toward in portraying Peter Pan?*

He's described as the best dancer of the boys, and he runs circles around Hook when they're fighting, so I've tried to incorporate a sense of real dexterity and speed, a youthful athleticism -- almost like a bird, with their hollow bones. It's about being very physical and very athletic without necessarily being muscular.

*Peter Pan is the boy who wouldn't grow up. Many have said the same thing about actors! Care to comment?*

We as actors go on stage and make believe like a child does, so there's definitely a parallel there. But whether or not we're doing it as actors, we all want to make believe at some point. That's one thing I'm always learning: never underestimate the power of belief and believing.

## **Scene Breakdown**

### **Act One**

#### **Scene 1: The Darling Nursery**

It's bedtime at the Darling household. Wendy, John, and Michael, supervised by their dog Nana, are getting ready to turn in for the night while their parents, George and Mary, prepare to go out for the evening. Mary is a bit uneasy; she confesses to her husband that she is sure she has seen a boy's face outside the nursery window. George chalks it up to his wife's active imagination, and the topic is forgotten when he is accused of bad form by his family after tricking Nana into drinking his medicine and then chaining the beloved canine outside. The children are eventually tucked in and Mr. and Mrs. Darling leave the house.

Soon after, Mary's mysterious boy appears, accompanied by his fairy companion Tinkerbell. He is Peter Pan, and he has come back to find his shadow, which he had left behind during a previous visit to the nursery. He inadvertently awakens Wendy, who helps him to re-attach his shadow. The two strike up an immediate friendship, and Wendy is eventually convinced to go back with Peter to his home in Neverland. She awakens her brothers, and with the help of a generous portion of fairy dust, the three of them fly off with Peter to a grand adventure.

#### **Scene 2: Never Land**

Ferocious pirates Smee, Starkey, Cecco, Jukes, and Cookson are joined by their Captain, James Hook. Hook dispatches all of the men except Smee to go look for lost boys. Alone with Smee, Hook confesses his desperate wish to get his hook on Peter Pan, who cut off his hand. He concocts a plan to poison the lost boys with a cake left on the shore of the lagoon. Hook and Smee are frightened off when they hear a familiar ticking: that of the crocodile that swallowed Hook's hand, as well as a clock, and now follows Hook in hope of tasting the rest of him.

With the pirates gone, lost boys Tootles, Slightly, and Nibs emerge from their hiding places. When they spy a flying 'Wendy-bird' approaching, Tootles follows Tinkerbell's jealous instructions and shoots her out of the sky with an arrow. Fortunately, the arrow is stopped by the button Peter had given Wendy in the nursery, and she is revived soon after John and Michael arrive on the scene.

The boys celebrate when Wendy agrees to be their mother and read them stories, but they are interrupted by the arrival of Hook and his crew, who want Wendy to be their mother. A fierce battle ensues until the pirates are again frightened off by the crocodile. Wendy and a wounded Peter, however, are stranded on Marooner's Rock and surrounded by rising tides. As the scene ends, they make a desperate bid to grab hold of Michael's kite, which is passing over their heads.

***End of Act One***

## Act Two

### Scene 1: The Home Underground

As John, Michael, and the lost boys await Peter's return from hunting, Wendy relates the exciting story of her and Peter's escape from Marooner's Rock. After Peter's return, and another story that reminds the Darling children of their anxious parents, Wendy decides it is time they returned home. She assures the lost boys that her parents will happily adopt them. Peter reluctantly agrees to let them go, but refuses to come with them.

As the Darlings and the lost boys emerge from the home underground, however, they are abducted by Hook and his men. Hook poisons the sleeping Peter's medicine, but Tinkerbell sacrifices herself by drinking it before Peter can. Fortunately, Tinkerbell is revived by the audience's belief in fairies, after which Peter is off to rescue Wendy. As he leaves the home underground, he catches sight of Hook's feared crocodile -- and notices that the creature's clock has run down and is silent.

### Scene 2: The Jolly Roger

Aboard Hook's ship, the captives are readied for walking the plank. The pirates are none too attentive, however, and Nibs and Tootles manage to slip away. Just as Slightly steps onto the plank, the entire crew is terrified by the sound of a clock. In the panic, Peter boards the Jolly Roger and hides himself in the cabin as the boys toss Cookson overboard. As pirates begin to disappear and hideous screams emanate from the cabin, Hook and Smee grow increasingly unnerved. In the chaos, Peter manages to untie Wendy from the ship's mast and disguise himself in her cloak. He finally reveals himself to Hook, and the battle is on.

The boys manage to chase off the thoroughly terrorized crew, while Peter and Captain Hook duel. Hook is defeated by Peter's youth and vigour, and ultimately walks the plank...straight into the waiting jaws of the crocodile.

### Scene 3: The Nursery

While Nana and Mrs. Darling sit in the nursery mourning the children's disappearance, Mr. Darling is atoning for his treatment of Nana by living in her kennel. Nana and Mrs. Darling leave the nursery just as Wendy, John, and Michael appear at the window. They creep into their beds and then reveal themselves to their delighted mother when she returns to the nursery. After the joyful family reunion, the lost boys appear and are promptly taken in by the Darlings. When Peter arrives, however, he refuses to be adopted, choosing to remain a boy in Neverland forever. Wendy wants to join him, but Mrs. Darling will only allow her a yearly visit to Neverland.

Years later, a grown-up and married Wendy can no longer fly to Neverland, but allows her own daughter, Jane, to make the journey with Peter. So begins a long tradition that shall endure as long as children are young and innocent...and as long as they believe.

## Questions for Discussion

- 1) J.M. Barrie has said that Neverland would look different for everyone. Rather than pirates and mermaids, who would populate your Neverland? Would it be made up mostly of jungle, or forest, or sea, or desert, or some other landscape? Who would be the villain in your imaginary world?
- 2) Many stage productions of *Peter Pan* have used a small, dancing light and "tinkling" sound effect to represent the fairy Tinkerbell. Globe Theatre has chosen to have a live Tinkerbell on stage. If you were directing the play, what would be your choice, and why?
- 3) Near the end of the play, the older Wendy says, "In the young there should always be something of the old, and in the old there should be something of the young. In that way we might grow old in body but never in spirit." What do you think it means to "grow old in spirit"?
- 4) The roles of Mr. Darling and Captain Hook were played by the same actor. This has been a common practice almost since the original play was staged in 1904. Why do you think this is, and do you think it's a good idea? How does it affect the story?
- 5) Peter Pan became who he is by refusing to grow up. Whatever your age, are there things about growing up you'd rather avoid, or wish you could have avoided? Does the phrase "growing up" feel like a negative or a positive idea to you? What images does it bring to your mind?
- 6) *Peter Pan* is a story about make-believe. Some have said that in today's era of computer games and movies with their sophisticated animation and graphics, children and young people don't "make believe" or make use of their own imaginations like they used to. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 7) Who was your favourite character in this play? What did you like about them, or about the performance of the actor portraying them?

**Note: Teachers, you can find a more detailed and involved set of suggested learning activities at: [http://static.visitlondon.com/assets/peterpan/pp\\_educationpack.pdf](http://static.visitlondon.com/assets/peterpan/pp_educationpack.pdf).**



## Return Trips to Neverland: For Further Exploration

### Works of J.M. Barrie:

*The Little White Bird* (serialized novel), first published in 1902

*Peter Pan* (original play), first published in 1904

*Peter and Wendy* (novel), first published in 1911

### Stage versions of Peter Pan on DVD:

*Peter Pan* (1960), a televised broadcast of the stage musical that premiered on Broadway in 1954. Baby boomers will forever associate Mary Martin with her performance as Peter.

*Peter Pan* (2000), a filmed rendition of the updated musical that premiered on Broadway in 1991. This version features some spectacular staging, particularly the flying sequences and the acrobatics of the athletic Cathy Rigby as Peter.

### Film adaptations:

*Peter Pan* (2003), directed by P.J. Hogan and starring Jeremy Sumpter as Peter. A more-or-less straight-up version of the story, a tad more violent than previous tellings.

*Peter Pan* (1953, animated), the Walt Disney film that is perhaps most responsible for our current image of Peter. Tainted by some painful stereotyping of First Nations people.

*Peter Pan* (1924), a silent film representing Peter Pan's first appearance on the big screen. Followed the stage-version conventions of the time by casting a woman (Betty Bronson) as Peter.

### Peter Pan prequels, sequels, and spin-offs:

*The Starcatcher Trilogy* (2004-2007), a children's fantasy series by humorist Dave Barry and suspense writer Ridley Pearson. These books develop the 'back story' and growing conflict with Captain Hook leading up to Peter Pan's visit to the Darling nursery.

*Peter Pan in Scarlet* (2006), a children's book by Geraldine McCaughrean. This "official sequel" to J.M. Barrie's 1911 novel takes place in 1926. Wendy, John, and the adopted Lost Boys return to Neverland to find that Peter has taken Captain Hook's place as the captain of the Jolly Roger. Uh-oh.

*Finding Neverland* (2004), feature film depicting J.M. Barrie's deepening friendship with widow Sylvia Davies, and the imaginative games with her four sons that inspired Peter Pan. The film, and Johnny Depp as Barrie, were warmly praised, but some have taken exception to its presentation of the events (see *Captivated*, below).

*Return to Never Land* (2002), Disney's sequel to its 1953 animated film. Peter Pan must come to the rescue when Captain Hook kidnaps Wendy's daughter Jane.

*Hook* (1991), feature film directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Robin Williams as a grown-up Peter Pan who has forgotten his identity when Captain Hook kidnaps his children. Critics and purists hated it, but audiences didn't.

**Biographies, critical studies of J.M. Barrie:**

*J.M. Barrie: The Man Behind the Image*, by Janet Dunbar. Focuses on the "curious, secret, unhappy life" that (according to Dunbar) led Barrie to immerse himself in the worlds of his imagination. First published in 1970.

*Captivated: J.M. Barrie, the Du Mauriers and the Dark Side of Neverland*, by Piers Dudgeon. Making liberal use of papers kept by Sylvia Davies's son Peter (who committed suicide in 1960), Dudgeon maintains that J.M. Barrie's influence on the Davies family was sinister and damaging. A work of speculation, not of scholarship, but some fascinating reading. Published in 2008.

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