

Seattle Children's Theatre

ACTIVE AUDIENCE GUIDE



Presented in association with the Unicorn Theatre (UK)

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SYNOPSIS

Be warned: This synopsis has spoilers.

An unassuming man in a suit carrying a briefcase enters the stage. A younger man dressed similarly approaches him and the two men shake hands. A third man, also similarly dressed, briefcase in hand, approaches. He greets both with handshakes. They wait patiently. One man discovers a large stocking hanging behind him. Feeling clever, he shows off his elegant argyle sock. The three walk toward the large stocking and are surprised by movement inside it. A man emerges from the stocking and as the narration begins, he becomes the Velveteen Rabbit.

The Narrator tells us the Rabbit, a gift for a young boy, is in pristine condition. The Boy fluffs the Rabbit's velveteen fur and admires his plumpness. But when new toys are introduced the Boy becomes distracted. He unwraps a rocking horse, finds a sailboat and various other toys. The Rabbit is left forgotten on the nursery floor. The mechanical toys consider themselves superior and pretend they are real, looking down on the Rabbit. The only toy who is kind to him is the Skin Horse, the oldest toy in the nursery.

The Rabbit asks the Skin Horse, "What is real?" The Skin Horse shares that when a child loves a toy for a long time it becomes real. The Rabbit considers what he might look like when he is real—will he have to lose his whiskers? The Boy slides in on a wagon and gathers his toy soldiers, engaging them in an epic battle. He makes a toy train engine with blocks and the wagon to carry his China Dog.

It is time for bed. The Boy's Nanna enters to tidy up the nursery. Nanna looks at the mess and marvels that one boy made it all. She proceeds to put the toys away, with the Boy's reluctant help. The Rabbit realizes he is the last toy in the nursery not in a cubby. He moves himself into the toy chest.

Nanna tucks the Boy into bed but cannot find China Dog. The Boy can't sleep without him. Nanna hands him the Rabbit instead. That night is the first of many nights the Rabbit sleeps in his bed. The Boy moves wildly in his sleep jostling the Rabbit. The next morning the Boy and the Rabbit say hello to each other. They embark on all sorts of imaginary adventures. They sail on a boat across the ocean. They encounter a great storm and are tossed on the water. Eventually they jump into the water and crawl themselves to shore. On land, they make a fire to keep warm. They enjoy marshmallows toasted over their campfire. They fall asleep under the night sky. They hear strange noises in the night and take up swords to defend themselves. They create a camel on which they ride through the desert. Their play results



in a gigantic pillow fight. Feathers from the pillows fly around the room and suddenly it is snowing! The Boy and the Rabbit walk through a blizzard. They climb a snowy mountain and plant a flag at its summit.

Time passes. The Rabbit's fur has become worn, his tail is unsewn, and the pink has rubbed off his nose where the Boy kisses him. As the Boy prepares for sleep one night he can't find the Rabbit. Nanna finds him and remarks the search is quite a lot of fuss for a toy. The Boy argues that the Rabbit is real. The Rabbit is happy and filled with love.

The pair spend the long spring days in the garden. Their playful adventures continue. Spring turns to summer and they play in a nearby wood. The Rabbit is left alone one day as evening falls. Two real rabbits appear and want to know why he can't get up and play with them. They mock him for not being a real rabbit. The Rabbit insists he knows he is real because the Boy said so. But the rabbits are gone.

Weeks pass and the Rabbit grows quite shabby. One day the Boy falls ill with scarlet fever. The Rabbit hides under the bedclothes for fear that someone will take him away and he knows the Boy needs him. Finally, the Boy gets well. When Nanna discovers the Rabbit, she says he is covered with scarlet fever germs and must be disposed of. She puts him in a sack with other toys and rubbish to be burned. That night the Boy sleeps in a new room with a new bunny.

The Rabbit feels very lonely waiting atop the bonfire. He thinks of all his adventures with the Boy. A real tear trickles down his nose to the ground. Where the tear lands, a flower grows, and out of the flower, a fairy speaks to the Rabbit. She tells him that because the Boy loved him, he will now be real to everyone.

The next spring, the Boy notices a rabbit looking at him in the garden. He thinks it looks just like his old toy, not knowing that it is indeed his dear toy made real.

We Are All on the Same Team:

THEATER ETIQUETTE

The fantastic thing about going to see live theater is that it is a shared community event where everyone plays an important part. You hear pre-show announcements about theater etiquette every time you come to SCT. Happily, the vast majority of our audience members help us make the theater-going experience better for everyone by complying with the requests. But if you or the kids in your life have ever wondered why we ask the things we do, here are some explanations:



Please completely turn off all electronic devices including cell phones, cameras and video recorders.

Why turn them completely off? So they won't get used. Airplane mode will stop incoming calls and messages, but it won't stop people from using their devices to take pictures, record audio or video, read books or play games during the show.

Phone calls and texting are a distraction to the audience and performers, and can pose a safety hazard as well as interfere with our sound system.

The distraction factor is an easy one to explain. It is very difficult for people to ignore a lit screen. Walk through a room where a TV is on and you are going to at least glance at it. In a darkened theater, eyes are drawn to the light. Everyone sitting anywhere behind someone looking at a lit phone will turn their attention to that phone. And the actors on stage can see the screen lighting up the holder's face. A ringing phone or text message alert takes everyone in the theater, on stage and off, out of the moment.

How does this create a safety hazard? Distraction can be a problem for actors and crew whose focus needs to stay on doing their work safely, especially when working on, with or around moving scenic pieces or as scenery is being lowered to the stage.

Do electronics in the audience really interfere with the sound system? Yes.

You would not notice it over the speaker system in the house, but our crew is on wireless headsets, and electronic devices in the audience can cause interference. If crew can't hear cues and communicate with each other, they can't do their job safely or efficiently.

Also, taking pictures or video is not allowed.

We are fortunate to work with very talented performers, designers, playwrights and directors at SCT. One of our responsibilities to these artists is to help protect their work from illegal distribution or piracy. Contractually, the use of images of their designs and recordings of their work is very specifically controlled. We appreciate that people want to capture a memory to enjoy later, but it is actually a violation of contract, and of trust between the artists and the audience.

You are welcome to take pictures in the lobby, of family and friends in their seats before or after the show, or when talking to the actors at autographs after the show, with their permission. If you are not sure if a photograph is permitted, please ask.

If you are with someone who becomes noisy or restless, please be kind to your neighbors and use our quiet room, which is located in the back of the theater over your right shoulder.

We love our audiences and want them to express themselves during the show—

laughing, clapping, shouting in amazement. It's part of the community experience.

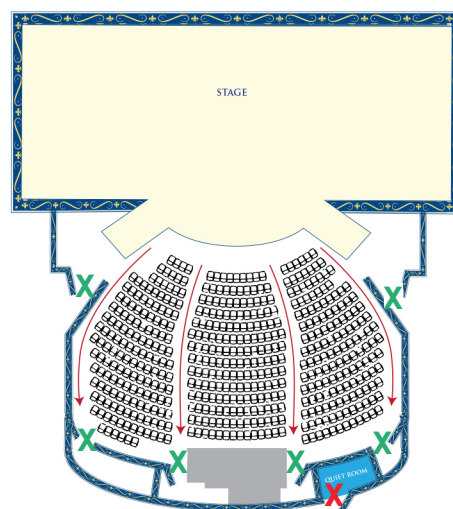
But everyone has moments when they just don't want to be where they are. And sometimes they express this quite loudly. The quiet room offers a place to see and hear the show, while having a chance to settle in private. Please keep in mind that although it is called the "quiet room" it is not completely soundproof.

If you need to exit during the performance, please use one of the four upstairs doors.

We're pretty sure no one wants to become part of the show if they need to run out of the theater to use the restroom or get a drink of water. Using the upstairs doors is less distracting for everyone. Actors often use the areas near the lower doors for entrances and exits.

Thank you being part of the SCT family. If you have any questions visit our [FAQ Page](#) at [sct.org](#) or contact us at [tickets@sct.org](#).

X Doors to Lobby → Exit During the Show
X Door to Quiet Room ■ Quiet Room



STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

The Velveteen Rabbit touches on many themes and ideas. Here are a few we believe would make good **Discussion Topics**: Self-Discovery, Empathy, Unconditional Love, Self-Acceptance.

We believe that seeing the show and using our Active Audience Guide can help you address these 21st-Century Skills:

- Creative Thinking
- Collaboration
- Critical Thinking
- Perseverance
- Communication
- Growth Mindset

We also believe that seeing the show and using the AAG can help educators meet many of the **Washington State Learning Standards**. Below are some that might fit in well with certain articles or activities. Where more than one standard within a specific area applies, we selected a few examples. Multiple standards could apply to most of these articles and activities.

Standards are grouped by the AAG articles and activities they connect to. Descriptive text of chosen standards is on the following page.



Attending a performance of *The Velveteen Rabbit*

Arts

Theatre Arts

- Anchor Standards 7–11

Inside A Child's Mind; Creating *The Velveteen Rabbit*; A Chat With Clark Sandford; About The Design

These articles explore the creative processes of some literary and theatre artists with deep connections to the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

Arts

Theatre Arts

- Anchor Standards 7, 8, 11

English Language Arts

Reading Standards for Informational Text

- RI.1, RI.2, RI.7

Friendship; Becoming Real

These articles use the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit* as a jumping-off point for discussing the values of personal integrity and empathy for others.

**Highlight the 21st-Century Skills of Collaboration, Communication Growth Mindset*

English Language Arts

Reading Standards for Informational Text

- RI.1, RI.2, RI.4

Reading Standards:

Foundational Skills

- RF.1, RF.3, RF.4

A Brief History of Toys

English Language Arts

Reading Standards for Informational Text

- RI.1, RI.2, RI.7

Social Studies

History

- 4.1, 4.2

The Taming of Wild Rabbits

English Language Arts

Reading Standards for Informational Text

- RI.1, RI.2, RI.7

Science

Life Science

- LS1.A, LS1.B, LS1.D, LS2.A, LS2.D

Social Studies

History

- 4.1

Words and Phrases That Might Be New To You

English Language Arts

Language Standards

- L.4

Reading Standards for Informational Text

- RI.7

Reading Standards:

Foundational Skills

- RF.1, RF.2, RF.3

Jump Start; Drama in Action

Arts

Theatre Arts

- Anchor Standards 1–6

Visual Arts

- Anchor Standards 1–2

Health and Physical Education

Physical Education

- Anchor Standard 1

English Language Arts

Language Standards

- L.1

Speaking and Listening Standards

- SL.1, SL.2, SL.5, SL.6

Writing Standards

- W.1, W.2, W.3, W.8

Activity Pages

English Language Arts

Writing Standards

- W.3

Language Standards

- L.1, L.2, L.5

Speaking and Listening Standards

- SL.5

Washington State K-12 Learning Standards

Arts

Theatre Arts

- Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Visual Arts

- Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Health and Physical Education

Physical Education

- Anchor Standard 1: Students will demonstrate competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.

Social Studies

History

- 4.1: Understands historical chronology.
- 4.2: Understands and analyzes the causal factors that have shaped major events in history.

Next Generation Science Standards

Science

Life Science

- LS1: From Molecules to Organisms: Structure and Processes
 - LS1 A: Structure and Function: All organisms have external parts. Different animals use their body parts in different ways to see, hear, grasp objects, protect themselves, move from place to place, and seek, find, and take in food, water and air. Plants also have different parts (roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruits) that help them survive and grow.
 - LS1 B: Growth and Development of Organisms: Adult plants and animals can have young. In many kinds of animals, parents and the offspring themselves engage in behaviors that help the offspring to survive.
 - LS1 D: Animals have body parts that capture and convey different kinds of information needed for growth and survival—for example, eyes for light, ears for sounds, and skin for temperature or touch. Animals respond to these inputs with behaviors that help them survive (e.g., find food, run from a predator). Plants also respond to some external inputs (e.g., turn leaves toward the sun).

Common Core State Standards

English Language Arts

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- L.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- L.2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on age appropriate level reading and content.
- L.5: With guidance and support from adults, explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills

Print Concepts

- RF.1: Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.

Phonological Awareness

- RF.2: Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).

Phonics and Word Recognition

- RF.3: Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details

- RI.1: With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- RI.2: With prompting and support, identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

Craft and Structure

- RI.4: Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- RI.7: With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts).

Speaking and Listening Standards

Comprehension and Collaboration

- SL.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about age appropriate topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- SL.2: Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- SL.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.
- SL.6: Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Writing Standards

Text Types and Purposes

- W.1: Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell the reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book (e.g., My favorite book is...).
- W.2: Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.
- W.3: : Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- W.8: With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

INSIDE A CHILD'S MIND

-Author Margery Williams



Margery and her dog Suzie, 1940

On July 22, 1881, Margery Winifred Williams was born in London to a barrister and famous classical scholar. As a young child, Margery had a vivid imagination and would create different personalities for each of her toys. Her father stressed the importance of reading for her and her older sister. He believed reading was the primary source of education for children under the age of 10. Because of her father's coaching, Margery grew up with a love of reading and soon developed a passion for writing, using personalities from her childhood.

When Margery was seven years old, her father died suddenly, a life-changing event which, in one way or another, would affect all of her future creative activity. The undertone of sadness and the themes of death and loss that flow through her children's books have been criticized by some reviewers, but Margery always maintained that hearts acquire greater humanity through pain and adversity. She wrote that life is a process of constant change—there are departures for some and arrivals for others—and the process allows us to grow and persevere.

In 1890 her family moved to the United States, first to New York, then settling on a farm in Pennsylvania. Margery attended the Convent School in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania, until she was 17 years old. By this time, Margery had decided to become a writer even though her stories had previously been rejected. Her ambition to make a living as an author propelled her in 1901, at the age of 19, to return to her birthplace and submit her first children's stories to a London firm that published Christmas books. A number of these saw print, as did her first novel *The Late Returning*, which was published in 1902 and aimed at an adult audience. It did not sell well. She also published a few early-adult novels afterward, however, she had little success with them.

While visiting her publisher, Margery met Francesco Bianco, an Italian living in London, who was employed as the manager of one of the book departments. They were married in 1904 and became the parents of a son, Cecco, and a daughter, Pamela, who 20 years later would be illustrating some of her mother's books. The family lived in London for three years, where Margery gave up writing so that she could raise their children.

In 1907 the family left England, traveling through Europe for the next three years, eventually settling in Turin, Italy. In August 1914, Italy, along with the rest of Europe, was plunged into World War I and Francesco Bianco found himself in an Italian Army uniform fighting for his country along with millions of other soldiers from many nations. While remaining on the home front with the children, Margery became really interested in the work of Walter de La Mare, a poet she believed truly understood the mindset of children.

By 1921, Margery and her family settled in the United States and she returned to writing. This time, however, Margery turned to her children and reminisced about her own childhood. She found inspiration in watching her children play with toys and animals.



Pamela Bianco's portrait of her mother, 1922

This inspiration soon led her to write her most popular book, *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real* in 1922. In this book, she creatively expressed Walter de la Mare's literary concepts of wonders and miracles from a child's point of view. *The Velveteen Rabbit* was well-received, although some critics believed that the book was "too sentimental."

In 1925, Margery published *Poor Cecco* and in 1927, *The Skin Horse*. Consistent with her fascination with toys and miracles, these novels told stories of animals that possessed human traits and emotions. In 1927, Margery wrote a short story, *The Little Wooden Doll*, a story about a doll who had been abused by two children and was restored by a third child.

Later in her life, Margery began to write young adult novels. These all featured young people who were in one way or another isolated or alienated from mainstream society and the joy, success, prosperity and social acceptance seemingly enjoyed by their peers. She received a Newbery Medal in 1937 for *Winterbound*, a story about two teenage girls who are forced to take care of their family while their parents are called away without warning. In *Other People's Houses* (1939), she wrote about a young girl who chose to earn a living for herself in New

York instead of going to college. And in 1944, Margery wrote *Forward Commandos!*, an inspirational story of wartime heroism, which included as one of its characters a black soldier. Acknowledging the contribution of African Americans to the war effort was extremely rare in literature at the time and that fact was noted in the book's reviews. It was also unusual for Margery in that she rarely used male characters in her books.

Margery fell ill the year that *Forward, Commandos!* was published. After three days in the hospital, she died on September 4, 1944.

Excerpted and Adapted from:

Pennsylvania Center for the Book: [Bianco](#)

PoemHunter.com: [Margery Williams](#)



A CHAT WITH CLARK SANDFORD

— Scene Shop Carpenter

Clark is not working on this production because SCT is not building the set, but he kindly took the time to answer a few questions about his job

Please tell us about your working process as a carpenter.

I'm a carpenter at Seattle Children's Theatre. To be more exact, I'm one of the scene shop carpenters. We build scenery for all the plays SCT produces. If you have seen a play in the last 13 years at SCT, you have seen stuff that I built with my hands, and some tools.

Here's how it works. The scenic designer makes a model of the scenery that shows what they want the set to look like. They also make a drawing of each piece of scenery. The technical director and the assistant technical director take those drawings, and the model, and from those they make working drawings. These show what each piece of scenery should be built out of and exactly what size and shape it should be. Then I get one of those drawings and figure how to build it, and then actually build that piece. I use lots of different tools to shape and attach the pieces together to make it be what I want.

We make scenery out of a lot of different materials. Mainly wood (which is my favorite), and steel too. Sometimes we also use other stuff, like different kinds of cloth and Styrofoam, plastic, cardboard, carpet, rope—all sorts of stuff. So I have to know how to use all those kinds of material and I need to know what they can and can't do.

What is a particularly interesting challenge of your job, and how do you approach it?

When you build something that is square or rectangular, that's pretty easy. Wood and steel come, usually, already square.

"Square" is what carpenters say when they mean each side is straight and each corner is 90 degrees. Like a square or like the letter "L." Its corner, where the two lines come together, is 90 degrees, so it's square. The letter "V" isn't. The corner is pointier. It's less than 90 degrees. When that happens with scenery, it gets tricky and I have to do more math. There's a lot of math when you are a carpenter.

You may have noticed that in many SCT plays, the scenery moves. When it has to move I have to build it differently than if it was just sitting in one place. It has to be stronger, but also lighter. I have to know if it's moving up and down or side to side, or sometimes both up and down and side to side. The more the scenery moves, the stronger I have to make it, so it doesn't break. That's trickier and takes more work.

Sometimes scenery isn't even flat. It's curved or round. That gets tricky too. Then I have to figure out the exact curve and cut that curve into wood, or even bend the wood or steel to the right curve. But that's what I like about being a carpenter at SCT. We get to build some wacky scenery, and that's fun and challenging.

What in your childhood got you involved in theater and to where you are today?

My mom was a scenic painter and designer. So as a kid I helped build and paint scenery. I liked that. Then, sometimes, I would get cast in a play as an actor. I liked that too. What I liked most is when people would laugh at what I did on stage. It made me realize that I had connected with them, that I had shared something with them. Something we wouldn't have felt or thought if they hadn't come to see the play. That was really powerful to me.

Here we are doing *The Velveteen Rabbit*. A play about a toy that gets so played with that it becomes real. Through the years I have built toys for the kids in my life. My nephews and nieces and son and daughter. I made the toys for them as gifts, so they might have something to remind them that I loved them. But more importantly, I made the toys for them to play with.

I think when we play, we are connecting. We connect with the other people we play with and we connect with the imaginary characters we create when we play. We are social animals; we need to connect with others and playing is how we practice. Playing is really good for our brains.



Clark's daughter said that these were the high water mark for blocks. When she played with other kids' blocks she'd "miss the ramp one, or the long flat one." He also made the bulldozer in the front. They're all in the same picture because they have always lived together.



Even though his son is 28, his much loved tug boat still lives in Clark's bathroom.

I build scenery, which is kind of like a big toy for actors (players) to do a play on. The better I do my job, the better the actors can connect to the audience. We play games and connect with one another. We watch players play sports games and we connect with them and the other fans. Musicians play music and connect with other musicians and their audience. And when you play, you are making stronger connections with your playmates. Even if you are playing by yourself, you're connecting with imagined people or characters. And when we make those connections, we're sharing thoughts and feelings together at the same time as others. And we're imagining what it's like to be someone else. Playing makes us better people. I think this is true.

That's why I like to build scenery. And act in a play. And play music and sports. And why I like to build toys. We play with toys and that can make us better people. Toys can make us more real.

Clark has been working in professional theater for over 40 years. He has been working on and off for SCT since 1979 as an actor, teacher, stage hand, even house manager as well as a scenic carpenter. He has worked on more than 100 plays just at SCT. Besides theater, Clark is a dad and a husband. He has also been a fisherman and sailor, writer, truck driver, scientist, longshoreman and a musician. He likes it here at SCT.



Purni on the top of Mount Sinai in Egypt

Why did you decide to adapt *The Velveteen Rabbit* for the stage?

I came across the story a few years ago, and I immediately thought it would make a great show, and I also knew who I wanted in it as the Rabbit. I knew that a lot of the time when people stage this book, they have a puppet as the Rabbit, but it was really important to me that the Boy and the Rabbit should both be actors, because that way you can tell the story of the relationship between them. To me, it's the story of a friendship.

At first, the Rabbit is new in the nursery, almost like a new child in school, but then suddenly he and the Boy are thrown together, and they become best friends. But then at the end, the Boy goes away to the seaside and leaves the Rabbit behind, and their friendship comes to a sudden and terrible end. It made me think about what it felt like to have toys when I was a child—I used to worry, for example, about whether I was playing with some of them enough: you know that feeling that you prefer some of your toys over others, and play with them more often, and then suddenly you feel guilty that maybe you aren't taking good enough care of the others? I guess for me there was a lot in this story that I thought everyone would recognize: what it's like to have a best friend, what it's like to worry that nobody likes you, what it's like to be forgotten, how wonderful it is when you and your best friend make up after an argument. All those kinds of things were what drew me to this story.

Can you tell us a little about how it will be staged?

Almost as soon as I thought I wanted to make this piece, I knew what I wanted it to look like. I knew the actor I wanted for the Rabbit. Although he's a human, he still looks to my mind a bit like a rabbit, so I knew I wanted to have him. And I knew I didn't want him to be in a rabbit costume, so then I became interested in the idea that the story would not only be about the Boy and the Rabbit, but also be told by the actors themselves.

I then realised I needed a third person, to play Nanna and the Doctor and all the characters who represent Authority—so if you like, the Boy and the Rabbit are children who live in the world of play and the nursery, but there is another figure who is able to control them and decide their destiny.

So then I knew I wanted three actors, and I realised that I wanted the third one to be a man as well, because otherwise it would risk looking like two boys and their mother, which I thought meant something too specific. So then the idea of three men in suits, playing themselves as performers telling the story, but who could also transform into the Boy and the Rabbit and the Authority Figure came to me, and that led to another thought, which was: a lot of children's literature is set in the world of a nursery that feels a bit Victorian—I'm thinking of *Mary Poppins* or *Peter Pan* or *Pollyanna* or *The Railway Children*, or even *Swallows and Amazons*. I know they're not all literally Victorian, but they do all have a certain feel to their worlds that I don't think most children live in any more.

So I became interested in a contrast between the modern and the traditional, and we've been working on a design that juxtaposes the two. The world of the nursery is very traditional, with traditional and vintage toys, but the performers themselves are in modern dress, and the games they play are modern games.

In the second half we transform the set into a garden, so we can include games outside, and those feel more boisterous. And of course at the end, when we get to the bonfire, that'll be quite abstract—modernist almost, but definitely something the Rabbit can climb.

I wanted the whole thing to feel exciting, and for the audience to really want to be in that nursery with the Boy and the Rabbit. But because I tend to prefer theatre that's actually quite simple, and that doesn't pretend the story is really happening, or that we're somewhere we're not, at the same time there will be a slightly homespun feel to it.

We're using movement and specially composed music, which I think is going to feel a bit like the lullabies and pieces for children by Brahms and Schumann. But then our movement director is a BBoyer (break dancer) by origin, so that'll be an interesting mix.

I sort of want the whole thing to feel like an enormous toyshop but to be quite sad at the end, when the Rabbit and the Boy go their separate ways.

How did you get involved in theatre, and why do you do it?

I was at school, and my school built a theatre. It was designed to be like a proper professional theatre, and at first nobody really knew what to do with it. I was in seventh grade at the time, and I didn't come from a theatre family—my family was into music, and I'd played the violin since I was two years old—but I knew I was interested in what was going to happen in this new building. I remember being in ninth grade and choosing drama as one of my subjects, and the teacher asked if there is anyone here who doesn't want to act, and I put my hand up. I don't remember why—maybe I knew I didn't want the attention, or more likely I didn't like the other girls who did want the attention, but anyway that started me off learning about all the technical aspects of theatre. I went to the National Youth Theatre as a stage manager, and by the time I went to university I'd done almost everything you can do backstage at least once: lighting, sound, set building, making costumes, stage managing, administration—I loved it. I think it helped that boys from the boys' school came to be in the plays, and I found that very appealing. In my final year I directed the senior play,

What things about this actor remind you of a rabbit? (Christian Roe as Rabbit in Unicorn Theatre's production of The Velveteen Rabbit. Photo credit Manuel Harlan)

You Can't Take It with You by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. We did American accents and everything—I wonder what I'd think of it if I saw it again now!

I went to university and studied history, but I'm not sure I did all that much studying. Mostly I was in the theatre studio doing plays, and I also was the president of the theatre club for a year. And then when I graduated I got a job at the National Theatre in London, in the literary department—basically a whole department of people who get paid to read plays: new plays, classic plays, plays in foreign languages; it was incredible. And then from there I became literary manager at Berkeley Repertory Theater in California, which was my first experience of working in the States.

I think theatre is about more than plays, though. I think so much of the time, the world we see in plays feels alien to what we see in the real world around us. Even something as simple as costumes—we see people pretending to be in the nineteenth century, or pretending to be dockworkers, or pretending to be having an argument—there's something I've always found really off-putting about that. "Why are they talking like that," I always want to say, and I notice that since I've been directing plays for children, a lot of children in the audience ask that question, too. I want the theatre to be a place in which we take a break from being alone, from being individuals, and become an audience, a group, a society, where we can think about the world together. When we watch films or TV, we have all the feelings we have because of the stories of the people we're watching, and we empathise or become angry or sad, and those feelings change our day. But in the theatre it's different—we still have the same feelings and we are perhaps also watching a story, but the real thing that's happening is something else: we're in a room together, with strangers, with people we might not even like if we met them, and we find we're all feeling these feelings together. That's why for me the theatre is the best art form—it is the only place people sit together as individuals, for a few hours with no phones, no outside world pulling you, and in that moment you realise: those feelings that could change your day when you've been watching a film—well, in the theatre, if we put all those together, we could change the world.

Article originally commissioned by Unicorn Theatre.

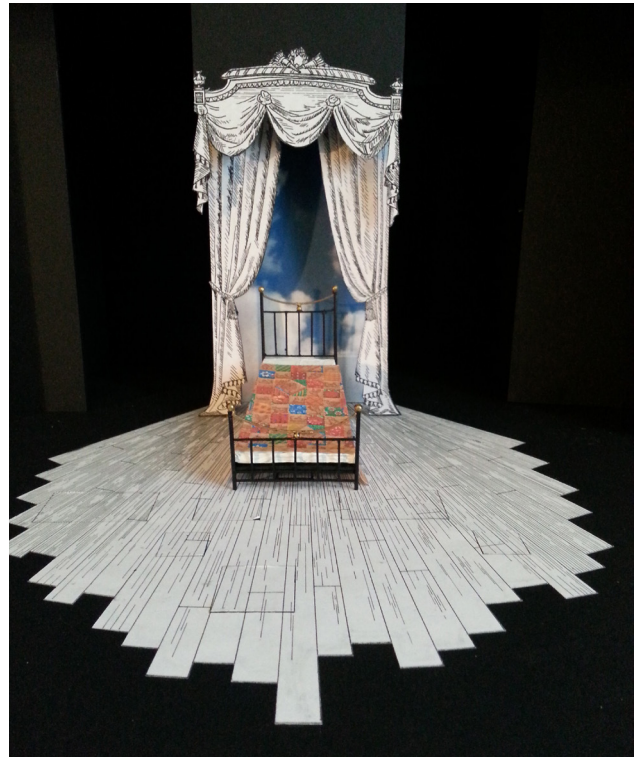


ABOUT THE DESIGN

From James Button,
Set and Costume Designer



Set model with scenic elements for the nursery, including hidden openings in the floor for prop storage



The Boy's bedroom



The garden

When we first started thinking about designing *The Velveteen Rabbit* the one question we kept coming back to was, “What is real?” Considering we are in a theatre where all the worlds we create are not real (in most cases they start as a black box), it seemed like an exciting starting point to keep asking this question through the design as the play unfolds. I became really interested in seeing the contrast of “real” objects sitting side-by-side “not real” objects. The set contrasts crisp white with black lines, like an old illustration ripped out of a story book, with the photographic realism of a real sky—one part real, one part imagination. But which part of the world is more real?

What is so wonderful about this story is that whatever your age, you can probably remember having the same experience with a toy, teddy or doll and that has the potential to make this play a surprisingly emotional experience for its audience. I certainly had not thought about the toys that I had loved so much as a child until revisiting this play. It felt important that the design should allow the audience to implant their own story into the experience by tapping into their imagination, not giving too much detail, so we ourselves (as an audience) fill in these gaps with our own experience of the world and memories.

Imagination—we use this word a lot in creating theatre, but when relating it to this story it really makes so much sense. When you think about it, the Boy creates the whole world around them through playing and his imagination. We are always in the bedroom, playroom or garden (all very domestic, practical locations), never actually on a boat being shipwrecked onto tropical islands or on ice adventures to find the poles. It felt important to show this process—from the play, to the imagination, to real.



In this production photo, notice the combination and contrast of the artistic style of the garden elements and the painted floor with the photo-realistic sky. (Ashley Byam as Boy, Christian Roe as Rabbit in Unicorn Theatre's production of The Velveteen Rabbit. Photo credit Manuel Harlan)

We kept the costuming of the play incredibly simple. There are no fluffy tails or bunny ears. To introduce such items would instantly break the lines of imagination. We have to believe that the Rabbit thinks he is real and not a man wearing silly ears and a tail. The journey of the Rabbit is simply portrayed by the slow aging of his velvet jacket (there are four in total, from new to the end) as the Boy loves all his fur off. The rest of the cast walk in as three suit-wearing men finding themselves in the space and then using the toys and objects in the space to transform into their next characters, as a child would do playing with their toys.



The imaginative play world of the Boy and the Rabbit lets the bed become a ship in a storm at sea. (Christian Roe as Rabbit in Unicorn Theatre's production of The Velveteen Rabbit. Photo credit Manuel Harlan)



The Rabbit's first day in the nursery. His jacket is still in perfect condition. (Christian Roe as Rabbit in Unicorn Theatre's production of The Velveteen Rabbit. Photo Manuel Harlan)



After many adventures with the Boy, the Rabbit's jacket shows wear and tear. In this image you also see one of the suit-wearing men become the Boy's Nanny by simply adding a cap and an apron over his suit. (Paul Lloyd as Nanny, Christian Roe as Rabbit in Unicorn Theatre's production of The Velveteen Rabbit. Photo credit Robert Day)



Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very insignificant and commonplace, and the only person who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse, who was old and wise, and had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others.

—Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*

Friendship is one of the greatest things we can experience. Everyone needs friends—some people need one good friend and other people need many. One of the worst things you can do to people, or any living creature really, is to keep them isolated from others. Humans are very complicated, and our needs as social creatures can be the easiest thing in the world for some to fulfill, or absolutely the most difficult for others. Young children often have a natural ability to make friends, yet there are those that don't find it easy and it can leave them feeling left out. There are many reasons people can have a difficult time making friends. For example, they might be very shy, or they might feel they are different from everyone else. When you feel different, trying to figure out how to find a place in a group of people can be very hard. It is just as challenging to know how to be inclusive when you want to reach out to another person and they do not seem responsive. The journey of friendship is a two-way street, and that path can have sharp turns and dead ends.

In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a toy rabbit is given as a gift to a boy and, as the story tells us, the Boy immediately loves him, “for almost two hours.” Then family arrives and other presents are unwrapped, and the Rabbit is forgotten. Imagine the Rabbit as a friend, and the other presents as friends as well. You don't get people as presents, but you do meet them for the first time. A new friend might be made, and then when other friends come over and join in it is possible that new person could be left out, like the Rabbit. Or the new friend may simply feel left out, even if that

was not the intention. The Boy was not being intentionally mean—he just forgot about the Rabbit. He could have introduced the Rabbit into his play with all his other toys, but he didn't. The other toys “snubbed” the Rabbit. Each toy, except the Skin Horse, found a reason to feel superior, and the Rabbit felt more and more alone.

Then, one day, China Dog, one of the Boy's favorite toys, couldn't be found. The Boy couldn't sleep without him, so his nanny gave him the Rabbit instead. Here, there is an interesting moment when the Rabbit feels “rather uncomfortable” in the Boy's arms, and sometimes he misses the moonlight and quiet talks with his only friend, the Skin Horse. You could imagine that this is similar to a child who isn't used to being the center of someone's attention—maybe they are very quiet or shy, and suddenly they need to adapt to new people. Over time they find they “grow to like it” and then they find they are very happy. You can't make someone like you, but as you learn more about each other, a deep friendship can grow.

The Boy plays very differently with the Rabbit than he does with his toy soldiers and other toys. So too we can learn to be a different kind of friend to each of our own friends, depending on their individual personalities and interests. Some friends love to run and climb trees, others love to wrestle, some love to do art, or dance or play tea party. The wonderful thing is we can do any number of different things together. There is not only one way to be friends.

In *The Velveteen Rabbit* you can also see the difference between the Boy not noticing the Rabbit, and the other toys and the real rabbits choosing to be mean or bullying him. While both of these actions leave the Rabbit sad and lonely, we see how being a bully has cruel intentions. Once we are aware of someone we may not have noticed before being unhappy and having difficulty fitting in, we can make the choice to help them. Also, once we are aware of someone being bullied we can choose to make the effort to be kind and show we care about the way they are being treated. Something as simple as a smile and a “hello” can make an enormous difference to that person. It just takes one step at a time.

One of our greatest qualities as humans is our ability to empathize, to understand and share the feelings of others. Empathy leads to kindness and is a gift that gives both ways—to the giver and the receiver. And it is a gift, like friendship, that grows the more you give it to others.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOYS



Medieval shooters and toy arrows from the Netherlands



Greek pottery doll from the tenth century BCE



Wooden horse, between fourth and seventh century, Medieval period

In Margery Williams' beloved 1922 children's tale, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a stuffed rabbit made from velveteen fabric is a Christmas gift initially overlooked by a boy in favor of his new more modern, mechanical toys. Later, when the toy he usually sleeps with is misplaced, the Velveteen Rabbit is offered instead and becomes his favorite toy, providing him with hours of cuddles, joy, and imaginative play. He pretends the rabbit is real, has picnics and adventures with it, talks with it, and when he becomes seriously ill with scarlet fever, the Velveteen Rabbit is a major source of comfort as he recovers.

Throughout their long history, toys have provided entertainment, joy, and comfort to the children of the world, transcending cultures and class.

The earliest toys we know of are small stone and clay marble-like balls dating back to 4000 BCE, found in Egypt in the graves of children. Natural toys like rocks and sticks delight children to this day: throw them, catch them, dig with them, emulate adults using them as tools or weapons, play with them for sport, explore the world with them—the list goes on. As time passed, clay was shaped into animal or human figures. The earliest known dolls made from materials at hand such as clay, wood with fabric, etc., date from approximately 2000 BCE.

Between the fifth and fifteenth centuries, during Europe's Middle Ages, or Medieval period, toys included yo-yos, tops, toy soldiers and push/pull animals, often made from wood or bone. Wealthier families at the time also had toys made from materials such as glass, silver or bronze.

The European Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century saw the start of changes in how children were viewed; they were now beginning to be considered people unto themselves with a right to enjoy their childhood. There was an increase in the type and number of manufactured toys, such as the first jigsaw puzzle, board games and rocking horses. Simple things such as blowing soap bubbles, playing with hoops, pulling/riding in toy wagons, or playing with puppets were also used to pass the time.

Still, until the nineteenth century, most people (except for those of means), including children, spent their waking lives contributing to the family's very survival. There was little leisure time. Children were expected to work along with their parents in the fields, hunting and gathering, carrying water and fire wood, cooking, caring for siblings, etc. Yet, as is true today, toys served a vital function: they helped children develop coordination and fine/gross motor skills, develop mental agility, learn about spatial relationships and

problem solving, cause and effect, and helped them practice and navigate social skills and relationships. Time spent “playing” with toys prepared children for adulthood; they learned and honed skills needed as childhood was left behind.

In the nineteenth century, the Victorian period, the rise of a middle class began to see both an increase in leisure time and more toys with an educational bent. The larger market for toys and the manufacturing changes of the Industrial Revolution brought mass production of toys that were more complex, with more moving parts. Printing on paper became more widespread, and things like jigsaw puzzles and embossed paper cut-outs used to make scrapbooks became popular. Hollow cast-lead toys were popular in the late 1800s (toy soldiers, ships, trains, animal farms, Noah’s Ark, etc.). Dice, dominoes and card games, while popular with children, were enjoyed by adults as well. Also popular in Victorian times, shortly before *The Velveteen Rabbit* was published, were automata toys which had mechanical clockworks, along with spinning tops (popular among all classes).



Soap Bubbles. Painting by Jean Siméon Chardin, France 1733-1734, the Age of Enlightenment



Toy cradle board and doll, Plateau Native Americans (USA/Canada), circa (which means “from approximately”) 1850–1920

A major shift in children’s lives came with Victorian era social movements placing limits on child labor and mandating public education. Mass production made toys cheaper to purchase, but children did not have as many toys as they do today. While wealthy children enjoyed doll houses, rocking horses, dolls with elaborate clothes, or fancy puppet theaters, these were still far too expensive for those with modest means. In contrast, a doll for a poor child might be made of a handkerchief over a wad of fabric.

The twentieth century, referred to by some as the “Golden Age of Toys,” saw more complex toys, but stuffed toys were still popular. In 1903, the Teddy Bear was born after President Theodore Roosevelt was featured in a cartoon refusing to shoot a bear cub while on a hunting trip. German toy maker, Margaret Steiff, began making a jointed doll figure with the head of a bear—still popular to this day!

Prior to World War I, Erector Sets, Lincoln Logs and Tinker Toys were developed. The war years saw a boom in toy soldiers, toy military vehicles and field hospitals. By the 1930s toys based on cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and Felix the Cat were popular.

Some toys came about by accident: Play-Doh was originally developed as a wallpaper cleaner in the 1930s. Silly Putty hit the scene in 1943, developed by an engineer trying to create a substitute for synthetic rubber, and the ever popular Slinky, developed the same year, was inspired by an engineer working on springs to keep sensitive equipment stable at sea, watching a spring fall off a table and “climb” to the floor!



Clockwork mechanical tin toy Ferris wheel, between 1900–1910, the Late Victorian Era



Athenian pottery image, circa 500-450 BCE



The Victorian Era, circa 1902-1905



The 1920s



Present day

Rolling hoops through the centuries

During World War II, toy-making slowed as factories focused on supporting the war effort. Cheaper toys such as paper dolls came to the fore. After the war, plastic became a popular and efficient material for the manufacture of toys and beyond. Western societies became more affluent and new technologies led to more inexpensive toys.

By the 1950s, along came television, children's programming, and new marketing strategies, popularizing Matchbox cars, Barbie Dolls, Legos, and action figures based on television

or movie characters. The 1960s Space Race brought space age toys and robots.

Children of all backgrounds have, of course, always found ways to play with objects, even if they aren't designed to be toys: a piece of paper folded to become a paper airplane; toddlers happily amusing themselves with pots, pans and wooden spoons while a parent cooks; the shiny new toys sitting unplayed with while the child spends hours on adventures of the imagination in the empty boxes the toys came in. While in more recent decades,

electronic toys have gained prominence, children still play with sticks and rocks. And toy rabbits made of a variety of fabrics can still be found clutched in the hands of children, offering comfort, joy, and inspiring imaginative play.

“While in more recent decades, electronic toys have gained prominence, children still play with sticks and rocks.”

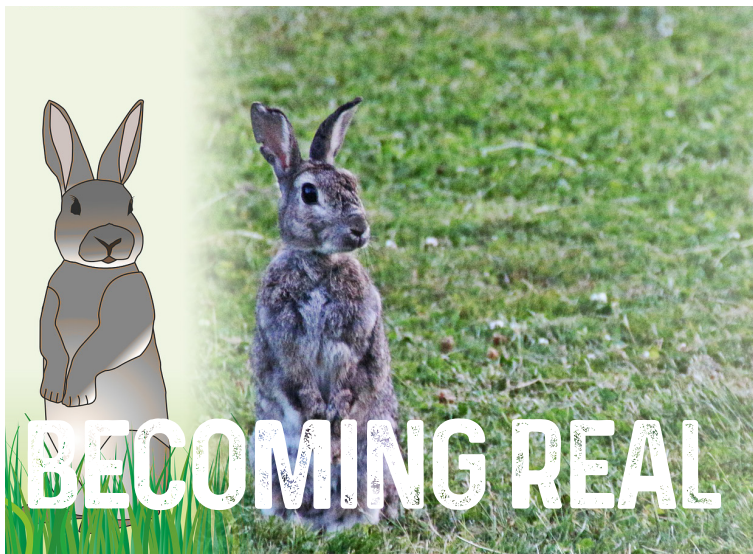
Resources

ChertseyMuseum.org: [Victorian Toys](#)

BrightonMuseums.org.uk: [Toy Timeline](#)

ImagineToys.com: [How Have toys Changed Over the Years?](#)

Wikipedia.org: [Toy](#)



“Are you for real?” “Get real!” “Really?” These are phrases we hear a lot every day and it seems we are always looking for what is real. In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a toy rabbit tries to find out how to be real and what that means. Through the course of the play and the Rabbit’s journey, we discover that being real is finding the way to truly be yourself and not a version of something you think you are supposed to be. It’s living your life genuinely, accepting and being accepted by others for who you really are.

Being real is based on our own individuality and is different for everyone. We are all striving for a feeling of happiness and contentment. We are always looking for work and activities that are engaging, relationships that feel satisfying, and genuine love and friendship so we never feel alone in this world.

The book, *The Velveteen Principles* by author Toni Raiten-D’Antonio, explores what real is in the context of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. The book helps show that being real comes from within. Being real happens when we start to identify who we truly are and focus on our own identity and self-worth. As soon as the Rabbit learns what real is and the Rabbit believes it is possible, he starts to show signs of being real. Each of us has the ability to find our own, true self.

In the play, Skin Horse explains the process of becoming real. “Real isn’t how you are made. It’s a thing that happens to you.” What he is saying is that change and a transformation to find our real selves is a process. In the play, the Rabbit maintains an emotional longing for being real. When the Rabbit asks if it hurts to be real, the Skin Horse explains, “Sometimes. When you’re real you don’t mind being hurt.” That means that emotions brought about by true acceptance, joy and love can be a good part of the process. Sometimes it can even bring a tear to the eye.

Empathy is a part of being real. Empathy means being able to identify with the thoughts, feelings and emotions of someone else. When you are not being genuine or not living a real life, you have difficulties understanding and relating to others. Skin Horse is honest and real when he’s talking to the Rabbit. The Rabbit learns that you need to be honest with yourself and others. Empathy allows us to be generous about caring for others’ health and happiness. In the story, the Rabbit is more concerned about the Boy’s health than the fact that he is being taken away. Being generous

is about being concerned, showing compassion for others and lending encouragement. To be generous and empathetic is to be supportive and accepting and that is also what makes us real.

In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the Boy’s love plays a big role in the Rabbit becoming real. The Skin Horse says, “When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with you, but really loves you, then you become real.” The Rabbit understands that it is the acknowledgment of that love, the acceptance of it, that means what it is to be real and for that he is grateful. Truly being grateful is more than simply saying thank you. It comes from the heart and has become a part of your real self. The Rabbit also learns that the acceptance of love has helped him to realize his true self and that it was a journey that he needed to take on his own.

The journey to find your true self can be painful, as the Rabbit already learned. Transforming into being real, or living an authentic and genuine life, is a complex process. In our lives, moving toward a real life and living the life of our dreams can be a challenging experience, but once you reach your goal, you recognize the pain was part of the journey and allowed for a positive outcome. The Velveteen Rabbit becomes real when he understands the Boy’s love and affection. This story is based on acceptance and unconditional love both from Skin Horse and the Boy. When that love and acceptance is understood, it is there to stay. “Once you are real, you can’t be unreal again. It lasts for always,” says the Skin Horse.

The theme in the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit* is a great example of how important it is that we all live a genuine, real and authentic life, based on our own self-worth and our true acceptance of others. We can all learn from the Rabbit’s journey and incorporate ways to become better ourselves.

Really.

*“Empathy is a part of being real.
Empathy means being able
to identify with the thoughts,
feelings and emotions of
someone else.”*

Resources

Goodreads.com: [The Velveteen Principles](#)

Upenn.edu: [Full Text of The Velveteen Rabbit](#)

THE TAMING OF WILD RABBITS

When the Velveteen Rabbit meets a pair of wild rabbits in the woods, they laugh at him for not being able to hop the way they do and for not smelling like a real rabbit. If he had been a real rabbit they might not have rejected him, even if he didn't live in the wild like them. Domestic rabbits started out as wild rabbits. When did they become tame?

A recent study in ScienceNordic theorized that over one thousand years ago wild rabbits were tamed. Domesticating animals had long been a practice for agricultural reasons. Farmers needed dogs, goats, cows and sheep to support their livelihood. The rabbit, scientists believe, was one of the last animals domesticated by humans. According to ScienceNordic, around 1,400 years ago a group of monks in Southern France managed to domesticate the rabbit. The Catholic Church set forth an edict that the flesh of young rabbits was akin to fish, paving the way for rabbit to be eaten during Lent, a solemn religious holiday that marks the beginning of the Easter season. It is believed these monks kept the rabbits caged to serve as a food source.

While that particular interpretation offers a tidy lineage for the domestication of the rabbit, other scientists note this story could be an oversimplification for the long process of taming. Melinda Zeder, senior scientist at Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and an adjunct professor of human ecology and Archaeobiology at the University of New Mexico, agrees with alternate conclusions presented by an international research team. The team argues the journey was longer and messier in its evolution. Zeder says, "The authors here are pointing out and trying to correct a really longstanding fallacy—it's a little bit depressing that it still needs to be pointed out, but it does—that domestication is not a ... point at which wild becomes domestic. It's a process."

In *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin wrote: "Hardly any animal is more difficult to tame than the young of the wild rabbit; scarcely any animal is tamer than the young of the tame rabbit." Wild rabbits possess a strong flight response. When wild



rabbits come into contact with humans or other animals, they quickly hop away. They live in complex social hierarchies, with few males and more females. They are smaller than tame rabbits and most often have brown fur.

Domesticated rabbits are descended from the European hare. Their social behavior has evolved over time making them minimally cautious with humans and able to be great pets. Domesticated rabbits have long life spans, often living over 10 years. They will instinctively burrow like their ancestors and need space to roam and play. Rabbits are remarkable creatures with a mysterious and extraordinary history. The domesticated variety makes incredible companions for humans. The wild variety flourishes in their natural habitat. These adorable animals capture our affection and attention with their playfulness, spirit and energy.

Resources

ScienceNordic.com: [How the Wild Rabbit Was Domesticated](#)

DiscoverWildlife.com: [Understand mammal behaviour – rabbits](#)

SmithsonianMag.com: [The Odd, Tidy Story of Rabbit Domestication That Is Also Completely False](#)

SOME RABBIT FACTS

Rabbits are small mammals with fluffy, short tails, whiskers and distinctive long ears. There are more than 30 species around the world, and while they

live in many different environments, they have many things in common.

Size

Some rabbits are about the size of a cat, and some can grow to be as big as a small child. Small rabbits, such as pygmy rabbits, can be as little as eight inches in length and weigh less than a pound. Larger species grow to 20 inches and more than 10 pounds. The world's longest rabbit, according to Guinness World Records, is a Flemish giant that clocked in at 4 feet 3 inches and 49 pounds.

Offspring

Rabbits breed three to four times each year. This is because only 15 percent of baby rabbits make it to their first birthday. So, to ensure that the population grows, rabbits have more babies. Each pregnancy produces three to eight babies, called kittens or kits. After four to five weeks, a kit can care for itself. In two or three months it is ready to start a family of its own. If there is a lack of natural predators, an area can quickly become overrun with rabbits.



Baby rabbits, called kits, are born blind and without fur. They are completely dependent on their mothers for the first few weeks of their lives.

Diet

Rabbits are herbivores. This means that they have a plant-based diet and do not eat meat. Their diets include grasses, clover, and some cruciferous plants, such as broccoli and Brussels sprouts. They are opportunistic feeders and also eat fruits, seeds, roots, buds and tree bark.



Wild rabbit foraging for food

Habitat

While originally from Europe and Africa, rabbits are now found all over the world. They occupy most of the world's land masses, except for southern South America, the West Indies, Madagascar, and most islands southeast of Asia. Although originally absent from South America, Australia, New Zealand and Java, rabbits have been introduced to these locations during the last few centuries. More than half of the world's rabbits live in North America.

Domestic rabbits need a regulated environment to protect against heat exhaustion or hypothermia. Wild rabbits don't have this problem and make their homes in various temperature extremes. They can be found in woods, forests, meadows, grasslands, deserts, tundra and wetlands.

Wild rabbits create their own homes by tunneling into the ground. These tunnel systems are called warrens and include rooms for nesting and sleeping. They also have multiple entrances for quick escape.



Gathering outside one of the entrances to their warren

Habits

Wild rabbits are very social creatures and live in large groups called colonies. The busiest time of day for them is at dusk and dawn. This is when they venture out to find food. The low light allows them to hide from predators—which include owls, hawks, eagles, falcons, wild dogs, feral cats and ground squirrels. Predators are a constant threat, but rabbits can be very crafty and quick. The rabbit's long legs and ability to run for long periods at high speeds are likely evolutionary adaptations to help them elude things that want to eat them. To get away from a predator, a cottontail rabbit will run in a zigzag pattern and reach speeds of up to 18 mph.

Their long ears allow them to better hear predators that may be approaching. They also help them to stay cool in hot climates; extra body heat is released through blood vessels in the ear. Their eyes are made for safety, too, placed high and to the sides of the skull, allowing rabbits to see nearly 360 degrees, as well as far above their heads.



Above ground view of a warren. How many entrances can you count?

Rabbit Facts excerpted and adapted from:

LiveScience.com: [Rabbits: Habits, Diet & Other Facts](#)

Additional resources:

AnimalDiversity.org: [Leporidae – Hares and Rabbits](#)

HumaneSociety.org: [Rabbits](#)

NationalGeographic.com: [Eastern Cottontail Rabbit](#)

WORDS & PHRASES THAT MIGHT BE NEW TO YOU

There once was a **Velveteen** Rabbit – cotton fabric with a pile resembling velvet

And in the beginning he was really **splendid**. – wonderful

He was fat and **bunchy**... – rounded

...and his ears were **lined** with pink **sateen**.

lined – covered in fabric

sateen – cotton fabric woven like satin, with a glossy surface

On Christmas morning, when he sat **wedged**... – forced into a narrow space

...with a **sprig** of holly... – small stem

There were other things in the stocking: nuts...and a **clockwork** mouse... – mechanism with a spring and toothed gearwheels, used to drive a mechanical clock, toy or other device

...and there was a great **rustling** of tissue paper... – soft, muffled crackling sound

And unwrapping of **parcels**... – packages

...lived in the toy **cupboard** or on the **nursery** floor...

cupboard – cabinet or closet, usually with a door and shelves, used for storage

nursery – room in a house for the special use of young children

He was naturally shy...some of the more expensive toys quite **snubbed** him. – ignored

The **mechanical** toys were very **superior**...

mechanical – run by machinery

superior – higher in status

...they were full of **modern** ideas... – new

The **model** boat... – small copy of a larger object

...caught the **tone** from the mechanical toys... – mood

...never missed an opportunity of referring to his **rigging** in **technical** terms.

rigging – ropes, cables and chains that support a ship's mast and work the sails

technical – detailed specialized knowledge



Ship's rigging

Even Timothy, the wooden lion, who was made by the **disabled** soldiers, and should have had **broader views**, put on **airs** and pretended he was **connected** with Government

disabled – injured in the war

broader views – more open-minded opinions

airs – fake fancy way of being/acting

connected – attached to or linked

Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very **insignificant** and **commonplace**...

insignificant – small or unimportant

commonplace – ordinary

There was a person called Nanna who **ruled** the nursery. – controlled

Every now and then, for no reason whatever, she went **swooping about**... – coming down on something in a sudden, swift attack, like a bird diving down

It's quite a **mystery** to me... – something difficult to understand or explain

There's **company** downstairs... – visitors or guests

Wait! What about **China Dog**? – dog-shaped item made of a fine porcelain material

...the Rabbit could **scarcely** breathe. – hardly

...his beautiful velveteen fur was getting **shabbier** and **shabbier** – more worn out

That night he was too happy to sleep, so much love **stirred** in his little sawdust heart that it almost **burst**.

stirred – moved or fluttered

burst – split open

They had wonderful adventures in the woods, playing **brigands...** – bandits, group of robbers, especially in the forests or mountains

... and making **fairy huts** in the **raspberry canes**

fairy huts – small houses for fairies or woodland creatures

raspberry canes – long, hollow stems of a raspberry plant

Sometimes the Boy would build the Rabbit a little nest in the **bracken...** – large, coarse fern that covers a large area

His face grew very **flushed...** – red and hot, typically as the result of illness

...the little Rabbit lay hidden from sight under the **bedclothes...** – sheets and blankets

A **mass** of **Scarlet Fever** **germs...**

mass – large group

Scarlet Fever – infectious bacterial disease affecting children especially, and causing fever and a scarlet rash

germs – microorganisms, especially ones that cause disease

And so the little Rabbit was put into a sack with the old picture books and a lot of **rubbish**, and carried out to the end of the garden behind the **fowl-house**.

rubbish – trash, garbage

fowl-house – building where fowl (domestic chickens, turkeys, ducks) are kept

That was a fine place to make a **bonfire...** – large, open-air fire for a celebration or for burning trash

Nearby he could see the **thicket...** – a thick group of bushes or trees

...like a **tropical** jungle in whose shadow he had played with the Boy on **bygone** days.

tropical – hot, humid (wet/moist) climate

bygone – belonging to a past or earlier time

He seemed to see them all pass before him, ...the **fortress...** – fort or castle

It had slender green leaves the colour of **emeralds...** – bright green gem stones

...there was something **familiar...** – recognizable



Bracken ferns



Emerald crystal

JUMP START

Ideas for things to do, wonder about, talk about or write about before or after you see The Velveteen Rabbit

What's the oldest toy you have? Do you remember when you got it? Do you remember who gave it to you?		What would you tell the Velveteen Rabbit to make him feel better about how the other toys treat him?	Draw the story of <i>The Velveteen Rabbit</i> in four panels like a comic strip.	Tell, write or draw a story about a favorite toy. Why is it your favorite? How long have you had it? What do you love doing with it?
Why were the real rabbits mean to the Velveteen Rabbit? Write a letter to the rabbits telling them how you feel about the way they behaved.				Tell the story of a fairy who travels the world making toys real.
				What does love mean to you?
Name all the characters you saw in the play, including all the toys.		Why do people sometimes try to make themselves seem more important than other people?	What in the story reminded you of the way you play?	Write, draw or act out a story of an adventure you and a toy would go on if it was real.
Make a toy.		Have you ever taken care of someone who was sick? Who has taken care of you when you were sick? Did you thank them?		Make a list of what is the same and different about the Velveteen Rabbit and the real rabbits. What ways could they have found to play together?
Have a rabbit race. Everybody has to hop.				
Ask the grownups in your family what their favorite toy was as a child and why. Draw pictures of the toys as gifts for them.				Write about a time you felt different from other people around you. What did you do or wish someone had done for you to help you feel better?
Have you ever had an imaginary friend? What kinds of things did you do with them?				
Use your toys to tell the story of <i>The Velveteen Rabbit</i> . They don't have to be the same toys that are in the original story—it could be the story of the Lego blocks or any other toy.		Play <i>Storytelling Catch</i> about the order of events in the story. One person starts by holding a ball and saying the first event in the story, then throwing the ball to someone else who tells the next event, etc. until you reach the end of the story. Then try it backwards, from the end to the beginning. You can give each other clues to help remember what happens next but don't answer for each other.		When the Rabbit asks the Skin Horse what being real means, the Skin Horse tells him, "Real isn't how you are made. It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real." Rewrite the Skin Horse's answer in your own words.
What if Nanna had found China Dog and not put the Velveteen Rabbit in the boy's bed that night? What would've happened to the Rabbit? Write or tell a story about a different way the Rabbit and the Boy could have come together.				
Play <i>Toy Charades</i> with your family or friends. Without showing each other, write the names of toys on small pieces of paper. Fold the papers and put them in a bowl. Split up into two teams. Each person takes a piece of paper from the bowl and has to become that toy to get their team to name the toy they are. No talking, just movement, facial expression and gesture.				Do you need to be able to see or touch something for it to be real? Name some things you can't see or touch that are real to you. Here's one to start—air.
				Where is your favorite place to play? What ways do you play there?
				Design a poster for a play about your favorite toy.
Tell the story from the point of view of the Skin Horse.				
Donate gently-used toys you don't play with anymore to places like Treehouse, Mary's Place, Northwest Center or Westside Baby for other children to play with.				

DRAMA IN ACTION

This is a customized *The Velveteen Rabbit* Dramatic Connection Workshop exercise for you to try.



EXERCISE: Back to the Toy Box

GRADES: K and up

TIME: 15 minutes

SET-UP: This exercise works best in an open space.

SUPPLIES: : Educators have the option of a funny hat or glasses to play Nanna.

In The Velveteen Rabbit, creativity and the friendship between the Boy and the Rabbit brought their imaginary adventures to life. But Nanna, the adult in the story, did not share in their imagination. Whenever she looked at the Rabbit, she only saw a stuffed toy. On stage, the actor playing the Velveteen Rabbit changed how his body moved when he was playing with the Boy versus when Nanna saw him as a toy. In this exercise, students will use their imaginations to become toys going between movement and stillness.

Instructions:

Before the lesson, create an open space to move around in freely without any safety hazards.

Students should make a circle around the teacher. Ask students to think of a toy that would be in the Boy's toy box. When you count down from five, the students can stand and make a frozen picture of the toy they were thinking about. When the students make their toy shapes, comment on what you see in the room. Note aloud low, medium, and high levels; small and big shapes; and any expressive emotions on their face. Ask students to come alive and move like the toy they are playing for five seconds. Comment on movements you see or ask students about their toy.

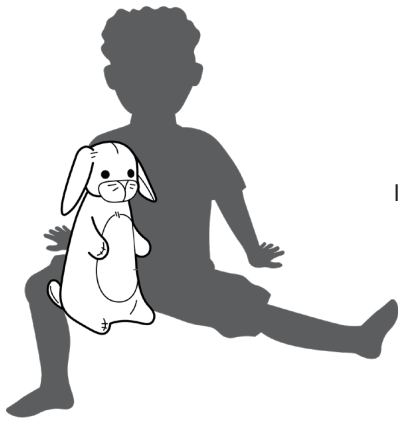
After students have created their toy character, ask students to line up on one side of the room, as close to the wall as possible. Introduce Nanna (you wearing a small costume piece). Nanna does not like to see a messy playroom. If Nanna puts toys back in the toy box, it's harder for them to come out to play. Explain to students that they may move around as toys when Nanna's back is toward them, but if Nanna turns around and sees them moving, she/he will point to them and say, "Back to the toy box!" This means the toys must go back to the wall, where the toy box is and start over. When all the toys have crossed to the other side of the room, the game is over.

During this round, Nanna should move all over the space to give the toys as many chances as possible to cross the room unseen. As new rounds begin, move quickly to "catch" the toys moving or put soft objects as obstacles for them to move around. Always remind students to stay in character as toys for the duration of the round.

Variations:

If your class has mastered crossing the room from one wall to the other, ask them to spread out and lie down on the floor in a frozen toy shape. Nanna will walk around the room to examine toys. Behind Nanna's back, toys can come alive and try to form a circle around her/him. The toys can remain alive forever if they all make a holding-hand circle around Nanna. Remember Nanna can send the toys "back to the toy box" (laying down on the floor frozen again) if they are seen moving, and the game starts over.

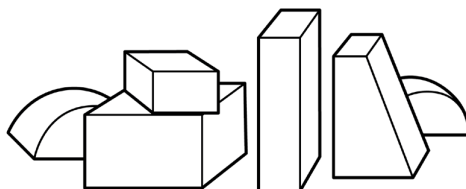
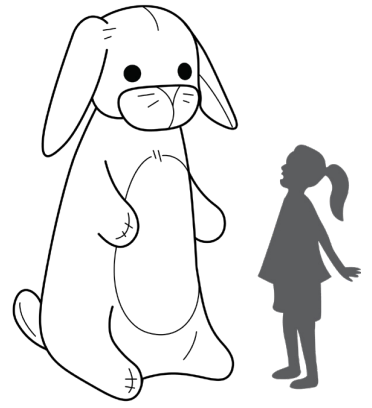
Bring the SCT experience back to your classroom! Expand your experience of watching *The Velveteen Rabbit* with a workshop all about the production. Engage your students' bodies, voices and imaginations while deepening their knowledge about the themes, characters, historical context, and production elements of the play. Workshops can occur either before or after seeing the play and can be held at SCT or at your location. To learn more about our outreach programming and to reserve a workshop for your class, contact educationoutreach@sct.org.



BIG & SMALL

In *The Velveteen Rabbit* a small toy is trying to find a place to belong in a big human world.

Draw a story of a small human trying to find a place in a big toy world. What toys might help the human? What toys might not like the human? Use as many different toys as you want. None of them need to be rabbits.



The full title of the book *The Velveteen Rabbit* is

The Velveteen Rabbit **OR** *How Toys Become Real*

Put the title of a book listed below that you've read before each "or," then add a second title after "or" that describes what the book is about. You can also choose to use the titles of other favorite books, the book you just read or the first book you remember reading.

OR

OR

or

or

OR

or

OR

The Boxcar Children
Captain Underpants
The Cat in the Hat
Charlotte's Web
Corduroy
Diary of a Wimpy Kid
Elephant and Piggie: I Love My New Toy!
Flat Stanley
Frog and Toad

Goodnight Moon
If You Give a Mouse a Cookie
The Little Prince
Llama Llama Red Pajama
The Polar Express
Mr. Popper's Penguins
Ready Freddy
Stuart Little
The Very Hungry Caterpillar

BOOKLIST

For Children & Young Adults:

Fiction

Corduroy

Don Freeman

If You Plant a Seed

Kadir Nelson

A Little Princess

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Marshmallow

Clare Turlay Newberry

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane

Kate DiCamillo

Pinocchio

Carlo Collodi

The Forgotten Rabbit

Nancy Furstinger

Waiting

Kevin Henkes

Five animal toys wait for marvelous things to happen.

Watership Down

Richard Adams

An allegorical tale of survival about a band of wild rabbits who leave their ancestral home to build a more humane society chronicles their adventures as they search for a safe place to establish a new warren where they can live in peace.

Nonfiction

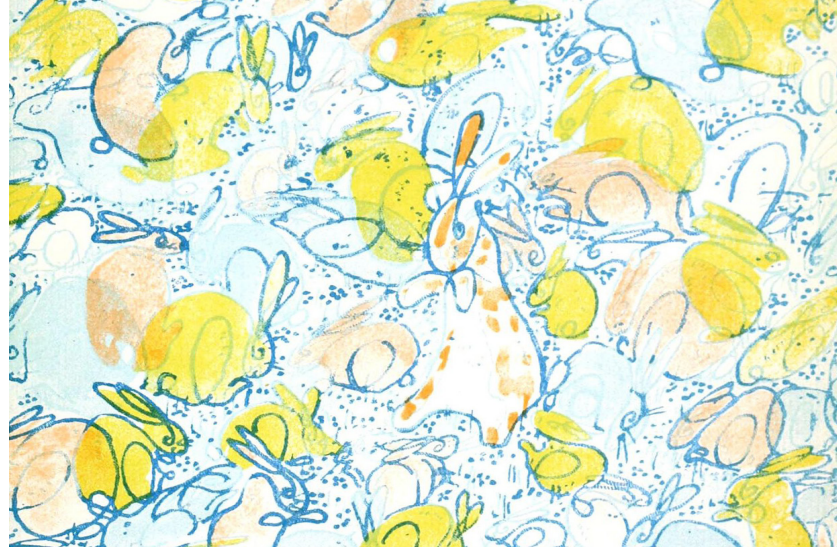
National Geographic Readers: Hop, Bunny!

Susan B. Neuman

Living Things and Nonliving Things: A Compare and Contrast Book

Kevin Kurtz

Using a wide variety of stunning photographs, author Kevin Kurtz poses thought-provoking questions to help readers determine if things are living or nonliving. For example, if most (but not all) living things can move, can any nonliving things move?



For Adults Working with Children:

Hopping Ahead of Climate Change: Showshoe Hares, Science and Survival

Sneed B. Collard

Children's Book of Philosophy

Sarah Tomley

Explores philosophy and notable philosophers, discussing "thought experiments," and how to explain a complex idea through a story.

**Booklist prepared by Lauren Lindskog Greene
Pierce County Library System**

Websites

[Gutenberg text of *The Velveteen Rabbit*](#)

[WA State Department of Fish and Wildlife: Rabbits](#)

Share Your Thoughts

Engaging young people with the arts is what we are all about at SCT. We hope that the Active Audience Guide has helped enhance and extend the theater experience for your family or students beyond seeing the show.

Your input is very valuable to us. You can email your thoughts about the guide to us at info@sct.org

Seattle Children's Theatre, which celebrates its 44th season in 2018-2019, performs September through June in the Charlotte Martin and Eve Alvord Theatres at Seattle Center. SCT has gained acclaim as a leading producer of professional theatre, educational programs and new scripts for young people. By the end of its 2018-2019 season, SCT will have presented 269 plays, including 113 world premieres, entertaining over four million children.

Seattle Children's Theatre

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