



Beatrix Potter...Biography

Beatrix Potter was a scientist, conservationist, and farmer as well as a much-loved author of children's books.

“Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter.” – The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter

What makes author Beatrix Potter especially fascinating and noteworthy is her multifaceted, complex background. Potter was not only an author and illustrator; she was a scientist, conservationist, and farmer. Some of the particulars of her complex yet inspirational life remain obscure and mysterious but this is what we do know...

Potter's Childhood

Potter, born in 1866 in South Kensington, London, lived a lonely life reared and educated by nurses and governesses, isolated from peers, and with minimal interaction with her wealthy parents. It was on annual summer vacations to Scotland and the Lake District that Potter developed a love of nature. To combat loneliness Potter would sketch her greatest passions: animals and the natural world. At one point, Potter possessed a frog, two lizards, water newts, a ring-snake, a tortoise and a rabbit.

Potter the Scientist

Potter was fascinated with science and spent a great deal of time studying botany, entomology, geology and paleontology, and mycology, finally creating a theory of the germination of fungus spores.

Potter wrote a paper, "On the Germination of the Spores of Agaricineae," which was presented to Linnaean Society of London by a man (women were not allowed). She was not respected in a field almost entirely dominated by Victorian men and became frustrated that her work was not taken seriously. Potter, dejected, began to focus on animals.

Potter kept a journal of her life from age 15 to 30 in her own secret code. The journal was published in 1966 after Leslie Linder, an engineer, broke the code and took seven years to translate it. The journal documents Potter's unsuccessful attempts to gain recognition for her theories and drawings.

Potter the Author and Illustrator

Encouraged by close friend Vicar Hardwicke Rawnsley, Potter continued her artwork. In her mid-20s, Potter created greeting cards from her illustrations and also illustrated a book small book of animal drawings, *A Happy Pair*, accompanied by verses by Fredric Weatherley.

Potter also wrote about her animals in letters to her former governess' children. In one such letter to five-year-old Noel Moore in 1893, Potter began, "My dear Noel, I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits..."

This story of a naughty rabbit named Peter was published as the *Tale of Peter Rabbit* in 1902 by Frederick Warne and became one of the most famous stories ever written. It was an overnight success and led to a series of 23 small books for small hands. Nearly every character is based on the pets Potter owned.

In addition to creating children's books, Potter created accurate, realistic botanical drawings and paintings and created a collection of detailed watercolors of fungi, which are now held in the Armit Library in Ambleside, England.

Potter the Conservationist and Farmer

Potter fell in love with Norman Warne, of whom her family did not approve, and although they became engaged, weeks later Norman died of pernicious anemia.

Books by Beatrix Potter

1. The Tale of Peter Rabbit-- 1902
2. The Tailor of Gloucester -- 1902
3. The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin -- 1903
4. The Tale of Benjamin Bunny -- 1904
5. The Tale of Two Bad Mice -- 1904
6. The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle -- 1905
7. The Pie and the Patty-pan -- 1905
8. The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher -- 1906
9. The Story of a Fierce Bad Rabbit -- 1906
10. The Story of Miss Moppet -- 1906
11. The Tale of Tom Kitten -- 1907
12. The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck -- 1908
13. The Roly-Poly Pudding (The Tale of Samuel Whiskers) -- 1908
14. The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies -- 1909
15. Ginger and Pickles -- 1909
16. The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse -- 1910
17. Peter Rabbit's Painting Book -- 1911
18. The Tale of Timmy Tiptoes -- 1911
19. The Tale of Mr. Tod --1912
20. The Tale of Pigling Bland -- 1913
21. Tom Kitten's Painting Book -- 1917
22. Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes -- 1917
23. The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse -- 1918
24. Cecily Parsley's Nursery Rhymes -- 1922
25. Jemima Puddle-Duck's Painting Book -- 1925
26. Peter Rabbit's Almanac for 1929 -- 1928
27. The Fairy Caravan -- 1929
28. The Tale of Little Pig Robinson -- 1930
29. Sister Anne -- 1932
30. Wag-by-Wall -- 1914
31. The Tale of the Faithful Dove -- 1955
32. The Sly Old Cat -- 1971
33. The Tale of Tuppenny

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