

# The Velveteen Rabbit

Adapted from the book by Margery Williams

Teachers Notes



## About Spare Parts Puppet Theatre

Spare Parts Puppet Theatre is Australia's flagship puppetry company and a driving force in the puppetry landscape in Australia since 1981.

Our artistic program is designed to compliment and enhance the teaching process while offering meaningful ways to link back to the curriculum and the needs of teachers and students.

We believe that the performing arts is an excellent vehicle for teaching young people skills in empathy, relationship building, resilience, creative thinking and story telling. Through being audience members, as well as arts makers, young people are learning to express themselves in a healthy way, while also learning about different cultures, historical events and traditions.

For many of our audience members we are their first live performing arts experience. We are proud to offer students and teachers the very best puppet theatre along with programs to maximise the experience beyond the theatre.



## **The Velveteen Rabbit**

Adapted from the book by Margery Williams

*"Where the young stay young and the old grow young forever"*

The Velveteen Rabbit is an enchanting tale of the relationship between a child and his toy rabbit. To others, he's just an old toy, but the boy and the rabbit believe he's real – and the scene is set for a story of great emotional power.

This timeless classic is an excellent vehicle for inspiring philosophical discussion in the classroom about what makes something 'real'.

### **About the book by Margery Williams**

Margery Williams (1881-1944) was born in London and lived alternatively in the United States and England. She first wrote and published books for adults. The Velveteen Rabbit, her first attempt at writing for children has become her most well-known work and a children's literature classic.

About the story she said, "It was by a sort of accident that The Velveteen Rabbit became the beginning of all the stories I have written since... By thinking about toys and remembering toys, they suddenly become very much alive. Toys I had loved as a little girl — my almost forgotten Tubby, who was the rabbit, and Old Dobbin, the Skin Horse, and the toys my children had loved."

### **The Puppet Designs**

The puppets in The Velveteen Rabbit vary from toys that have been adapted for manipulation and life size rod puppets. Soft toy animation is an aspect of puppetry similar to Object Theatre where any object with the aide of an experienced puppeteer can be animated and develop character. The Velveteen Rabbit will explore this form of puppetry together with rod puppets and traditional marionettes.

### **The Creative Team**

**Director** Philip Mitchell

**Adapting Writer** Greg Lissaman

**Designer** Zoe Atkinson

**Composer** Lee Buddle

**Lighting** Graham Walne

**Puppet Construction** Jiri Zmitko

**Production Manager** Chad Wetton

**Assistant Stage Manager** Sarah McKellar

**Performers**, Jessica Harlond Kenny, Bec Bradley, Nick Pages-Oliver

## **Pre Show Discussion Starters**

### **Your students and puppetry**

- Have you seen a puppet show before? Where? When?
- What are some differences between a puppet show and another type of theatre production?
- Is a production just about having fun? Do you think you can learn anything from a performance?

### **Your students and their toys**

- Are toys important to you? Why?
- Discuss the different types of toys you have
- What time of the year do you get new toys?
- What becomes of your old toys?

### **The Velveteen Rabbit story (after reading)**

- How did it make you feel? Why?
- What different messages does it deliver to its' audience?
- The story was written in 1922. How different was the world then? What was going on in those years?
- Why did all of the boy's toys and bedding need to be burned? Why do you think diseases like this are not very common in today's world?
- Did you know this story inspired the Toy Story movies? What are the similarities?

## Post Show Discussion Starters

### Back from the Theatre

- Did you enjoy the performance? What did you or did you not like about it?
- What was the performance about?
- What puppets did you see? What kind of toys did you notice in the performance?
- What was the lighting and sound like?
- What were the main parts of the set?

### The toy characters

- Who was the new toy? Who were the older toys?
- Did all the toys get along together? How did the toys welcome the velveteen rabbit?
- Describe the different types of toys the boy had.
- Discuss the characters of those toys and their relationships with each other
- Why did the velveteen rabbit keep asking questions to the other toys?
- Could the velveteen rabbit hop? Why not?

### Becoming Real

- How do the toys feel about becoming real? How do they think they can become real?
- How do the boy and the velveteen rabbit start being friends?
- How did the velveteen rabbit get lost?
- What happens when the velveteen rabbit meet the other rabbits in the bushes?
- How does the velveteen rabbit become real to the boy?
- In the story, who thinks the velveteen rabbit is not real?
- When the boy got sick, do you think the velveteen rabbit was afraid to stay by him? Why not?
- How does the velveteen rabbit become real to everybody?

## **Activity One: My Favourite Toy**

### English > Persuasive Writing & Oral Communication

The velveteen rabbit story explores children's universe of toys and fantasies. The purpose of this activity is to have the students express orally and in written their own relation to toys.

Have the children bring their favourite toy to class for **Show and Tell**.

**Start** with a class discussion about following subjects:

- Different types of toys they brought: dolls, soft toys, mechanical toys
- Different games they play or stories they imagine
- Reasons why they cherish this particular toy
- What do children do with their toys as they grow up?

**Direct** each child to plan and write a persuasive argument and/or advertisement, which will highlight their toy's best features and encourages others to have one too.

Children share their work with the rest of the class, who should be encouraged to **ask questions** or **challenge some of their opinions** (further developing their persuasive language)

## Activity Two: Toy Stories

### English > Responding to and creating literature

**Read** the story of The Velveteen Rabbit to the class.

**Discuss** the narrative structure of the story, looking at:

- Setting,
- Characters,
- Plot,
- Problems and Solutions.
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**Create**, Have students create a character profile for the Velveteen Rabbit. This should include a description of its wants/desires/wishes/characteristics/friends/appearance/likes/dislikes etc.

**Discuss** with the students other toys stories

- What other story about toys do you know? What do you like about them? What did you enjoy in this particular one?

**Compare** and discuss themes and plots. How do these different stories explore the following themes:

- Toys' fear to be replaced
- The love/hate relationship between human and toys
- Friendships and wars

**Compare** and discuss the narrative techniques and media used in toy stories: books, movies, performances, digital animation, puppetry...

Finally, have students brainstorm, plan and **write their own** narrative about a favourite toy of theirs becoming alive, using the ideas from class discussions to aid their creativity.



## Activity Three: Create a Toy Technologies // The Arts

Students design and create a toy from their imagination or from their narrative.

**Plan** the design of their toy, including what materials they will need for each of their toy's features.

- *Encourage them to bring in materials from home if there is limited resources at school*
- *If possible have an assortment of things for them to choose from when designing their toy.*
- *Having different materials for the students to touch, feel and play with will help with the process of deciding which material would be best for their toy.*

**Research** different types of toys and puppets, the different ways in which they are connected together and different materials that are used.

**Evaluate**, students should evaluate their toy after building. This should include positive and constructive opinions about the technology process, as well as a description of their toy's attributes

- What are some of the things their toy can do?
- What would they change if they could make it again? What worked? What didn't?
- What does their toy like about its' appearance? What does it dislike?
- What would their toy say to one of the other children's toys?
- Describe the characteristics of a child that would be most suited to their toy, (age, gender, personality etc)



## Activity Five: Treatment of Others - A Role Play Technologies // The Arts

**Design**, Students are to design a wall collage of a rabbit using a variety of materials such as felt, fabric, sandpaper, hair, wool, buttons etc.

In this activity students can experience careful design planning, problem solving, creative expression and demonstrate working with different materials and tools.

The materials collected and used should be a range of soft and harsh to experiment with finding a large range of different surfaces. Students will need to look at the design of the Wall Collage and the materials used in order for the collage to be hung appropriately on a wall.

## Activity Six: Let's Recycle Sustainability // Science

In The Velveteen Rabbit story the nursery is the home of the old toys that may never get their owner's attention back... which reminds some of us of our insatiable desire for new ones and how we get bored of and abandon others...

What about trying to stop the waste? Have you ever heard of toy recycling?

**Discuss** with students what has become of their old toys:

- Why did you stop playing with it? Do you remember what become of your old toys?
- Did you pass it to your younger sisters or brothers? ...

**Discuss** with students their need to get new toys:

- Looking for new excitement? Receiving gifts?

**Search**, Have the students search for ideas to recycle toys on the internet

- See associations recycling toys, donations to charities.

Let's practice: after searching for ideas, students can put them into practice and

**Recycle** their old forgotten toys **OR**

**Make** their own new toys from junk, recycled materials.

## **Activity Seven: Music Visualisation**

### **The Arts > Music**

In this activity students will experience how music communicates meaning, thought processes and emotion.

Choose a piece of classical music to play in the classroom.

Encourage students to think of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and a scene in the play that the music reminds them of. They might link the music to different emotions or actions portrayed by the Velveteen Rabbit.

Students to form a circle and lying down with their eyes shut.

After the music has played through, students are to share with the class the images and thoughts that came to mind: What was it about the music that provoked these responses?

## **Activity Seven: Light Effects**

### **The Arts > Skills and Processes**

Purpose: Students to demonstrate and experience communicating meaning through non- verbal means.

#### **Group Activity:**

*Materials: Torches, Cellophane*

*Teacher: Devise a short scene using small objects. Must be no verbal and involve a range of emotions which the students will need to express using their 'lighting'.*

Students form into groups. Each group will need to have a torch and a few different colours of cellophane. Once given the short scene each group is to perform it to the class using the cellophane and torch as lighting.

#### **Discuss** with the class:

- The effects of different lighting used in different scenes.
- How do different colours affect atmosphere, mood, time and movement?
- How does the colour of light used effect the mood of the scene and change the setting of the scene? (i.e. dark and stormy, bright and sunny, sad and happy)



## **Activity Eight: Write a Review**

### **English > Writing**

After seeing *The Velveteen Rabbit* have your students write a review of the performance. What did they like? What didn't they like? When finished send them in to us at Spare Parts Puppet Theatre.

We like to know what you and your students think!

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