

“Miss Potter” starring Renée Zellweger, Lloyd Owen, Ewan McGregor, 2006, PG, 92 minutes

Major themes:

- Stories
- Imagination
- Beauty
- Artist
- Children
- Animals
- Sexism
- Publishing
- Romance
- Love
- Friendship
- Convention

Major characters:

- Beatrix Potter
- Rupert and Helen Potter (parents)
- Miss Wiggin (chaperone)
- Warne family – Mrs. Louisa, Harold, Fruing, Norman, Millie
- William Heelis (solicitor)

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- This biographical drama is based on the life of based on the life of Beatrix Potter (1866-1943), an English writer, illustrator, natural scientist, and conservationist, best known for her children's books featuring animals.
- Beatrix Potter remains one of the world's best-selling and best-loved children's authors. She wrote and illustrated 28 books, including her 23 Tales which have sold more than 250 million copies worldwide.
- A 2020 survey by Infoplease of the best-selling children's books of all time ranks "*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*" as number 16, selling 45 million copies since its initial publication in 1902.
- As a child, Potter was educated by governesses and isolated from other children. She had numerous pets and spent holidays in Scotland and the Lake District, developing a love of landscape, flora and fauna, all of which she closely observed and painted. She and her brother kept a variety of small pets—mice, rabbits, a hedgehog and some bats, along with collections of butterflies and other insects—which they drew and studied. They were allowed great freedom in the country, and both children became adept students of natural history.
- Whenever Potter went on holiday to the Lake District or Scotland, she sent letters to young friends, illustrating them with quick sketches. Many of these letters were written to the children of her former governess Annie Carter Moore, particularly to Moore's eldest son Noel, who was often ill. In September 1893, Potter was on holiday at Eastwood in Dunkeld, Perthshire. She had run out of things to say to Noel, and so she told him a story about "*four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail, and Peter.*" It became one of the most famous children's letters ever written and the basis of Potter's future career as a writer-artist-storyteller.
- Potter was also a prize-winning breeder of Herdwick sheep and a prosperous farmer keenly interested in land preservation.

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- Although Potter focused on studying, collecting, and painting in almost every branch of natural science, she specialized in mycology, the scientific study of fungi. Her study and watercolors of fungi led to her being widely respected in this field, leading her to submit a paper in 1897 to the Linnean Society of London, a learned society formed in 1788 and dedicated to the study and dissemination of information concerning natural history, evolution, and taxonomy. Her paper, "*On the Germination of the Spores of the Agaricineae*," was introduced by a male colleague, because, as a female, Potter could not attend proceedings or read her paper. In 1997, the Linnean Society issued a posthumous apology to Potter for the sexism displayed in its handling of her research.
- Potter bequeathed nearly all her property to the National Trust, including 4,000 acres of land and 15 farms. She is credited with preserving much of the land that now constitutes the Lake District National Park, the most visited national park in the United Kingdom.

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Scriptures:

Psalm 23:1-6 (ESV) – *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

Isaiah 32:18 (ESV) – *“My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”*

Psalm 104:1a,10-18,30-35 (NLT) – *“Let all that I am praise the LORD. O LORD my God, how great you are! . . . You make springs pour water into the ravines, so streams gush down from the mountains. They provide water for all the animals, and the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds nest beside the streams and sing among the branches of the trees. You send rain on the mountains from your heavenly home, and you fill the earth with the fruit of your labor. You cause grass to grow for the livestock and plants for people to use. You allow them to produce food from the earth—wine to make them glad, olive oil to soothe their skin, and bread to give them strength. The trees of the LORD are well cared for—the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests, and the storks make their homes in the cypresses. High in the mountains live the wild goats, and the rocks form a refuge for the hyraxes . . . When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth. May the glory of the LORD continue forever! The LORD takes pleasure in all he has made! The earth trembles at his glance; the mountains smoke at his touch. I will sing to the LORD as long as I live. I will praise my God to my last breath! May all my thoughts be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. Let all sinners vanish from the face of the earth; let the wicked disappear forever. Let all that I am praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!”*

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Discussion points:

1. How did the film's animation sequences help to convey Beatrix's various emotions?
2. "A woman's life is more than marriage and children, my dears." What does this observation teach us about the culture, time, and place in which Beatrix Potter lived, when, for example, a woman was required to be chaperoned? How was she, as a woman, ahead of her time?
3. Beatrix Potter said that of all her books, "*The Tailor of Gloucester*" was her favorite. Which is your favorite, and why? (Her eight best sellers are "*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*", "*The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*", "*The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy Winkle*", "*The Tale of Tom Kitten*", "*The Tale of Two Bad Mice*", "*The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*", "*The Tailor of Gloucester*", "*Tale of Benjamin Bunny*", "*The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies*")
4. Which of Beatrix Potter's beloved characters is your favorite, and why? (They include Peter Rabbit, Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-Tail, Mr. McGregor, Squirrel Nutkin, Twinkleberry, Old Brown, the Tailor, Benjamin Bunny, Two Bad Mice, Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, Mr. Jeremy Fisher, Miss Moppet, Tom Kitten, Jemima Puddle-Duck, Samuel Whiskers, Ginger, Pickles, Mrs. Tittlemouse, Timmy Tiptoes, Mr. Tod, Pigling Bland, Appley Dapply, Johnny Town-Mouse, Cecily Parsley, Little Pig Robinson)
5. What can we learn about emotional healing and soul restoration from this film?