



Disney and CAMERON MACKINTOSH's

# MARY POPPINS

THE BROADWAY MUSICAL

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PRODUCTION HANDBOOK



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# INTRODUCTION

*Come feed the little birds,  
Show them you care,  
And you'll be glad if you do.  
Their young ones are hungry,  
Their nests are so bare.  
All it takes is tuppence from you.  
Feed the birds, tuppence a bag,  
Tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag.*

— “Feed the Birds” by Richard and Robert Sherman

“‘Tuppence a bag’ has nothing to do with tuppence or bread crumbs. It’s about the fact that it doesn’t take much to give love, that it costs very little to make a difference to other people’s lives.”

— Richard Sherman, songwriter



*The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*

The Broadway musical of *Mary Poppins* contains numerous examples of ingenious imagining and reimagining. One of the greatest occurs with “Feed the Birds.” Following a scene at George’s office – a bank of intimidating proportions – in which Jane asks a single, pointed question of her father about recognizing value, Mary takes Jane and Michael past St. Paul’s Cathedral. On its steps they meet the Bird Woman. Jane is ready to dismiss this old lady in rags, but Mary makes sure the children stop and listen to her. The Bird Woman sings the Sherman Brothers’ classic, “Feed the Birds,” which was first heard in the movie, though in a different context. The words resonate deeply, personally, and in new ways in the stage version, following the interactions – and transactions – that have just occurred at the bank. The song, now more clearly than ever, articulates something essential to this story and to us, the audience: Small gestures of kindness, rather than monetary

transactions, fill our lives with joy, satisfaction, and meaning.

With “Feed the Birds,” as in so many other songs and moments in the show, the writers have placed the Banks family in a world not just of magic, but also of real people, real challenges, and real history. The Bankses are in need of Mary Poppins’s care and attention, but there is an entire world of people (and other living

“We were all working under the directive that we would not do onstage anything we could not do as well or better than it had been done in the film.”

– Julian Fellowes, book writer



# INTRODUCTION

creatures) around them in need of equal care and attention.

The message of “Feed the Birds” applies to the act of theater-making as well. Theater does not require large budgets or high-tech wizardry to tell stories. Care and attention, along with imagination, teamwork, and commitment, will bring the show to life. The spectacular moments that likely stand out in your memory from viewing the stage show or the movie, and that have delighted people around the world, are about surprise, which can be manufactured with old-fashioned stagecraft and little else.

The stage adaptation is not a replica of the film, but an original musical that honors some of its greatest achievements and most beloved moments. The screenwriters gave P.L. Travers’s fantastic (in all senses) stories a plot: The Bankses need Mary Poppins to nanny their children because they need to learn how to be a family. The stage adaptation builds upon this, giving Winifred Banks a fuller storyline, George Banks a backstory, the children a bit more room to grow from spoiled and bratty to kind and thoughtful, and the diversity of London’s economic classes fuller due. The stage musical clarifies the passage of time (fall

to winter of a single year), so the audience can better chart their change. Over multiple productions, the musical’s team explored which aspects of the books, film, and their own imaginations were most stage-worthy. Ultimately, the goal was not to put any one version of Mary Poppins onstage, but to bring her magic to something that is both familiar and new.

“Which is the real Mary Poppins? The one from the books, the one from the movie, or the one from the show? Well, that’s the point. They are *all* Mary Poppins, and they are – *together* – Mary Poppins. ... Like many of the myths of antiquity, they are different tellings of the same essential story as understood by unique individuals, so that each telling has its own meaning.”

– Brian Sibley and Michael Lassell,  
*Anything Can Happen If You Let It: The Story Behind the Journey from Books to Broadway*

There is no doubt that you’ll enjoy your visit with Mary Poppins, and that she will bring your theatrical family closer together. This handbook is a toolkit for creating a vision that is all your own. It highlights what’s in store for your cast and creative team based on experience gathered over the course of many productions worldwide: the challenges discovered, the secrets unlocked, and the games played. The goal is to provide resources that you can draw from as

needed, including general and specific ways to approach the staging, background on the original concepts of the London and Broadway productions, historical information, design ideas, and more. This handbook should inspire you to make choices that serve the text in ways unique to your company and your creativity, because there are many ways of making magic. In essence, where Mary Poppins goes, magic goes too.



# SYNOPSIS

## ACT 1

Bert, a man of many trades, informs us that something big is about to happen to the Banks family. At No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane, Jane and Michael Banks are constantly misbehaving, and Katie Nanna – the latest in a long line of nannies – has had enough (**Cherry Tree Lane**). She leaves, and George Banks asks his wife, Winifred, to place an advertisement in the newspaper for a new nanny, but the children decide to write their own ad (**The Perfect Nanny**). Mary Poppins arrives, and she fits the children's requirements exactly (**Practically Perfect**).

Mary Poppins takes the children to the park, where they meet Bert, who is creating his latest works of art. Bored with the park and wary of Bert's scrappy appearance, the children try to escape, but Mary urges them to see the magic in everyday life. Then, the park bursts into brilliant colors and the statues come to life to dance with them (**Jolly Holiday**).

As Mary Poppins begins to win over the children, George informs Winifred that they must maintain order and convention. Winifred feels that she is disappointing both her husband and her children, and she struggles to understand her role within the family – and within in the world (**Let's Hope She Will Stay**). The household prepares for Winifred's party (**A Spoonful of Sugar**), but even with Mary Poppins's magic, the event is a disaster, as no one shows up. Winifred is left feeling more lost than ever.

Mary Poppins takes Jane and Michael on a trip to visit their father at his workplace, the bank (**Precision and Order**). There, George has a

choice: to give a loan to Herr Von Hussler, a businessman with a dubious money-making scheme, or to John Northbrook, who presents a solid plan for a factory that would help many but offers little collateral. An innocent question from Jane prompts George to remember the ideals and values he once held (**A Man Has Dreams**). He decides to take a chance on Mr. Northbrook and gives him the loan.

On the way home from the bank, the children and Mary Poppins run into the Bird Woman, who is feeding the birds in front of St. Paul's Cathedral. Jane is still worried about outward appearances and shuns her, but Michael offers to give the Bird Woman money (**Feed the Birds**).

Mary Poppins, Jane, Michael, and Bert meet Mrs. Corry, the mysterious owner of the unusual "talking shop," where people purchase words along with gingerbread. The children are surprised to hear that when their father was a boy, he came to this shop to enjoy its magic and spirit of invention (**Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious**).

Things begin to go very wrong for George. Von Hussler has gone to another bank for his loan and is making millions, and George is blamed for passing on the deal and is suspended without pay. In his stress, George yells at the children. In turn, an angry Jane and Michael fight over their toys, which magically come to life to teach them a lesson (**Playing the Game**). Recognizing that the children are not yet ready for the lessons she has to teach them, Mary says goodbye to Bert (**Chim Chim Cher-ee**), leaving a note saying *au revoir*, or "till we meet again."

# SYNOPSIS

## ACT 2

The fall has turned to winter. The house is bustling again, because a nanny is returning to No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane. However, it's not the much-missed Mary Poppins, but Miss Andrew, who raised George. Miss Andrew is a harsh woman who believes that children should be punished on a regular basis with a horrible-tasting medicine (**Brimstone and Treacle**). In a panic, the children escape the house and run to the park where they meet Bert, who explains that the cure for every ill can be found at the end of a kite string (**Let's Go Fly a Kite**). Their kite flies up into the London sky and when it comes back down, Mary Poppins is with it. George has also been hiding from Miss Andrew (**Good for Nothing**). With her entire family missing, Winifred worries that she's to blame but resolves to assert herself and fight harder for the people she loves (**Being Mrs. Banks**).

Mary returns home with the children and defeats Miss Andrew in an epic battle of wits and will. George returns, relieved to find that Miss Andrew has left, but still anxious about supporting his family. Winifred reminds him he can count on her and the children to stick by him.

Whisked up to the rooftops, Mary Poppins, Jane, and Michael meet Bert and his fellow chimney sweeps (**Step in Time**). The sweeps dance across the rooftops of London and into the Bankses' house, wishing good luck to George and shaking his hand as they go.

The Bank Chairman asks to see George immediately. George fears the worst, but Bert reminds him that his family is more important than his ambitions (**A Man Has Dreams – Reprise/A Spoonful of Sugar – Reprise**). George leaves for the bank. Winifred wishes she could go with him. Mary Poppins and the children encourage her to do what she believes is right (**Anything Can Happen**).

In front of the bank's board of directors, George launches into a defense of his actions before they can tell him that he was right all along: Von Hussler's scheme has fallen through and the competing bank that approved his loan has been ruined. Northbrook's business, on the other hand, is thriving and earning a healthy profit. Winifred shows up, ready to defend her husband, but when she finds the board is promoting him, she negotiates his raise for him. George announces that from now on his family comes first. As George and Winifred walk along the streets of London, Mary Poppins takes Jane and Michael on one more magical adventure – this time through the heavens.

Her job done, Mary Poppins says her goodbyes and flies off to her next task. Although the Banks family is sad to see her go, they are glad that they have finally found one another.



# CASTING

Although full of iconic songs and wonderful dancing, *Mary Poppins* is very much an acting piece. Cast the strongest actors you can, and the production will be served well. Below is a breakdown of characters, which can be used as a guide to casting *Mary Poppins*. Included is a description of each role, the age of the character (use this only as a reference for the actor playing the role), along with recommended audition material from the show, vocal ranges, and some suggestions for possible doubling of parts.

## CHARACTER BREAKDOWN (in order of appearance)

**BERT** (30s), the narrator of the story, is a good friend to Mary Poppins. An everyman, Bert has many occupations, including hurdy-gurdy player, sidewalk artist, and chimney sweep. Bert watches over the children as well as the goings on in Cherry Tree Lane. He has charm, speaks with a Cockney accent, and is a song-and-dance-man. Baritone.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Let's Go Fly a Kite" and "Chim Chim Cher-ee" (end of Act 1)

**Acting Audition:** pp. 18-20 and 69-70

**GEORGE BANKS** (early 40s), father to Jane and Michael Banks, is a banker to the very fiber of his being. Demanding "precision and order" in his household, he is a pipe-and-slippers man who doesn't have much to do with his children and believes that he had the perfect upbringing by his nanny, the cruel Miss Andrew. His emotional armor, however, conceals a sensitive soul. A baritone, George may speak-sing as necessary.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Cherry Tree Lane" and "Good for Nothing"

**Acting Audition:** pp. 28-30 and 107-110

**WINIFRED BANKS** (30s) is George's wife and Jane and Michael's mother. A former actress, she is a loving and distracted homemaker who is busy trying to live up to her husband's desire to only associate with "the best people" as well as be a model wife and mother. She suffers from the conflicting feelings that she's not up to the job of "being Mrs. Banks," yet she is, and more. She has a great warmth and simplicity to her tone. Mezzo Soprano.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Being Mrs. Banks" and "Anything Can Happen"

**Acting Audition:** pp. 28-30

**JANE BANKS** (11), the high-spirited daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Banks, is bright and precocious but can be willful and inclined to snobbishness. Child soprano.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Perfect Nanny" and "Let's Go Fly a Kite"

**Acting Audition:** pp. 63-65

**MICHAEL BANKS** (9) is the cute and cheeky son of Mr. and Mrs. Banks. Excitable and naughty, he adores his father and tries to be



# CASTING

like him. Both he and Jane misbehave in order to get the attention of their parents. Male child voice, unbroken.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** “Perfect Nanny” and “Let’s Go Fly a Kite”

**Acting Audition:** pp. 63-65

**KATIE NANNA** (30s) is Jane and Michael’s nanny at the beginning of the show. Overwhelmed and upset, she has absolutely had her fill of the Banks children.

**Acting Audition:** pp. 1 and 3

**POLICEMAN** (30s-40s) is a neighborhood fixture who is respected by and observant of the households on his beat.

**Acting Audition:** pp. 1 and 86-87

**MISS LARK** (30s) is the haughty next-door neighbor of the Banks family who treats her dog, Willoughby, as if he were her child. Mezzo soprano.

**Acting Audition:** pp. 2, 31, and 47

**ADMIRAL BOOM** (50s) is a retired Royal Navy man and neighbor of the Banks family. A physically large man with a loud and booming voice, he speaks in Navy jargon and has a soft spot for his neighbor, Miss Lark. Can be any vocal range needed. If Admiral Boom doubles as the Bank Chairman, he can be a baritone (see Bank Chairman on page 8).

**Acting Audition:** pp. 2 and 32

**MRS. BRILL** (50s) is the housekeeper and cook for the Banks family. Overworked and harassed, she’s always complaining that the house is understaffed. Her intimidating exterior is a cover for the warmth underneath. Mrs. Brill doesn’t have a high opinion of nannies in general and Mary Poppins in particular. She does not have to be a strong singer. Alto.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** Mrs. Brill/Robertson Ay verse of “Cherry Tree Lane”

**Acting Audition:** pp. 33-34

## Auditioning Jane and Michael

The roles with the most stage time in *Mary Poppins* are not Mary and Bert, but Jane and Michael Banks. Casting 9- and 10-year-olds for these roles poses a special challenge. What methods can be used to make it seem less like an “audition” to young children? And how do you get more insight into their personalities? Associate Director Anthony Lyn, whose job was to cast and maintain all the companies of *Mary Poppins* around the world, introduced an element of play into the auditions. He invited all the children auditioning for Jane and Michael into a rehearsal room together and organized games for them. From these games it was determined which children were confident, creative strong leaders who played well with each other. (For a list of possible games for the Jane and Michael auditions, see page 93 in the Resources chapter.)

# CASTING

**ROBERTSON AY** (20-30) is the houseboy to the Banks family. Lazy, sleepy, and grumbling, he never gets things right and believes himself to be useless. He doesn't do a lot of singing, but his "Spoonful" solo can be a fun surprise. Tenor.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** Mrs. Brill/Robertson Ay verse of "Cherry Tree Lane"

**Acting Audition:** pp. 33-34 and 58-59

**MARY POPPINS** (20s) is Jane and Michael Banks's new nanny. She is extraordinary and strange, neat and tidy, delightfully vain yet very particular, and sometimes a little frightening, but always exciting. She is practically perfect in every way and always means what she says. A mezzo soprano with strong top notes, she should be able to move well. She can have a more traditional soprano sound, but precision and diction is key.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Practically Perfect"

**Acting Audition:** p. 13 through "Practically Perfect"

**PARK KEEPER** (40s-50s). Uniformed and officious, he makes sure no one breaks park regulations. His life is defined by rules, but he secretly hankers after his childhood. Tenor.

**Vocal Audition:** "Let's Go Fly a Kite"

**Acting Audition:** p. 17

**NELEUS** (16-20) is the statue of a young boy posed with a dolphin in the park. Neleus was separated from his father, Poseidon, and misses him very much. A small and lonely

being, he is very happy to befriend Jane and Michael. This role is a wonderful opportunity to feature one of the strong dancers in your ensemble.

**Acting Audition:** pp. 24-25

**QUEEN VICTORIA** (40s-50s) is a statue in the park.

**BANK CHAIRMAN** (50s), the head of the bank where Mr. Banks is employed, is an Edwardian stuffed-shirt. He can speak/sing his lyrics if necessary. Baritone.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Precision and Order" ("Great men have dreams")

**Acting Audition:** pp. 114-117

**MISS SMYTHE** (40s) is the Bank Chairman's humorless secretary.

**Acting Audition:** p. 41

**VON HUSSLER** (30s-40s) is a businessman seeking a loan from the bank for a shady business deal. He speaks with a German accent.

**Vocal Audition:** "A Man Has Dreams" on pp. 40-41

**Acting Audition:** p. 42-43

**JOHN NORTHBROOK:** (30s-40s) is an honest businessman seeking a loan to build a factory for his community. He speaks with an accent from Northern England.

**Vocal Audition:** "Precision and Order" on p. 41

**Acting Audition:** pp. 41-42



# CASTING

**BIRD WOMAN** (50s) is covered in a patch-work of old shawls, and her pockets are stuffed with bags of crumbs for the birds. She tries to sell her crumbs to passersby, who ignore her as if she doesn't exist. Sings "Feed the Birds." There can be a gruff, folksy quality to her voice that reflects the hardness of her life. Alto.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Feed the Birds"

**MRS. CORRY:** (40s) owns a magical gingerbread shop. She is a mysterious woman of great age who speaks with a Caribbean accent (or any accent that would make her seem exotic). Soprano.

**Vocal Audition:**  
"Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious"  
**Acting Audition:** pp. 48-51

**ANNIE** and **FANNIE** (20s) are Mrs. Corry's daughters.

**VALENTINE** is a stuffed boy doll belonging to Jane.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** Valentine's verse of "Playing the Game"  
**Acting Audition:** pp. 65-66

**TEDDY BEAR, MR. PUNCH,** and **DOLL** are toys belonging to Jane and Michael. Other toys can be added as desired.

**MISS ANDREW** (40s-50s) is George's overbearing and scary nanny. With her bottle of nasty-tasting brimstone and treacle to keep naughty children in line, she is a bully who only knows one way of doing things – her way. A soprano with an alto belt, there can be some heaviness to her voice along with the range.

**Vocal Range:** 

**Vocal Audition:** "Brimstone and Treacle (Part 1)"  
**Acting Audition:** pp. 74-75

**DANCING ENSEMBLE** comprises good tap, jazz, and ballet dancers and strong singing voices (all vocal ranges) that can understudy the principal roles if necessary. The ensemble can be divided vocally as needed for your production in order to play chimney sweeps, toys, parkgoers, etc.

**Movement Audition:** Prepare a fun general movement combination (perhaps to the tune of "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious"), some basic tap steps for your potential chimney sweeps, and a simple ballet combination to pinpoint who in your ensemble can be featured as Neleus and the statues.



## Options for Doubling

The following are doubling options for productions that plan to use a smaller cast. These combinations have been used successfully in regional productions, but are by no means the only options available. Please feel free to devise other creative ways to use casting.

- Admiral Boom/Bank Chairman
- Miss Andrew/Miss Smythe and Queen Victoria
- Miss Andrew/Bird Woman
- Miss Lark/Miss Smythe and/or Doll
- Mrs. Corry/Katie Nanna and/or Queen Victoria
- Park Keeper/Von Hussler or John Northbrook
- Policeman/Von Hussler or John Northbrook

If you have a small cast, “Jolly Holiday” can be done with Neleus and Queen Victoria as the only statues. However, to utilize a larger ensemble, add some Graces/Nymphs, Adonises, and Pans. While not mentioned in the script, these additional statues (employed on Broadway), can add energy and vibrancy to the staging of this number.

# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

## SPEECH: ACCENTS AND CLASS DISTINCTIONS

Just about everyone in *Mary Poppins* speaks with a British accent. In this musical, dialect (pronunciation along with regional-based word choices) illuminates a person's status in society – whether she is from the upper, middle, or lower class. An accent reveals if a person is from somewhere else in the world, which can make him seem strange or exotic. More than just creating the right sound, employing accents and dialects help create character. Speaking with an accent is actually a mindset!

Most of the characters in *Mary Poppins* will speak either with Received Pronunciation (RP), which is a standard British accent that sounds very well-to-do (think of actors like Sir Patrick Stewart or Dame Judi Dench), or with Cockney accents. One character, John Northbrook, speaks with a Northern English accent, such as Cumbrian, Yorkshire, or Geordie (think *Billy Elliot*).

How an character speaks is important in *Mary Poppins* because it influences how others treat her. Prime examples of this are those characters that employ the Cockney dialect: the shabbily dressed Bird Woman who passersby deliberately ignore as she tries to sell her bags of birdseed; Bert, who performs manual labor (what would be considered blue-collar work in the present day); Mrs. Brill and Robertson Ay, servants; and the Park Keeper and the Policeman. All these characters are part of the lower class and speak with Cockney accents. Keep in mind, however, that the Bankses' servants and the Park Keeper speak with a Cockney accent that is not quite as harsh as the chimney sweeps.

The Bankses, with their house on Cherry Tree Lane and George's profession as a banker, would be considered upper middle class, along with their neighbors, Admiral Boom and Miss Lark. None of them would speak with a Cockney accent, but rather with the more plummy-toned Received Pronunciation. Mary Poppins is the only servant in the Banks household who speaks in this way. The importance of her duties in bringing up "proper" English children from a "good family," coupled with the way she speaks and comports herself (she is practically perfect, after all), puts her at a higher status than Mrs. Brill.

Two characters in *Mary Poppins* do not have British accents. Herr Von Hussler speaks with a German accent, while Mrs. Corry was originally played with a Caribbean accent, though that is not an iron-clad rule. Whoever plays Mrs. Corry should speak with any accent that makes her seem strange and special. Make sure your Mrs. Corry picks one with which she is comfortable. The women playing this role have chosen accents from all over the globe, including French, Filipino, Irish, Spanish, and Indian, making Mrs. Corry a rare and magical woman of the world.

The easiest way to learn an accent is to listen to it over and over again. YouTube clips are excellent resources to get started. It is highly recommended, however, that a dialect coach be used during rehearsals. If that is not possible, check out the online options listed in the Resources section of this handbook on page 93.



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

## MARY POPPINS

“Mary Poppins comes with a deep intent... She comes to find something for herself as well as to bring something... The something that she comes to find is a happy family.”

— P.L. Travers, author,  
*Mary Poppins* series

For inspiration on finding the poise and precision of Mary Poppins, encourage your actress to explore P.L. Travers’s original novels and this handbook’s information on how period clothing affects posture. However, your actress should trust that with enough practice, the poise will be naturally present. Mary Poppins displays poise effortlessly, and an actor working too hard at it will be projecting that effort to the audience. Part of her magic is that she’s always got a plan, a reason behind every game and excursion, and her “twinkle” comes from having that secret in mind. From her first entrance, when she knows that she is exactly what the children asked for, and exactly what the family needs (in ways they are not yet aware of), she is in charge – and she very much likes being in charge. Everything she does and says comes from a desire to make things right with the Banks family.

### Mary’s Movement

The figure of Mary Poppins is iconic. Before Bert sets his eyes on her, he says, “Stay right where you are. I’d know that silhouette anywhere: Mary Poppins!” She stands heels together in a dancer’s First Position, holding herself slightly up and slightly forward, always leading with her “presence.” Mary Poppins has an “at rest” position for her hands – clasped in front at her waistline or on top of her parrot-head umbrella – from which all her movement is initiated. Whenever she moves, she floats as if on a cloud of air, flitting across a room, or gliding like a swan up the stairs to the nursery. We never see her sweat.

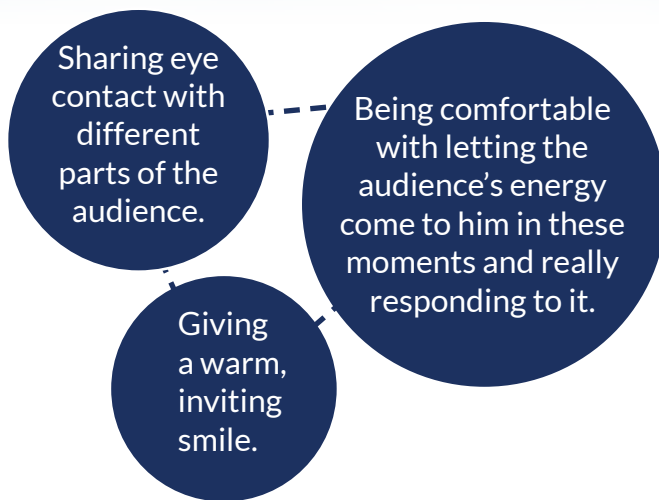
### BERT

For all of her authority and powers, it isn’t Mary Poppins who gets to address the audience – it’s Bert who has this exclusive privilege. Bert wants so much to share this story with us that he puts the entire show in motion. Engaging directly with an audience is a very different skill than acting with scene partners (and singing, and dancing – all of which your multitasking Bert must do well). Of course, it’s a harder one to practice in rehearsal, because there isn’t an audience present.

Encourage your Bert not just to “play” the role of narrator, but also to take charge of, and find joy, in it. Finding genuine ways to relax into these moments of talking to the audience is key.

# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

He can do this by:



After these sections have been rehearsed a bit, have some ensemble members act as practice audience members. Their presence throughout the space gives your Bert the opportunity to practice focusing his attention in different spots and taking in the faces he's seeing. The more spontaneous the energy can feel – even while sticking to a script and staging – the better.

Look for ways to bring different staging ideas to this section to create a feeling of comfort and intimacy for the audience, and for your actor. For example, if Bert is always moving in the scenes and musical numbers, maybe he's still in some of the narrative sections. Perhaps there is a spot downstage; along the proscenium; or even in front of, or seated on the lip of, the stage that Bert can occupy during these moments of direct address to the audience.

## Bert's Movement

Bert is an everyman – he can be anything at any time. It's no wonder that every time the audience sees him he has a different job! His earthy movement is rooted to the ground with just a bit of a working-class swagger and looseness that shows the audience his comfort with himself. He is a

## Thoughts from the Original Broadway Cast

Four actors from the original Broadway company of *Mary Poppins* – who played Mary Poppins, Bert, and Mr. and Mrs. Banks – were asked a few questions about getting into character. For the student-actors inhabiting these roles, and those taking on any part in this production, these discussions of their processes may be helpful.

**What was your biggest joy in playing this character?**



Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins

**Ashley Brown (Mary Poppins):**

I loved stepping into these shoes for a lot of reasons. I loved the movie growing up, and it was a dream come true to bring her to life onstage. I love how she never apologizes for anything she says or does – not

in a nasty way, but in a very direct way, which gives her that mystery and grace. One of my favorite lines from the show is "I never explain anything." I also love the joy she finds in everything, all the very simple things, such as feeding the birds, flying kites, and walks in the park. She is very strict but never mean or nasty, which is a fine line. Mary Poppins would never show an ugly side of herself, whether that side is inside or outside. She never loses her temper, and she teaches through lessons, so the children can learn for themselves.



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

dancer without being a “dancer.” In fact, he doesn’t reveal to the audience that he can dance at all until well into “Jolly Holiday.” He and Mary are two ends of the movement spectrum, with Mary being more poised and Bert more elastic.

## MARY AND BERT

There is a playfulness to Mary and Bert’s relationship that comes less from mutual romantic interest than from a shared craftiness. Both are resourceful and multitalented, able to get out of any bind, and up for any challenge. When they join together to spell out “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,” she’s challenging him to keep up with her in the way two good friends might do. They make a good team and enjoy each other’s company. Encourage your actors to imagine their backstory – How long have they known each other? How did they meet? – and to pursue this sense of playful synchronicity.



*Bert and Mary in “Jolly Holiday”  
at The Governor’s School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*

## MR. BANKS

This is a challenging role – and a central one. Mr. Banks undergoes the most change in this story – it’s his arc that we follow. Charting that journey is important and can be helped by posing the following questions to your actor:

- What does Mr. Banks want for himself and his family? What is standing in his way?
- Does Mr. Banks love his family? Why doesn’t he spend more time with them?
- Why is he so preoccupied by his work? Can you relate to that?
- What are the rules or ideas that Miss Andrew taught him as a child? How do they affect him now? What must have been his relationship with his parents?
- When does he begin fearing for the safety of his job? What will happen to him and his family if he loses his job? How does he work through his fear?

In Act 1, Scene 5, when George tells his wife he believes his role in the family can be summed up as “to pay for everything,” the line may elicit a laugh from the audience, but the feeling is seemingly genuine and serious on George’s part. His is a lonely job with a lot of pressure.

The more your Mr. Banks can find ways to relate to the pressure the character puts on himself to be strong, independent, successful, and protective, rather than just play Mr. Banks’s stiffness, the better, and the more rewarding for your actor and the audience. Mr. Banks’s struggles come from



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

very real places that many of us can identify with: a tough childhood, economic pressures, and internal doubts. His priorities are skewed, and this, more than any anger or coldness, gives the character his depth.

## MRS. BANKS

Mrs. Banks wrestles with her role within the Banks family – and the world. Smart and capable, it is interesting to see her repress those aspects of herself in order to become what she deems is required of her. She may not take action until later in the show, nor may she always make her opinions known, but the expectations of women in that time period discouraged doing so. She is outwardly doing the very best she can – what she wears, where she goes, how she carries herself – and this physicality is certainly important. But your actress should feel free to let Mrs. Banks be at odds internally with society's rules for women – which is to say, she can absolutely be an intelligent and perceptive participant in every scene, even when she's not talking. Find ways to chart her growth and confidence even when she isn't speaking.

## MR. AND MRS. BANKS'S MARRIAGE

Consider taking some time to explore George and Winifred's relationship with the actors playing these roles. While George doesn't show much affection toward, or faith in, Winifred, they presumably married for love rather than money since neither seems to possess or come from great wealth. So creating some sense of a bond – albeit a frayed one – that strengthens over the course of the show will be a worthwhile acting challenge that adds color and likeability to these characters.

Winifred visibly awakens George to the support and love of his family in Act 2, Scene 6 when he confides in her his fear about losing his job, which is key to setting up the rest of George's arc:



*Gavin Lee as Bert*

**Gavin Lee (Bert):** The best thing about playing Bert is that he gets to do everything – act, sing, dance, and be an absolute clown! The role is just fun.

Bert is always the life and soul of the party!

**Daniel Jenkins (George Banks):**

I think the biggest joy for me in this process was whom I got to do it with. I basked in the glow of the people around me, my wife and children, my directors and musical supervisors, the choreographers. I felt so honored to take part in the continuing history of the material and was eager to learn the clues that would help me put the character together.

**Rebecca Luker (Winifred Banks):**

I fell in love with Winifred Banks. She's a challenge, in that she seems like a wet blanket when you first meet her – all neuroses and wringing hands and seemingly content to let her husband run the show. But one soon learns that there's more to her than meets the eye, and it's always a joy to play a delightfully flawed human being.

**What was a challenge you had in finding your character, and how did you tackle it?**

**Gavin Lee:** Even though Bert is a jack-of-all-trades, a clown, and has a certain amount of magic about him, I still had to make him real. He is a regular, average guy living in a real world – unlike Mary Poppins.

# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER



The Banks family at the beginning of Mary Poppins.  
Bowling Green High School, Bowling Green, OH



The Banks family at the end of Mary Poppins.  
Bowling Green High School, Bowling Green, OH

## GEORGE

*(thinks for a moment)*

Winifred... if I am to be dismissed by the bank, we'll be destitute. The servants will leave, the house will be repossessed, and we'll be outside with the children sitting on the frosty curbside.

*(This is a blow to WINIFRED, but after a second, she recovers.)*

## WINIFRED

We'll still have what really matters.

*(GEORGE looks at WINIFRED, bewildered. She smiles.)*

The children. And each other.

In order for him to later decide with Winifred to sell the heirloom, to rediscover the gingerbread stars, to accept his children's sixpence, and to stand up to his bosses, it's important for this moment to land. It's the unlocking of a door that, by his promotion at the bank, is completely opened.

## JANE AND MICHAEL

The challenges with Jane and Michael are different here depending on whether you cast young-looking high school students or more age-appropriate young performers. Either way, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- As children, they wear their hearts on their sleeves more than the rest of the characters. Out of everyone onstage, what they feel and what they want are perhaps the clearest in the text and for an audience. We see Mary Poppins's magic and Mr. Banks's aloofness through Jane and Michael's eyes. Their emotions are the most susceptible to their surroundings – when they are shown attention, they blossom, and when they're scolded, they wilt or grow prickly.

# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

- There is little that is more helpful for bringing a childlike sense of play onstage than fostering a playful environment in rehearsal. Especially if you're working with younger kids, but also with actors of any age, taking some time to "play" – in ways that bond them with the rest of the cast, relax them, deepen their sense of character, and inspire staging ideas – can pay huge dividends.
- During Broadway rehearsals, the children were given a "Brat-o-meter" reading for each song, starting at 10 in the beginning of the show and shrinking down to zero by the end. A great deal of fun was had adjusting to each Brat-o-meter setting. Keep an eye out for them in the Music Direction chapter of this handbook.

## Challenges for Young Performers

A high school-aged cast of *Mary Poppins* will most likely be playing characters much older than themselves or, if young children are not used as Jane and Michael, much younger. It is important to remember that the cast is not necessarily portraying age but real people in particular situations in the musical's time period. Discussions and exercises in rehearsal can address the time period, what each person's job/responsibility is in the play, how high or low the characters are on the social ladder, a mother and father's role in 1910, how children were taken care of in that time period, and so on. If your actors understand the action and what their characters want in each scene, and they can color the scene with what they've learned about the Edwardian point of view, their performances will be less about performing a certain age and more about performing a specific character.

**Gavin Lee** (continued): He's very down-to-earth and calls a spade a spade! It's only when Mary Poppins shows up that he can join in with her magic.

**Rebecca Luker**: I had to make certain that Winifred was always fighting for something, even if she seemed to be lying down and taking George and the children's abuse all the time. I tried to make her the smartest person in the room, but that was sometimes difficult. I tried to find her vulnerability and honesty, but also her strength as she grew to understand that her family desperately needs her – something she didn't know at the start of the play.

**Daniel Jenkins** I believe Mr. Banks to be a workaholic, and that he loses sight of his priorities. I had to look to myself and identify times in my life when I became single-minded to the detriment of others around me. Connecting with those errors and feeling those missteps became key for me in identifying with this character.

**Ashley Brown**: I wanted to make her my own. Everyone around the world, including me, has grown up with Julie Andrews as their Mary Poppins. I wanted to keep the qualities that everyone loves about her but add a little of myself to the character. I felt I made her a little sassier and a little more stern. I think it's important to make any role your own. The reason you were cast is because [the director] saw something in you, and it's so magical when the audience can see that.



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

## THE PASSAGE OF TIME

The script indicates that Act 1 occurs in the fall, and Act 2 plays out over the winter, but there is room for interpretation. The amount of time that passes between some scenes could be one day or several weeks; the time lapse between Acts 1 and 2 – when Mary is away from the family and George is suspended from the bank – could be a few weeks or months. As you work on each scene, discuss with your actors how much time has passed and what has happened in the intervening time.

## THE ENSEMBLE

The director of the West End and Broadway productions of *Mary Poppins*, Sir Richard Eyre, peopled Cherry Tree Lane with an ensemble of recurring characters. Characters walking down the lane or strolling through the park included a nanny with a pram, a vicar, a policeman, a posh lady, a spinster, and a young man and woman he called Ernest and Gwendolyn. There could also be gardeners, kite flyers, or whoever was needed for each particular scene.



*The ensemble in "Playing the Game"  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*

The statues in the park include two Graces/Nymphs, two Adonises, two Pans (half-man, half-goat), Queen Victoria, and Neleus. Use as many or as few of these statues as needed (or devise your own), so long as Neleus and Queen Victoria remain. Feel free to create an ensemble of characters for your specific production.

"Playing the Game" offers a similar opportunity to create characters using the ensemble. Besides Valentine, Doll, and Teddy Bear, on Broadway there was a jack-in-a-box, toy soldiers, a mechanical monkey banging a drum and another banging cymbals, Mr. Punch (made to look much larger by standing on stilts) with his slapstick, a china doll with a cracked face, a Pierrot, Mr. Frog from *The Wind in the Willows*, and a ballerina. There are many images of antique toys online – like Raggedy Ann – which can be used for inspiration to create a set of toys for this scene.

Here are some questions for your ensemble to consider as they come onstage in each scene (Edwardian research is encouraged, but a little imagination is the only real necessity):

- What is your occupation/class status? How does this affect your interaction with the people around you?



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

- How familiar are you with the location in this scene?
- What is your relationship to the other characters (principal or ensemble) onstage? What do you want from them?
- How do you carry yourself? At this moment, are you particularly tired, excited, hurried, or distracted? Does that change over the course of the scene?
- Where did you come? Where are you headed?

## Ensemble Characters by Song

**Jolly Holiday:** Three Graces/Nymphs, Pans, Adonises, Queen Victoria, Gwendolyn and Ernest, nanny with pram, Miss Lark with Willoughby, Admiral Boom, Policeman, gardeners, vicar, spinster, posh lady, and Park Keeper.

**Precision and Order:** The stiff-backed, efficient clerks and secretaries who work at the bank.

**Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious:** The brightly colored and eccentric customers of Mrs. Corry's gingerbread shop, the Chatterboxes, wish to buy some of her alphabet letters and conversations.

**Playing the Game:** Jane and Michael's abused toys.

**Let's Go Fly a Kite:** Park visitors – nanny with pram, spinster, Gwendolyn and Ernest, kite flyers, Park Keeper, posh lady, and kite flyers (boys and girls who run with a kite at the end of the scene for "A Sight for Sore Eyes").

**Step in Time:** The chimney sweeps of London.

**Anything Can Happen (Part 3):** The Starlighters and all the featured characters in the play.

**What were the things you read, heard, watched, and discovered along the way that helped you understand your character?**

**Daniel Jenkins:** Richard Eyre suggested a very amusing book called *The Diary of a Nobody*, which I really enjoyed. It was a comical fiction about a bumbling, puffed-up character from the period, and I found it very funny. I also looked at pictures, including newly-released documentary footage from the Edwardian Era (which I believe can be found online now). All this was useful, but mostly as a way to relieve myself from too much "acting out" of the period. These were people like you and me with problems and joys that we could relate to. There were some things that I may have used from those sources about physicality or mindset, but their humanity, and the relief I felt in them not being that far from me, was very helpful.

**Ashley Brown:** I had never read the books before I started auditioning for the role. I strongly recommend them. They are amazing and give so much more detail to the characters and their surroundings than the movie does. It would be impossible to have everything in the movie. Mary Poppins is very stern in the book, so that gave me the idea to use a little of that. That was just another layer I added to the character.

**Rebecca Luker:** This is a tough question. All I can say about this is that after six weeks of rehearsal, and dealing with all the other characters in the play, I came to know Winifred more intimately. I had read about life during that part of the century in London; I knew all of that.



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

## A Chorus Member's View of *Mary Poppins*

Spending two years as part of the ensemble for the U.S. national tour of *Mary Poppins* was both a challenge and a thrill. First of all, I hadn't done any heavy dancing in a show for years (I'm what you'd call a "character woman"), and this show was demanding skills I wasn't sure I had anymore. I flew to Denver to join the company and spend a few weeks learning not only my ensemble track as Miss Lark, but also three understudy roles as well (Mrs. Brill, Miss Andrew, and the Bird Woman). That's a lot to handle, and more than a little daunting, but I soon found myself swept up in the process of learning one of the most delightful shows I've ever done and being welcomed into the *Mary Poppins* family.

This musical is so much fun for the ensemble. Not only do they get to do some really showy dancing, and sing songs they grew up hearing, but also they have\*// so many characters to play! No one is invisible in this show. It's impossible. The ensemble characters are just too rich and colorful. When I wasn't playing Miss Lark, I was busy changing costumes, hair, and makeup to become an old but sprightly chimney sweep, an extremely overworked bank employee, or the Chatterbox who always comes late to Mrs. Corry's shop. And for someone who doesn't consider herself a dancer, I was quite proud when I finally got all the letters in "Supercal" right. Whenever I'd forget a letter, which is very easy to do in this number, I'd make sure I made the last letter of each five-letter phrase (that would be "R," "F," and "L") nice and strong. (Trust me, it's a good trick.) Tapping my heart out in "Step in Time," which turned out to be my favorite number, was absolutely exhilarating. And, I have to admit, watching Mary fly off at the end of the show every night never failed to make me tear up.

Every person in the cast was happy to help if I was trying to figure something out, struggling to get into a costume, or trying to clarify a dance step or a piece of harmony. They were the "spoonful of sugar" that aided my transition into such a huge show. We continued to be that for one another – onstage and off. "And, snap! The job's a game." Thank you, Sherman Brothers. Truer words were never written.

— Debra Cardona



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

## EDWARDIAN DRESS AND MANNERS

"[The Edwardian lady is] a spectacle which cannot be seen today ... she knew how to move and carry herself. She had balance and poise, she had elegance, and she was one hundred percent feminine."

— W. Macqueen-Pope,  
*Goodbye Piccadilly*

In the Edwardian era, how one held herself and moved was in keeping with her social status. The wealthy were obsessed with public appearance, and they took great pains with the way they looked. Much of the desired effect was accomplished with clothing, so in order to achieve the ideal Edwardian body shape, women wore corsets

underneath their clothing. Wearing such undergarments affected every movement they made. Because they could not move very quickly or take large steps, women had an air of leisure in the way they strolled.

When ladies sat, it was usually on the edge of their seats, since sitting back would make it virtually impossible to get up again. This reinforced the illusion of poise. It also made it extremely difficult to dress without the help of servants. All women wore corsets, even the servants. Servants' clothing, however, was not as weighty as their employer's, since they were expected to cook, scrub, and carry for hours every day. They held themselves up straight and, depending on their status in the hierarchy of servants, could have an elegance of their own, but they also had to be able to complete their duties.

An Edwardian man's clothing was tightly tailored, and his well-starched shirts had high, stiff collars which restricted movement and forced straighter posture. Some men even wore modified corsets. All of this influenced the way Edwardian men carried themselves and gave them an air of importance.

**Rebecca Luker** (continued): But it really just takes listening and trying to bring out the truth of the character every second you're onstage. And in that way, I found what I hope was an acceptable Winifred Banks. At least I learned to love her and to love playing her every night.

**Gavin Lee:** Bert has to be liked by everyone in the audience as well as onstage. What helps this is that he is the narrator of the play, and so he gets to break the fourth wall – he is the only character to talk/sing directly to the audience. Once the actor has an audience it becomes easier to connect with them and bring them along with you into the action of the play.

**Is playing a character who is already familiar to audiences different from playing a totally new character?**

**Rebecca Luker:** Well, with this particular Winifred, she is completely new in many respects. The Hollywood version of Mrs. Banks portrayed her as a suffragette and a much more outgoing and vivacious person. The musical version of Mrs. Banks is a former actress who gave up that life (because she never was really suited to it anyway) to marry George Banks, an up-and-coming young banker, whom she loved very much. The part of Winifred that can be seen as the same [from version to version] is that she is different. She isn't the conventional wife, as George so desperately wants her to be, as life went on, and the children came. But in the end he remembers that he fell in love with her precisely because she is different.



# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER



*Mrs. Banks at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*



*Bert at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*

The chimney sweeps of London were not restricted by the formality of clothing at all – no starched collars for them! Because they had to crawl around in narrow spaces, climb up chimney flues, and traverse the rooftops, it was necessary that their clothing be functional, allowing them complete freedom of movement. They were more grounded; walked with a looser, easier gait; and never had to worry about how they looked, especially since they spent a lot of time covered in soot.

The effect of moving like an upper-class lady or gentleman can be accomplished without having a corset and all the elaborate clothing that Edwardian men and women used to adorn themselves. British actor Brian Bedford, who played Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, was asked about his decision to forego wearing a corset for the role. He remarked, “I do think I act as if I have a corset on,” and that is the key. A valuable exercise would be to have the cast practice moving around the rehearsal space as if they were wearing Edwardian clothes. If there are any bits of clothing available that can be used, like simple floor-length skirts, or something that can be tightened around the torso like a corset (even a modern-day corset will do), everyone can take turns walking around the rehearsal space in them. Suit jackets can be worn in rehearsals. The more time the cast has to get used to the formality of the clothing they’ll be wearing, the easier it will be for them to move like well-to-do Edwardians in their costumes. After practicing as posh Edwardians, take some time to explore moving as chimney sweeps. Note the difference in bearing, and ensure that your cast members can make that physical switch.

# APPROACHES TO CHARACTER

**Gavin Lee:** I was very glad when I found out the stage musical wasn't an absolute carbon copy of the movie. This meant that I wasn't expected to be Bert from the film. I could take my portrayal of Bert wherever I wanted within the script. This made the development of the character easier. Any actor playing the role should definitely be his own Bert and not a replica of the character in the film, as the musical doesn't follow the same path anyway.

**Ashley Brown:** The positive is that everyone came into the show loving Mary Poppins. They were very large shoes to fill, but I had to remind myself that I'm here for a reason. Others believed I could do it, so I had to believe it. It was a very magical time in my life, and I'm so happy people everywhere will be stepping into the sensible shoes of Mary Poppins. There are only a select few people on this planet that can say they played this role. Welcome to the club!

**Daniel Jenkins:** I think the only real obstacle for me may have been other people's expectations about the character and his role in the story. I find it best to forget about what I might know about the historical portrayals (unless there is a juicy idea I want to steal!) and just commit myself to what I would in a new piece. I try to answer questions: Who am I? Where am I? What time is it? What do I want? How do I get what I want? What is in my way? etc. I get as specific as possible about these things and then my concerns about past portrayals mean less and less. I'm too busy "doing" and much less concerned about how my acting compares with others.



# STAGING

## STAGING THE EFFECTS, OR “SELLING IT”

The Design chapter of this handbook addresses the technical challenges of *Mary Poppins*’s magic. However, it’s worth noting that actors can help with the storytelling of these magical moments by holding the audience’s attention during the crew’s preparation of them, as well as by reacting in character. These finessing details by your performers can be as important as the actual design of the props or effects, so encourage them to “sell it”!

One example of staging a magical moment is when Mary Poppins holds up a sheet to disguise the sliding in of her bed during “Practically Perfect” (see tips on page 56). Your actress should focus on her activity – examining the sheet, smoothing it, shaking it out a bit to remove wrinkles – to keep the focus on Mary rather than on what she’s covering up. When the bed appears, Michael and Jane’s awestruck reactions can make the moment seem all the more magical.

The greatest effects are only as stirring as your actors’ use of them to tell the story. If the actress playing Mary flies, she should feel comfortable and confident enough to make it all look easy, natural, and in control, and the other actors should respond with awe to her superhuman abilities.

### A Note on Pacing

This is a long (but worthwhile!) show, so the instinct to keep things moving along is a good one. (See the Design chapter for hints on keeping the scene transitions smooth, which can take out a lot of the “air.”) The book scenes contain a lot of rich and important material that give the show its power, so allow them the time to land. Without letting pauses into the production, make sure the dramatic beats are clear to the audience. Find simple ways to use gesture or blocking to punctuate them – it will be worth the amount of stage time it takes.

## BLOCKING

It can be easy in a big musical like this to focus on the staging of the major technical or musical and choreographic moments, but the stage pictures you create in the book scenes tell so much of the story. The emotional distance of the family can be communicated by keeping the children at a physical distance from their parents – especially their father – until their relationship warms. If you’re using a multilevel set, place Jane and Michael on the stairs while their parents remain on the ground level, or keep George in his study or behind a piece of furniture. Consider which character is in a position of power onstage in relation to the others and how to physically stage this (scenes with particularly dynamic power structures include “Precision and Order,” the battle between Mary Poppins and Miss Andrew, and Winifred’s claiming of power).



# MUSIC DIRECTION

## OVERVIEW

The Sherman Brothers' first major contribution to the film version of *Mary Poppins* happened before they wrote the score. They suggested the time period of the story change from the 1930s, when the books were actually written, to 1910, the height of the English music hall, which style infuses their songs ("Step in Time" was inspired by a popular music hall song entitled "Knees Up, Mother Brown"). Later, when Anthony Drewe and George Stiles began to adapt the score for the stage, they wanted to honor what the Sherman Brothers had already established. It was necessary to expand the existing songs, add dance music, and write new songs in order to further the plot. "By the end of the process," Richard Sherman remarked, "it was sometimes hard to remember who wrote what and when."

While the orchestrations create the British music hall sound that the composers were looking for, it is more helpful to concentrate on the songs that aren't meant to have that type of sound – such as the ballads – to make sure that the musicians are observing all of the dynamics and phrasing as notated in their parts to play with sensitivity and elicit the most emotional performance possible.

The score is meticulously notated for the ensemble's phrasing and dynamics. It cannot be stressed enough that the storytelling is foremost. Nearly everything the ensemble sings is either a celebration of being with Mary Poppins or a lesson for Jane and Michael to learn – oftentimes it is a combination of both. The more the ensemble can tap into why they're singing, rather than get carried away by the fact that "it's fun to sing these songs," the more moving the end product will be for both the performers and the audience. Always tell a story – don't just sing along.

## VOCAL WARM-UPS

It is just as important to warm up the voice for speaking as it is for singing, especially since diction is so vital in *Mary Poppins*. Start out with exercises to help the cast prepare to speak and then move on to singing scales. Incorporate British accents into the vocal work so the dialects become more natural for your actors. By the time the curtain raises, their dialogue will flow as easily as their songs.

## SINGING WITH AN ACCENT

The use of accents while singing the music in *Mary Poppins* is not only significant, but also has a huge effect on the vocal sound production of the show. Although potentially challenging for American singers, singing with the proper accent affects the physicality of the characters and their vocal inflections, as well as the tuning of the sung notes.



# MUSIC DIRECTION

A few things to remember:

- Consonants, especially “t’s,” are very important. Really make those “t’s” bright.
- In a British accent, most short “a” vowels become “AH.” For example, “can’t” becomes “CAHN’T.”
- Short “o” vowels become darker and sound more like “AW.” “Not” becomes “NOUGHT” or “NAWT.” “Bother” becomes “BAW-thah.”
- Soften the “r” in words ending in “er.” For example, “rather” becomes “RAH-thah.”

When utilizing an accent, it is always a good idea to read the lyric aloud as text a few times to get used to the “feel” of the accent before singing. With practice it will become quite natural.

## SINGING FAMILIAR SONGS

As many of these songs are well known (“Let’s Go Fly a Kite,” “Step in Time”), it’s very easy to slide into a “sing-a-long” mode for the cast. Spend extra time on these songs, ensuring your performers are singing exactly what is on the page, as opposed to what their memories tell them is there. Some of these songs serve different functions in the theatrical version than they had in previous iterations. For the show to be effective, always emphasize storytelling. The dynamics and phrasing written into the score will help achieve this.

## SINGING WITH A TRACK

If using a track, as many licensees do, approach the music as if the singer is leading the orchestra rather than following a recording. There are also several helpful cues in the orchestration pointing to when a singer should enter. Utilize the Guide Vocal CD a few times with your cast to get a sense of tempo and tone. Once the notes and rhythms have been taught, move toward using the Accompaniment CD so your cast can work on creating their own approach to the characters. Both CDs are available from MTI.

## PERFORMING WITH AN ORCHESTRA

William Brohn’s imaginative orchestrations for *Mary Poppins* are available for licensing from MTI in two formats: 11- and 16-piece orchestrations. If you choose to perform with a live orchestra instead of with the recording, be sure to give your instrumentalists plenty of time to acquaint themselves with the score, as it can be difficult to play. Every instrument is crucial and every part has its own moment. The score has a chamber-music quality, with some passages producing a more frilly sound, but there are also a lot of character-driven moments. Insist that the music director become very



# MUSIC DIRECTION

familiar with the script. There is underscoring in almost every scene and many musical moments are dependent upon action onstage. You will notice these five- and nine-bar phrases occurring throughout the score, and they can come as a surprise if you and your orchestra are not used to working with them.

Be aware that parts of the orchestrations show a melody or countermelody started by one instrument, which is then passed off to another instrument. The best way to approach these sections is to have the instrument initiating the melody or countermelody drive it forward, rather than just play the passage as a separate entity. The next instrument in the sequence should swell in volume to receive the melody and then be ready to pass on to the next part, creating a seamless transition.

The *Mary Poppins* orchestrations call for a lot of wind instruments, including a brass section. Depending on the location of the orchestra, this can make it extremely difficult to hear the actors. Schedule enough time during those final rehearsals to work on the balance of sound between orchestra and cast. Surrounding the orchestra pit with some sort of masking will help muffle the sound a bit. Ensure the cast can hear what they need from the orchestra in order to make their vocal entrances and find the correct keys.

## Preparing Jane and Michael to Sing

Vocally prepping your actors playing Jane and Michael is probably the biggest musical challenge in this show. Jane and Michael are onstage more than any other character in the show (including Mary Poppins), and much of what they sing is interjections: individual sung lines, short verses, transitions, etc. You will want to allot as much time as possible to training these actors. For the Broadway production, the children were led through a warm-up before every performance, and that time was used to give them notes on small musical details that were being skimmed over (cutoffs, English accent, pitch). Ear-training exercises were incorporated as well as tongue-twister-type warm-ups to help them focus on the sound and the feeling of those sounds in their mouths. It is very important to make sure that they understand everything they're singing. They have lots of strange references ("barley water," "gruel," Queen Victoria, the significance of the word "bloody"), and it is critical that they understand these references and how everything they do and sing propels the story forward.



# MUSIC DIRECTION

## TRANSITIONAL MUSIC

Many cues were included in the score to accompany onstage transitions for the Broadway production. You may find that you have more music than needed for your physical production. Detailed below is a list of optional cuts to incorporate into the score if needed. If there are additional moments you'd like to address, you can contact your MTI representative. Avoid extending transitional cues beyond what is written in the score. The show is designed to flow smoothly from location to location, and long scene changes can drastically bog down the pacing of the performance.

## NOTES ON THE *MARY POPPINS* SCORE

Now on to the specifics of the *Mary Poppins* score. The notes below are broken down by song and measure numbers.

### #1 – Prologue

- m. 9 – Think of the first 8 measures as the well-ordered life of Mr. Banks before Mary arrives. At m. 9, it's as if the wind has swept through the orchestra and changed everything. Look out for these constant changes in tone and tempo throughout the show to underscore the twists and turns of the family's journey.
- m. 46 – The “painter” of the story, Bert holds a special relationship with the audience. Ensure all of his lyrics can be clearly understood through his Cockney accent. It is almost as if Bert is causing the action to happen, so he should use little back-phrasing in these early scenes.
- m. 84-85 – Make sure the pronunciation of “che-ree” in “Chim Chim Che-ree” has a “u” vowel, as in “chuh-REE” instead of the “e” sound in “cherry.”
- m. 86 – Jane and Michael are at their brattiest with Katie Nanna. (Throughout this section look for Brat-o-meter readings for the children.) Let the quick *staccato* accompaniment influence their run across the stage.

### #2 – Cherry Tree Lane (Part 1)

- m. 20 – In this section it is difficult to line up the dialogue with the underscoring. Ensure Winifred has finished speaking by the three quarter notes in m. 20 so that Mrs. Brill has enough space to start singing in m. 21.
- m. 43 – George can opt to speak-sing most of the lyrics in this song. It is important that he connect his thoughts in a stream of consciousness during which he absolutely cannot be interrupted. His sense of propriety is a bit over the top, and he should use rolled “r’s” whenever possible.

# MUSIC DIRECTION

## **#3 – The Perfect Nanny**

To show their parents how well-behaved they will be with this “perfect nanny,” Jane and Michael adjust their Brat-o-meter down to a three. (On the other hand, they are a bit proud of the pranks they’ve played on all their previous nannies.)

## **#4 – Cherry Tree Lane (Part 2)**

After listening to the children’s advertisement, George is once again all business. Remember that his spoken and sung thoughts should be as connected as they are in “Cherry Tree Lane (Part 1).” With their Brat-o-meter ratcheted up to a nine, Jane and Michael are making fun of their father in this section, matching his tone and intention.

## **#5 – Practically Perfect**

This song describes Mary Poppins to a tee and sets the mark for her precision and crispness. She should use the diction required in this song throughout the show.

- m. 4 – Mary stops Michael’s protest with a hand or a look, then turns to Jane. When Mary sings “I’ll show you, if I can,” she’s referring to the stubbornness of her charges, not to her abilities.
- m. 14 – Make sure the top note of this figure (B) is always perfectly in tune. As the song progresses, it will have a tendency to slip down to the A.
- m. 132 – Jane and Michael approach Mary Poppins with many misgivings – she’s tricky, all right. By the end of the song, they are intrigued enough to let her stay.

## **#5a – All Me Own Work**

- m. 9 – Bert should sing this section lightly and happily. Remember, the word “che-roo” is pronounced “chuh-ROO.”

## **#6 – Jolly Holiday**

The children are not happy to be in the park until the statues come to life and they begin to experience Mary’s magic. Nothing in this song should sound rushed. A “walk-in-the-park” feel should be as much a part of the music as it is of the visual scene.

The ensemble is a mix of classes in this number, so it is not necessarily important to match accents. There are so many clever lyrics in this song, you don’t want the audience to miss them. Mary and



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Bert, therefore, should work on diction for “passing statuary” and “man out with his dog will stand agog.”

- m. 72 – Build these notes like a bell chord. The “b” of “blue” should cut through as each new part is added.
- m. 73 – If the tenor part is too high, consider swapping the tenor and baritone parts so the tenors sing a “D” and the baritones sing the “A” below it. This change can happen throughout the song and throughout the show if necessary.
- m. 101 – Acknowledge the rests between the syllables in “blood is blue” and “crystal clear.” Each one should be as short and crisp as possible, while still rolling the “r” of crystal, giving it an almost operatic sound. The ensemble should sound genteel here.
- m. 132 – The men match Bert’s Cockney accent here. “Saunter” rhymes with “born to” (“SAWN-tah, BAWN-tah”). They should pronounce “bound to” as “bound tah,” then roll the “r” of “promenade” as if they were posh, making a big deal of that lyric.
- m. 165 – “Features” is pronounced “FEE-chéz.”
- m. 169-170 – The phrase “your heart” is pronounced as if the two words were connected with the “h” dropped, making it sound like one word: “your-ART.”
- m. 173-183 – After the Queen Victoria statue has met the children, the final verse should have a raucous music hall feel. By the end of this number, Jane and Michael are smitten and the Brat-o-meter begins to lower.

## #7 – Let’s Hope She Will Stay

- m. 10 – The mood changes abruptly as Winifred begins to sing. Mr. and Mrs. Banks do not yet fully understand how to communicate with each other and therefore sing with very different musical vocabularies. If you are performing with an orchestra, let your actress playing Mrs. Banks lead this entrance.
- m. 44 – Here is another change in mood as the children begin to sing. While Winifred is coming closer to understanding her children, George is still off in his own silo. Be aware that Jane’s first note might be difficult to hear in the orchestrations. Spend some time on the transition so your actress feels comfortable. It might be easier to think of this as a minor third above Winifred’s last note.

## #7a – Winds Do Change

- m. 7 – Emphasize the consonants in “Tides can turn. Sink or swim.”



# MUSIC DIRECTION

## #8 – A Spoonful of Sugar

This song is a perfect contrast to “Cherry Tree Lane,” during which the family is influenced by George’s strict demeanor as they sing of precision and order. In “A Spoonful of Sugar,” the topic is still about order, but all fun.

- m. 6 – Be aware of the difference between half step and whole step intervals and be faithful to them. They are important to the composer and when done well, show off Mary Poppins’s attention to detail.
- m. 85 – Time Winifred’s entrance so that her exclamation “Ah!” sounds like the top of Robertson Ay’s scale. It may take a few tries to time this out correctly.
- m. 106 – Make this sound as ridiculous and “faux opera” as your performer can make it.
- m. 120-144 – Robertson Ay and Mrs. Banks get to have lots of silly fun after having their spoonful of sugar. The entire group should be having a raucous good time.

## #9 – Precision and Order

The ensemble should feel and sound like they are part of a machine. The lyrics must be crisp and precise. The sound should be *staccato*, with quick consonants (especially double consonants as in “closing”) and rolled “r’s.”

- m. 42 – The Bank Chairman can speak part of his lyrics. After all, he taught George all he knows.
- m. 56-57 – This is the only exception to *staccato* rule. There is weight on “are built,” using the full value for each quarter note.
- m. 80 – At the end of each ensemble verse (e.g., “met... met... met...”), the words must become softer immediately, as if they were fading out in the distance, but still remain crisp.

## #9a – A Man Has Dreams

- m. 32 – This is a rare show of emotion on George’s part, and he sees a whole world of possibilities ahead. Encourage the actor to sing as broadly as he can, which will make his fall all the more devastating.

## #10 – Feed the Birds

Reported to be Walt Disney’s personal favorite – much of his philosophy is summed up in the song’s simple message – your actresses should sing it plainly, as the lyrics will do the heavy lifting.



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- m. 9 – The Bird Woman’s sound is slightly gruff and folksy – a great contrast from Mary’s refined and warm sound.
- m. 26-27 – St. Paul’s is pronounced “Sent Paul’s.”
- m. 72 – On Broadway, the choir was pre-recorded to accommodate a complex costume change into “Supercal.” If at all possible, have an offstage ensemble sing this live. You don’t need many singers, as this section should sound ethereal.

## **#11 – Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious**

Diction is extremely important throughout this song. There are some great and unusual lyrics, and the audience will need a lot of help to follow along. Plan to spend a little extra rehearsal time so the cast feels comfortable with the spelling. And if you’re not having fun, you’re not doing it right!

- m. 74 – Mary can’t help showing off a bit.
- m. 74-75 – Bert, as always, is no match for Mary. The end of his phrase can be more of a bray than a sung note.
- m. 129 – This chord should sound like bad opera. When Michael says “bloody good,” everyone is shocked. In England, the word “bloody” is a curse word, so everyone should react accordingly.
- m. 161-166 – If you are using the Accompaniment CD, work through this section a few times to get a proper feel for the tempo change. It can get very easy to fall behind when the letters become complicated.

## **#11a – Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious (Reprise)/The Winds May Blow**

As the song repeats, the melody can begin to sound “sing-song-y” after a while. To avoid that trap, keep it moving forward with energy. Make it feel active rather than repetitive. This reprise is the height of the music hall tradition, and the audience should feel like they want to join in.

## **#12 – Playing the Game**

Mary can be quite intimidating when she wants to be. Jane and Michael need to learn a lesson and this song should be a bit scary for them. Don’t be afraid to push the creepiness.

- m. 205 – Ideally, the last phrase, “Will we meet again,” should be sung in one breath even though there are rests between each word. Make sure each rest is given its full value.

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## #13 – Chim Chim Cher-ee

This is the most descriptive lyric for Bert. He begins with a breathy sound, and when Mary appears, it becomes a dance-like duet.

## #14 – Cherry Tree Lane (Reprise)

- m. 37 – Michael may have difficulty finding his first note. Rehearse this section against the orchestrations multiple times so he feels comfortable.
- m. 54 – Mrs. Banks can speak-sing since she is following George's example.

## #15 – Brimstone and Treacle (Part 1)

- m. 5 – Miss Andrew should roll every "r" possible. She quite enjoys torturing these poor children.

## #15a – Run Away

On Broadway, this cue underscored an elaborate projection design in which Bert created the word "welcome" for Mary's return. If your physical production of this moment is simpler, cut m. 16-23 or fade out early.

## #16 – Let's Go Fly a Kite

- m. 52 – Despite Bert's encouragement, the kite still falls to the ground here. His voice should falter a bit as he tries to think of another way to cheer up the children.
- m. 90 – Do not take a breath between "soaring" and "up." Think of this as one big *legato* phrase.
- m. 106 – To underscore Mary's return, make this ensemble verse as grand as possible. The first eighth note of the phrase should have a bit of weight behind it.
- m. 116 – This *decrescendo* should happen quickly. Mary still has work to do, and we can't celebrate just yet.

## #17 – Good For Nothing/Being Mrs. Banks

- m. 1 – If "A Man Has Dreams" was filled with hope, this song should be its antithesis. This is what George gets for taking risks and slipping away from his precious order. It almost leaves a bitter taste in his mouth.



# MUSIC DIRECTION

- m. 18 – The song has the opposite effect on Winifred. She has finally found her confidence and should be given her moment to shine.

## **#18 – Brimstone and Treacle (Part 2)**

Mary should sing in head voice almost exclusively here. She is Miss Andrew's opposite in every way.

- m. 198 – Mary Poppins forces Miss Andrew to drink some of her own awful medicine. The “glug, glug, glug” is the sound of her drinking and doesn't need to be sung precisely as written.
- m. 221 – If Mary has difficulty singing the high “C,” she should stay on the “G.” The Miss Andrew track also requires a large range. Modify the part as needed to allow the actress to sing in a strong part of her range. In this scene, Mary not only outwits Miss Andrew, but triumphs vocally as well.

## **#18a – Practically Perfect (Reprise)**

The Brat-o-meter registers zero. The children are happy to have Mary Poppins back in the house.

- m. 65 – This is an incredibly fast scene transition to go from the nursery to the rooftops for “Step in Time.” If your physical production requires music, vamp m. 65-68. Also, to help cover a set change, consider performing the beginning of “Step in Time” in front of a curtain or scrim. The stage doesn't need to open up to a full production number until m. 89, which should give you ample time to clear the nursery.

## **#19 – Step in Time**

The ensemble will have their heaviest accents in this number. “Years” sounds like “YEHZ,” there are no ending “t's,” and they drop all “h's.” “Try to” is sung as “try da.” Please note the vocal splits on each harmony line since the altos are often singing with the baritones. Don't worry about the blend. It shouldn't sound perfect – it should sound real.

Also, spend a little time talking through this song and why the chimney sweeps are so important for Jane and Michael's journey. They show the children that there is something larger and even more important than our individual lives and needs, and that people are looking out for us, even if we don't realize it. The more the ensemble can tap into why they're singing what they're singing, the more emotional the end product will be for both the performers and the audience.

- m. 89 – This measure begins with a straight tone.
- m. 97 – Every time “never need a reason, never need a rhyme” is sung, please acknowledge the



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comma between the phrases. There's not enough time for a pause or breath, but there should be a pulse on the second "never."

- m. 170 – If your dancers have difficulty sustaining this extremely long number, please cut m. 170-171, 173-177, and 207-269. This cut will match the original London cast recording version of the song.
- m. 186 – For the phrase, "Link your elbows," the "k" attaches to "your" so that it's pronounced "LIN kyour" with a bouncy feel.
- m. 286 – Consider simplifying Mary's choreography a few measures before her solo so she's not out of breath.
- m. 326 – Consider adding offstage singers during this section as your onstage dancers may be too out of breath to really sing out.

## **#20 – A Man Has Dreams (Reprise)/A Spoonful of Sugar (Reprise)**

Bert is gently leading Mr. Banks, little by little, to a realization. He should not sound condescending, no matter how brusque George has been to him in the past.

- m. 25 – When George sings, he should work against making it sound like a lullaby. Sing it out.
- m. 112 – Bert's line, "Well, good luck, Guv'ner," is a throwaway – an opposite feeling to the heaviness of the scene. George, however, retains the poignancy of the moment.

## **#21a – Give Us the Word**

It may be very difficult for George to find his first note for "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious (Reprise)." The last note heard in the previous song is an "A," and George needs to start a half step up on a "Bb." Tons of practice will eventually make this second nature. If he is still having difficulty finding the pitch, have him speak/shout the first few lines and pick up the melody at m. 5.

## **#22 – Anything Can Happen (Part 2)**

Just as there is a comma in "never need a reason, never need a rhyme," there are several in this song. Use them.

- m. 53 – If the Tenor 1 part is too high for your cast, have all tenors sing the Tenor 2 part.
- m. 56 – This verse should be *legato* and dramatic. Make sure all "t's" are bright and crisp. The extra precision is worth it.



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- m. 59 – Begin a new thought with “But we’ve found a whole new spin...” Add a liquid “e” in the word “new” so it sounds like “nyew.”
- m. 63 – The tenors can drop down to the baritone part if necessary.
- m. 81 – Emphasize the word, “you.” This is a new thought.
- m. 87 – If the high “C” is too challenging for your sopranos, drop down to the “Ab.” Additionally, the Tenor 1’s can drop down to the Tenor 2 or baritone part if needed.

## #23 – A Spoonful of Sugar (Reprise)

On Broadway, this lengthy music cue underscored Mary’s flight out into the audience. If you do not choose to create such elaborate staging, cut m. 78-90 inclusive, then transpose m. 91-105 down a half step to incorporate the correct key change.

# CHOREOGRAPHY

When developing the choreography for *Mary Poppins*, there are so many possibilities! Instead of prescribing detailed choreography, this chapter offers insight into the process used in the Broadway and touring companies to prepare the cast to dance and inhabit the characters, breathing life into Mary Poppins's world.

This chapter employs the help of Brian Collier, dance supervisor of the Broadway company of *Mary Poppins*. Brian was responsible for ensuring that all dance numbers – created by choreographers Matthew Bourne and Stephen Mear – were maintained, teaching new cast members the choreography, and taking part in the audition process for Broadway and both national tours. “I could literally talk for hours about each number,” he said, and indeed, he provided a wealth of information.

## NOTES ON THE MARY POPPINS CHOREOGRAPHY

### Practically Perfect

**Dancers:** Mary Poppins and the children

**What Happens:** After Mary Poppins sweeps into the Banks home and is hired as the new nanny, Jane and Michael get an inkling that this nanny is magically different and very much in charge.

**Preparing to Dance:** It is in this number that the audience and the Banks children begin to realize that Mary Poppins is a magical being.

They are trying to figure her out and take control of the situation like they have done with all the other nannies, but Mary doesn't let them. At one point, during the musical interlude, Mary does a little dance step and the children fall into line, and it becomes a game of follow the leader.

The number is filled with magic tricks, such as pulling many differently sized objects out of a seemingly empty carpetbag and making a bed appear out of nowhere. It is important for the audience to see that Mary is in charge, but she is never condescending. She says things plainly and she means what she says. Her movements are deliberate, effortless, and poised. At song's end, the children follow her out to the park – and they have no idea how it happened.



*“Practically Perfect” at Akron School of the Arts  
Akron, OH*



# CHOREOGRAPHY

## Jolly Holiday

**Dancers:** Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael, Bert, Neleus and the Greek statues – the Graces/Nymphs, Adonises, and Pans – Queen Victoria statue, gardeners, Admiral Boom, Miss Lark, nannies, other park visitors, Park Keeper, Policeman

**What Happens:** A walk in the park becomes a lesson in seeing things differently, when statues jump off their plinths, and the drabness of the park transforms into a colorful place full of brightness and life. Flowers burst forth, couples flirt, and policemen's uniforms change color before our very eyes. The number builds to a mad tea party complete with nymphs and Pans; the children meet Queen Victoria, whose statue has also come to life; and everyone kicks up their heels in vaudeville fashion. At the end, a rainstorm breaks, the color drains from the scene, and everything returns to normal.



*"Jolly Holiday" at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*

**Preparing to Dance:** In the Broadway and touring companies, the "gray park," as it was called, was designed to introduce the audience to the gray, dull, overcast malaise that is London and also to show how the different strata of society interacted, or didn't. For example, a posh lady would never give one of the gardeners a second look – neither would the nannies, because they were of a higher station than the gardeners. The movement of everyone in the park just before the number was slow and deliberate, with the feeling of blinking as if you were underwater, accentuating the propriety and dullness of their lives. It showed the audience why Jane and Michael don't want to go to the park.

Once the park bursts into color, feelings left below the surface and relationships forbidden by social restraints are free to blossom. For example, Gwendolyn and Ernest (if you decide to have them as ensemble characters) can finally show interest in each other, Admiral Boom and Miss Lark can cavort through the park, and the nannies may give those gardeners a second glance. This freedom grows to a feverish degree until everyone (including Queen Victoria) takes part in a big music hall finish. With a thunderclap, it all fades away. The gray park is back, as if nothing ever happened, but perhaps the memory of it remains in their hearts and minds.



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The movement for the statues is not fluid like traditional ballet but is quite specific. Think of statues in a museum with very stylized hands and slightly odd, broken lines that create the sense of being carved in stone even after being brought to life by Mary Poppins. There should always be a feeling that they are still made of marble. The Graces/Nymphs are elegant and flirty, the Adonises are strong and Greek-god-like, and the Pans are animalistic and very low to the ground (with a vaudeville tilt). Neleus, despite his puckishness, carries himself with nobility in keeping with being the prince of the sea. As an exercise, the actors playing the statues could be asked to do some research and talk to the cast about the mythology behind their particular characters.

## A Spoonful of Sugar

**Dancers:** Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael, Mrs. Brill, Robertson Ay, Mrs. Banks

**What Happens:** By using a “spoonful of sugar” and looking at work as a fun activity, Mary Poppins gets Jane and Michael to clean up a seemingly insurmountable mess.

**Preparing to Dance:** Like “Practically Perfect,” this musical number also calls on a number of magic tricks, such as a broken table and shelves fixing themselves, a burst faucet making itself good as new, and a cake rising and frosting itself. Whenever Mary Poppins snaps her fingers and something fixes itself, she doesn’t have to look at it happening, because she knows it is happening.



*“A Spoonful of Sugar” at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*

The important thing to understand is that Mary is changing how the children look at the world. Mrs. Banks has left a kitchen in chaos, but returns to everything tidy and clean, and is treated to a “spoonful of sugar” from Mary. Mrs. Brill enters and is swept up into the scene at the very end in complete bewilderment, not really understanding what has just happened, just that she has somehow returned to a clean kitchen and a frosted cake.



# CHOREOGRAPHY

## Precision and Order

**Dancers:** The clerks and secretaries of the bank

**What Happens:** Buried under the weight of documents and ledgers, the bank employees embody the unrelenting task of making money in this Edwardian hive of industry.

**Preparing to Dance:** The musical movement in this number is interspersed between acting scenes that serve to move the plot forward. Think of the constant ticking of a clock or a typewriter in the office as an internal metronome, keeping the “cogs in the wheel” moving smoothly.

The inspiration for the look of the bank employees was pictures by British cartoonist and caricaturist H.M. Bateman, whose series of cartoons, “The Man Who...,” were published in *Tatler* during the Edwardian era. Examples of his artwork can be seen at [www.hmbateman.com](http://www.hmbateman.com). Bateman’s style was to take one particular feature of the person he was lampooning and grossly exaggerate it. All ensemble members were encouraged to use that idea and take one aspect of their movement (hunch, limp, leading with the nose, leaning backwards, etc.) and over-pronounce it in order to create distinctly different characters. Gender roles in the office were also considered. For instance, the secretaries were subservient to the clerks, and the movements and stage positioning reflected that.



*“Precision and Order” at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*

## Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

**Dancers:** Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael, Bert, Mrs. Corry, Annie and Fannie, the Chatterboxes

**What Happens:** At Mrs. Corry’s “Talking Shop,” her customers, the Chatterboxes, are in a tizzy because she has announced the shop is all out of conversations. With just a handful of letters, Mary Poppins saves the day by creating a marvelous new word – supercalifragilisticexpialidocious – and teaching them how to use it. Thus begins a musical number that culminates in everyone spelling this incredible word in dance and that is later reprised.

**Preparing to Dance:** When Jane and Michael walk into Mrs. Corry’s shop, it is like walking into an alternate reality that exists in a place they may have passed every day, but on this particular day it suddenly appears, and can just as suddenly disappear. Mrs. Corry and her two daughters are even



# CHOREOGRAPHY

more exotic than the Chatterboxes. They are described as the oldest women in the world and their clothing and manner give a “Carnival in Rio” feeling to the scene.

What is important to know about the Chatterboxes is that conversations are their oxygen. They cannot survive without them, so when they run low, they go to Mrs. Corry’s shop to be replenished. In order to get into the spirit of the scene and understand why the Chatterboxes need Mrs. Corry’s letters so badly, challenge the ensemble to speak to one another using only half the words for what they are trying to say, or perhaps, if they are running low, use only one or two letters. In addition, you can break the ensemble into pairs, and ask the pairs to decide on a conversation and then communicate without using any words at all, only physical movements. Everyone in the room can watch what each pair is doing.

The world of the Chatterboxes is radically different from the Edwardian world, which gives characters more freedom to be expressive and move in ways that would not be considered “normal.” To create distinct Chatterbox characters and actions, cast members can be asked to choose a body part and explore leading with it, holding it on his body in a strange way and then explore how it affects his movement. For example, one Chatterbox on Broadway always used his top hat as the focal point for his movement, while another had his bowler hat pulled way down on his head and his shoulders lifted up to his ears.

The entire number evolves as a sort of game of charades. As Mary teaches everyone about her exceptional new word, it influences the shapes the Chatterboxes make until Bert takes the lead in creating all the letters in movement, and everyone follows along.



*“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” at The Governor’s School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*



# CHOREOGRAPHY





# CHOREOGRAPHY



Brian Collier  
Original Broadway Cast



# CHOREOGRAPHY

The inspiration for the “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” movement was co-choreographer Stephen Mear’s partner, who is deaf. British sign language gave the choreographers a base for the spelling of the word. Then, they decided to have fun with the idea and make each letter less literal — something that could be seen and understood from the back balcony. Choreographer Matthew Bourne describes it as a “tongue-twister in movement.”

Although Bourne and Mear’s original choreography is available for licensing, there are so many inventive and fun ways to create an original version of this dance. From paddles emblazoned with letters to colorful stripes on costumes that form words when put together, anything is possible to create an entertaining effect.

## Playing the Game

**Who Dances:** Mary Poppins, Jane and Michael, Valentine, Mr. Punch, Doll, Teddy Bear, all of the toys

**What Happens:** Mary Poppins teaches an unrepentant Jane and Michael a lesson by bringing all their ripped and abused toys to life to protest their treatment.



*“Playing the Game” at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*

**Preparing to Dance:** Working on the premise that Jane and Michael would play roughly with their dolls and then throw them in the corner, every toy in “Playing the Game” is damaged. Choreographer Matthew Bourne developed an exercise for the Broadway production in which all the toys would begin in the position on the floor where they had been thrown and then try to find a way to get up and move around. This was influenced by whatever materials the toy was constructed with – cloth, ceramic, metal – and whether a part of it was broken. For example, one doll had very long arms, so he often let them dictate how he moved around the stage.

Another useful exercise is to ask those cast members playing toys to tell the story of how they were ruined by Jane and Michael. One actress said her doll was a gift received by Jane because Mr. Banks went on a business trip and felt guilty about missing her birthday. Jane, still angry with her father, promptly broke the doll’s arm.



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What should be remembered about the spirit in which this musical number is executed is that it should not have a “pitchforks and torches” feeling. Even though the toys are berating the children for what they have done to them, at the end of the day, they want to be played with and cherished, not thrown in a corner and forgotten.

## **A Sight for Sore Eyes (The Kite Ballet)**

**Dancers:** Children who run through the park with their kites

**What Happens:** Several children run through the trees with a kites, playing and teasing each other. “The Kite Ballet” happens just as a dejected George Banks enters the scene, creating a juxtaposition of the freedom and happiness of the children with the world-weariness and sadness of George.



*“A Sight for Sore Eyes (The Kite Ballet)” at  
Archbishop Stepinac High School White Plains, NY*

**Preparing to Dance:** This is a short interlude that takes place after “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” (a number which is not so much choreographed as it is staged). While the movement has a balletic influence, it is important that it looks more like children at play than a choreographed ballet. They are chasing one another, playing a sort of cat and mouse game with the kite.



# CHOREOGRAPHY

## Step in Time

**Dancers:** Mary Poppins, Bert, Jane and Michael, chimney sweeps

**What Happens:** On the roof of the Banks home, Mary and Bert introduce the children to London's chimney sweeps, who show them the joy and precariousness of life on the city's rooftops. Jane and Michael also learn the sweeps are watching over them like earth-bound guardian angels.



*"Step in Time" at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*

**Preparing to Dance:** The chimney sweeps, who are from the lower rungs of society, are more grounded and earthy. Up above, however, they are acrobats as they climb up chimneys and hop from rooftop to rooftop, becoming light as a feather and cat-like, very much like ninjas or athletes that practice free running. They are very good at what they do. The most important thing to know, and the idea that drives the scene, is that the chimney sweeps are watching over Jane and Michael and will always be there when they need them.

This musical number was created around the strengths of each particular dancer. There are "spotlight" moments of small groups of chimney sweeps dancing throughout the piece, but everyone learned each section. The choreographers would observe and then pick the dancers that were best of each of these moments. If they noticed some dancers had special skills (such as tumbling), sections were created to highlight them. In the end, each dancer had a piece of the number in which he could shine.

The style of dancing used for "Step in Time" is a rhythmic boot tap, which has a more into-the-ground feel and is not at all like the kind of traditional tap used in musicals like *42nd Street* or *Anything Goes*. This number is more like the style of the Australian group Tap Dogs or the show *Stomp*.

The dance number, however, is not only about the choreography. Every sweep was asked to create a backstory and relate to one another in different ways. For example, one boy sweep always followed around a certain older sweep because he looked up to him. As an exercise, the sweeps were broken into groups and then challenged one another, razzing and one-upping the competition. In this way, "Step in Time" became the sweeps' opportunity to show off for the children and reveal the beauty of seeing things from their rooftop perspective.



# CHOREOGRAPHY

## Anything Can Happen (Part 2)

**Dancers:** Mary Poppins, Bert, Jane and Michael, Mr. and Mrs. Banks, Robertson Ay and Mrs. Brill, Admiral Boom and Miss Lark, Neleus, Bird Woman, Miss Andrew, Park Keeper, Starlighters

**What Happens:** Mary Poppins takes the children on their final magical outing – in *A Christmas Carol* fashion through the night sky – where they observe their father’s change of heart and the wonderfully positive outcome of all their parents’ troubles, and, finally, they visit the heavens. There they see Starlighters dance through the skies illuminating each star, providing a canopy of galaxies over the children, and the characters in their life dance beneath it. The children, to their wonder and delight, learn that “anything can happen if you let it.”



*“Anything Can Happen” at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*

**Preparing to Dance:** The style of the movement in this number is more of a grand processional. The beginning of the dance section – Bert and Mary doing a little soft shoe in the park – is in the spirit of “Fred and Ginger’s Last Dance.” Indeed, Mary and Bert know this is their last encounter, for this go-round anyway. When the Starlighters appear, they are responsible for bringing the stars twinkling into view. They have a circular grandness and sweep to their movement. The movement can be balletic, and everything leads with the chest. The lines should be long and lengthened.

Like the chimney sweeps, the Starlighters look over Jane and Michael but as sky-bound guardian angels. They are also there to usher in all the characters that have appeared in the children’s lives since Mary Poppins arrived – the Bird Woman, Mrs. Corry, Neleus, the Park Keeper, Miss Lark, Admiral Boom, Miss Andrew, and all the members of the Banks household – to begin a joyful dance around the children under the constellations.



# DESIGN

## OVERVIEW

*"In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. You find the fun and snap! The job's a game."*

On Broadway, *Mary Poppins* was an incredibly ambitious show filled to the brim with eye-popping design elements. As you map out your approach to the musical, keep in mind that you are not expected to recreate either Bob Crowley's scenic and costume designs or designs from Disney's motion picture, *Mary Poppins*. Because *Mary Poppins* is a beloved figure to many, audience members may come to the theater with preconceived notions of the character. It's perfectly fine to draw upon some of the more iconic elements, such as Mary Poppins's classic look, to satisfy audience expectations while also leaving room for your own interpretation. You will most likely find that while audiences appreciate the familiar, they will also wish to be enchanted by the unexpected.



*"A Spoonful of Sugar" at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*

It is through design that the audience will be swept up into the Edwardian world of the play. The silhouettes of the costumes and the sharp visual delineations between classes will do much to transport spectators to this era. The play offers many exciting opportunities to visually contrast the realistic Edwardian world with the fantasy moments *Mary Poppins* creates. Keep in mind that you can achieve a period look without being completely literal in your designs.

With a little careful planning and imagination, this show can be achieved on a budget of any size. At the beginning of the process, prioritize which design elements are most important to your production, and which might be scaled down. Don't let the technical and design elements take over the entire play, because at the heart of all the spectacle in the show is a story about a family coming together. As you figure out strategies to tackle the scenic, costume, lighting, and sound designs, remember that each choice you make should support clear storytelling. The suggestions in this chapter are offered as a jumping-off place for you and your creative team.

## MARY'S MAGIC

### Anything Can Happen (Onstage) If You Let It

Staging *Mary Poppins* presents two challenges: How do you make the seemingly impossible possible onstage, and how do you conceal the essence of the trick from the audience?

On Broadway, Mary Poppins flew across the audience, and Bert danced upside-down across the proscenium arch. Not every production will have access to rigging that will allow its actors to defy gravity, but the magic in *Mary Poppins* can happen on a smaller budget with a bit of imagination. In fact, much of the magic that was included in Disney productions of the stage

show draws upon technology available during the Edwardian era in which the play is set. Keep things simple – don't let the magic tricks overwhelm you or the show.



Mary flies at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY

Whether achieved with lighting, trick props, or sleight of hand, the magic in the play exists first and foremost to help tell the story. Mary Poppins alters the air around her when she walks into a room. Part of her magic is the change she sparks in the other characters. Their reactions to her magic are just as important as the magic itself. Not only does Mary dazzle the characters' senses with feats of wonder, she also helps them open their hearts to one another. When pondering how to achieve Mary's magical moments, keep in mind that the most enchanting thing about Mary is her ability to get everyone around her (including the audience) to look at the world differently.

Specific strategies for the magical moments are presented in the Illusions section of this handbook on pages 54-59. Whatever solutions you come up with, the true magic will come from your actors. Remind them of the importance of selling the illusion to the audience. Make sure they have plenty of time to practice the tricks, so they can comfortably integrate them into their performance. For more discussion on this, see the Staging chapter on page 24.

There are many ways to achieve Mary's magic onstage. If you are looking for more ideas or want to share a solution your creative team discovered, visit MTI ShowSpace at [www.mtishowspace.com](http://www.mtishowspace.com). This free online forum allows users to share advice, photos, design ideas, and more.

**Special Note on Flying:** One of the most iconic images of *Mary Poppins* is that of her with her umbrella, floating through the sky. If you are interested in making your Mary fly, there are a number of professional companies you can hire, including Flying By Foy and ZFX. Do a little research to





# DESIGN

see which company and flying package might be right for your production. Do not attempt to make any of your actors fly in homemade rigs or without the help of trained professionals. Be sure not to overuse flying tricks or reveal them too early in the show. Keep the audience enchanted without letting the special effects lose their magic.

Flying systems are very expensive and are not required to capture *Mary Poppins*'s magic. There are many theatrical ways to achieve a "flying" moment. Experiment with lighting tricks, a projection of Mary's silhouette, shadow puppets, or simply a shadow traveling across the stage floor. Directing the other characters onstage to react appropriately will help sell the effect. Perhaps a magical noise or the whoosh of wind accompanies Mary's movements so the moment feels otherworldly and special.

## SETS

Bob Crowley's scenic design for the Broadway production featured a nearly full-sized English home weighing five tons. His design won a Tony Award®, but you don't need a complex set to put on the show. Even Crowley had to rethink the design and scale down his original ideas when the production went on tour. The size of No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane was reduced and modeled like a dollhouse that opened up onstage.

There are many ways to approach the creation of the set. Be sure that the set pieces are designed to move quickly into position. Nothing will deplete the energy and impede the flow of a show faster than clunky, elaborate, and loud scene transitions. Try using painted drops to move locations, or columns that can rotate with different scenes painted on each side. Consider building smaller units that can roll on and off or hinged flats that can be opened onstage to create a new location. To economize, try creating units that will serve as two locations. For example, the nursery unit could be wheeled around to reveal the rooftop just outside its window. You might also decide to create a multi-purpose, flexible unit set with levels and stairs that can become many locations symbolically through lighting and the addition of smaller set pieces. However you differentiate locations, be sure transitions are thoughtful and seamless so you can keep your audience engaged with the story. Give thought to the amount of space you have backstage and how you will store set pieces in the wings.

### No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane

Though it is most famously portrayed as nearly full-sized, don't feel as if you must recreate a multi-story house on stage. The Banks family home can also be achieved less literally. The house could be as simple as a doorframe on wheels, with furniture rolled in from the wings and hanging window frames, or it could be realized through a painted drop. Just remember that room will be needed onstage for the many dance numbers, so no matter what size the house, it will have to move quickly offstage or be pushed far enough upstage to create space. The Banks home must have a few key components:



# DESIGN

- **Main entrance/Parlor area:** Many people come and go through the front door, and if placed upstage, it allows for the dramatic entrances of Mary Poppins and Miss Andrew.
- **Stairs:** Mary Poppins leads the children up the stairs to the nursery many times over the course of the show. If your set isn't multi-storied, a staircase can lead into the wings (with a ladder for actors to climb down offstage) or behind a flat or be located offstage altogether so long as the staging is clear.
- **Fireplace:** The fireplace must exist so that Mr. Banks can toss Jane and Michael's advertisement into it. Perhaps the same unit doubles as the nursery fireplace into which the children are magically pulled.
- **Study:** Mr. Banks retreats here to lose himself in work and escape the emotional needs of his family. This private sanctuary can be achieved simply with a desk and door frame or be more elaborately realized.
- **Nursery:** Scale your nursery according to how it needs to perform. A separate, raised mobile unit with three walls can conceal stagehands helping Mary Poppins with her magic items during "Practically Perfect." Stagehands can pass items through openings from the back of the unit or through trap doors underneath. This unit could also be turned around to reveal the rooftop that lies outside the nursery window. It is important that this piece can be moved on and offstage quickly. If you



No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane at Green Valley High School  
Henderson, NV



No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY



# DESIGN

have decided to scale down the scope of what comes out of Mary's carpet bag (see page 55 for tips), you can get away with creating a simpler nursery. Key pieces include beds, the dollhouse for Valentine to emerge from, toys, a fireplace, and a window. The nursery is at the top of the house.

- **Kitchen:** This location can be created by moving a few items – shelves with trick dishes, a suggestion of a sink, and a table – onstage. Use movable, hinged flats that can be brought on and off to further define the space.



*Nursery at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*

## St. Paul's Cathedral Steps

Use either a painted backdrop or a few steps and a column to suggest this iconic location.

## The Park

The park transforms from dreary to colorful in "Jolly Holiday." Consider using lighting to achieve this effect or two separate painted drops. The most important thing to convey is the sense of magical transformation. Colorful costumes and props will also help brighten the park. For more suggestions on the magic in this location, see page 56 of this chapter. Other set pieces include a park gate that rolls on and off and plinths for the statues.

## Mrs. Corry's Shop

This fantastical store in a riot of color is located in the park. Consider using the same bright "Jolly Holiday" look as a background, and roll on a display counter to indicate that this is a shop. Quickly open hinged flats to further



*Kitchen at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*



# DESIGN

define the space. Letters large and small can decorate the store (and even be pulled down for use during “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious”). Because this is a magical place, you can let your imagination run wild with your design.

## The Bank

Consider using a drab color scheme and strong geometric lines for this monolith of precision and order. Feel free to think less literally here, and use your ensemble to realize both the mood and physical environment of the bank.

## The Rooftops

It is important that the rooftop set pieces allow for plenty of room for the ensemble to dance in “Step in Time.” The set could consist of a painted drop or cardboard silhouettes of London chimney tops rolled onto the stage.

## The Heavens

Mary Poppins and the children take a fantastical journey to the heavens and back, where they are met by the characters they have encountered throughout the play. Try utilizing your ensemble to animate this magical moment. For more suggestions about how to create the stars, see pages 58-59 of this chapter.

## Neutral Space

Such a space might be useful to help you quickly complete transitions between scenes. It can be created simply by having the actors move the action downstage as a drop or curtain is lowered behind them to hide scene changes. Or, isolate the actors in a spotlight and let the scene change



*Mrs. Corry's Shop*  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA



*The Rooftops of London*  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA



# DESIGN

happen around them. Don't feel as if you must completely hide all of the transitions. You may even want to incorporate actors into these moments. Because Bert is our storyteller, it may be appropriate to have him and his chimney sweep friends interact with the set during scene changes.

## ILLUSIONS

Below are some suggestions to help you along as you tackle the many magical moments in the show. Let your imagination guide you as you craft theatrical solutions to serve the story. Consider visiting your local magic shop or go online to find more ideas.



*The Heavens at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*

### Jane and Michael's Advertisement

When George takes Jane and Michael's advertisement for a nanny and rips it up, the pieces must appear to go up the chimney if the audience is to believe that Mary Poppins arrives with the mended piece of paper later. One solution is to attach bits of red, orange, and yellow fabric to a fan to create a faux fire in the fireplace. Lean the fan toward the ceiling, and then disguise the fan with logs of wood. Not only will the fan animate the fabric "fire," but it will also blow the paper around giving the illusion that it travels up the chimney.

### Mary's Sudden Appearance

Mary Poppins suddenly appears in the home of the Banks family. To make her appear out of thin air, use a trapdoor, or stage the Bankses in a way that they block the audience's view of Mary's entrance. If they are standing in a group,

"We are all looking for magic. We all need to feel we are under a spell and one day a wand will be waved and the princes that we truly feel ourselves to be will start forth at last from the tattered, shapeless, smocks. But indeed we have to wave the wand for ourself."

– P.L. Travers



# DESIGN

the actress playing Mary might be able to sneak out from behind a set piece or piece of furniture to pop up behind them. She might also simply come through the front door, but with special lighting, the sound of wind, and a gust of leaves blowing in with her. A simple fan and stagehands with the leaves can accomplish this.

## Mary's Magic Carpet Bag

Mary pulls many tricks out of her bag. What these items are is up to your creative team. Choose what works for your vision of the show, and don't feel pressured to pull everything but the kitchen sink out of the bag. It is most important that the audience gets a taste of Mary's magic in this moment. For example, if you are having trouble pulling a lamp out of the bag, Mary can snap her fingers to turn on a lamp in the nursery in order to create a magical moment. This simple lighting trick will convey Mary's specialness and control of the space.

The stage directions do mention that Mary pulls a full-length hat stand out of her bag. Buy or construct a telescoping hat stand. One option to help you get started is the "appearing eight-foot pole" trick. This collapsible pole is available for purchase online and can be modified to create the hat stand. The end of the pole can slip into a hole in the nursery floor to stabilize it vertically. You can also experiment with a tension shower curtain rod as the hat stand.



*Magic carpetbag at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*

To create the illusion that Mary pulls impossible items out of her carpetbag, you have many options:

- Create a false black bottom on the inside of the bag that can be shown to the audience by Michael. This false bottom conceals props underneath. The actor need only move the bottom to the side and begin pulling out the small, hidden props.
- The bag could be set on a table near a nursery window allowing stagehands to pass items through the window and into a hole in the side of the bag.
- Construct the bag with a hidden hole in the bottom or a hinged bottom panel. Jane and Michael set the bag on a table which can be constructed with a hole in the top through which the items can be passed into the bag. A large tablecloth will conceal the trick, or consider



# DESIGN

using the old magician's technique of angled mirrors underneath the table. Alternatively, the bag could be set on a dresser which appears solid, but has fake drawer fronts, a hole in the top, and enough room inside to pass props through from behind the nursery wall.

In the Broadway production, Mary Poppins pulled a bed out of thin air. To accomplish this, Mary and Jane can hold up a sheet between them to block the view of a stagehand wheeling a bench out from the wings. Once the bench is in place, the sheet can be laid on top. Add a pillow to the bench to get the full effect. If your nursery is a raised unit set, consider having the bed pop up from underneath the floor, while Mary conceals the trick with the sheet.

## Jolly Holiday Transformations

During "Jolly Holiday," the park transforms. Some of this magic can be achieved with colored lighting or hidden colorful banners and streamers that actors can pull from set pieces and remove quickly at the end of the number. Two different painted drops can be flown in, one depicting a dark and dreary park and the second, a brightly colored park with flowers. Also, you can utilize colored costume accessories to show how Mary's magic affects everyone in the park.

## A Spoonful of Sugar to Clean the Kitchen

Robertson Ay makes a mess of the kitchen, which Mary cleans up magically. Depending on your budget, you may need to pick and choose which magical moments of repair are feasible for your creative team. The most important part of the scene is giving the audience a taste of Mary's magic and allowing Michael and Jane to learn their lesson. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Mary restores shelves of plates. Glue together a row of plastic plates (painted to look like real dishes) and attach the row to the top of a hinge. The bottom of the hinge should be screwed into the bottom of the shelf. The hinge should fold forward so the natural movement of the row of plates is to lay face down on the shelf. Connect fishing line to the back of the middle plate and string it through a hole in the back of the dresser. When the line is pulled taut from backstage, the plates will



*Robertson Ay makes a mess at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*

# DESIGN

raise up as though they are standing upright on display on the shelf. When the line is released, they will fall forward on the hinge.

- Mary produces a cake that rises. For this trick, consider using the same spring-based technique used to create collapsible top hats. Purchase a collapsible hat and decorate the top like a cake and the brim like a plate.
- If your kitchen table is covered with a tablecloth, a stagehand can hide underneath and manipulate props. For example, depending on the thickness of your table, you may be able to use magnetic kitchen props and give the stagehand a powerful magnet to drag underneath the surface of the table to “magically” move the item. You can also string fishing line through the bottom of a weighted plastic bottle and run the line through a hole in the table. After the bottle is knocked over, the stagehand can pull on the fishing line from under the table, and the bottle will right itself.
- If the kitchen set has a door, stagehands can use fishing line to magically swing the door shut.

## Flying Kites Onstage

To make kites fly, position stagehands above the stage on the catwalk armed with fishing poles. Actors onstage can subtly attach the lowered line to the kites, and the stagehands will reel them in and bob them around to make it appear that they’re flying. You can also station the fishing poles offstage, and run the fishing line through pulleys hung from a pipe above the stage. If you have a balcony that is not used for seating, position stagehands with fishing poles there to let actors fly kites around the audience.

## Miss Andrew’s Departure

The giant birdcage that ensnares Miss Andrew can arrive through a trapdoor or be rolled on magically by a hidden stagehand. When it is time for her to disappear, the cage can sink into the stage or be rolled back off. Because this is a moment of magic, you have some leeway in the staging. Use sound and lights to support your vision, but it will be up to the actor playing Miss



*Miss Andrew at Akron School of the Arts  
Akron, OH*





# DESIGN

Andrew to really sell the idea that she is being controlled by Mary's unseen forces.

## Jane and Michael Up the Fireplace

Jane and Michael get sucked up into the fireplace. This trick will depend upon your set design. Perhaps the back wall of the fireplace is actually a black curtain that allows Jane and Michael to exit backstage and “reappear” with Bert. If the nursery set piece is on wheels, the backside can double as the rooftop and spin around as the children appear on the other side. The scene takes place at night, so you may want to use lighting and shadow to mask their travel. Mary later joins them, but this can be done simply. You can stage the other characters in a group to mask her entrance, so it seems like she appears magically behind them.

## Bert's Magical Climb

Bert has an “impressive climb” over the rooftops. Find a way to make him stand out from the other chimney sweeps as one who is special and imbued with Mary's magic. On Broadway, Bert climbed vertically, dancing up and around the proscenium arch. But what is most important is that he has a special moment to shine. This is a perfect place to showcase the actor's dancing skills in a solo. Use lights and sound to support the moment.

## Mary and the Children Take a Journey to the Stars

In this part of the show, Mary and the children take a fantastical journey to the heavens. To create the illusion that the stars have descended upon the stage, consider using a disco ball or



*Flying kites at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*



*Bert's magical climb at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*



# DESIGN

shadow lanterns with star patterns. Perhaps ensemble members carry paper lanterns shaped like stars hanging off of poles. Another option is to paint dowel rods black, attach battery-operated votives to their tips with duct tape, and allow actors to manipulate the lights in the choreography. Star-patterned gobos can be attached to lighting instruments to populate the stage with stars. If you have access to a projector, it can also be used to help you achieve a starry look.

## Bert's Flowers for Mary

Bert can pull flowers out of his painting for Mary using the old trick of pulling a bouquet out of one's sleeve. Make sure the flowers in the bouquet match the flowers in the painting. You can also mount a shadow box with a frame. Paint the inside of the box black and place a square vase with flowers inside. The flowers will appear to be two-dimensional until Bert pulls them out.

## PROPS

Props should be realistic and look like they belong in the Edwardian era. For more information about the props associated with the magic in the show, see the Illusions section on the previous pages.

**Kites:** There are a number of kites flown throughout the play. Diamond and box kites are just two of the designs that are period-appropriate. Michael has a “makeshift” kite that should look like he built it without his dad's help. Use fishing line to help the kites “fly” onstage, or attach them to thin dowel rods and let actors manipulate them as if they were riding on the wind.



*A journey to the stars at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*



*Kites at Does Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*



# DESIGN

**Willoughby:** Find a realistic dog puppet or modify a stuffed toy so the actor playing Miss Lark can manipulate Willoughby when he is held in her arms.

**Carpetbag:** Check thrift stores for a large, old bag with the appropriate silhouette (rectangular with one or two large handles) and cover it with decorative upholstery fabric. For ideas about how to manipulate the bag for the magic in “Practically Perfect,” refer to pages 55-56.

**Mary Poppins’s umbrella:** This prop can be purchased or rented. To make your own parrot-head umbrella, acquire an umbrella with a curved wooden handle. With aluminum foil, sculpt a parrot head using the hook of the handle to guide you as you mold the beak. Next, cover the foil with masking tape to produce a smoother surface. Then, apply *paper-mâché*. When it dries, paint the parrot. Instruct the actress playing Mary to hold the umbrella below the parrot head to help keep it from being damaged throughout rehearsals and performances.

**Mary’s measuring tape:** On Broadway, the tape was made very wide and descriptions of the children were written out for the audience to read, but a simple sewing measuring tape will do.

**Telescope:** Small, brass-colored hand telescopes can be purchased relatively cheaply, or a plastic telescope can be painted to look more like brass or wood.

**Bert’s paintings:** Bert’s main subjects are landscapes, such as the park and flowers. Perhaps you can enlist students in the art department to help craft these paintings.



*Mary’s carpetbag and umbrella at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*



*Mary’s measuring tape at The Governor’s School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*



# DESIGN

**Mr. Banks's briefcase:** Look in thrift stores for an old-fashioned briefcase, though it shouldn't look worn or damaged.

**Toys/Valentine:** Some toys one might find in an Edwardian nursery include teddy bears, jack-in-the-boxes, dolls, rocking horses, and blocks. Check a thrift store for wooden toys that will look more period-appropriate. Valentine is a boy doll whose arm gets ripped off by Jane and Michael, so find a doll at the toy store and cut one arm off. Attach Velcro to each end of the severed fabric so Valentine can be "torn" and repaired for the next performance. This doll should be dressed to match the actor who plays Valentine.

**Medicine bottles:** Mary and Miss Andrew both carry medicine bottles, though their contents could not be more different. To make Miss Andrew's bottle look more terrifying, find a green glass bottle and put dry ice inside to create a smoke effect. A glow stick can be inserted to cast an eerie light through the bottle.

**Coins:** A number of characters carry coins, specifically a sixpence and a shilling. Both were silver in color. A quarter and half dollar can stand in for these coins. For reference, six pennies were worth one sixpence and 12 pennies were worth one shilling.

**Breakable vase:** Breakaway glass props can be purchased, although this option might be expensive. Try finding a recipe to make your own sugar glass breakaway vase, or cut a plastic vase and loosely tape together the pieces so it will give way when it hits the floor. Sell the effect with a shattering glass sound.



*Miss Andrew's "medicine" bottle  
at Dos Pueblos High School, Goleta, CA*



*Breakable vase at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*



# DESIGN

## **Gingerbread pieces with gingerbread stars:**

Craft the stars from a material that will stand up to being dropped since they will be inside the vase that breaks. Cover them in gold star stickers or glitter to make them sparkle.

**Chimney sweep brush:** If you have a stage full of chimney sweeps for “Step in Time,” an affordable brush solution is important. Find old brooms, bend the stiff plastic bristles so that they stick straight out, and spray paint them black. You might also try gluing black pipe cleaners, stiff tulle, or tutu net on top of a circle cut out of cardboard so that the material sticks out like bristles. Glue a second circle of cardboard on top. Attach the rounds to the bottom of old broom or mop handles or dowel rods painted black.

**Cage with Caruso:** Check craft stores for inexpensive decorative birdcages that can be painted to your specification. If you decide to have a fake bird in the cage, make sure there is room for Mary Poppins to hide it from sight before she lets Caruso go. You may decide to have a projection of a bird flying away, or just let the sound of chirping and the children’s reactions do the work for you.



*Gingerbread stars at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*



*Cage with Caruso at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*



## COSTUMES

In the West End and Broadway productions, Bob Crowley's costumes reflected the Edwardian fashion of London in 1910. Costume design reveals when and where the play takes place, but it also serves to visually distinguish both the economic and social class of the characters. The upper-middle-class residents of Cherry Tree Lane look very different from their laboring servants, the lower-class chimney sweeps, and the Bird Woman on the street. In addition to these strict class distinctions, *Mary Poppins* hosts a score of fantasy characters from Mrs. Corry and the Chatterboxes to the Starlighters who arrive during "Anything Can Happen."

Costumes can also be used to highlight personality traits, indicate differences between characters (Mary Poppins and Miss Andrew, for example), or show how characters change throughout the play. Color is a primary tool to indicate magical transformations and draw lines between a realistic Edwardian London and the more fantastical places, people, and moments.

The costume choices made on Broadway and in the Disney film are certainly iconic. Though you may give a nod in the direction of those designs, do not feel pressured to recreate them. If you are on a budget, consider a base costume for each character and utilize accessories to create different looks. If corsets are not worn, work with actors on practicing posture and movement to give the same effect.

### A Note on Edwardian Style

For Edwardian men, the three-piece suit was the standard. In the upper and middle classes, tailored suits and starched collars were typical, and some men wore modified corsets as well. They tended to wear more muted colors (black, dark blue, gray), but added to the elegance and formality of their look with elaborate cravats and gloves. Their hair was usually parted in the middle or brushed across their temples – some men even curled their hair. The servants in such households were held to a certain formal dress code, but were still expected to complete their duties in uniform. Working men, such as chimney sweeps, had neither the means or the need for such finery and wore functional clothing to get their jobs done.

For the children of the upper and middle classes, sailor-inspired looks were popular for both boys and girls. Dresses for girls loosely mimicked the "pigeon-breast" (see page 64 for details) appearance in a range of pastel colors.





## The Style of Edwardian Women

The hallmark look of the age was the S-shape silhouette. Accomplished with the S-bend (or swan-bill) corset that helped push the hips backward, it enhanced the chest and gave the woman the appearance of leaning forward (a style known as a “pigeon-breast”). In the years preceding 1910, women wore their hair in pompadours, made famous by the “Gibson Girl” (the feminine ideal of beauty portrayed by the satirical pen-and-ink illustrations of illustrator Charles Dana Gibson). By 1910, the hairstyle was more flattened on top and puffed out on the sides with a part in the middle. A lady never went out without a hat, which generally had a large brim in order to protect her skin from the sun. Tanning was shunned, as a pale complexion was the ideal.

## COSTUMES BY CHARACTER

### Mary Poppins

- Blouse
- Skirt
- Long coat
- Dress boots
- Hat with cherries on the brim
- Locket
- Apron

No-nonsense and vain, she is professional but takes much pride in her appearance. For “Jolly Holiday,” she changes into a colorful summer dress. Because this happens quickly, another option is to layer a colorful skirt onto her base outfit.



Mary Poppins at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA

# DESIGN

## Bert

- Dark pants
- Collared shirt
- Dark button-up vest
- Dark suit jacket
- Neckerchief
- Cap

A working-class man of many trades, Bert wears practical work clothes. For “Jolly Holiday,” add a brightly colored jacket or a full, brightly-colored summer suit.

## George Banks

- Bowler hat (that Robertson Ay ruins)
- Pants
- Collared shirt
- Suit jacket
- Overcoat
- Dress shoes
- Scarf

A member of the upper middle class, Mr. Banks dons business attire. He is buttoned-up literally and figuratively. Use his costume to reflect the change in his character throughout the play through color or in the way he wears the costume (fully buttoned up at the beginning and looser at the end).

## Winifred Banks

- Dress or skirt and blouse
- Long coat
- Boots

A fashionable Edwardian woman, Mrs. Banks tries to play the part of a society wife. If your budget is limited, add lace to the sleeves and collar of a button-up shirt or consider using shawls or jewelry to change up her looks.



*Bert at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*



*Mr. and Mrs. Banks  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*





# DESIGN

## Jane Banks

- Stockings
- Dress shoes
- Dress
- Nightgown
- Coat

An upper-middle-class young girl, Jane is well-dressed. Instead of a nightgown, she can simply layer a thin bathrobe over her costume. Be sure that Jane removes her stockings for Act 2.

## Michael Banks

- Collared shirt
- Knickers
- Sweater vest
- Coat
- Tie
- Boots
- Knee socks
- Pajamas

An upper-middle-class young boy, Michael is well-dressed. Instead of pajamas, he can simply layer a bathrobe over his costume.



*Jane and Michael Banks  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*

## Miss Lark

- Dress
- Hat
- Coat
- Boots

Miss Lark is a fashionable Edwardian woman.

## Admiral Boom

- Admiral uniform
- White collared shirt
- Black tie

A former military man, Admiral Boom wears nautical colors. To create his double-breasted uniform, find a navy suit coat at a thrift store and sew on gold buttons and trim at the wrists.



*Miss Lark and Bert  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*



# DESIGN

## Robertson Ay

- Black pants
- White collared shirt
- Double-breasted coat with tails
- White bow tie

The Bankses' clumsy houseboy, porter, and footman, Robertson Ay is dressed for work. If your budget is limited, skip the coat with tails and make Robertson look a bit disheveled to match his personality.

## Mrs. Brill

- Black maid uniform (black dress or skirt and blouse)
- White apron
- White cap

The Bankses' housekeeper and cook, Mrs. Brill is dressed for work. If desired, add white lace to the collar and sleeve cuffs of her uniform.

## Neleus

To give Neleus his statue-come-to-life look, paint a leotard or fabric to suggest the appearance of marble. If using fabric, drape in a simple ancient Grecian silhouette. Match the actor's makeup to his costume, so that he appears to be made of the same statue material.

## Queen Victoria

A statue come to life, dress Queen Victoria in a Victorian-style dress and crown. Add lace and a blue sash to dress up a more basic costume.



*Robertson Ay and Mrs. Brill  
at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*



*Neleus at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*



*Queen Victoria  
at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*

# DESIGN

## Katie Nanna

- Dark skirt
- Light blouse
- Coat

## Park Keeper

Employed to enforce the park rules, the Park Keeper does so with an inflated sense of authority. Depending on your budget, he can wear an official-looking uniform or you can pair simple suit pants and coat with an official hat.

## Policeman

- Dark blue button-up coat
- Dark blue or black pants
- Black belt
- Black shoes
- Bobby hat

The Policeman should have a traditional Edwardian “bobby” look except for “Jolly Holiday,” when he dons a pink coat or pink accent piece.

## Bank Chairman

- Dark suit pants and coat
- Collared shirt
- Dress shoes

## Miss Smythe

- Blouse and skirt in drab colors
- Dress shoes

## Von Hussler and Northbrook

- Pants
- Collared shirt
- Dress shoes
- Suit coat

Consider how Von Hussler and Northbrook contrast visually, and how their garments reflect their inner selves.



*Katie Nanna and Mary Poppins  
at Dos Pueblos High School, Goleta, CA*



*Bert and the Policeman  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*



*Mr. Banks, Bank Chairman, and Miss Smythe  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*

# DESIGN

## Bird Woman

- A patchwork of rags and shawls
- Blouse
- Scuffed boots
- Fingerless gloves
- Skirt

## Mrs. Corry

Colorful and bright, Mrs. Corry is otherworldly. Add fantastical decorations and details to the Edwardian silhouette.

## Fannie and Annie

Like their mother, they are bright, colorful, and strange. They should don vibrant dresses or blouses and skirts. If you are on a budget, consider using decorated smocks.

## Valentine

Mistreated by the children, Valentine is a boy doll that has come to life. The script doesn't specify what kind of doll Valentine is, so there is room for interpretation. Some popular boy doll styles in the Edwardian era included gingerbread men, boys in sailor suits, and clowns. Make sure the prop doll of Valentine matches this costume.

## Teddy Bear

A simple mask can be made or bought and paired with appropriately colored sweatshirt and pants if a full animal costume is impractical for your budget.

## Mr. Punch

- Curved hat with pom or tassel
- Tunic
- Colored ruff collar

A disgruntled toy come to life, use makeup to create Mr. Punch's red nose and cheeks.



*Bird Woman at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*



*Mrs. Corry at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*



*Mr. Punch, Teddy Bear, and other toys  
at Dos Pueblos High School, Goleta, CA*





# DESIGN

## Doll

- Dress
- Stockings
- Mary Jane shoes

Because she has been treated poorly by the children, perhaps part of Doll's outfit is worn and torn. Use makeup to sell the rosy-cheeked doll look, and put the actor's hair in ringlets.

## Miss Andrew

- Skirt
- Blouse
- Coat
- Boots
- Hat

The antithesis of Mary – perhaps she looks like a twisted version of the beloved nanny – Miss Andrew is a very imposing figure. Dress her in dark colors.

## Chimney Sweeps

- Dark pants
- Collared shirt
- Dark button-up vest
- Little neckerchiefs

Accessorize the sweeps with caps and scarves, while ensuring that the actors can move and dance in their costumes. A thrift store is a great resource to get older worn pants and suit coats.

## Chatterboxes

Costume Mrs. Corry's customers in bright colors and eccentric patterns. If you are on a budget, decorate inexpensive smocks with fabric paint or bright accessories.

## Park Visitors

Ensemble members in the park will have basic, as well as colorful, looks for "Jolly Holiday." This number moves



*Miss Andrew and Mary Poppins  
at The Governor's School of the Arts, Norfolk, VA*



*Chimney Sweeps  
at Bowling Green High School  
Bowling Green, OH*



*The Chatterboxes  
at Archbishop Stepinac High School  
White Plains, NY*



# DESIGN

very fast, so be sure to plan ahead for quick changes. Alternatively, you can give each of these characters one colorful accessory (bright scarf, colorful jacket, or shawl) for the number that achieves the transformation and can be taken on and off quickly.

## Statues

The statues in the park should look like stone, bronze, or marble. As with Neleus, consider painting faux marble patterns on leotards or onto fabric that can be draped into ancient Grecian silhouettes. With makeup, use the same color scheme as the costume to cover the actor's face in stone or marble patterns. Temporary spray hair coloring can be used to complete the effect.



*Park statues at Dos Pueblos High School  
Goleta, CA*

## Bank Workers

These professionals wear business attire in drab colors. Dress the men in pants, collared shirts, and dark suit jackets and the women in blouses and skirts.

## Toys

If on a budget, use simple costume solutions to create the toys. For example, to achieve a clown look, add three white pom-poms to an over-sized red sweatshirt, black leggings, colorful kneesocks, and top it off with a cone hat. A monkey with cymbals or a drum can be costumed in an inexpensive sock monkey hat paired with a gray sweatshirt and leggings with red-and-white tube socks. Dolls can be created with dresses and ringlet curls.



*Bank Chairman, Mr. Banks, and bankers  
at Dos Pueblos High School, Goleta, CA*

## Starlighters

While not in the script, these characters help animate Mary Poppins and the children's journey through the heavens during "Anything Can Happen." If you decide to have them look like Edwardian lamplighters, you can reuse pieces from the chimney sweep costumes. If you want a



# DESIGN

bit more shimmer in the musical number, consider adding glittering black top hats or black glittering shirts. You may wish to simply bring on the ensemble in their regular costumes. This is a fantasy moment where the children see everyone they have met on their adventures with Mary Poppins.

## LIGHTING

*Mary Poppins* presents many opportunities for lighting design to enrich the story. Use light to create the mood and atmosphere of the many different environments. For example, the domestic sphere of No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane can have warm, soft, and inviting light, while the bank can be lit in harsher, cooler tones. Especially if your set is less literal and more suggestive of location, lighting can help the audience distinguish place, season, and time of day. Use light to focus audience attention where you want it and to help hide transitions. Consider using light to trace the emotional journey of George Banks as he changes from a distracted and distant man to a loving husband and father.



*Starry night sky at The Governor's School of the Arts  
Norfolk, VA*

Lighting can also be an incredible tool to help you achieve some of the magic in the show. Here are a few tips:

- If you are using a flying system, consult with the professional company you hire about how to use light to help hide the rigging wires. On Broadway, a dark background reduced visibility of the rigging, but for *Mary Poppins*'s flight through the fourth wall and over the audience, a spotlight on just her face helped disorient spectators' perception of her location. The light pulled back to reveal her aloft with her umbrella over the heads of a much delighted audience.
- Lights can be an easy element for *Mary Poppins* to manipulate and magically take control of a space. Perhaps she turns on a lamp in the nursery in "Practically Perfect" with only a snap of her fingers or distorts the lights during her battle with Miss Andrew.
- A simple way to add to the transformation of the park in "Jolly Holiday" or to the otherworldliness of Mrs. Corry's shop is to use bold and colorful gels in your lighting instruments.

# DESIGN

- Lighting will be the key element in conveying Mary Poppins and the children's journey to the heavens in "Anything Can Happen." Whether the ensemble is manipulating battery-operated light sources, or you decide to use a star drop or star-patterned gobos, it is the lighting design that will sell this fantastical moment.

## SOUND DESIGN

Work with your designer to create moments that support the storytelling and do not compete with the music and dialogue of the show. Blowing wind can accompany Mary Poppins's first entrance as well as the top of Act 2 when signaling the change in the season. The rain and thunder sounds are crucial to the transition in "Jolly Holiday." Consider using a magical sound effect to enhance Mary Poppins's feats or to help sell dramatic moments. For example, amplify Robertson Ay's clumsiness by with the sound of clanking cookware during his tumble in the kitchen, or reinforce the drama of the heirloom vase breaking with the sound of shattering glass.

Decide early on if you will use body microphones for your production. Take into account the acoustics of your space and the vocal projection of your actors. It is important that the audience is able to properly hear and understand the song lyrics, particularly for "Cherry Tree Lane," which contains a wealth of storytelling information. If you choose to outfit your actors with body microphones, do some research before renting. Ensure that the rental package you choose fits your budget, but also that it gives you the quality you need. No one wants audible cracking and popping sounds from inexpensive mics to spoil the performances of the actors. Also, consider having a monitor onstage so actors can hear themselves.

Take care when choosing where the orchestra will be in relationship to the stage. To inform your decision, ask orchestra members to join you for an early rehearsal with your actors. *Mary Poppins* has a brass-heavy score, so your orchestra space may need some masking to balance the sound of the instruments with the voices of your performers. If you decide to use the Accompaniment CD instead of musicians, position the speakers at the back of the stage so the actors can hear the music clearly.





# BEYOND THE STAGE

There's a lot more to *Mary Poppins* than what you see onstage. This chapter offers some insight into the show – a look at the journey Mary took from page to screen to stage, as well as helpful information on Edwardian England and words in the script that may be unfamiliar to you and your cast. While some professional theaters have a dramaturg on staff to help research unfamiliar words or details in a script, actors who do their own character, period, and text research are always a step ahead, and it can be a really helpful part of an actor's process to look up any phrases or references he doesn't know or look into the specifics of the society in which his character lived.

Maybe there is one student who wants to take on a project of making a more comprehensive glossary, complete with places (St. Paul's Cathedral, for example, or more generally, London's parks and banks) and historical information about the Edwardian period. Or, perhaps your students can create an online forum where they can share the research they do for their own characters.

Encourage your students to make note of any words they don't understand and look them up. There isn't any embarrassment in not knowing a word, of course. The more they understand their characters and what they are saying, the better their portrayals will be!

## GLOSSARY

Below is the beginning of a glossary with explanations of many of the script's less common words and expressions.

**Alexander the Great, William the Conqueror, and Vlad the Impaler** (p. 50): Historical figures with many important achievements in their lives; suffice it to say that they were around a long time ago (as far back as 356 BCE), making Mrs. Corry as old as history.

**barley water** (7): A sort of tea made by boiling barley; traditionally consumed by pregnant women and older ladies for its health benefits and as an alternative to alcoholic beverages. Michael's request seems to have less to do with barley water's unpleasant smell than his desire for a younger nanny (one, say, with Mary Poppins's youthful energy).

**blighters** (1): People you look at with dislike, annoyance, or pity.

**bloody** (55): A British curse word, considered vulgar.

**brimstone and treacle** (76): Medicine commonly used in Victorian times (a clue as to how old Miss Andrew is!). Brimstone is another name for sulphur; treacle is a medicinal mixture used as antidote to poisons, including snakebites.

**castor oil** (7): Used to treat constipation; tastes similar to how any cooking oil would when drunk straight.

**cod-liver oil** (76): A supplement high in Vitamins A and D, which comes from the liver of cod fish. Given to children because of Vitamin D's usefulness in preventing rickets, a disease of the bones.

# BEYOND THE STAGE

**creed** (24): A system of belief.

**doff** (2): To take off, as in an item of clothing.

**druids** (55): An ancient Celtic people.

**forbearance** (24): Patient self-control; restraint.

**gasworks** (33): An industrial plant for the production of flammable gas; since lighting a match (to smoke a cigarette) near there would cause an explosion, Mrs. Brill seems to be saying she doesn't think much of Robertson Ay's usefulness in the kitchen.

**gruel** (7): A type of cereal (oat, wheat, or rye flour; or rice) boiled in water or milk; a thinner version of porridge. There are many other things Michael would rather eat than this.

**halitotious** (55): A play on the medical condition of "halitosis," or bad breath.

**hallmark** (24): Defining aspect.

**heirloom** (58, 106): A family possession passed from generation to generation.

**lark** (21, 88): A source of amusement or adventure. Also, a type of bird, such as the caged one that Miss Andrew brings with her when she visits Cherry Tree Lane in Act 2.

**larval** (112, 124): Meaning "in the form of larva" with "larva" being the juvenile form many creatures (including caterpillars and butterflies) take before they turn into adults.

**lead** (49): A leash.

**lummy** (18): An expression of surprise or interest.

**monoliths** (55): Towering slabs of carved stone erected by druids for use in their rituals.

**needs must** (106): An expression used when discussing something you must do, but would rather not.

**Neleus** (22): A character from Greek mythology; the son of Poseidon (God of the Sea) and Tyro (a Greek princess). Neleus's relationship with his father ended when Neleus and his twin brother Pelias were conceived. For more information, see page 84 of this handbook.

**plinth** (21, 25, 26): The heavy base used to support a statue.

**pressing your advantage** (24): Using an available opportunity to get ahead.

**rack and ruin** (108): Complete destruction.

**Rococococious** (54): A play on the word "Rococo," an 18th-century artistic period ("Late Baroque") characterized by its ornateness, elegance, and as Mary Poppins suggests, its flourishes.

**Roman Empire** (55): The vast ancient empire built by Julius Caesar, which eventually grew too large to effectively manage or protect and collapsed, or "entered the abyss."

**screever** (18): Someone who draws pictures on sidewalks for money.



# BEYOND THE STAGE

**snuffed aborning** (108): If a flame is snuffed aborning, it is put out while it is just being produced, or born.

**spit-spot** (12, 15, 17, 38, etc.): An expression like “chop-chop;” basically, “hurry up.”

**sovereign** (4, 9, 84): A supreme ruler, like a king or queen.

**“swing for you and sing as they pull the lever”** (34): Mrs. Brill is threatening to kill Robertson Ay and says she’d be happy to suffer the consequences; “they pull the lever” refers to being hanged, which was the punishment for murder at the time.

**tommy rot** (7): Nonsense; ridiculousness.

**weather vane** (14): An instrument for showing the direction of the wind that is typically placed on the highest point of a building.

## EDWARDIAN SOCIETY

During Broadway rehearsals for *Mary Poppins*, there was much discussion about society in 1910 London and how one’s station had an impact on his entire life. England was emerging from 60 years of Victorian puritanism, and British society was considered quite “buttoned up.” After the reign of Queen Victoria’s son, Edward VII, society relaxed a bit and finally began to “undo the top button.” Change, however, can be a slow process, and many people clung to the strict mindset and manners of Victorian times.

### Class Status

Status is a person’s position in society, and it changes the way she sees the world, and how others see her. In Edwardian England, status was pretty much set in stone – your position when you were born was the same throughout your life. What Americans would consider “individualism” did not really exist. There was very little thought about moving up to a higher station in life – it was just not done – and so, people comported themselves according to their position in the hierarchy. But your status can be different depending on whom you relate to. For example, Mary Poppins’s status is high compared to the children (she is their mentor and caregiver), but Mr. Banks can fire her (she is his employee). Think about your own status within the community of your school and how that can change depending on whom you relate to (fellow students, teachers, administrators, parents).

At the beginning of the 20th century, English society was built on the vision that everybody had his place in the ladder of society, and those on the lower rungs served those higher up. As you’ll see on page 78 of this handbook, there were even servants to raise the children of the wealthy.



# BEYOND THE STAGE

During the Edwardian period, British society was divided into the following general classes:

- **Upper class:** Royalty, the nobility, and the very rich.
- **Upper middle class:** The wealthy, bankers, lawyers, doctors, merchants, and manufacturers.
- **Lower middle class:** A growing class in early 20th century Britain, consisting of shopkeepers, managers, civil servants, and small manufacturers.
- **Working class:** Chimney sweeps, farmers, factory workers, shop employees, house servants, and clerks.
- **Lower class:** The homeless and destitute, which were a grave and growing concern during the Edwardian era.

## The Rise of the Nanny

During the 19th century and into the early 20th century, something unique happened in Great Britain. Rather than raising their children themselves, mothers and fathers from rich and middle-class families handed over their children to special caregivers called “nannies,” who were hired to address children’s every need from food and education to discipline. As in *Mary Poppins*, fathers worked while mothers entertained guests and led the staff of servants. Having a nanny became a status symbol; the middle classes hired nannies even if they couldn’t afford them.

So why did this happen? During the industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, both population and wealth dramatically increased in Great Britain. In 1830, the average English family had six or seven children, and this number was even higher for the wealthy. More children created a need, and more money created the means to hire more servants to watch the children. As Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy in his book *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* writes, “If the rich had anything that needed looking after – whether it was a coat or a child – then there was a servant for it.”


As nannies became more and more popular among the wealthy and middle classes, their power in the household increased. The nursery was their kingdom and they ruled it with a firm hand. The nursery was always removed from the rest of the house; many times, as in *Mary Poppins*, it was on the top floor or near the servants quarters. Children would see their parents for only a short amount of time each day. Nannies controlled the children’s clothing, books, food, medicine, and discipline, and so exerted a great deal of influence over the lives and personalities of their charges.




# BEYOND THE STAGE

## Household Staff


Below are some of the people who might have worked in an upper-class or upper-middle-class English home in 1910. Note that the Banks family has not hired this entire staff of workers for their home – George's position at the bank does not pay enough for them to afford a staff this large.




**THE BUTLER:** Often the oldest servant in the house, he was in charge of the family silver, china and glassware and answering the door to callers. He assisted at all the family's meals, standing behind the chair of the master of the house, awaiting his next command. His responsible position meant that he had the highest salary.




**THE HOUSEKEEPER:** The housekeeper was in charge of maintaining order and cleanliness in the house. She looked after all the household stores, ensuring that everything was in good condition. All of the other female servants reported to her, and she would work closely with the butler to see that everything ran smoothly.




**THE VALET:** He was second in importance to the butler. The valet assisted the master with his clothing. He would also take care of all travelling arrangements when the master decided to go abroad. If valets had a good relationship with the head of the house, their job would be made much easier.




**NANNY:** Children from wealthy families would spend very little time with their parents. Instead, a nanny would be employed to look after them. Although the nanny's job was very important, they were not paid very much. She was given a comfortable bedroom in the family's house, and allowed more days off than the other staff.




**THE FOOTMAN:** Reporting to the butler, the footman's job was to clean and refill oil lamps, clean cutlery, polish silver and copper plate and set the dining room table for dinner. He would also accompany the man of the house as he paid calls. It was very important that footmen kept on the good side of both the butler and the valets in the house.



**THE HOUSEMAID:** The housemaid was responsible for many tasks with kept the household running. She swept the rooms, cleaned the fireplaces, polished the brass, mended clothes and washed dishes. She would usually be younger than the housekeeper, and her wage not as high, but her position was not the lowest in the house.



**CHIMNEY SWEEPS:** Although not employed by the family on a permanent basis, many Edwardian families would regularly pay chimney sweeps to clean their chimneys. It was a dangerous job with many health and safety risks, such as: breathing problems, falling and breaking bones.



**THE COOK:** In consultation with the lady of the house, the cook chose and prepared the dishes for each day's meals. She also oversaw the kitchen area, ensuring that there was enough food, and that this was well kept. Her position was very important and she had a lot of influence - if you upset the cook, you might not get any dinner!



**SCULLERY MAID:** The scullery maids were often the youngest girls in the house. Their jobs included washing dishes, pots, and pans, preparing fires and lighting the stove in the mornings. Because work was hard, low paid, and there was little time off, they took every opportunity to have fun behind the bosses' backs.

# BEYOND THE STAGE

## Parks and Recreation

During the 19th century, London's neighborhoods were arranged to create a balance between buildings and open, leafy spaces that still exist today. London's industry was growing at a rapid pace, and people of all classes needed places to go to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and reconnect with nature. Most of London's small parks were built during the 1820s. The parks were laid out with larger evergreen trees and shrubs along the outer belt to create a secluded feeling. The interiors of the parks were set with grass, paths, flowerbeds, and a statuary.

## Chimney Sweeps

*Nowhere is there a more happier crew  
Than them what sings chim chim cher-ee, chim cher-oo.*

– Bert

During the early 20th century, the rooftops of London were the chimney sweeps' kingdom. As long as we have heated our homes with fire, there has been a need to clean out chimneys of soot, and the sweeps have always come to the rescue. During the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, more and more people built tightly packed houses in cities and urban centers – and with houses came chimneys. In 19th-century England, young boys were employed as chimney sweeps because it was easier for them to get inside the chimney. Many became sick and died from this difficult work.

The phrase “to light a fire under” someone – to make him work faster or harder – comes from the young chimney sweeps. Sometimes a young sweep was too scared to go into a chimney, so his boss would light a fire in the fireplace underneath him! Being a chimney sweep was a dangerous job, but an important one. Dirty chimneys could easily cause fires and back up with deadly smoke.

Eventually, the creation of instruments that would allow someone to sweep the chimney without actually being inside allowed older men like Bert to take over the job. In many places in Great Britain, it's still considered good luck to shake hands with a sweep. Chimney sweeps are sometimes hired for weddings so they can shake hands with the bride and groom before the ceremony. In fact, sweeps today often make more money at weddings than they do cleaning chimneys!



# BEYOND THE STAGE

## MARY POPPINS: THE JOURNEY FROM PAGE TO FILM TO STAGE

### Mary Poppins on the Page

Mary Poppins, the beloved magical nanny, has captivated audiences since blowing in on an eastern wind into the imagination of author P.L. Travers nearly 90 years ago. It makes sense that Travers avoided

claiming ownership for inventing Mary because autonomy and mystery are such essential parts of the character's nature.

Independent and headstrong, Mary Poppins occupies the liminal space between the authority of adulthood and the imaginative world of children, the space between reality and magic. She cannot be contained by traditional limitations of her station nor the laws of physics. That she is able to navigate through these barriers and takes us along for the ride makes her intoxicating to audiences of all ages.

### Literary Mary

The Mary Poppins of the books does not spoon-feed the children either sugar or explanations. Displaying a classic English "stiff upper lip," this Mary of the 1930s has a reliable "keep calm and carry on" sensibility. Stern, vain, and unapologetic, Mary refuses to explain herself and her magic. She becomes quite angry when the children ask her if the extraordinary moments they have witnessed are real, and therein lies her lesson: Jane and Michael must trust in their own instincts and experience in order to ascertain truth and fiction for themselves. Her refusal to engage in their questions isn't cruel, but rather preparation for a life in which no one is standing by with all the answers.

"I don't want to know where she [Mary Poppins] comes from. It isn't as though I secretly know and wouldn't tell anyone. I don't know. And I feel visited by her; I don't feel for a moment that I invented her."

– P.L. Travers

Mary Poppins's adventures are cataloged across seven books including *Mary Poppins* (1934), *Mary Poppins Comes Back* (1935), and *Mary Poppins Opens the Door* (1943). Situated in the canon of beloved children's literature, the *Mary Poppins* stories draw upon the traditions of the myths and fairytales that Travers cherished as a girl. Born Helen Lyndon Goff in 1899 in Australia, she read works by the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, and Beatrix Potter. After adopting the name Pamela Lyndon Travers and moving first to Ireland then England, she was introduced to Eastern mysticism and Celtic folklore.

Travers also became captivated by Theosophy, which sought to examine the interconnectedness of the universe and the divine. From these spiritual influences came one of the most beautiful passages in the *Mary Poppins* series. In the chapter "Full Moon," Jane and Michael find themselves magically transported to the zoo after closing hours. The animals interact with one another, freed not only from their cages but also from their roles of predator and prey. To honor her for her birthday, they encircle



# BEYOND THE STAGE

Mary Poppins as Hamadryad, a serpent, explains to the children, “We are all made of the same stuff... Bird and beast and stone and star – we are all one.” The magic, as Mary demonstrates, is all around us and in us. We need only open our hearts to that magic and embrace it with childlike wonder.

## Mary Poppins on the Silver Screen

After watching his daughters enjoy a copy of *Mary Poppins*, Walt Disney read the stories himself and was delighted by the nanny with the “no-nonsense personality, and the wonderful, impossible things that just happen around her.” Disney’s studio approached Travers in 1938 about turning her creation into a film, but she was not enthusiastic. The author found the idea of mixing her beloved character with animation distasteful. Not one to be discouraged, Disney nearly secured the rights to three *Mary Poppins* books in 1946, but the deal fell through because Travers did not give her approval. It wasn’t until 1959, after a personal visit by Disney to her London home, that Travers changed her mind.

Disney’s charisma won him the day and the rights to *Mary Poppins*, but the agreement did not come without strings. Travers would have script approval over the project, and she set about creating her own outline. The plot she crafted drew upon different adventures in the first three books. Disney had other ideas in mind and enlisted songwriting brothers Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman to work on the project. They took inspiration



*The Sherman Brothers*

from the world of the books to craft several musical numbers including “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,” “Jolly Holiday,” and “Feed the Birds.” More than just delightful musical diversions, the songs became integrated into the narrative that was taking shape. “We didn’t just write songs,” Richard Sherman explained. “We wrote songs that fit into stories and expressed either a story point or a personality quirk or a desire...” For Richard Sherman, the character of the Bird Woman encapsulated the

## Movie Mary

Disney’s motion picture added songs and more than a spoonful of sugar to sweeten the disposition of the famous Mary Poppins. P.L. Travers once said that Julie Andrews was too pretty to play the nanny described in the books as having a face “like a wooden Dutch doll.” The movie also transported the character from the 1930s to Edwardian London and realized many of the magical moments through animation. Piecing together episodes from the books, the film’s creators conceived a dramatic through-line in which Mary Poppins has a mission to save the Banks family, particularly the emotionally distant Mr. Banks.

# BEYOND THE STAGE

theme of the entire story. When she sings “tuppence a bag,” he insisted, it has “nothing to do with tuppence or bread crumbs. It’s about the fact that it doesn’t take much to give love, that it costs very little to make a difference to other people’s lives.”

At the end of 1960, Travers travelled to Disneyland and read the treatment created by the Sherman Brothers and Disney staff writer, Don DaGradi. Travers had many objections and changes she wanted to see made, and thus began a bumpy creative process (which would later be the subject of its own Disney movie, *Saving Mr. Banks*). When *Mary Poppins* the motion picture finally opened in 1964, it was a huge success. Audiences fell in love with Julie Andrews as Mary, Dick Van Dyke as Bert, and the technical wizardry of the animation that brought magical moments to life. The movie was nominated for thirteen Academy Awards® and took home five statues, including Best Score.

## Stage Mary

Combining elements from both the books and the movie with brand new material, this *Mary Poppins* takes the spotlight as a re-invisioned character all her own. She sings, she dances and she flies over the audience. Magical moments from the books find their manifestations through expanded songs and extraordinary dance. By teaching the children to open up their awareness to the joy and hardships of others, she is able to help them teach their parents a lesson about what is most important in life. She opens up a world of possibility where “anything can happen if you let it.”

## Mary Poppins Onstage

The singing nanny of Disney’s motion picture captivated theater producer Cameron Mackintosh. “The character of *Mary Poppins* was so extraordinary that I could never forget her, nor the wonderful Sherman Brothers’ songs,” he remarked. He tried acquiring the stage rights in the early 1970s, but Travers was weary to let anyone else touch her character after her disappointment in the Disney film. It wasn’t until Mackintosh made a personal visit to P.L. Travers in 1993 that his dream started to take shape. Mackintosh brought with him a proven track record for producing theatrical hits including *Cats*, *Les Misérables*, and *Phantom of the Opera*, as well as a deep understanding and love for the *Mary Poppins* books. Though Travers was skeptical at first, Mackintosh managed to convince her that in order for the stage musical to succeed, it would have to utilize some of the elements that audiences knew and loved from the movie. With Travers’s blessing to use material from her books, Mackintosh approached Disney. The Studio, however, had been considering its own plans for a stage adaptation and was not ready to give over the rights to adapt elements of one of its most successful films.

P.L. Travers’s death in 1996 renewed interest in and discussions about creating a *Mary Poppins* stage show, which had been one of the author’s dying wishes. Mackintosh met with Michael Eisner at Disney, but no collaborative agreement could be reached. It seemed that the possibility of a *Mary Poppins* stage project had

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flitted away again on the western wind. It is a testament to Mary's ability to capture imaginations and hearts that talks renewed four years later, this time between Disney's Thomas Schumacher and Mackintosh. The two men found that they were on the same page about the direction of the project and were able to develop a working collaboration.

With the path cleared for Mary Poppins's new life on the stage, a talented creative team was assembled to send the project soaring. George Stiles and Anthony Drewe, creators of the musical *Honk!*, were brought on to craft new music that would sit alongside classics like "A Spoonful of Sugar." Acclaimed theater director Richard Eyre joined the team, as well as co-director and choreographer Matthew Bourne who shared choreography duties with Stephen Mear. Scenic and costume designer Bob Crowley created stunning visuals and filled the stage with a nearly life-sized version of the Banks house at No. 17 Cherry Tree Lane. Writer Julian Fellowes, the Oscar®-winning screenwriter and later the creator of the hit television show *Downton Abbey*, agreed to write the script. Fellowes remembered the books fondly and recognized the challenges of combining those stories with elements of Disney's motion picture: "Everyone realized that it wouldn't do just to put the film on the stage," he said. "But we wanted a show that would fulfill the expectations of people who loved the film and would at the same time give them something else – something new."

And give audiences something new they did. It was the plan of the creative team to go back to the original source material to enrich the story with details and deepen dramatic themes. The Banks children, responsible for chasing away countless nannies, got a chance to show their naughty side. Drawing inspiration from two chapters in the books, "Bad Tuesday" and "Bad Wednesday," Jane and Michael misbehave by fighting with each other and talking back to their mother. They also take their aggression out on their toys, ripping an arm off a doll in one of their tussles. In the new song, "Playing the Game" (originally "Temper Temper"), the children are shocked when the mistreated toys come to life and decide to leave the nursery until they are properly appreciated. In the play, the episodes of acting out by the children underscore a deep need to be seen by their distracted parents and serve as the dramatic impetus for Mary Poppins to leave the house at the end of Act 1.

Returning to the books also yielded new characters not seen in the movie, including Mr. Banks's former nanny, Miss Andrew. Known as the "Holy Terror," Miss Andrew presents a view on nannying that is diametrically opposed to Mary Poppins's methods. Subscribing to traditional ideas of parenting, she believes children should be seen and not heard. Not only does she provide a villain for the piece, as well as a foe for Mary, but she also creates a richness to Mr. Banks's backstory. Terrorized by her harsh severity and "brimstone and treacle" medicine, Mr. Banks learned to adopt "precision and order" as his mantra in life and prioritize work above spending time with his family.

*Mary Poppins* premiered in England at the Bristol Hippodrome in 2004 and later moved to the West End, where it won two Olivier Awards. A Broadway production debuted in 2006 at the New Amsterdam Theatre. After over six years and 2619 performances, the show closed to make room for *Aladdin*, though not before becoming one of the longest-running shows on Broadway.





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Mary Poppins continued to fly to stages across the country on the *Mary Poppins* national tour. At the core of all the incredible stage spectacle is a simple story about the coming together of a family. It is this emotional center, along with Mary's magic, that allows these characters to transcend generations – across books, film, and theatrical productions. Associate Director of Disney's Broadway, international, and touring productions, Anthony Lyn explains the enduring appeal of *Mary Poppins*: "In all honesty, the show is full of heart. It's about change and the parents, and the children, about that bond and imagination. I don't mind saying so: It moves me still."

## Myth in *Mary Poppins*



"Boy with Dolphin" in London's Hyde Park

The character of Neleus, son of Poseidon, reemerged from the pages of mythology in a story called "The Marble Boy" in *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*. According to Greek mythology, Poseidon abandons Neleus before he is born. In the P.L. Travers story, however, Neleus is part of a family of ancient statues overlooking a cliff in Greece, and is separated from Poseidon when he is packed up and shipped away to a British park. There he meets Mary Poppins and the Banks children and is magically brought to life:

*"What is your father's name? Where is he?" Jane was almost bursting with curiosity.*

*"Far away. In the Isles of Greece. He is called the King of the Sea." As he spoke, the marble eyes of Neleus brimmed slowly up with sadness.*

In the musical *Mary Poppins*, Neleus's yearning for his far-away father is used to parallel Jane and Michael's longing for their own who has distanced

himself emotionally from them. With the help of Mary Poppins's magic, at show's end, both Neleus and the Banks children are happily reunited with their fathers.

As for how P.L. Travers came up with the idea for Neleus: There is a statue in London's Hyde Park called "Boy with Dolphin" which looks very much as Neleus is described in "The Marble Boy." The statue was sculpted in 1862 and it is possible that Travers saw it whenever she strolled through the park.



# BEYOND THE STAGE

## THE CREATIVE TEAM OF THE BROADWAY MUSICAL

**MATTHEW BOURNE** (*Co-Director, Choreographer*) Widely hailed as the UK's most popular and successful choreographer/director, Matthew is the creator of the world's longest-running ballet production, a five-time Olivier Award winner, and the only British director to have won the Tony Award® for both choreography and direction of a musical. He is Artistic Director of New Adventures which has created an enormous new audience for dance with its groundbreaking dance/theater productions: *Nutcracker!*, *Highland Fling*, *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella*, *The Car Man*, and *Play Without Words*. Musical theater includes: *Oliver!*; *My Fair Lady* (Olivier Award); *South Pacific*; *Mary Poppins* (Olivier Award); and *Edward Scissorhands*, based on Tim Burton's classic film.

**WILLIAM DAVID BROHN** (*Orchestrations*) received the 1998 Tony Award® (Best Orchestrations) for *Ragtime* and Drama Desk awards for both *Miss Saigon* and *The Secret Garden* in 1991. Other Broadway musicals he has orchestrated are *Crazy for You*, *Carousel*, *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, and *Wicked*. After Cameron Mackintosh commissioned Brohn to orchestrate *Miss Saigon* (1989) for London's Drury Lane Theatre, the association continued with *Oliver!*; *Witches of Eastwick*; *Martin Guerre*; *Hey, Mr. Producer!*; and co-productions at the National Theatre of *Carousel*, *Oklahoma!*, *My Fair Lady*, and *South Pacific*. Brohn's output includes arrangements for solo singers and instrumentalists, choruses, ballet companies, and symphony orchestras.

**BOB CROWLEY** (*Scenic Design*) is an associate of the National Theatre. He has designed more than 50 productions in London including *Mary Poppins* (London Evening Standard Award; Broadway – Tony®, Drama Desk Awards). Other Broadway credits include: *The Glass Menagerie*; *Once* (Tony Award®); *The Coast of Utopia* (Tony®, Drama Desk Awards); *TARZAN®*, which he also directed; *The History Boys* (Tony Award®); *The Invention of Love* (Tony® nomination, Drama Desk Award); Disney's *Aida* (Tony Award®); *The Iceman Cometh* (Tony® nomination); *Twelfth Night* (Tony® nomination); *The Capeman* (Tony® nomination); and *Carousel* (Tony Award®).

**ANTHONY DREWE** (*New Songs & Additional Lyrics*) During his 23-year writing collaboration with composer George Stiles, Anthony has written the book and lyrics for *Tutankhamun*, *Just So*, *Soho Cinders*, the multi award-winning *Honk!*, and the lyrics for *Peter Pan – A Musical Adventure* (book by Willis Hall). With composer Tony Hatch, he wrote lyrics for *The Card*, and with Singaporean composer Dick Lee, the lyrics for *A Twist of Fate*. Work as a director includes *Snoopy*, *Honk!* (South Africa, Chicago, Tokyo, and Singapore), and *Just So* (North Shore Music Theatre and Chichester Festival Theatre). As a performer, work includes *Rogues to Riches*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *A Twist of Fate*. *Mary Poppins* marked his Broadway debut. [www.stilesanddrewe.com](http://www.stilesanddrewe.com)

**RICHARD EYRE** (*Director*) was director of the Royal National Theatre (1988-1997). He has directed many classics and new plays by David Hare, Christopher Hampton, Tom Stoppard, Alan Bennett, Trevor Griffiths, Tony Harrison, and Nicholas Wright. He directed Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* on



# BEYOND THE STAGE

Broadway (2001) and *Hedda Gabler* in the West End (2006). He has won five Olivier Awards, four Evening Standard Awards, three Critics Circle Awards, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Director's Guild. He has directed many award-winning films for TV and four feature films – *The Ploughman's Lunch*, the Oscar®-nominated *Iris* (which he co-wrote), *Stage Beauty*, and *Notes on a Scandal* (with Judi Dench and Cate Blanchett).

**JULIAN FELLOWES** (*Book*) A British, Oscar®-winning screenwriter, Julian is also an actor and director. He studied at Ampleforth College, Yorkshire and Magdalene College, Cambridge. His first script for cinema, *Gosford Park* (2001), won the Best Original Screenplay Oscar®, plus honors from the Writers Guild of America, among others. He received the National Board of Review's Best Directorial Debut Award for the film *Separate Lies*, based on his own screenplay, and he wrote and directed the feature film *From Time To Time* starring Maggie Smith. His other projects include the books *Snobs* and *Past Imperfect*, the television series *Downton Abbey*, and the scripts for *Vanity Fair*, *The Young Victoria*, and *The Tourist*.

**CAMERON MACKINTOSH** (*Producer and Co-Creator*) For nearly 50 years, Cameron Mackintosh has produced more musicals than anyone else in history including the three longest-running musicals of all time, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Cats*, which are still running successfully across the world. Cameron, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of both *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom Of the Opera*, mounted new versions of both shows which were as successful as the original. His new production of *Miss Saigon*, which was the fourth of his great hits of the 1980s, opened to record-breaking advanced booking in London's Prince Edward Theatre, having been acclaimed around the world. *Mary Poppins*, his co-production with Disney, continues to disperse its magic globally. Some of his other musical productions that continue to be produced around the world include *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *Martin Guerre*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Betty Blue Eyes*, and *Barnum*. He also produced the most successful production ever of Stephen Sondheim's legendary *Follies* in London. In 2013, Cameron, in conjunction with Working Title Films and Universal, produced his first hugely successful musical film, the Oscar®, Golden Globe, and BAFTA award-winning *Les Misérables*. Cameron owns seven historic theatres in London's West End – the Prince of Wales, Gielgud, Queen's, Wyndham's, Noël Coward, Novello, and Prince Edward. In May 2014, Cameron announced the acquisition of two major West End theaters – the Victoria Palace Theatre and the Ambassadors Theatre. He is also the co-owner of Music Theatre International, the world's largest owner of secondary rights of the greatest musicals. In 1995, his company received The Queen's Award for Export Achievement and he was knighted in the 1996 New Year's Honours for his services to British theatre. In 2006, he received the National Enjoy England Award for Excellence for his Outstanding Contribution to Tourism, and he was the first British producer elected to the Theater Hall of Fame on Broadway.

# BEYOND THE STAGE

**STEPHEN MEAR** (Co-Choreographer) Broadway: *The Little Mermaid* (world premiere in Denver), *Mary Poppins* (Tony®, Drama Desk, and OCC nominations). London: *Mary Poppins* (Olivier Award for Best Choreography with Matthew Bourne), *On The Town* (English National Opera), *Acorn Antiques*, *Tonight's The Night*, *Anything Goes* (WhatsOnStage Award, Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production), *Singin' In The Rain* (WhatsOnStage Award, Olivier nomination), *Soul Train* (Olivier nomination), and *Witches Of Eastwick* (Co-Choreographer with Bob Avian). Regional theater: *Just So*, *How To Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, *Putting It Together*, *Bouncers*, *Shakers*, *Honk!*, *Snoopy*, and *Half A Sixpence*. Opera: *Don Giovanni* (Royal Opera House). Music Videos: "Number One" (Goldfrapp) and "The Importance Of Being Idle" (Oasis).

**RICHARD M. SHERMAN & ROBERT B. SHERMAN** (Original Music & Lyrics) Honors include two Oscars® (*Mary Poppins*), nine Oscar® nominations, three Grammys, 24 Gold/Platinum albums, a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame, and induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Early hits including "You're 16" and "Tall Paul" led to long-term association with Walt Disney and over 150 songs for Disney films, TV, and theme parks with "It's A Small World" being the world's most translated and performed song. Sherman Disney film credits include *The Jungle Book*, *The Parent Trap*, *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Aristocats*, and *The Tigger Movie*. Other films: *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Tom Sawyer*, *The Slipper and the Rose*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Beverly Hills Cop 3*. Stage credits include *Over Here!*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (London, Broadway, UK tour), *Busker Alley*, and *Mary Poppins* (London and Broadway).

**GEORGE STILES** (New Songs, Additional Music, Dance & Vocal Arrangements) Stiles and Drewe's musical *Honk!* won London's Olivier Award for Best New Musical (2000) and has since been seen in over 2,000 productions worldwide. Their other shows include *Just So* (North Shore Music Theatre), *Peter Pan*, *Tutankhamun*, and *Soho Cinders*. George's musical *The Three Musketeers*, with lyrics by Paul Leigh and book by Peter Raby, played at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Other work includes the scores for Sam Mendes's *Twelfth Night* and *Uncle Vanya* (BAM), musical adaptations of *Tom Jones* and *Moll Flanders*, songs for the RSC's *Shakespeare Revue*, and a blissful spell as Dame Edna's pink pianist and resident composer. *Mary Poppins* marked his Broadway debut. [www.stilesanddrewe.com](http://www.stilesanddrewe.com)

**P.L. TRAVERS** (Author of the *Mary Poppins* stories) was born in 1899 in Australia in a residence above the bank where her father was branch manager. She began to write while a member of a touring stage company. In 1924, able to support herself as a journalist, she left Australia for England. She wrote a number of other books in addition to the *Mary Poppins* stories. She was fascinated by myth and fairy tales and traveled widely, living for a time with the Navajo. She was made "writer in residence" at both Smith and Radcliffe colleges in Massachusetts and also received an honorary doctorate from Chatham College, Pittsburgh. She died in London in 1996.



# BEYOND THE STAGE

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Staging *Mary Poppins* will give your cast and crew a valuable education in the art of theater-making and thrill your audiences. More than sheer entertainment, *Mary Poppins* provides rich opportunities for cross-curricular investigation. Arts integration is the technique of teaching through the arts that allows students to explore varied subjects through an engaging and accessible forum. Whether your students investigate Edwardian class structure, explore the art of adaptation, or literally go fly a kite, *Mary Poppins* offers a wealth of educational entry points and connections across academic disciplines.

Each session includes optional journal prompts that encourage students to draw connections between their work in *Mary Poppins* and their own lives. Share these lesson ideas with English, social studies, and science teachers, or use them to enrich your exploration of the play in rehearsals. Feel free to modify or adapt the lessons to suit your needs.

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: The Art of Adaptation

Use this activity to explore the process of adapting literature for the stage. Provide students with an excerpt from P.L. Travers's book *Mary Poppins*. Try choosing a chapter that was not adapted for the musical.

Students should identify some differences between the ways that literature conveys a narrative versus how a script captures a story. What techniques do novels and scripts employ when addressing character, plot, setting, and conflict? What freedoms does a novel have that a stage play does not and vice versa? Discuss different elements of storytelling including narration, dialogue, and dramatic action when exploring how to adapt literature for the stage.

Ask each student to write a stage adaptation of the *Mary Poppins* excerpt while taking into consideration the opportunities and limitations of theatrical conventions. Which parts of the story excerpt are essential? Which can be edited or cut? Encourage students to include music or dance if they wish.

Next, have students work in small groups. Each group should choose one scene to present to the rest of the class. After each group presents, analyze the differences between the source material and the stage adaptation of each scene. Ask the audience of students to share their experiences: What parts of the scenes were most engaging and why? What were the similarities and differences between the scenes presented? Give time for the adaptors to explain the choices they made to create each script. Is there anything they would change after seeing the scene acted out?



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**Journal Activity:** Ask students to reflect on various adaptations they have encountered in popular culture across media (books, movies, stage shows, etc.). Which examples were successful, which were not, and why? Is the act of adaptation detrimental in any way to the original source material or do adaptations breathe new life into old stories?

## Musical Storytelling

More than merely ornamental, the music in *Mary Poppins* is fully integrated into the story of the play. In this activity, students will investigate how music serves a dramatic function in *Mary Poppins*.

Have students brainstorm the general functions of songs in musicals. Gather students in small groups and assign each group a different song to examine. Provide students with lyrics from the songs, and ask them to do a close textual reading. As groups, they will answer the following questions:

- Does the song introduce us to the world of the play or provide exposition?
- Does the song further the plot or present a dramatic conflict, and how does it accomplish this?
- Does the song help us understand a character's emotional life, wants, or objectives, and if so, how?
- What atmosphere does the song evoke?
- Does the song comment upon the themes of the play, and if so, which themes and how?

Ask one member of each group to share their findings and then listen to a recording of the song as a class. Repeat with each group.

Students should revisit their adapted scenes from the last exercise. Where in their scene might they add a song, and how would it function? Ask them to try their hand at writing lyrics for this new song.

**Journal Activity:** What can music add to a story onstage? Did your close examination of the lyrics change the way you felt about the song or how you heard it when it was played aloud for the whole class? Did you learn anything new about how the song functions after listening to it rather than just reading the lyrics?



# BEYOND THE STAGE

## SOCIAL STUDIES: The World of *Mary Poppins*

Use this activity to open up the historical world of *Mary Poppins* and deepen understanding through research.

Ask students to gather information on Edwardian England looking specifically at any two of the following topics: social welfare, social class structure, the role of women in society, and parenting. Form small groups and allow students to share what research they have gathered. Ask them to consider the following:

- How does *Mary Poppins* engage with the two social issues they have chosen?
- In what ways are the topics woven into the domestic drama of the Banks family?
- How is the play commenting on the issues of the era?
- Does its story challenge popular ideas of the time or support the status quo of Edwardian England? What does the audience learn about these topics through the play?

Ask the students in each group to pick one topic to present to the class through a scene of improvisation. For example, they might stage an improv scene between a traditional Edwardian nanny and her young charges or between suffragettes at a rally for women's rights.

### Status Game

Discuss how Edwardian English society was divided into distinct social classes. Use the information provided in this handbook as a starting point, and ask students to bring in their own research. What are some of the factors that might influence where a person falls on the hierarchy of society (upper class, upper middle class, working class, and lower class)? Identify which class each of the characters in *Mary Poppins* belongs to. How does class influence behavior between the characters? Ask students to consider how wealth, age, gender, power, and respect are used to define a person's status, but also how those factors set up a hierarchy within each class itself.

Write down each of the different Edwardian classes on separate index cards and shuffle them. Allow participants to draw cards to determine their class, but ask them to keep their selections to themselves. Ask them to pretend they are now on a street in Edwardian England acting in character according to their status. Ask the student audience to take note of interactions between the student actors. After a few minutes, ask the audience to line up the actors from highest class to lowest before asking the actors to reveal their cards. Did the student audience get it right? What observations helped the audience identify class? Did any stereotypes of class emerge? How is gender performed in each class? How did the actors use their status to inform their character?

# BEYOND THE STAGE

**Journal Activity:** Ask each student to write a diary entry as a member of one of the classes in Edwardian England. What are some of their everyday activities? Who might they encounter from different classes, and how would they interact? What do they do for fun? What pressures do they face?

## SCIENCE: Let's Go Build a Kite

Property designers often make scaled drawings of the objects that will be created for use onstage during a show. With the construction and aesthetic specifications mapped out on paper, the design can be fabricated in the scene shop. In this activity, students will design their own kites by creating a scaled and colored drawing.

Discuss different designs for kites: diamond, box, sled, delta, and so on. Ask students to research these designs and then create their scaled drawings. Simple kite designs utilizing easy-to-find materials can be found all over the Internet. Ensure that they list measurements, specify materials, and give thought to how the kite will fly. In the end, their drawings should be so detailed that someone can pick up the designs and craft the kites.

Though the kites onstage in *Mary Poppins* fly with the help of rigging, kites flown outside are subject to a number of scientific forces. In order to send a kite soaring, its design and construction must be carefully considered. As a heavier-than-air object, a kite relies on the lift created when wind moves across its surface area to stay aloft. Though the kites that the students create will look different, each one is subject to four forces that affect flight: lift, drag, weight, and thrust. Discuss and define these forces. Once the students have completed their kites, pick a windy day to take them on a test flight.

Advanced: Once their kites are off the ground, ask your students to determine the altitude of their kites by drawing upon their math skills. Detailed instructions on how to determine a kite's graphical maximum altitude can be found on NASA's website:  
[www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/k-12/airplane/kitehigh.html](http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/k-12/airplane/kitehigh.html)



# BEYOND THE STAGE

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

After spending hours in the rehearsal room, it's finally time to share your creative team's production of *Mary Poppins* with audiences of all ages. Further the show's impact by inviting area elementary and middle school students to your performances and consider adding supplemental public programming. There are many benefits to reaching out to your local community. These can include cultivating leadership skills in your cast and crew, introducing younger students to the themes of the play and the creative process of theater itself, as well as fostering a community that is engaged more deeply and personally in the arts.

Community Outreach Ideas:

- Schedule a student matinee and invite local elementary and middle schools.
- Schedule a "family night" with special pricing or activities for families. For example, set up a "build a kite" station in the lobby with supplies for audience members to construct mini kites, or provide pictures of kites for younger kids to color.
- Consider asking your creative team to make a study guide for elementary and middle school students attending the play. What should they know before seeing the show, and how can dramaturgical information (cultural and historical context) deepen their experience of the play?

Some contents of the guide can include:

- A glossary of British terms and historical references used in the play.
- Background information about Edwardian England and social classes.
- Classroom activities exploring the themes of the play. For example, the status game in this handbook can be modified for a middle school classroom.

Coordinate a visit to elementary and middle school classes that will attend the show. Student actors can share their enthusiasm for performance as well as answer questions about the artistic process of staging *Mary Poppins*. Workshop visits can include participatory elements such as teaching a short dance step to students while explaining the art of storytelling through movement.

Set up an informative lobby display that highlights dramaturgical material about the world of the play. To further engage younger audience members, consider creating an interactive element in the lobby. For example, members of the cast can greet and engage spectators in character, shedding light upon the time period and the class system of Edwardian England before the show.



# RESOURCES

## AUDITION RESOURCES

### Games for Jane and Michael

Here are a few examples of what was devised for the Jane and Michael Broadway auditions:

- An ordinary object (like a highlighter) is passed around. Each child is asked to mime something with the object while the rest of the children guess what it is.
- The children are divided into two teams. They are given the following instructions: “If I was in an airplane flying overhead, this is what I want to see.” Then something is named – for example, a giant capital “N.” The children then lie on the ground and create that image. This is an excellent test to see which children have good leadership skills.
- The children are assembled in teams of two. The first child observes the second child for 30 seconds, trying to notice everything about her. Then, both are told to stand back-to-back while the second child changes three things about his appearance. Once the adjustments are made, they turn to face each other again. The first child is then asked to tell everyone what has changed. This exercise determines how much information each child can retain as well as how observant she is.
- The children are asked to walk or run. Then, they are asked to change directions (as well as to walk or run) and then to change directions again. This can be done for several minutes, to see how well and quickly they take instruction.

## DIALECT RESOURCES

When learning a dialect, the Internet provides a wealth of material. How-to videos for just about any accent in existence can be found on YouTube. Listed below are some helpful websites:

- **British Library Sound Archive:** <http://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects>  
Contains audio clips and oral histories from five different archives, including the Survey of English Dialects and BBC Voices. Scroll down to “View by” for access to hundreds of recordings sorted by county, date, or as clickable options on a sound map.
- **IDEA (International Dialects of English Archive):** [www.dialectsarchive.com](http://www.dialectsarchive.com)  
Created by a dialect coach in 1997, this website contains dozens of samples of dialects from all over the globe – over 90 examples from England alone.

It is also extremely useful when learning an accent to stay in character during the length of rehearsal. For the Broadway and touring companies of *Mary Poppins*, the longer everyone maintained their accents, the more solid they became.



# RESOURCES

## MARY POPPINS-RELATED RESOURCES

**MTI ShowSpace:** [www.mtishowspace.com](http://www.mtishowspace.com)

A free online forum that allows show licensees to share advice, photos, design ideas, and more.

**Mary Poppins Education Series:** [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL90E7F7094B88D11F](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL90E7F7094B88D11F)

This 10-part series on YouTube covers everything from the literary inspiration for the Broadway musical, its music, movement, and characters to playing Jane and Michael Banks. It should be the first stop for research.

**P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* series:** Read the books that were the inspiration for the film and Broadway show. The musical was adapted from the first three of the eight books in P.L. Travers's series. Here is a list of them all:

*Mary Poppins* (1934)

*Mary Poppins Comes Back* (1935)

*Mary Poppins Opens the Door* (1943)

*Mary Poppins in the Park* (1952)

*Mary Poppins From A to Z* (1962)

*Mary Poppins in the Kitchen* (1975)

*Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane* (1982)

*Mary Poppins and the House Next Door* (1988)

***Anything Can Happen If You Let It: The Story Behind the Journey from Books to Broadway:*** Brian Sibley and Michael Lassell's book contains a wealth of images and stories about the creation of the *Mary Poppins* books, the Disney film, and the stage productions.

***The Secret Life of Mary Poppins:*** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aai-fqmH0IE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aai-fqmH0IE)

An hour-long documentary about P.L. Travers.

***Mary Poppins, She Wrote: The Life of P.L. Travers:*** Valerie Lawson explores Travers's life and the mythological and literary influences on her writing in this 2013 book.

# RESOURCES

## HISTORICAL RESOURCES

**Every Woman's Encyclopedia, Vol. 6:** <https://archive.org/details/everywomansencyc06londuoft>

This fascinating source of material about women's life from 1910-1912 contains a wealth of information on everything from clothing, hair, furniture, children's dances, and etiquette to an article entitled "Married Women Who Earn Money," which discusses arguments for and against the idea of married women earning a living. Chockfull of photos and illustrations, this encyclopedia is a valuable glimpse into the mindset of the Edwardian woman.

**LongAgo.com:** [www.longago.com/edwardianwomen.html](http://www.longago.com/edwardianwomen.html)

If you are looking for patterns for women's clothing (including corsets) of the Edwardian era, check out this website. There is also a link to Harper House Bookstore, which sells books on costuming of all eras.

**Edwardian Promenade:** [www.edwardianpromenade.com](http://www.edwardianpromenade.com)

Novelist Evangeline Holland has a website dedicated to this era in history, as well as a portal for the popular television shows *Downton Abbey* and *Mr. Selfridge*, which partially take place during this era. Use the search function on the right side of the page to locate specific topics of interest, such as Edwardian women's or men's fashion. The Resources page has a section on Edwardian era-themed films.

**Glamor Daze:** <http://glamourdaze.com>

Looking for the perfect hairstyle for Mrs. Banks? This comprehensive website breaks down fashion, hair, and makeup by decade.

**Fashion Era:** [www.fashion-era.com/the\\_society\\_hostess.htm](http://www.fashion-era.com/the_society_hostess.htm)

This site has a great deal of information on Edwardian fashion – the S-bend corset, the cut of Edwardian skirts, dressing for a society dinner, and ladies' maids.

**Bricks and Brass:** [www.bricksandbrass.co.uk](http://www.bricksandbrass.co.uk)

On this website dedicated to period British houses, a search for "Edwardian" will turn up many useful results, complete with images and historical information, of particular relevance to your set and props designers and actors.

**Edwardian England: A Guide to Everyday Life:** Evangeline Holland's clearly organized catalogue of life in Edwardian England.

**Nanny Knows Best: A History of the British Nanny:** Katherine Holden explores the centuries-long tradition of nannies and how their role has changed over the years.



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Disney and CAMERON MACKINTOSH'S

# MARY POPPINS

THE BROADWAY MUSICAL

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Original Music and Lyrics by  
**Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman**

Book by  
**Julian Fellowes**

New Songs and Additional Music and Lyrics by  
**George Stiles and Anthony Drewe**

Based on the stories of P.L. Travers and the Walt Disney film

Originally produced on Broadway by  
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## Original London and Broadway Production Credits

Produced by  
**Cameron Mackintosh and Thomas Schumacher**

Co-Choreographer  
**Stephen Mear**

Lighting Design  
**Howard Harrison**

Scenic and Costume Design  
**Bob Crowley**

Co-Direction and Choreography  
**Matthew Bourne**

Directed by  
**Richard Eyre**



## Production Handbook Credits

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