

Talking about *The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Other Stories*

by Beatrix Potter · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/peter-rabbit/

Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Pick the animal you'd be for one day: Peter, who runs; Jemima, who wanders off; or Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, who does everybody's laundry and knows all their secrets.
2. Peter loses a jacket and both shoes in a single afternoon. What do you lose most often, and where does it usually turn up?

The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Peter's mother gives him exactly one rule, and she tells him why: his father was put in a pie in that garden. He goes in anyway, on the very next page. Why didn't knowing the reason stop him?
2. Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail do as they're told and get bread and milk and blackberries for supper. Peter disobeys, nearly dies, and gets camomile tea in bed, and he's the one we're still reading about. Is the book on Peter's side?
3. Jemima Puddle-Duck meets a very polite gentleman with sandy whiskers who offers her a quiet place to lay her eggs. Every reader can see he's a fox. Jemima can't. What makes somebody easy to fool, and has anyone here ever been the last to notice?
4. The two bad mice wreck a whole doll's house in a rage because the ham turns out to be painted plaster. Then Tom Thumb comes back and pays for everything with a crooked sixpence he found under the rug. Does paying for it make it all right?
5. Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle washes and irons for every animal on the hill, and knows every stain on every piece. At the end she runs off and is 'nothing but a HEDGEHOG.' Who in real life knows that much about everybody, quietly, without anyone thinking much about it?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

The first of these stories wasn't a book at all. It was a letter to one sick five-year-old, and it started because Potter could not think what else to send him: "I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story." It has been in print ever since. What is the smallest thing anybody ever made just for you, and do you still have it?

Do it *together*

Send somebody a picture-letter. Do the thing the book came from. Each of you picks one real person who isn't at this table (a cousin, a grandparent, a friend who's home sick) and writes them a story about an animal they would recognize: one sentence per page, a drawing above each sentence, four or five pages, no more. Nobody reads them aloud here; they go in envelopes and get posted. That is the entire origin of this book, and it worked.