



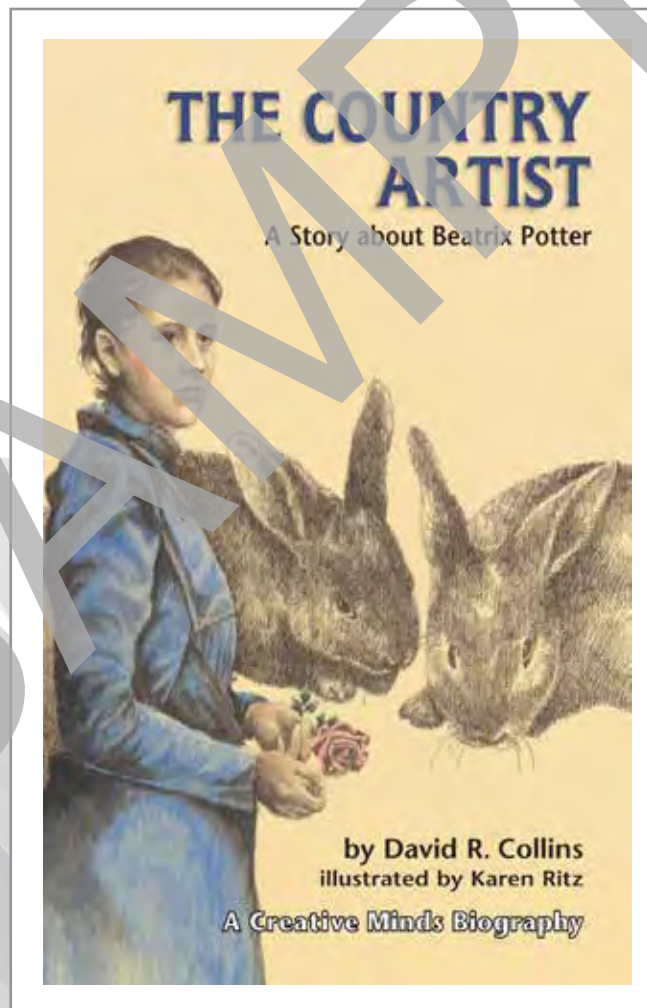
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Country Artist: A Story about Beatrix Potter

David R. Collins



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Country Artist: A Story about Beatrix Potter

David R. Collins

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

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Summary

Although the cast of characters on the third floor of the Potter house, where Beatrix lived, changed frequently, the days and nights remained much the same. The chain of routine and loneliness confined Beatrix Potter to a late Victorian age in which children were seen but not heard. Making sketches of her animal friends, and then creating stories about them, kept Beatrix occupied and relatively happy. In these early days, Beatrix Potter wondered about her future, and if there was life beyond the walls that confined her each day. This tale takes the reader through the pages of her life.

About the Author

David Collins was born February 29, 1940, in Marshalltown, Iowa. He received his B.S. and M.S. degrees from Western Illinois University. Collins was a teacher of English at Woodrow Wilson Junior High School in Moline, Illinois. He "grew up in a world of books. My father, an educator, had an insatiable reading appetite for mysteries; my mother favored Gothics and biographies; my older brother was always surrounded by history and sports books. I quickly joined the reading ranks of my family, and reading soon led to an interest in writing."

"I write for younger readers because they are curious; their minds are open and flexible. They want to enjoy new reading adventures. Providing such adventures is an exciting task."

Initiating Activities

1. Ask each student to make a list of names of people and book characters whose first name is Peter. Make a compilation of the lists. Ask for volunteers to make name banners to hang in the room, and name strips for the bulletin board.

Peter Cottontail

Peter Brady

Peter The Great

Peter Sampras

Peter O'Toole

Peter the pumpkin eater

Saint Peter

Peter Pan

Peter Piper

Point out, or add, the name of Peter Rabbit. Ask if anyone knows who the creator of this story character is. While doing so, start a KWL about Beatrix Potter. What do the members of the group know about her? What would they like to know? Ultimately, cross off any incorrect statements as the study evolves, and list all that has been learned about this artist/author.

| What They Know | What They Would Like to Know | What They Learned |
|----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| | | |

Chapter One, Pages 7–14

Vocabulary

governess (7)
frocks (9)
indistinct (14)

barrister (7)
glens (9)

improper (8)
constantly (12)

participate (9)
confined (14)

Vocabulary Activity

Match the vocabulary word with its definition.

| Definition | Vocabulary Word |
|--------------|--------------------|
| lawyer | _____ (barrister) |
| restricted | _____ (confined) |
| dresses | _____ (frocks) |
| incorrect | _____ (improper) |
| valleys | _____ (glens) |
| persistently | _____ (constantly) |

Discussion Questions

1. What would the one rule in the Potter household be? (Pages 8-9, "If there was one rule in the Potter home, it was that children must be proper at all times. Proper children were most often 'seen but not heard'—except when they were invited to participate in family discussions about art and politics.") Do you think that you would enjoy living with this rule? Why? Why not?
2. What is your impression of the early years of Beatrix Potter? Do you think that she led a "normal" childhood? What one thing impressed you the most? Why? ("Her parents did not seem to be interested in her. At least, they hardly ever saw her. As she grew older, they never played with her. They never gave her parties. They never took her for drives with them in their carriage. They lived in one part of the house, and she lived in another." See Bibliography, Aldis.)

("Beatrix was caught firmly in the grip of her period, stuck with the conventions of her time and class. Her parents were typical of the safe, solid late Victorian age, and she took the path that her mother had followed. Could she be called deprived? Stuck alone up there in that top floor nursery, missing her brother away at school, and with no one her own age to play with or talk to, the picture of her life can be made to look rather sad. She was part of an affluent, stable family, though. No one was cruel to her. Mr. Potter certainly considered himself a caring father, which he was, in the manner of his day. Beatrix did not feel hard done by, and why should she? Her life was pretty normal. There were lots of other girls sitting in top floor nurseries in London, looking out at their future, waiting and hoping, vaguely discontented but not knowing why.

Beatrix's animals were one means of escape. The Potters might seem very indulgent in allowing such a situation. However, it has to be remembered that the large staff at Bolton Gardens did the

looking after, and Mr. and Mrs. Potter hardly ventured into the nursery quarters. Keeping animals was quite typical of the young Victorians." See Bibliography, Davies.)

3. **Prediction:** Will Beatrix Potter spend her entire life at Bolton Gardens?

Supplementary Activities

1. Critical Thinking: Compare your childhood to that of Beatrix Potter. Use a T-chart for ease of comparison.

| Beatrix Potter | Me |
|----------------|----|
| | |

2. Writing: Reread the last paragraph on page 14. Imagine that you are Beatrix, looking out of the window. ("There were things Beatrix Potter rarely saw, because at Number Two Bolton Gardens she did most of her living in a third floor bedroom that had nursery bars at the windows. Like a prison." See Bibliography, Aldis.) What are you thinking? How do you feel? Express your thoughts and feelings through the use of art media, poetry, music, or in some other creative manner.

3. Character Analysis: Start an attribute web for Beatrix Potter. Add to the web as her life unfolds in the pages of this book. (See page 8 of this guide.)

4. Character Analysis: Make attribute webs for Mr. and Mrs. Potter. Add to them as the story continues.

Chapter Two, Pages 15–21

Vocabulary

predictably (15)
contribution (20)

imitated (17)

opportunity (19)

impressed (19)

Vocabulary Activity

Use a vocabulary word to complete each sentence.

1. He _____ each sound that he heard. (*imitated*)
2. Her _____ to the world of literature was great. (*contribution*)
3. The publishers were favorably _____ by her work. (*impressed*)
4. She made the most of every _____ to go to the country. (*opportunity*)
5. Because she was alone so much, she was _____ shy. (*predictably*)