

The Velveteen Rabbit

By Margery Williams

Adapted for the stage by Kim Esop Wylie

Music by Joe Dreyer

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The Velveteen Rabbit

By Margery Williams
 Adapted for the stage by Kim Esop Wylie
 Music by Joe Dreyer
 Directed by Kat Singleton

Scenic & Costume Design

Dorothy Marshall Englis

Stage Manager

Brian Peters

Director of Education

Marsha Coplon

Artistic Supervisor

Jeffery Matthews

The Company

(in order of appearance)

Boy, Toy Boat / **Jason Contini**
 Husband, Aunt, Horse, Nana, Wild Rabbit / **Alan Knoll**
 Margery / **Meghan Brown**
 Velveteen Rabbit, Live Rabbit / **Christena Doggrell**

Financial assistance for this theatre has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts,
 (which believes that a great nation deserves great art) a federal agency; the Missouri Arts Council, a stage agency;
 the Arts and Education Council of Greater St. Louis; and the St. Louis Regional Arts Commission.



Setting the Scene

The setting for *The Velveteen Rabbit* is very special because most of the play takes place inside Margery's mind as she imagines the story of the Rabbit's life. A big part of the fun comes from watching Margery weave many of the people, places and events from her own life into the action of her tale. For example, Margery and her family actually live in England, in the winter of 1922, much like the Boy with the Velveteen Rabbit. Just three years after the end of World War I, Britain, along with the rest of Europe, was still in recovery, and scientist Alexander Fleming would not discover penicillin for another eight years. This is important because penicillin is a kind of medicine that can kill the bacteria that cause infections such as scarlet fever, the illness that threatens the Boy's life. At this point in history, scarlet, or rheumatic fever was a diagnosis that mothers feared because medical science had not yet developed drugs to treat it. It was common for children to pick up a simple bug, such as strep throat, from playmates only to find themselves with a very serious case of scarlet fever a few weeks later because there were no antibiotics available to treat the initial infection. As frightening as it may have been for her to do, Margery probably included this in her story as a way of dealing with the very real fear that her own child might one day have this illness. Today, however, strep throat can usually be cured within a week to ten days and cases of scarlet fever are rare. One thing that hasn't changed over the years though, is the healing power of a good friend.



Who's Who?

Margery

is an energetic mother and successful writer who is normally quite busy but suddenly finds herself with nothing to do.

The Husband

is a playful and loving father to the Boy.

The Boy

is full of energy, questions and mischief.

The Velveteen Rabbit

is a stuffed animal who learns an important lesson of friendship from the Boy.

The Toy Boat

is the bully of the playroom and thinks that he is better than the other toys just because he has bells and whistles.

The Horse

is a very old and wise toy who helps the Velveteen Rabbit adjust to his new life.

Nana

is the strict but caring nanny to the Boy.

The Wild Rabbit

is a live animal who causes the Velveteen Rabbit to realize that there is a world beyond his own.

What's the Story?

As is the case with many great stories, *The Velveteen Rabbit* comes about because a young Boy would rather be outside playing in the snow than trapped inside the house with nothing to do. His mother, Margery, suggests that he write a story, but after she gets him started, she confesses to her husband that she is also bored. The year is 1922, and with World War I over, she isn't quite sure what to do with herself. She is no longer needed as a volunteer for the war effort, and the Boy stays busy with his tutor and his nanny. Even though Margery is a novelist, she can't think of anything about which to write. Knowing that this really is her talent though, her husband prods her to write—about anything—even a stuffed toy rabbit that is lying in the floor.

Margery takes her husband's advice and begins to create her story out loud, pulling pieces of it from her own life. Of course the main character is the Velveteen Rabbit. He is given to a young Boy as a gift. At first, the Boy is very excited about his Rabbit, but before long, he has many other presents and forgets about the stuffed toy. The Rabbit sits day after day, alone in the toy cupboard and becomes more and more shy. One day he runs into a mean Toy Boat who is quite certain that he is the greatest toy ever made. The Boat bosses and bullies the Rabbit and convinces him that the Boy will never want to play with him

because he doesn't have bells and whistles or moving oars.

However, one kind toy, an old worn Horse, tells the Rabbit that he should feel sorry for the Boat because he will never be able to be real. The Rabbit does not understand what it means to be real, so the Horse explains that when a child loves a toy for a very long time, nursery magic makes the toy lovable, even though it may be shabby and falling apart. Best of all, once a toy is real, it is always real.

Soon, Nana, the Boy's nanny is looking for his favorite animal to sleep with, a stuffed dog. She can't find the dog anywhere, and the Boy won't go to sleep without it. Margery suggests that she take the Velveteen Rabbit instead. The Boy is happy to see his long forgotten toy and quickly falls asleep, hugging the Rabbit. Used to spending his time alone in the cupboard, the Rabbit feels squashed and cramped at first, but soon he realizes that being hugged is a very special thing.

Before long, the Boy and the Rabbit spend all of their time together, playing inside and out and the Rabbit is so happy that he doesn't even notice that his fur is wearing thin and his tail is coming undone.

Sometimes, though, the Boy forgets to bring his Rabbit inside at the end of the day, so when bedtime comes, Nana has to go back outside to find the Rabbit. When she says that



"When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real."

the Boy makes much too big a fuss over a toy, the Boy tells her that the Rabbit isn't a toy at all. "He's REAL!" Of course, real or not, the Boy can't seem to remember to bring his Rabbit inside at night.

One summer evening while the Rabbit is waiting for Nana to find him, a Wild Rabbit hops up to him and starts talking. At first, the Velveteen Rabbit believes that the Wild Rabbit is a toy, like himself, but the Wild Rabbit soon discovers the truth and tells the Velveteen Rabbit that he isn't real. The Velveteen Rabbit protests, saying that he knows he is real because the Boy told him so, but the Wild Rabbit doesn't believe him and runs away. The Velveteen Rabbit quickly forgets this unpleasantness though because the Boy believes he is real, and that is all that matters.

One day, the Boy becomes sick with Scarlet Fever. He is too weak to eat or drink, and he sleeps most of the time. Nana and Margery sit by his side, day after day and the Rabbit stays tucked under the Boy's arm, even though the fever is so hot that it burns him. He stays because he knows that he must be there in case the Boy needs him. A full week and a half passes before finally, the Boy wakes. He begins to eat again and even goes outside on the balcony for fresh air. The doctor tells Margery that the best thing for the Boy would be to take him to the seaside where the warm weather will help him recover. So, the family makes plans for the trip and Rabbit looks forward to seeing the ocean. He does not get to go

though, because Nana arrives with orders from the doctor: everything that the Boy touched while he was sick must be burned—including the Rabbit. Margery begs Nana not

to take the Rabbit, but Nana insists that it is the only way to make sure that none of the germs are left to make the Boy sick again.

The Rabbit is put in a sack with bed sheets, clothes and other toys and tossed out behind the shed, to be burned the next day. As the Rabbit

sits in the sack, he becomes very sad and cries a real tear, which falls to the ground. Where the tear hits, a flower grows out of the ground and out of the blossom steps a fairy. The fairy explains that she is the nursery magic fairy who makes old loved toys that children don't need anymore into real creatures, so that everyone, not just the child who loves the

toy, believes that they are real. She takes the Rabbit into the woods, to Rabbitland and tells the Wild Rabbit to be kind to him and help him to learn

everything he needs to know to be real. The Velveteen Rabbit is afraid at first, because he doesn't think that he can move like the other rabbits, but when the fairy puts him down; he realizes that he has real hind legs, and real soft fur. He runs to play with the Wild Rabbit and when he turns to

speak to the fairy, she is gone.

The seasons pass and soon it is spring again. The Boy goes outside to play and sees a real rabbit in the garden that looks just like his old friend, the Velveteen Rabbit. He wonders, could it be?



"You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to things who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept."

Words to the Wise

"Once you're real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

FROSTBITE—The Boy's father tells him that he can't go back outside because he will get so cold that his blood will stop flowing in his hands or he will develop frostbite.

COAL—When the play takes place, people burned pieces of this mineral in stoves to heat their homes. Coal is still used as an energy source today, but usually is not burned in homes.

THE WAR—The war that Margery refers to is World War I, which took place from 1914 until 1919 and involved most nations of the world.

ACCLAIMED NOVELIST—When Margery's husband calls her an acclaimed novelist, he is just saying that she is a well-known writer.

VELVETEEN—The Boy's Rabbit is made out of this fabric, which is soft and smooth, like velvet.

BOWER—The Toy Boat orders the Rabbit to "Man the bower!" In plain English, this means to get ready to lower the ship's anchor.

LEEWARD HO—Another one of the Boat's orders, this command means to go the opposite direction that the wind is blowing.

STARBOARD—This is a sailor's term for the direction, right.

PORT—The opposite of starboard, port is the left side of a ship.

UPPITY—The Horse explains that any kind of toy can become uppity or prideful if it isn't careful.

SPIT AND GRIT—The Boat wants others to think that he is very tough, or "spit and grit."

SCARLET FEVER—This very serious illness can develop if strep throat or a similar infection is not treated. Although very common in children until the 1940s, the use of antibiotics now makes it rare.

Read More About It

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books, videos and Web sites.

Corduroy by Don Freeman. Viking Press, 1968. This classic picture book tells the story of a department store teddy bear who finds a friend and a home with a little girl.

Beady Bear by Don Freeman. Viking Press, 1954. A toy bear tries to become real by living in a cave but learns that he needs something else instead.

Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse by Leo Lionni. Knopf: Pantheon, 1969.

Alexander the mouse makes friends with Willy, a toy mouse, and wants to be just like him until he discovers that Willy is to be thrown away.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter. F. Warne, 1902. Follow the adventures of this young rabbit as he gets into and out of trouble.

Grandma's House by Elaine Moore. Lothrop, 1985. A little girl spends the summer at her grandmother's house in the country, a time which they both thoroughly enjoy.

The Velveteen Rabbit and the Twelve Months video recording based on the story by Margery Williams Bianco. Billy Budd, 1985. This claymation production brings the story of the loyal rabbit to life and also includes a Czech folktale.

www.Rabbit.org If you are interested in raising a "real" rabbit, visit this site for great tips on care along with fun trivia.

<http://www.mindspring.com/~mccarthys/cybrary/velvet.htm> This site offers a full-text version of Margery Williams' original story, *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

From the Playwright

Writing is all about trial and error. You get an idea, try to put it on paper, see what's wrong with it, try to fix it, get more ideas. . . Sometimes starting is the hardest part.

When The Rep asked me to do the stage adaptation of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, I wasn't sure where to start. I knew I wanted this play to be more than just a story about a toy. So, instead of thinking only about the rabbit, I wondered what made Margery Williams write this story and what her world must have been like.

I imagined how Margery might have gotten the idea from watching her son. And I imagined that, just as I do when I'm writing, she watched the idea develop, seeing what

was working in the story and what wasn't. Trial and error.

Some people insist that you have to have an outline before you start writing. I pretty much agree. I also believe, however, that sometimes a story will gallop off into a whole new direction that you didn't imagine. Just as life sometimes takes us in directions we didn't imagine.

But in facing the unexpected, Margery realizes that we all have a certain power over our stories—both the ones that we write and the ones that we live.

Kim Esop Wylie
Playwright

From the Director's Chair

"Once you're real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand," wrote Margery Williams. Sadly, the human race as a whole doesn't take the time to make things "real" in Ms. Williams' terms. We don't always investigate our cultures or faiths, so we turn on our TVs or open our newspapers and see the reality of intolerance. Snipers, terrorists, war and threats of war top the news stories. Perhaps this gentle story of the magic of love and acceptance will penetrate the hearts of our theatergoers and fill us with the holiday spirit of peace on earth.

So sit back and let Kim Wylie's inventive script, Joe Dreyer's lovely music and Dottie Englis' charming designs wash over you. Enjoy the world of *The Velveteen Rabbit* where love makes everything "real" beautiful.

Kat Singleton
Director

"What is love?"
"That's when you like something so darn much you just can't stop hugging it."

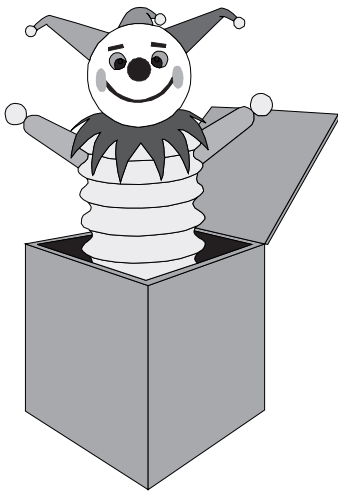
"What is loyal?"
"It's when you love someone so much that you stay no matter what."

my FAVORITE
TOY

COMIC CREATIONS

1 In the space provided, draw a picture of one of your favorite toys. It may be a toy that you had when you were younger or one that you play with now. Below, make a list of ten words that describe your toy. These words should tell how the toy looks, sounds, feels or moves. For example, for the Velveteen Rabbit, some of your words might be, brown, furry and soft.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____



2 Now imagine what might happen if your favorite toy could think, move and talk on its own. Pretend that you are making a comic book about what your toy does one afternoon when you are not home. What other characters besides your toy will be in the comic? Write their names and one word to describe each of them below.

Character name

Description

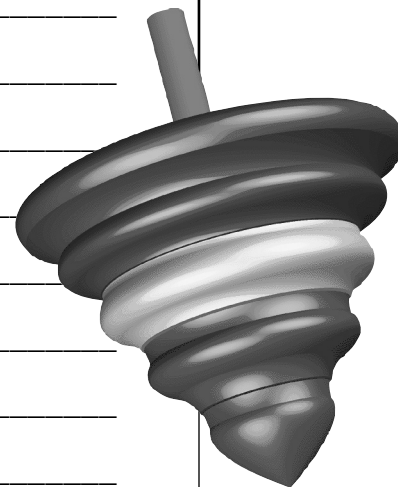
Character name	Description
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3 In each of the boxes below, draw a picture to represent one scene of action in your comic. Add boxes of your own if necessary. Make sure to keep the actions in order and be sure that your comic has a beginning, a middle and an end.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6.	7.	8.	9.	10.

4 Now write one sentence explaining what happens in each picture box. Try to use some of the describing words that you listed in the first two exercises.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. _____
_____ | 6. _____
_____ |
| 2. _____
_____ | 7. _____
_____ |
| 3. _____
_____ | 8. _____
_____ |
| 4. _____
_____ | 9. _____
_____ |
| 5. _____
_____ | 10. _____
_____ |



5 Choose one of the sentences that you wrote in exercise 4. Now imagine exactly what the characters in that scene might say. Write the lines or dialogue for that scene. Follow the format used in this example:

Rabbit: He plays with you.

Toy Boat: What's that?

Rabbit: The Boy. He plays with you. I've seen it. He doesn't play with me.

Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your classroom needs and save them for future use. The activities in these units address the following Missouri Knowledge Standards and Illinois Learning Standards.

MO: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, CA6, CA7, FA1, FA2, FA4, SS6

IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 18, 26

6 Write the name of your comic below.

For an extra challenge, put the dialogue and pictures together to complete your very own comic book!

A FRIEND INDEED



In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the Horse and the Boy are very good friends, and when the Velveteen Rabbit comes along, the Horse teaches him how to be a good friend as well. Imagine someone asked you for the same kind of advice. What makes a person a good friend? What can you do to be a good friend? Write a “Friendship Recipe” that can instruct someone on how to be a good friend. Include all the “ingredients” of a good friendship and the steps necessary to be a good friend or make a new friend.

Recipe for: *A Good Friend*

From the Kitchen of: _____

Ingredients: _____

Directions: _____

Friends Forever

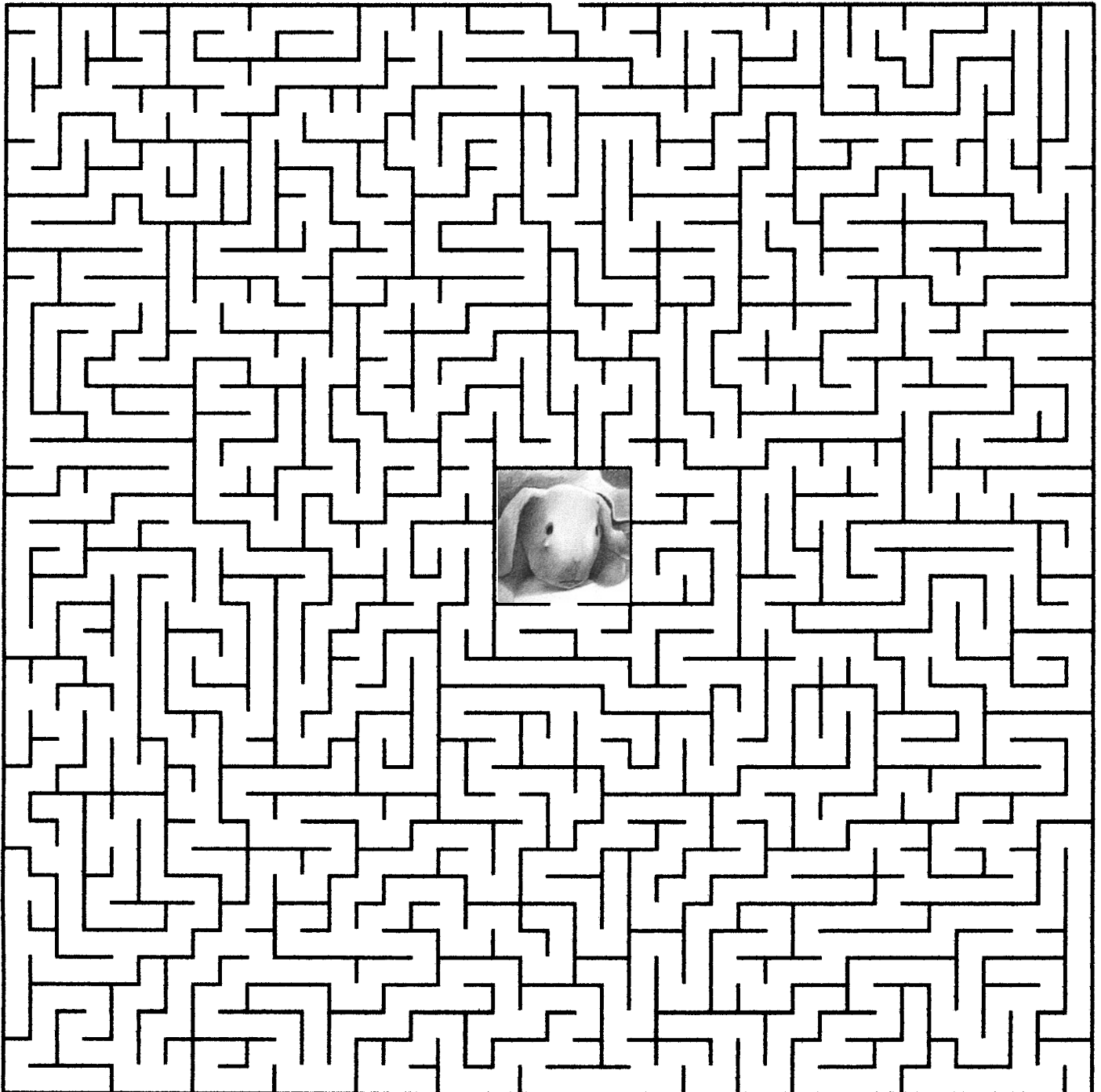
The Boy and the Velveteen Rabbit share many good times playing, even though they don’t always like to do the same things. Think about a time when you and a friend had fun together. Write a letter to your friend telling them why you like spending time with him or her and what was so special about that day together. Make sure to write in complete sentences. If you want, when you are finished you can mail your letter to your friend!

Dear Friend:



ADVENTURES IN BUNNYSITTING

The Boy has left the Velveteen Rabbit outside again.
Help Nana find him.



1. Color the Rabbit
2. Cut out each of the pieces following the dotted lines.
3. Put the Rabbit together using metal brads.

