

Theatre IV Classroom Study Guide



The House at Pooh Corner

*Book, music and additional lyrics by Bruce Miller
from the stories by A. A. Milne*

Synopsis of the Play

Edward Bear, known to his friends as Winnie-the-Pooh, or Pooh Bear, or just plain Pooh for short, is a bear of very little brain. This is the story of Pooh's last adventures in the Forest with his friends Christopher Robin, Piglet, Kanga, and Eeyore, faithfully based on A.A. Milne's classic.

The play tells the stories from the classic book including the building of Eeyore's house, Tigger's arrival in the Hundred Acre Wood, the origin of the game of Pooh Sticks, and Rabbit's plan for reducing Tigger's bounce. The play ends with Christopher Robin preparing to begin another school year. The animals join together to write him a poem. Saying their goodbyes, the animal friends wish Christopher Robin well, and leave the young boy and his bear alone to share their secrets of friendship and trust.



The Pooh Stories

W*innie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) became classics almost as soon as they were published. Names such as "Pooh Bear" and "Poohsticks" are firmly lodged in the English language; the adventures of Pooh and his friends are well known; the stories are read and loved all over the world in many different languages.

In both books a father and son, Christopher Robin, tell the tales and adventures of Pooh and his friends. Christopher Robin claims to remember the stories, but tells his father that Pooh does not. "I do remember," he said, "only Pooh doesn't very well, so that's why he likes having it told to him again. Because then it's a real story and not just a remembering." This is where the stories begin in the first book, *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

For A. A. Milne, writing had to be fun; no one can read the Pooh tales without feeling a sense of joy. There is no unkindness, no trickery and no jealousy in Milne's children's books. The animals, with Christopher Robin's assistance, solve grown-up problems in their make-believe world, always ending on a happy note.

The characters rely on each other and ultimately on Christopher Robin in each episode. The situations in which Pooh and his friends find themselves are very serious to the animals, yet each is viewed with a type of humor and charm. The books depict how essential friendships and understandings are to life. These shared friendships, joys and adventures came from Milne's own life where he deeply valued his family and friends.

Soon after its original publication, translations of *Winnie-the-Pooh* appeared in other countries. The Pooh stories have been translated into many languages including German, Danish, Finnish, Dutch, Hebrew, Slovenian, Hungarian, Latin, Russian, Portuguese, Latvian, Ukrainian, Czech, and Slovak. Each language has attempted to capture the uniqueness of Milne's original stories. These stories are among the most-quoted children's classics in the world.

The House at Pooh Corner was written as Milne's way of saying goodbye to childhood; his own childhood as well as that of his son's. The final paragraph of the book is Milne's way of reminding the reader that you can carry your childhood in your heart.

"So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing."

Theatre IV's The House at Pooh Corner

Background: A. A. Milne

Alan Alexander Milne was born in Hampstead, London on January 18, 1882. He studied at Cambridge University where he became the editor of *Granta*. On June 4, 1913 he married Dorothy de Selincourt, and in 1914 joined the army. During his time in the army he began to write plays for the other soldiers. Discharged in 1918, he became a full-time playwright, and his plays were successful in both England and the United States. By the 1930's, interest in his plays began to fade with the growing popularity of his four children's books - *When We Were Young* (1924), *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), *Now We Are Six* (1927), and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928).



A.A. Milne and his son Christopher Robin Milne.

As a professional writer, Milne wrote thirty-four plays, six novels, three books of verse, and three books of short stories; in addition, his essays and miscellaneous pieces were collected into approximately nineteen volumes. The dying interest in Milne's serious work as a dramatist and essayist was frustrating to the writer. In 1952 Milne suffered a stroke and in 1956, died at the age of seventy-four. Although he may have preferred it otherwise, Milne is not remembered for his essays, dramas and novels, but for his four well-loved and widely translated children's classics.

In his autobiography, Milne wrote that "Whatever subject an author chooses or has chosen for him, he reveals no secret but the secret of himself." Milne has shared his own secrets with readers for years through the loving stories of Christopher Robin, Winnie the Pooh and all their delightful friends.

Background: E. H. Shepard

Before drawing the pictures for *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, E. H. Shepard had illustrated Milne's first book of poetry verse's for children, *When We Were Very Young*. His illustrations for Pooh are a very important part of the stories popularity, capturing the subtle humour, the spirit and style of the author and the closeness and love shared between the fictitious animal characters and Christopher Robin.

Shepard's brilliant illustrations were based on real toys owned by Milne's son, Christopher Robin Milne. To assure that the illustrations in *Winnie-the-Pooh* were accurate, Milne invited Shepard to his home in Sussex, England, to meet Christopher Robin Milne's toy animals and to walk in Ashdown Forest, where many of the stories took place. Shepard's illustrations are realistic towards the Sussex landscape, matched with the likeness of the real Eeyore, Kanga, Roo, Piglet & Tigger. When Shepard was devising the illustration for Pooh, he substituted his own son's bear, Growler, for the real Pooh. In his eighties, Shepherd began to color the original black-and-white illustrations.

Shepard illustrated many books, articles and publications including Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1931). Shepard had been the third illustrator hired by Grahame who was most pleased with these pictures. In 1976, Shepard died at the age of 96.

The Real Christopher Robin

Born on August 21, 1920, Christopher Robin Milne spent a lifetime living with a fictional character also named Christopher Robin. Sharing the same name made popular by the children's stories, Christopher Robin Milne even had mutually identifiable traits - including the loveable toy animals. Readers who loved the books often searched for the "real" Christopher Robin. Late in life, Christopher Robin Milne admitted to the difficulty of living in the shadow of the beloved fictional Christopher Robin.

As a young boy Christopher Robin Milne passed most of his time with his nanny in a nursery on the top floor of the house. His childhood companion was a girl called Anne. The children's nannies would often take them for excursions into the city of London. Like his father, Christopher Robin Milne attended College at Cambridge and graduated in 1947 with a degree in English Literature.

On July 24, 1948 Christopher Robin Milne married his cousin Lesley de Selincourt despite his parents' hope that he should marry Anne, his childhood friend. In 1951 he moved to Dartmouth and opened a bookstore with Lesley. In 1956 his only child, Clare, was born with cerebral palsy.

In 1974 Christopher Robin Milne published the first of three autobiographical books, *The Enchanted Places*, an account of his childhood and relationship with his parents. After finishing these autobiographical works, he said that he could finally look his dreaded namesake in the eye and feel less embarrassed by him. Christopher Robin Milne died on April 20, 1996, leaving behind his wife Lesley and daughter Clare.

Pooh Bear and His Friends

Writers for children have often done stories about bears, but it has remained A. A. Milne who uncovered the true joys of these creatures. Pooh has all the characteristics of other bears and bear characters; clumsiness, slow-wit, sly humor, and greediness. Yet, Pooh has something else as well - a humility, a longing for approval, a desire to be correct, and a wistfulness that is heartwarming.

Pooh was a present to Christopher Robin Milne on his first birthday. Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore, Kanga, Roo, and Tigger were all a part of Christopher Robin Milne's collection. Five of the surviving animal toys are in the Donnell Library Center of the New York Public Library; Roo has disappeared.

The animals are very complex, but carry clear human-like traits. Pooh Bear is inventive but not intellectual, Piglet is timid, Eeyore pessimistic, Kanga overprotective of her baby, Roo stifled by her mother, Rabbit dictatorial. Even though the characters are very different, they interact well and are individuals. Adults and children love and enjoy these characters for their gentle humor and wit.

The origin of the name "Pooh" is given at the end of the first chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. After holding onto the string of a balloon for a long time, Pooh's arms "stayed up straight in the air for more than a week, and whenever a fly came and settled on his nose he had to blow it off. And I think - but I am not sure - that that is why he was always called Pooh."

Activities/Discussions:

1. The toy animals in the stories have very clear personalities. Discuss what these characters are like. What is it that makes Pooh different from the other animals? Piglet? Eeyore? Rabbit? Owl? Kanga? Roo? Do you know anyone that acts like Pooh and his friends? Do you have any of these traits? Have your student's act out a situation like the characters, then switch roles. Discuss whether anyone is truly like the characters, or a mixture of them. At one time or another have your students been all of these animals themselves? Discuss their decisions.

2. The Pooh stories have been translated into many different languages. With a globe or world map, try to find some of the many countries whose children have read these books.

3. Can you translate the name "Winnie-the-Pooh" into other languages? Here is what children in other countries call this famous bear:

Russia	Vinni-Pukh
Spain	El Osito Pu
Portugal	Joanica-Puff

4. Pooh and his friends sing to make themselves feel better during sticky situations. What do you do to relax yourself if you are afraid or worried about something?

5. Draw your favorite character or scene from *The House at Pooh Corner*. Send your drawing to Theatre IV for our **"From Stage to Page Art Contest."** Theatre IV staff members will select several drawings to be in future study guides. (One drawing per student. Please write name, grade, age, teacher, school, and school address clearly on the back of each drawing. Drawings will not be returned. Teachers will be notified by mail of selected drawings.) Please mail class drawings to: Theatre IV, Department of Education, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220.

6. Find some Pooh activities online at these sites:

Winnie the Pooh`s Corner - *Pages to color and interactive games.*

<http://members.easyspace.com/yoarra/>

Penguin Putnam Inc. - *In the "Familiar Friends" box, click on Winnie the Pooh, then click on "Fun Stuff" for a maze, crossword puzzle and word search.* <http://www.penguininput-nam.com/yreaders/index.htm>

Other books about friends:

[A Bear Called Paddington](#) by Michael Bond
[The Adventures of Corduroy](#) by Don Freeman
[Alexander the Wind-up Mouse](#) by Leo Lionni
[Bunny Trouble](#) by Hans Wilhelm
[Dandelion](#) by Don Freeman
[Do You Want to be My Friend?](#) By Eric Carle
[No Roses for Harry](#) by Gene Zion
[Play With Me](#) by Marie Hall Ets
[The Pokey Little Puppy](#) by Janette Sebring Lowrey
[The Puppy Who Wanted a Boy](#) by Jane Thayer
[The Rainbow Fish](#) by Marcus Pfister
[The Runaway Bunny](#) by Margaret Wise Brown
[Where the Wild Things Are](#) by Maurice Sendak
[Who Wants an Old Teddy Bear](#) by Ginnie Hofmann

Theatre IV is the second largest theatre for young audiences in the nation and is the Children's Theatre of Virginia. We encourage your comments about *The House at Pooh Corner*. Please send your letters to:

Theatre IV, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220

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