

created and performed by Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia

About the Author – Margaret Wise Brown

"We speak naturally," Margaret Wise Brown (1910-1952) once observed "and spend all of our lives trying to write naturally."

Best known as the author of *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny*, Brown pioneered in writing stories and poems for the very youngest ages. During a brief but many-faceted and brilliant career, she completed more than one hundred picture books; championed the work of such talented illustrators as Garth Williams and Clement Hurd; persuaded Gertrude Stein to write her now-classic children's fantasy *The World is Round*; and helped develop the board book and other fresh approaches to bookmaking for very young children. With seemingly boundless energy and imagination, she kept experimenting, always hoping, as she once said, to "write a book simple enough . . . to lift the child for a few moments from his own problems of shoelaces that won't tie and busy parents . . . into the timeless world of a story."

Brown was born in Brooklyn, New York, and raised in middle-class comfort on suburban Long Island, where she became a keen observer of nature. To her childhood friends she was known as the neighborhood storyteller, good at concocting tall tales and at putting her own words to old tunes like "Dixie."

Always something of a daydreamer, Brown had a lackluster student career until, as a young woman in the mid-1930's, she enrolled in graduate courses at one of America's most vibrant centers of early childhood development research, New York's Bank Street College of Education. At Bank Street, Brown observed children, listened to the stories and poems they told, and found her own vocation.

The core of the Bank Street philosophy was the belief that children should be made full partners in learning. Brown applied this idea in her writings by working in simple, gamelike forms and structures that the young might readily grasp and make their own. In the "Noisy Book" series, she encouraged children to listen hard to the sounds and rhythms of their own everyday surroundings and to say and sing them back -- the bee's buzz, the jackhammer's rattlings -- as loudly as they liked. In *Goodnight Moon*, she incited the young to decide which objects of their world mattered enough to them to be remembered one last time at the end of the day. Brown's legacy consists of a vast store of writings incomparable tenderness, sparkling mischief, and poetic piquancy and grace. Best of all, perhaps, her stories and poems are beguilingly open-ended: in them, the child, not the author, always has the last word.

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Dear Genius, The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom

Collected and edited by Leonard S. Marcus

<http://www.harperchildrens.com/features/mwb.htm>

About the Illustrator – Clement Hurd

If Clement Hurd (1908-1988), the illustrator of *Goodnight Moon*, led a charmed life, it was not the one his parents had predicted for him. The son of a prosperous New York mortgage banker, Hurd attended St. Paul's and Yale and seemed destined to join his father's firm when, in the spring of 1931, he announced his plan to become an artist, and sailed for France that summer.

The next two years proved a revelatory experience. In Paris, Hurd studied with Fernand Leger, absorbed the modernist painters' revolutionary new approach to composition and color, and generally immersed himself, as he later recalled, in "French civilization and the wealth of European treasures." Returning to New York when his money ran out in 1933, he was freelancing as a decorative artist when Margaret Wise Brown first saw two of his paintings and suggested that he try his hand as a children's books illustrator.

When the artist expressed tentative interest, Brown, with characteristic brio, wrote a manuscript to order for her promising new friend. *Bumble Bugs and Elephants* (1938), perhaps the first modern board book for babies, resulted from this initial collaboration. Within months Hurd had won the plum assignment for illustration famed Gertrude Stein's first children's book, *The World is Round* (1939), a project that Brown was proud to have initiated.

It was also at this time that Clement Hurd married another talented picture-book writer and friend of Brown's, Edith Thacher. Over the next forty-five years, the Hurds became one of the field's best known teams, collaborating on dozens of projects, including such picture-book favorites as *Johnny Lion's Book* (1965), *The Day the Sun Danced* (1966) and *Wilson's World* (1971). The couple soon moved to Vermont, where their son, Thacher, was born in 1949. Years later, and accomplished picture book author and artist in his own right, Thacher Hurd would recall the "wonderful aura of creativity" that surrounded his father and the magical feeling of the family's Vermont farm, which their friend, the illustrator Leonard Weisgard, had named Peaceable Kingdom.

But it was as the illustrator of two picture books written by Brown -- *The Runaway Bunny* (1942) and *Goodnight Moon* (1947) -- that Hurd achieved his greatest fame. For those two little bedtime books, the artist produced work of incomparable tenderness, gentle wit, and pictorial enchantment.

As the years passed, both books grew steadily in popularity, attaining classic status as the quintessential first book with which to introduce the very young to the lifelong pleasures of reading. A half century after that book's original publication, the magic of Clement Hurd's vivid, childlike art remains.

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About the Company

Founded in 1972, Mermaid Theatre's unique adaptations of children's literature have delighted more than four million young people on four continents. The company ranks among North America's most respected theatres for the young, and has won widespread recognition for its important ambassadorial role. Mermaid regularly crosses North America, and has represented Canada in Japan, Mexico, Australia, England, Northern Ireland, Holland, Scotland, Wales, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam. Mermaid has earned Export Excellence Awards from both Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada in recognition for contributions to the Province's culture and economy, has merited an award for Best Performing Group from the Canadian Arts Presenting Association, and received the Crystal Tourism Ambassador Award from Nova Scotia's tourism industry leaders in the Fall of 2008.

Mermaid Theatre's emphasis on imaginative design elements, original music, and challenging texts provides a rich opportunity to acquaint young spectators with the visual and performing arts as well as with the pleasures of reading. In addition to its international engagements, Mermaid Theatre regularly tours throughout Nova Scotia with specially designed programs designed to stimulate classroom learning as well as enthusiasm for the art of puppetry. Mermaid's puppetry programs at all levels as well as its dynamic Youtheatre activities offer vital outreach opportunities.

The Stories

Goodnight Moon is a short poem of goodnight wishes from a young rabbit preparing for--or attempting to postpone--his own slumber. He says goodnight to every object in sight and within earshot, including the "quiet old lady whispering hush." Clement Hurd's illustrations are simple and effective, alternating between small ink drawings and wide, brightly colored views of the little rabbit's room.

The Runaway Bunny begins with a young bunny who decides to run away: "'If you run away,' said his mother, 'I will run after you. For you are my little bunny.'" And so begins a delightful, imaginary game of chase. No matter how many forms the little bunny takes--a fish in a stream, a crocus in a hidden garden, a rock on a mountain--his steadfast, adoring, protective mother finds a way of retrieving him. The soothing rhythm of the bunny banter along with the surreal, dream-like pictures never fail to infuse young readers with a complete sense of security and peace. This old favorite will comfort and reassure.

Activities

Explore with Music

Parts of the book *Goodnight Moon* tie in well with the songs “Hey Diddle Diddle” and “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.”

First, practice singing “Hey Diddle Diddle” with your child, highlighting the rhymed word-pairs such as “the cat and the fiddle,” etc. You could use a book such as “Classic Nursery Rhymes” by Paige Weber to reinforce the song with images. Then ask your students which parts show up again in *Goodnight Moon*.

Then look at the pages that focus on the sky and the outdoors, especially when the bunny says, “Goodnight stars.” At this point you can introduce your students to the song “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.” Again, rhyming lines can be highlighted. There also exists a longer version of the song if your students are prepared for longer songs:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twinkle_twinkle_little_star#Lyrics

You can easily incorporate dance or music into this activity by accentuating the rhythm of the nursery rhymes. As you work with your students on these fundamental skills of auditory comprehension and analysis, keep up the positive, specific feedback about their progress and remind them of the show itself.

Explore with Math

The simple storyline in *Goodnight Moon* lends itself well to developing mathematical ability. After having found the mouse in each full-page color spread of *Goodnight Moon*, ask your students to count how many times they have seen the mouse (including when the bunny says “Goodnight mouse”) and move to other counting patterns. Can your students count the mittens in twos? This can be extended out into your classroom – how many pencils can you find in the room? How about desks or tables? Pairs of mittens?

Explore with Art

Have students draw pictures of their own bedrooms, reminding them to include everything they would like to say “goodnight” to before they go to bed. Students can also be encouraged to draw pictures of the night sky, including the moon and stars.

Explain to students that one person wrote the stories for *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* while another person drew the pictures to go along. Students can use the following coloring pages to add their own colors to the illustrations from the books.

Explore with Reading

Expand beyond *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* with these books that have similar characters and themes.

My World by Margaret Wise Brown – This melodic companion narrated by the endearing rabbit child introduces those elements of his life that he holds most dear. In alternating spreads, Hurd portrays simple, black-and-white images of items or pastimes and full-color scenarios spawned by those images. The final color spread underscores the volume's universality, as well as the little rabbit's contentment: swinging from a tree branch as his parents sit nearby on the porch, he announces: "Your world. / My world. / I can swing/ Right over the world." The volume's words and pictures stretch the boundaries of its time-honored predecessor, affirming that there is, indeed, a warm and welcoming world beyond the great green room.

Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney – In this book, a young rabbit named Little Nutbrown Hare thinks he's found a way to measure the boundaries of love. In a heartwarming twist on the "I-can-do-anything-you-can-do-better" theme, Little Nutbrown Hare goes through a series of declarations regarding the breadth of his love for Big Nutbrown Hare. But even when his feelings stretch as long as his arms, or as high as his hops, Little Nutbrown Hare is fondly one-upped by the elder rabbit's more expansive love.

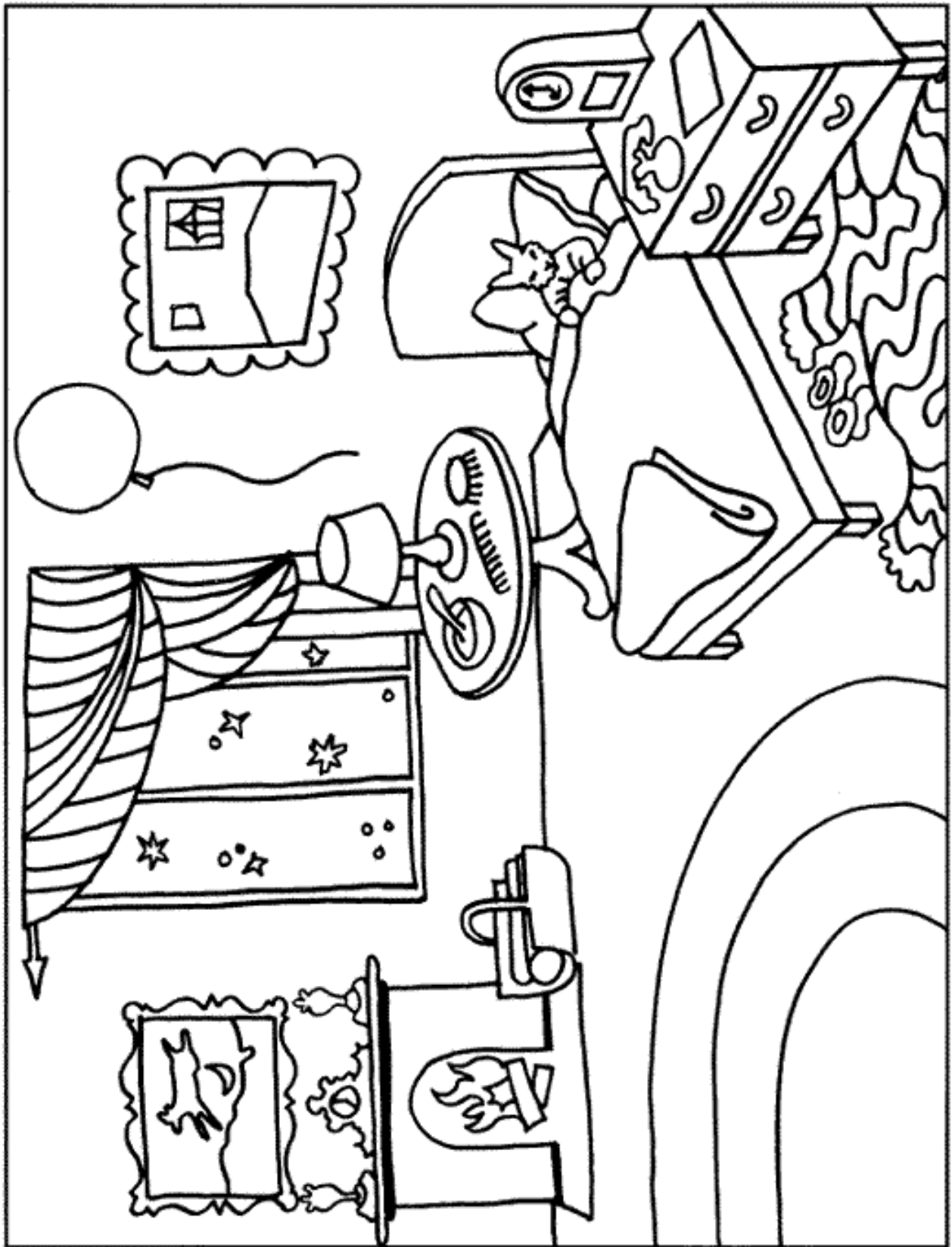
Online Resources

More activities related to *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* are available online.

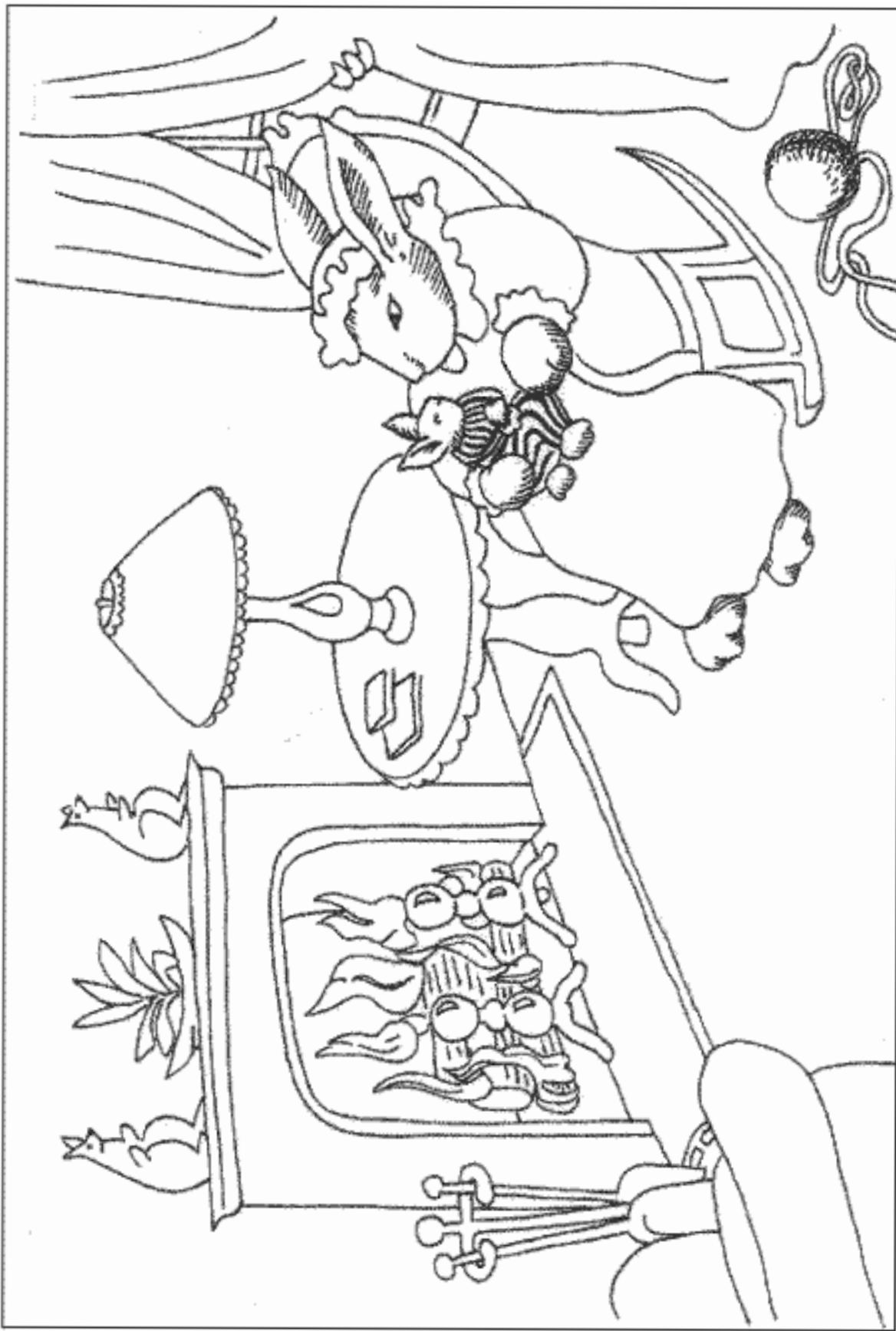
http://www.homeschoolshare.com/b4_resources_goodnight_moon.php

http://www.homeschoolshare.com/b4_resources_runaway_bunny.php

This website was designed for homeschool parents, and it has activity ideas that include templates you can print and use with your class. The "Activity Guide" listed for each book contains projects relating the books to other subject areas.



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