

Rag & Bone Puppet Theatre

# The Dolls' House

*from the book by*

Rumer Godden



Study Guide

# Table of Contents

Dear Teachers .....	3
Before the play .....	4
Vocabulary.....	5
The Company .....	6
Meet the Author.....	7
The Story .....	8
The Characters .....	9
Story Graphic Organizer .....	10
Comprehension & Discussion Questions.....	11
Suggested answers to the discussion questions .....	13
Word Search.....	14



Image from Carlo Raso: *Historical dolls from 18th up to 20th century*

# Dear Teachers

Thank you for inviting us into your school to present *The Dolls' House*.

This Study Guide will give you some ideas which you can adapt to the needs of your class for preparation, follow up and extended learning, including history and even some philosophy! If you have any comments or suggestions, let us know!

All the best,

Kathy MacLellan & John Nolan

Ragandbone.ca

FYI, Here's a review of the show:

*If you're a doll and see one of your kind named Marzipan in the distance, you'd best gather your family and head the other way. That golden-haired beauty spells disaster for you all, at least if your surname is Plantaganet. That's the upshot of this gentle show, which is adapted from Rumer Godden's children's story and features John Nolan, Kathy MacLellan and accompanying musician Russell Levia.*

*At times using dolls as puppets and at others becoming the dolls themselves, Nolan and MacLellan track the fate of the Plantaganets, who are delighted when they can trade the shoebox in which they've been living for a lovely Victorian dollhouse, but are*

The doll house we made for the show, with Tottie standing in front.



*then displaced when the cruel Marzipan appears. The family-friendly show honours innocence, kindness and hope, and, on Saturday, proved as entrancing for the adults as for the children in the audience. —Patrick Langston, ArtsFile*

# Before the play

What do you notice about the music you hear in movies or TV shows?

Be on the lookout for how music works in this show.

If you were going to put on a play about the lives of small dolls in a dolls' house, how would you stage it?

How do you turn a book into a play?

What is different about a movie or TV show and a play?

Do you ever make up stories with your toys? What kind of toys do you use?





# Vocabulary



## KEY WORDS:

*These words are important to the story. You might make sure ELL students know them:*

Dolls	Burn	House
Play	Family	
Flame	Home	

*A few words younger students might not be familiar with:*

Battered	Kennel	Butler
Ivy	Fireplace	Fluttered
Feather duster	Grime	Museum
Selfish	Checkers	Lace
Great-great aunt	Cracker box	

*Less familiar words:*

Shortage	Marzipan	Featherstitching
Paratrooper	Scarce	
Celluloid	Crocheted	

# The Company

Founded in 1978 by John Nolan and Kathy MacLellan, Rag & Bone's shows include *The Nightingale*, *A Promise is a Promise*, *The Story of Holly & Ivy*, *Felicity Falls*, *The Light Princess*, *Zoom at Sea*, *The Tempest*, *The Flying Canoe*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Last Polar Bears* and *Owl at Home*. Rag & Bone has been awarded a Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry from UNIMA-USA, the international puppetry association.

Kathy MacLellan is an award winning writer, performer and puppet-maker. Kathy has written over fifty television scripts, including episodes of *Under the Umbrella Tree*, *Theodore Tugboat*, and *Mr. Dressup*.

Actor, puppeteer, and designer John Nolan has built sets, props and puppets for stage and television, and has appeared on television and in many theatres, including GCTC, The National Arts Centre, Opera Lyra and Odyssey Theatre. He played Jackson on YTV's *Crazy Quilt*.

Kathy & John have also taught many puppet-making and drama workshops in schools across Ontario.

In the Ottawa area we are accompanied by musician Russell Levia, and, on tour, by Ainsley McNeaney.

Russell is a popular Ottawa musician who appears frequently in clubs, folk festivals, and daycare centres. He has been working with Rag & Bone for 20 years.



The Last Polar Bears



Felicity Falls



The Wind in the Willows

Ainsley, a singer-songwriter based in Montreal, has an honours degree from the University of Toronto in classical percussion performance, and has been singing and playing the piano her whole life.

# Meet the Author

## RUMER GODDEN

Rumer Godden, OBE (10 December 1907–8 November 1998) was an internationally renowned novelist, translator, and writer of children's books.

Many of these have dolls as central figures. With remarkable integrity, compassion, understanding and humour, she describes the world that they live in.

In *The Dolls' House*, Rumer Godden says, "Dolls cannot choose; they cannot do; they can only be done by. They can only wish hard for the right thing to happen.

## OTHER BOOKS BY RUMER GODDEN

<i>The Mousewife</i>	<i>The Rocking Horse Secret</i>
<i>Mouse House</i>	<i>A Kindle of Kittens</i>
<i>Impunity Jane</i>	<i>The Dragon of Og</i>
<i>The Fairy Doll</i>	<i>Four Dolls</i>
<i>The Story of Holly &amp; Ivy</i>	<i>The Valiant Chatti-Maker</i>
<i>Candy Floss</i>	<i>Mouse Time</i>
<i>Saint Jerome &amp; the Lion</i>	<i>Fu-Dog</i>
<i>Miss Happiness &amp; Miss Flower</i>	<i>Great Grandfather's House</i>
<i>Little Plum</i>	<i>Listen to the Nightingale</i>
<i>Home is the Sailor</i>	<i>The Little Chair</i>
<i>The Kitchen Madonna</i>	<i>Thursdays Children</i>
<i>Operation Sippacik</i>	<i>Premlata &amp; the Festival of</i>
<i>The Diddakoi</i>	<i>Lights</i>
<i>Mr. McFadden's Hallowe'en</i>	



# The Story



Image: State Archives of Florida/Streetman

Tottie is a loving little wooden doll who lives with her family in a shoebox.

The doll family are owned by two sisters, Emily and Charlotte, and are very happy, except for one thing: they long for a proper home. To their delight, their wish comes true when Emily and Charlotte fix up a Victorian dolls' house—just for them. It's perfect.

But then a new arrival starts to wreak havoc in the dolls' house. For Marzipan might be a wonderfully

beautiful doll, but she is also terribly cruel. And she always gets her own way . . .

*“But what it is about is loyalty, betrayal, courage, vanity and folly, within a story as beautifully and finely worked as the tiny tapestry chairs the dolls sit on in their lovely new house. Their happiness is shattered by the arrival of one of the house’s original residents. Unlike Tottie, however, she is a very grand doll, made of kid and china and clothed in lace. “Marzipan is a heavy, sweet, sticky stuff like almond icing,” explains Tottie to Apple. “You very quickly have enough of it. It was a good name for her.” Marzipan drives a wedge between Emily, who wants to turn the whole house over to Marzipan and make the other dolls her servants, and the younger Charlotte, who struggles to articulate her sense of injustice until the tragedy of Birdie’s death reveals the truth. So you see, it’s not about dolls at all—it’s as neat a portrait of humanity as you could ever wish.”* —Lucy Mangan, *The Guardian*

The story is also about family, bullying and inclusion, about making good choices, about the lasting value of carefully crafted objects, and self-sacrifice. It also respects, validates and models the way that children play with toys, one of the basic tenets of Rag & Bone’s mandate and mission.



# The Characters

## *Emily and Charlotte Dane*

The sisters who own the dolls' house and the dolls.



## *Tottie*

Tottie Plantagenet was a little wooden doll. She wasn't an expensive doll, but she was made of wood, good solid wood from a tall, strong tree. "A little of that tree is in me, I am a little of that tree."

## *Mr Plantagenet*

Mr. Plantagenet was easily frightened. Emily & Charlotte had found him battered and broken in a dark toy cupboard. Somehow that darkness stayed with him. It was almost as if Tottie was the father and he was the child. But there are real fathers like that.



## *Mrs Plantagenet*

Mrs. Plantagenet—Birdie—was not quite right in the head. Something in her head rattled. She was made of celluloid, a light weight plastic that burns very easily. Originally, she had been the prize in a box of crackers jacks.



## *Apple*

Apple Plantagenet was a little boy doll. He was wearing a sailor suit. He was very naughty, but everyone who saw him loved him, and said, "such a dear little doll!"



## *Darner*

Darner, the dog, loved to go to the park with Emily and Charlotte. He liked to growl at real dogs.

## *Marzipan*

Marzipan was valuable and expensive. She had beautiful clothes, with tiny pearls and real lace, stitched with delicate featherstitching.



# Story Graphic Organizer

Name: ..... Date: .....

Title: .....

**Characters:**

**Setting:**

**Problem:**

**Solution:**

**The story makes me think of:**

# Comprehension & Discussion Questions

Teachers: We've suggested some answers to these questions on a separate sheet.



Bane News Service: Doll raffled for Belgian Relief. Circa 1915. Library of Congress

## CHARACTERS

In a story, we can find out about a person's character in many ways:

- what the author says about them
- what other characters say about them
- what they say
- what they do

What do you remember about the characters in *The Dolls' House*? Can you describe each in one word? How did you find out about these characters?

## FORESHADOWING

Foreshadowing is an author's way of hinting at a future event. In what way is fire foreshadowed in *The Dolls' House*?

## FAMILIES

Nobody in the Plantagenet family is perfect, but they are a happy family even before the dollhouse comes. In what way is each character not perfect?

Why are they happy?

The dolls do not match—each is made in a different way, and has a different history. Are they still a family? Why or why not?

## HEROIC QUALITIES

A hero is often described as a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. Who is the hero of this story? Why?

## THE ENDING

This story has a surprising ending. It's sad in some ways but happy in others. In what way does each character get what they want?

## THEMATIC QUESTIONS

Here are some things Tottie says in the play. How does the story prove each of them to be true?

- Things that are carefully made can last a long time.
- Don't waste time hating. We must wish.
- Trees bend a little in the wind, but they don't break.
- If he could have a job, and go to work, he would be so happy.

## MUSIC

- How did the music help show the feelings in the story?
- What did you hear?
- Can you remember some music that sounded fast?  
Slow? Loud? Soft? Funny? Sad?
- What instruments do you remember?
- What other sounds did you hear?



Eileen Dunne, aged three, sits in bed with her doll at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, after being injured during an air raid on London in September 1940. Cecil Beton, Imperial War Museums.



## Some suggested answers to the discussion questions



Interior of a 17th century doll house. Wikipedia Commons

### CHARACTERS

What do you remember about the characters in *The Dolls' House*? Can you describe each in one word? How did you find out about these characters?

*(Birdie—feathers, fluffy. Tottie—wood, sensible. Mr. Plantagenet—worried, broken. Apple—cheerful, naughty. Marzipan—beautiful, cruel.)*

### FORESHADOWING

Foreshadowing is an author's way of hinting at a future event. In what way is fire foreshadowed in *The Dolls' House*?

*(Birdie is made out of celluloid, and celluloid burns easily; they'll have to be careful of that candle; Apple almost rolls into the fireplace; the candle is lit.)*

### FAMILIES

Nobody in the Plantagenet family is perfect, but they are a happy family even before the dollhouse comes. In what way is each character not perfect?

*(Birdie—not right in the head. Mr. Plantagenet—worried. Tottie—not expensive. Apple—naughty.)*

Why are they happy?

*(Because they love each other.)*

The dolls do not match—each is made in a different way, and has a different history. Are they still a family? Why or why not?

*(Yes—because they love each other and look after each other.)*

### HEROIC QUALITIES

A hero is often described as a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. Who is the hero of this story? Why?

*(Birdie is unselfish, kind, fair, always thinks of others and sacrifices herself for Apple.)*

### THE ENDING

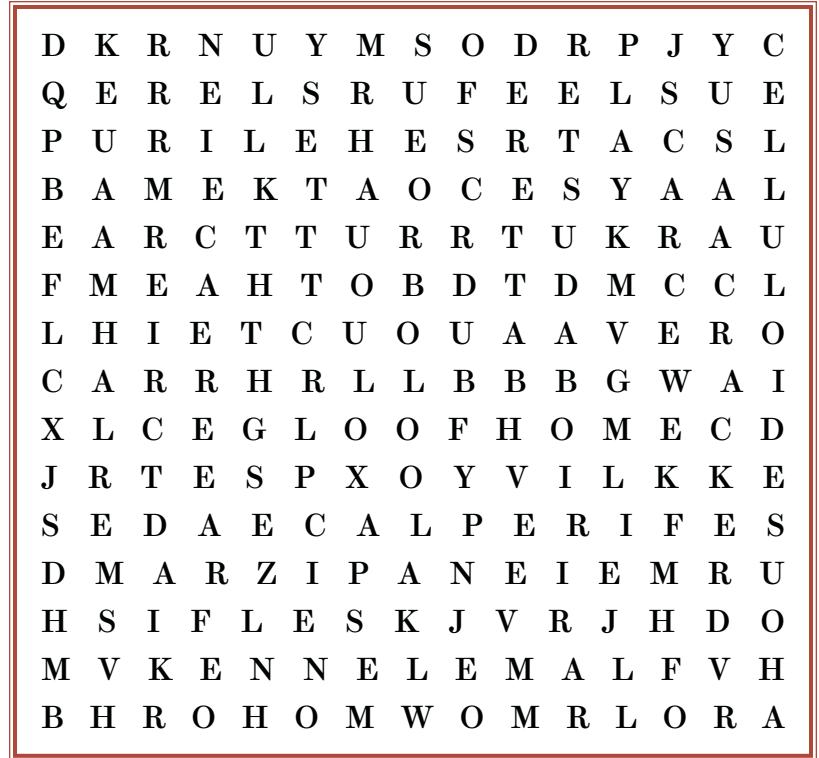
This story has a surprising ending. It's sad in some ways but happy in others. In what way does each character get what they want?

*(Birdie wants to save Apple, also wants to be like a Christmas fairy. Apple wants a crib where he'll be safe. Darner wants a dog house. Mr. Plantagenet wants to have a job. Tottie wants life to go on. Emily and Charlotte come up with a solution for Marzipan together. Tottie and Mr. Plantagenet remember that Birdie would be happy—she couldn't help but be happy.)*

# Word Search

*There are words hiding in the box of letters. Can you find them? They could be hidden upside-down, backwards or on a diagonal! Circle the letters of the list words.*

- |           |             |
|-----------|-------------|
| battered  | grime       |
| box       | home        |
| burn      | house       |
| butler    | ivy         |
| celluloid | kennel      |
| checkers  | lace        |
| cracker   | marzipan    |
| crocheted | museum      |
| dolls     | paratrooper |
| duster    | play        |
| family    | scarce      |
| feather   | selfish     |
| fireplace | shortage    |
| flame     |             |
| fluttered |             |



Inuit Dolls: Von Annie Ainarlik Parr, Cape Dorset.  
Photo: Wikipedia Commons



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