

BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

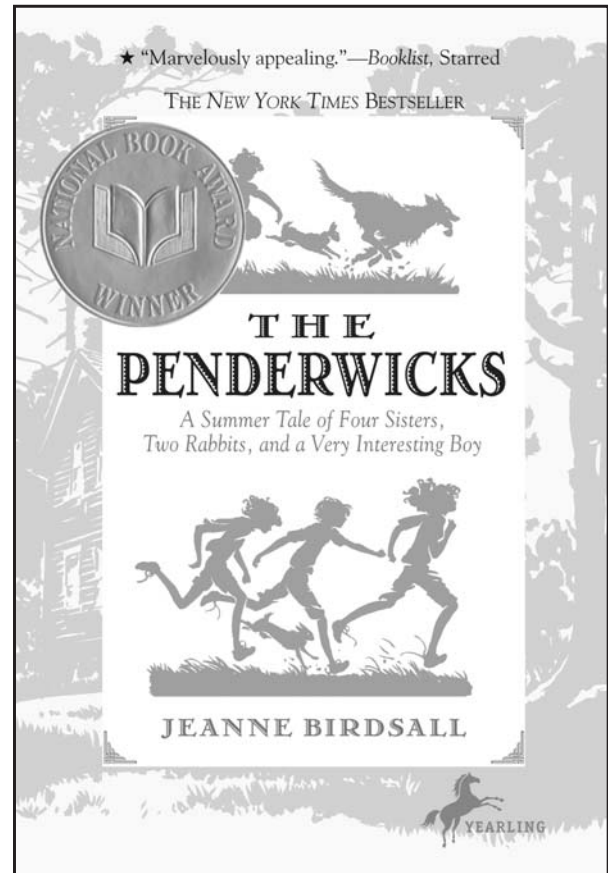
**Curriculum Connections
and a Readers'
Theater Activity Inside!**

Grades 4–7

about the book

By transplanting contemporary little women into a modern secret garden, Jeanne Birdsall has created a highly enjoyable, action-packed tale that captures the allure of a Victorian novel replete with gothic towers, secret passages, a mysterious boy, a disagreeable landlady, and an omniscient narrator.

The Penderwick sisters have looked out for each other since the death of their mother. Twelve-year-old Rosalind is the practical, responsible one; Skye, eleven, is teaching herself algebra; Jane, ten, plays soccer and writes stories; and shy four-year-old Batty finds reassurance in the family dog, Hound. Who wouldn't want to rent a summer cottage to this delightful crew and their college professor father? Not, it turns out, the snooty Mrs. Tifton, owner of Arundel Hall, who considers the Penderwicks too vulgar to associate with her eleven-year-old son Jeffrey. Can the Penderwicks obey her orders and not enter the forbidden gardens of the Arundel estate? Can they convince her that rather than being sent to a military academy, Jeffrey should be allowed to follow his dream of becoming a musician? Can they restore the Penderwick Family Honor after all the chaos they have caused on the estate?



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readers' theater

STARRING THE PENDERWICKS



After students perform the script on the previous page, distribute copies of the script to the class so they can compare it with the original text. This will serve as a model for them as they create their own readers' theater performances based on other sections of the novel.

Here are some guidelines for helping students create readers' theater performances for their classmates.

1. Form readers' theater groups of 4–6 students who have all finished reading the novel.
2. Have group members collaborate to decide on a part of the novel they consider particularly exciting or moving or entertaining that they would like to perform for their classmates. Passages with lots of dialogue work best.
3. Divide the passage into parts according to who is speaking. Add a part for a narrator if necessary. When there is a lot of narration, divide it up between readers for the sake of variety. A reader can be both a character and a narrator if the divisions are carefully assigned.
4. Retype the passage, taking out all the “he said” and “she said” and any other distracting or unnecessary words.
5. Assign one member the role of director. It will be his or her responsibility to make suggestions to the other students who will be reading the parts.
6. Assign the various parts to the other members of the group.
7. Practice reading the script as dramatically as possible without the use of staging, props, or costumes. The only action necessary is eye contact between characters speaking to each other and an occasional hand gesture.

Readers rely on the author's words to convey the meaning, emotion, and importance of

the passage. It is helpful to put the scripts in notebooks with pages that turn easily. Readers may stand or sit on stools behind music stands that hold their script notebooks.

8. Sequence the class performances so the various readings tell the Penderwicks' story in the order it occurs in the novel. Introductions are not necessary; let the words speak for themselves.
9. Grade students on their cooperation, effort, improvement, and enthusiasm.
10. Stress that the most important aspect of this assignment is enjoying the literature from which the readers' theater comes and encouraging others to enjoy it through the performance.

Students may wonder why the teacher doesn't just hand out prefabricated scripts for the various parts of the novel. If they ask for this, remind them that, by creating their own scripts, they deepen their involvement with the novel and will therefore come to understand it and the author's craft more fully. If they are truly at a loss for what passages to use, you might suggest the first MOOPS meeting (pages 33–37), the incident with the bull (pages 57–62—multiple narrators would be needed for this passage), Jeffrey's birthday dinner (pages 106–111), Batty and the rabbits (pages 128–131), the rabbit chase (pages 137–143), the soccer practice/Garden Club competition (pages 159–166), the piano lesson (pages 178–183), Rosalind's midnight stroll in the garden (pages 199–203), or Jeffrey runs away (pages 223–231).

Please keep in mind that the more students are empowered to interact meaningfully with the text, the more they increase their prospects of becoming lifelong readers and lovers of literature.



pre-reading activity

On the first page of *The Penderwicks*, the narrator asks, “But then what is a summer without a trip to someplace special?” Ask students to respond to this question with a journal entry about a special summer trip of their own.

Follow this writing activity by reading the first three pages of the book aloud and asking students to write another journal entry about traveling with siblings.

Does the passage you read about the Penderwicks remind them of a personal experience or a situation they have read about or seen in a movie or on TV? Ask them to describe it.

When they finish writing, group the class in literature circles of four to six students and have them discuss their journal responses.

The students’ discussion about summer trips and family travels will provide a natural segue into the introduction of *The Penderwicks*—a story of a family’s summer vacation adventures on the Arundel estate.

curriculum connections

Language Arts

Journaling—Allow students to enjoy the novel by reading it straight through without instructional interruptions. When they finish, have them write a journal entry describing their response to the novel as a whole. What did they find particularly appealing about the story? Which characters can they relate to the most? What in the story reminds them of their own experiences?

Writing—Rosalind is constantly writing letters to her friend Anna about her experiences at Arundel. Suggest interested students imagine what Rosalind would write and compose a set of letters from her to Anna.

Jane writes stories about Sabrina Starr. Encourage students to recreate Jane’s Sabrina Starr stories, or have them devise new Sabrina Starr rescue stories based on the adventures of the Penderwicks at Arundel.

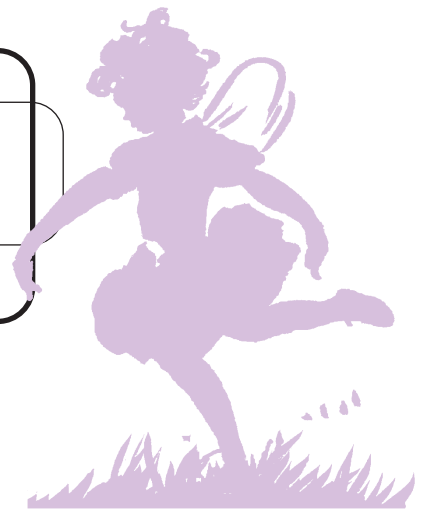
Literature—Jane lives in the world of books and she makes references to authors, characters, titles, and phrases familiar to book lovers. Send students on a quest (via the Internet, family members, friends, librarians—anyone but the teacher) to discover more about the following: Cair Paravel, El Dorado, Camelot, Louisa May Alcott, Patricia MacLachlan, the Bastable family, the Queen of Narnia, Dr. Jeckyll, Mr. Hyde, Magic by the Lake, Hamlet’s girlfriend Ophelia (this one is from *Rosalind*), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (from a movie seen by Jeffrey).

According to Jane, a great book is one you can read over and over and never get tired of it. Ask students to share experiences they have had with books that would be considered great by Jane’s definition. Make a list of these and post it on the classroom wall for students who want recommendations for future reading.

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curriculum connections (continued)



Storytelling—Rosalind tells Batty a bedtime story every night. Pair students and encourage them to tell each other stories based on family experiences or about adventures they invent.

Speech Making—When Skye insults Jeffrey and his mother, Jane is elected to deliver a formal apology speech. Ask students to compose apologies other characters from the novel might want to make to each other, memorize them, and deliver them to their literature circle members.

Listening—Everyone agrees that Mrs. Tipton does not listen to Jeffrey as she should. If the Penderwicks and Jeffrey were to create some listening guidelines for her, what would they be? Suggest several students write these up and share them with other class members.

Vocabulary/Use of Language—*The Penderwicks* abounds with wonderful, fascinating, even unusual words. Have students go through the book and collect interesting words. Then suggest they follow Jane's example and look them up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Art

Character Portraits—Jeffrey's family has a portrait of his grandfather in his general's uniform hanging in the family portrait gallery. If the Penderwicks and their friends were to have portraits painted, how would each of them be dressed? Have volunteer artists in class paint these portraits based on character sketches devised by other class members. The character sketches should include each character's interests, personality traits, and dress preferences.

Drawing the Garden—Based on Birdsall's detailed descriptions of the Arundel gardens and grounds, have interested students create a portfolio of drawings to present to the Garden Club competition committee.

Artistic References—The ceiling in the dining room of Arundel Hall is reminiscent of Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. Suggest students conduct research on this famous artist and report on his methods for creating the ceiling.

Social Studies

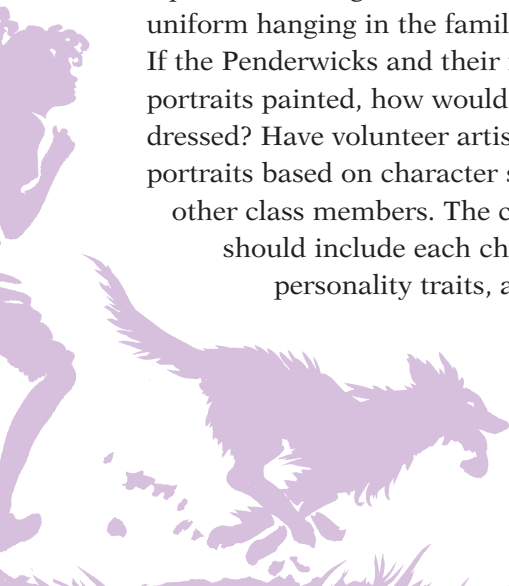
Cagney is delighted when Rosalind gives him a book of Civil War photographs. Ask for a volunteer or two to go to the library and check out a book of Civil War photographs to share with the class so they can see why Cagney was interested in this topic.

Science

The following flowers can be found in Arundel gardens: fimbriata rosebush, pink jasmine, nasturtium, lily, delphinium. Have students look them up on the Internet and create a gardening guide that includes images of these flowers and instructions for their care.

Math

Jeffrey tries to interest Skye in music by playing a Bach piece and talking about mathematical progressions. Ask a student who is interested in both math and music to explain to the class the connections that Jeffrey was trying to explain to Skye.



readers' theater

STARRING THE PENDERWICKS



With lively dialogue, characters with distinct personalities, and lots of action, *The Penderwicks* can provide excellent opportunities for student-created readers' theater experiences.

Introduce the concept of readers' theater by asking six students to practice and read (using their best expressive reading skills) the following script, which was created from pages 2–3 of the novel.

Skye: "It's Batty's fault."

Batty: "It is not."

Skye: "Of course it is. We wouldn't be lost if Hound hadn't eaten the map, and Hound wouldn't have eaten the map if you hadn't hidden your sandwich in it."

Jane: "Maybe it's fate that Hound ate the map. Maybe we'll discover something wonderful while we're lost."

Skye: "We'll discover that, when I'm in the back seat for too long with my younger sisters, I go insane and murder them."

Mr. P.: "Steady, troops. Rosalind, how about a game?"

Rosalind: "Let's do I Went to the Zoo and I Saw. I went to the zoo and I saw an anteater. Jane?"

Jane: "I went to the zoo and I saw an anteater and a buffalo."

Narrator: Batty was between Jane and Skye, so her turn was next.

Batty: "I went to the zoo and I saw an anteater, a buffalo, and a kangaroo."

Skye: "*Kangaroo* starts with a *k*, not a *c*."

Batty: "It does not. It starts with a *c*, like *cat*."

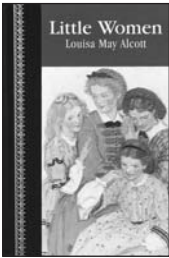
Rosalind: "Just take your turn, Skye."

Skye: "There's no point in playing if we don't do it right."

Narrator: Rosalind, who was sitting in the front seat with Mr. Penderwick, turned around and gave Skye her oldest-sister stare. It wouldn't do much, Rosalind knew. After all Skye was only one year younger than she was. But it might quiet her long enough for Rosalind to concentrate on where they were going. They really were badly lost. This trip should have taken an hour and a half, and already they'd been on the road for three.

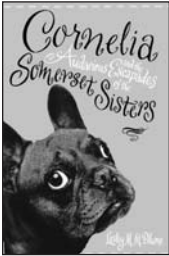
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about the author

Jeanne Birdsall lives in Massachusetts with her husband, four cats, a rabbit, a puppy, and a pet snail. She is working on another book about the Penderwick sisters.

praise for The Penderwicks

★ “Birdsall follows in the footsteps of Elizabeth Enright, Edward Eager, and Noel Streatfeild, updating the family story yet keeping all the old-fashioned charm.”

—*Booklist*, Starred

★ “Problems are solved and lessons learned in this wonderful, humorous book that features characters whom readers will immediately love, as well as a superb writing style. Bring on more of the Penderwicks!”

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**Look for the Penderwicks’
next adventure in summer 2008!**

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