

The Pied Piper of Hamelin



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Adapted from the 1842 poem by Robert Browning

Illustrations by Kate Greenaway, 1888

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For Willy Macready

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

CHILDREN'S/ADAPTATION. This play preserves much of the original verse of Robert Browning's poem but has been modified so that it can be performed by young actors. Hamelin is suffering a horrible rat infestation, and the Mayor hires the Pied Piper to rid the town of rats. The Pied Piper plays his magical flute and leads the rats away, but when he goes to collect his fee, the town officials refuse to pay him. To punish the town for its greed, the Pied Piper plays his flute and leads the children to a cave where they disappear. This play is easy to stage and is perfect for actors of all ages including young children.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.



Kate Greenaway (1846-1901)

About the illustrator

Kate Greenaway's illustrations of the "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" were printed in 1888. Kate Greenaway had a photographic memory and based many of her watercolor illustrations on her childhood, which she regarded as the happiest time of her life. The Kate Greenaway Medal is awarded annually in Great Britain to honor children's book illustrators.



About the Story

Robert Browning's 1842 poem is based on a legend about the disappearance of children from the town of Hamelin, Germany. The earliest mention of the legend dates to a stained glass window (1300) located in a church in Hamelin. A watercolor painting by Freiherr Augustin von Moersperg (pictured above) depicts this window, which was destroyed in 1660. It is thought that the window was created to commemorate a tragic historical event when many Hamelin children died or disappeared. The addition of rats to the legend was not added until 1559 and some scholars theorize that the legend could refer to a mass emigration to Eastern Europe in the 13th century, or that an epidemic, a drowning accident, or a landslide led to the demise of the children.

Characters

(12 flexible, extras)
(Doubling possible)

NARRATOR: Reads from a podium.

PIED PIPER: Wears a gypsy coat of red and yellow and plays the flute (or recorded music can be used.)

MAYOR: Town's dishonest mayor.

STOUT RAT: Rat who loves cheese.

LAME CHILD: Walks with a crutch.

BLACK CAT: Has a long bandaged tail; non-speaking.

WHITE RABBIT: Has a large bandage where his right ear should be; non-speaking.

PARROT: Has one wing in a sling; non-speaking.

DALMATION: Carries a crutch; non-speaking.

CALICO CAT: Has one arm in a sling and a bandage around his forehead; non-speaking.

SLY RED FOX: Non-speaking.

OWL: Non-speaking.

CHORUS: Light Voices are on one side and Dark Voices are on the other.

EXTRAS: As Rats, Dogs, Cats, and Children.

Setting

1284, Town of Hamelin, Germany.

Set

Stage is bare except for choir risers SL and a lectern DSC. All other areas are designated for staging of rats and children.

Props

2 Signs that read, "Where it happened."
Sign that reads, "Polly want a cracker" on one side and "The people's protest and the dilemma of the mayor and council" on the other.
Sign that reads, "A bargain struck"
Sign that reads, "The Pied Piper plies his magic"
Flute
Small sign that reads, "A brief celebration"
Sign that reads, "The Swindle"
Sign that reads, "The Piper's warning"
Sign that reads, "The Mayor's challenge"
Sign that reads, "The Pied Piper plies his magic again"
Sign that reads, "Regret is futile"
Sign that reads, "A Transylvanian Rumor"
Sign that reads, "The moral"

Sound Effects

Cartoon-type music
Tiny feet scuffling about
Squeaking
Knock on the door
Church bells ringing
Flute music

"When, lo,
As they reached the mountainside,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced
and the children followed."

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

(AT RISE: The Narrator enters DSR and goes to the podium.)

NARRATOR: *(To audience.)* Friends, I have a tale to tell,

And if you're wise,
You'll attend it well.

It's a little gory –
This ancient story.

It's all about greed
And corruption and fraud
With a moral at the end
That I think you'll applaud.

(The Chorus enters SL onto the choir risers. A Black Cat with a long bandaged tail enters DLC. He holds up a sign that reads, "Where it happened.")

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick
By famous Hanover City.
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its walls on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied.
The time is the year of twelve eighty-four;
The original legend's in German.
The townsfolk needed to settle a score
With a multitude of vermin.

(A White Rabbit with a large bandage where his right ear should be enters DLC. He holds up a sign that reads, "Where it happened.")

CHORUS: Rats! *(Dozens of Rats enter. Big rats, small rats, and different colored rats. A few Dogs are seen being chased by Rats. Rats have Cats cornered and are attacking them. All the violence must be in comic form and cartoon-like. The entire scene should depict the following scenario, which should be choreographed with*



cartoon-type background music where the physical action is timed to the music.)

They fought the dogs and killed the cats.

LIGHT VOICES: And bit the babies in the cradles.

DARK VOICES: And ate the cheeses out of the vats.

LIGHT VOICES: And licked the soup from cooks' own ladles,
Swung on the drapes like acrobats.

DARK VOICES: Made nests inside men's Sunday hats.

LIGHT VOICES: And even spoiled the women's chats.

LIGHT AND DARK VOICES: By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

(A Parrot with a wing in a sling enters DSL, crosses to DCS, and holds up a sign that reads, "Polly want a cracker." Suddenly, the Parrot realizes that something is wrong. She turns her head back and forth several times, reads the sign, and turns it around so that it now reads, "The people's protest and the dilemma of the mayor and council.")

NARRATOR: At last the people raised their voices
And to the Mayor and Council said,

(The Mayor, seated with the Chorus, goes CS.)

CHORUS: *(To Mayor.)* When we voted for you, we made
wrong choices.
You're overpaid and overfed,
You don't know how to keep your head,
And only fools could not determine
The way to rid us of our vermin.
Rouse up, sirs. Give your brain a wracking
To find the remedy we're lacking
Or sure as fate we'll send you packing!

NARRATOR: They shook their fists in indignation,
(The Chorus members shake their fists in the air).



And the Mayor decided to change the location
Of the place where he and his Council would meet.
He chose a back room.

(The Chorus turns their backs to the audience.)

Far from the street,

(The Chorus turns and faces full front.)

But still if they listened, they could hear

Those shouts of protest, muffled but clear.

But what made their hearts skip another beat

(The sound of cartoon-like tiny feet scuffling about and squeaking sounds are heard.)

Was the hurry and scurry of tiny feet

Around, above, beneath, below,

The rats were scuttling to and fro—

In the walls and in the drains,

On shaving stands and windowpanes,

Just beyond the thick oak door

And underneath the inlaid floor.

Then the Council and the Mayor

Lifted their voices in a prayer

That someone would get them out of there.

The Mayor said,

MAYOR: Oh, for a trap, a trap!

NARRATOR: Just as he said this, what should hap

At the thick oak door but a gentle tap. *(Tap on a door is heard.)*

MAYOR: Bless us,

NARRATOR: Cried the Mayor,

MAYOR: What's that?

(Frightened, the Mayor moves quickly back to stand in front of the Chorus.)

NARRATOR: With the City Council as he sat

Looking little though wondrous fat,

Nor brighter was his eye, or moister



Than to too-long-opened oyster
MAYOR: Only a scraping of shoes on the mat.
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat.
Come in!

NARRATOR: The Mayor cried, looking bigger,
And in did come the strangest figure!
(The Pied Piper enters USR and crosses DSC.)
His odd long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light, loose hair yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek or beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith or kin,
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
(A bedraggled, limping Dalmatian with a crutch enters with a sign that reads, "A bargain struck.")
He advanced to the council table,
And,

PIPER: Please, your honors,

NARRATOR: He said,

PIPER: I'm able

By means of a secret charm to draw
All living creatures beneath the sun
That creep or swim or fly or run
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole and toad and newt and viper,
And people call me the Pied Piper.

NARRATOR: And here they noticed around his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe
To match his coat of the self-same check,



And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his clothing, so old-fangled.

PIPER: Yet,

NARRATOR: Said he,

PIPER: Poor piper that you see,

I cleared the sharks from the Zuider Zee.
I freed the Medes and I freed the Persians
From a wide array of vermin incursions
Including adders, roaches, gnats,
Flying squirrels and vampire bats.
In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree,
But he couldn't have done it if he didn't have me:
I piped his Mongolian kingdom free
Of a certain plague-carrying, blood-sucking flea.
And as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats,
Will you give me a thousand guilders?

MAYOR: Double it!

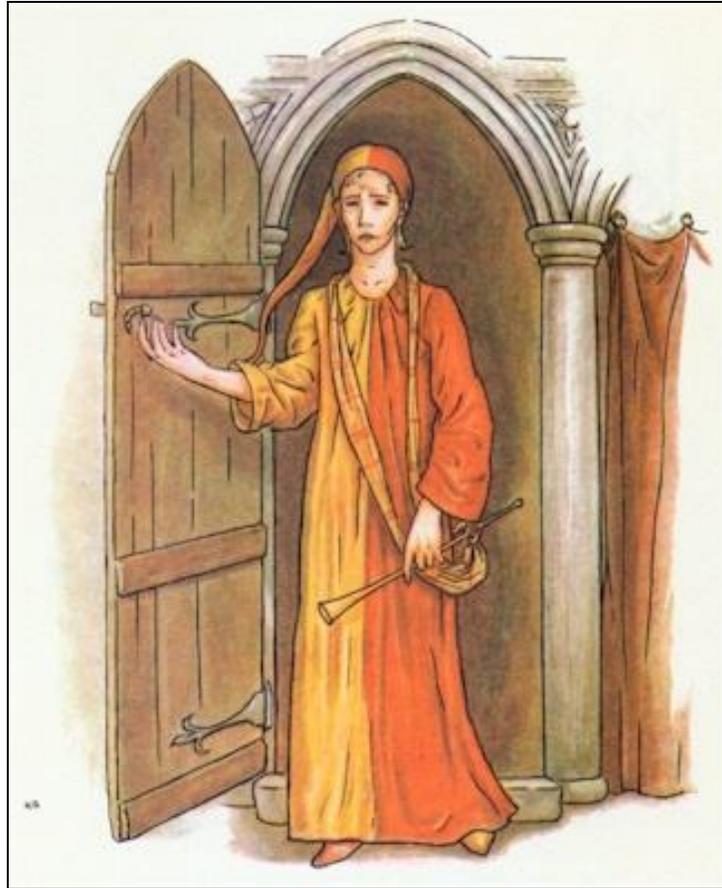
CHOIR: Triple it!

MAYOR/CHOIR: We don't care!

NARRATOR: Cried the City Council and the Mayor.

(A Calico Cat with his arm in a sling and a bandage around his forehead enters and holds up a sign that reads, "The Pied Piper plies his magic.")

Into the street the Piper stepped,
Smiling first a little smile
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while.
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled
(Pied Piper plays his flute.)
Like a candle flame where salt is sprinkled,



And before three notes that pipe had uttered,
You heard, as if an army muttered,
And the muttering grew to a grumbling
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling,
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.

(All the Rats enter.)

Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,
Brave old plodders, smart young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed, dancing,
This piper who alone they cherished
Until they came to the river Weser,
Wherein all plunged and perished! —
Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,
Swam across and lived to carry
To Rat-land home this commentary:

(Stout Rat, who is nervous, crosses DSC.)

STOUT RAT: *(To audience.)*

When I heard the Piper's peculiar tune,
My ears pricked up, and very soon
I was floating as if upon a soft breeze
And all I could think of or dream of was cheese—
Brie and blue and camembert,
Mozzarella and gruyere
Hear that music in the air!
Stilton, cheddar, Roquefort, Swiss
Ah, what melody, what bliss!



Then suddenly I said, "What's this?"
While I with happiness was drunk,
My friends and relatives had sunk.
They'd slipped away to a promised land
That had everything in life that pleases
Especially when it comes to cheeses.
You must hear the Piper to understand,
So here I am, alone and sad, (*Looks sad.*)
Denied the joy the others had.
(*Stout Rat holds up a small sign that reads, "A brief celebration."
The sound of church bells ringing is heard.*)
You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bell till they rocked the steeple.

MAYOR: Go!

NARRATOR: Cried the Mayor,

MAYOR: And get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!

NARRATOR: When suddenly, up the face
(*Pied Piper enters.*)

Of the Piper popped in the marketplace
With a...

PIED PIPER: (*To Mayor.*) First, if you please, my thousand
guilders. (*Holds out his hand for payment.*)

(*A Sly Red Fox enters and crosses to CS holding a sign that reads,
"The swindle."*)

MAYOR: A thousand guilders?!

NARRATOR: The Mayor looked blue
And so did the City Council, too.
They thought of fine horses and beautiful raiment
They could buy for themselves with the Piper's payment.
No longer need they all refrain



From Burgundy, Bordeaux, champagne,
Holidays in southern France,
A life of ease and elegance.
Why pay this amount to a wandering fellow
With a gypsy coat of red and yellow?!

MAYOR: Besides...

NARRATOR: Said the Mayor with a knowing wink,

MAYOR: We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come back to life, I think.
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
From the duty of giving you something to drink
And a bit of cash to put in your purse.
Cheer up now, young fellow, you could have done worse,
But as for the thousand, what we spoke
Of them, as you very well know, was a joke.
Besides, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders?! Come, take fifty.

(An Owl rushes to CS holding a sign that reads, "The Piper's warning.")

[END OF FREEVIEW]