

The Peter Stories

• Estelle Bryer

The following is an excerpt from the book Movement for the Young Child: A Handbook for Eurythmists and Kindergarten Teachers, a new edition of the book formerly titled Eurythmy for the Young Child by Estelle Bryer. As can be seen from the example given here, the circles and games that Bryer has brought together out of her decades of work in the kindergarten are not just for eurythmy lessons, but can be adapted for the nursery or kindergarten circle. Following the stories we have included some of Bryer's advice on movement in the kindergarten.

To simplify matters, we have not included the indications for sounds and other eurythmy gestures that Bryer gives in her book, but only those which can be appropriately done by the nursery/kindergarten teacher.

In her introduction to the Peter stories, Estelle Bryer writes, "These stories have been joyously done by the children, both in eurythmy and as pure dramatization or storytelling by the teacher. They can be added to and are suitable for ages three to six. Shy children cannot resist the 'chewing' bits and can easily be enticed into joining in through that particular part. The following is as would be done for three-year-olds, with short sentences."

Once upon a time, there was a young boy called Peter. Peter woke up in the morning.

A sunbeam came through the window and said:

*Wake up, wake up, the sun shines bright,
The dark is conquered by the light.*

Peter jumped out of bed. He washed his face. He brushed his teeth. He combed his hair. He put on his clothes. He ate his breakfast. Mummy said, "Peter, go to the farmer and fetch a cabbage for supper, I want to make cabbage soup."

"All right, Mummy," said Peter, "I'll take my cart." The wheels of the cart went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round (**in circle**) and he stopped. There in front of him was a tortoise. (**Walk like a tortoise—get inside its skin!**)

The tortoise stopped and said, "Good morning, Peter. Where are you going?" "I'm going to the farm to

get a big, big cabbage," said Peter.

"May I come with you?" asked the tortoise. "Yes," said Peter.

The tortoise climbed into the cart and there he sat.

Peter pulled the cart and the wheels of the cart went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round, and he stopped. (**In circle as before**) There in front of him was a rabbit. (**Put up hands to "bunny-ears" and hop**) "Hop, little bunny, hop little bunny, hop, hop, hop." (**Repeat**)

The rabbit stopped and said, "Good morning, Peter." (**Repeat conversation with Peter as for tortoise**)

The rabbit climbed into the cart and there he sat next to the tortoise!

Peter pulled the cart, and the wheels of the cart went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round, and he stopped. There in front of him was a duck.

Put knees together, hands as tail and waddle—here one can quack with each waddle or add the following verse.

Have you seen the little ducks going to the water?

Father, mother, baby duck, granny duck and grandpa,

Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack. . .

Quack, quack, quack . . . quack. (They love unexpected pauses here)

Continue as with the others but drinking up the water, then swimming in the water, then coming from the water.

The duck stopped and said, "Good morning Peter." (**Repeat conversation as with the others**) And there he sat, next to the tortoise, and next to the rabbit!

Peter pulled the cart, and the wheels of the cart went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round, and he stopped.

There in front of him was a frog. (**Jump like a frog**) The frog said "Good morning, Peter." (**Repeat conversation as above**) Into the cart hopped the frog, and sat next to the tortoise, and the rabbit, and the duck!

Peter pulled the cart, and the wheels of the cart

went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round. Peter came to the farm. Where was the farmer? He was chopping wood. **(Clap hands and stamp feet from side to side)**

*The axe swings, the steel rings
With a bang and a clang
And a leap it bites deep.*

The farmer stopped and said, "Good morning Peter, what do you want?"

"Good morning, Mr. Farmer," said Peter, "I want a cabbage, please."

"Pull one out yourself," said the farmer.

Peter pulled and pulled and pulled and up came the cabbage, but when he wanted to put it in the cart, there sat the animals. He put the cabbage down, "Out," he said. The animals climbed out. Peter put the cabbage into the cart. "What about me?" asked the tortoise, "What about me?" asked the rabbit, "What about me?" asked the duck, "What about me?" asked the frog. "You can sit on top!" said Peter, and the animals climbed up, and Peter pulled the cart, and it was heavy! Peter pulled the cart, and the wheels of the cart went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round. **(In circle)**

All sit.

Now, while Peter was pulling the cart, the tortoise said, "I'm hungry," The rabbit said, "I'm hungry," The duck said, "I'm hungry" "Me too," said the frog.

"Let's have just a nibble," they said.

Animals eat; get "inside" each animal in turn.

The tortoise went **(chew with lips in, bite on them)**. The rabbit went **(bottom lip tucked in and top teeth showing over)**. The duck went **(both lips pouting well out)**. The frog went **(tongue curling out and in beyond lips)**.

Dwell on each type of chewing in sequence, then speed up. This part is so funny and the children cannot resist. It is also extremely healthy for them as it puts the will strongly into the mouth.

(Whisper) The cabbage was gone! And there they were, fast asleep, with full tummies!

Snore, breathing deeply in and out. All stand.

And Peter pulled the cart, and the wheels of the cart went round and round, the wheels of the cart went round and round.

Peter got home. There was his Mummy waiting for him. "Where is the cabbage, Peter?" she asked. "Behind me, Mummy," he said. He looked behind and there were the animals, fast asleep. They looked so funny that Peter and his Mummy laughed and laughed. "Ha,

ha, ha."

Peter's Mummy wasn't angry, but she said **(pointer finger held up and moved from side to side)**, "Be careful, Peter, those animals can be naughty. But never mind. We'll have carrot soup for supper."

The next time this story can be repeated with Peter going to fetch a big cauliflower, and his Mummy can warn him of the animals by using pointer finger as above. On the way back, they can just take a tiny nibble but again end up by finishing the whole cauliflower!

Also, Peter can take appropriate food for them and take them swimming. "Where are you going Peter?" "I'm going swimming!" **A cabbage-leaf for the tortoise, a carrot for the rabbit and bread crumbs for the other two.**

Here the duck, frog, and tortoise do different types of swimming, while the rabbit watches. They eat, and Peter has a sandwich (chew with mouth closed and upright to show the difference between human and animal). When he goes home, the duck and frog remain behind to swim some more.

Peter can also have a birthday party and invite the animals and then go into the making of the cake as well.

The children get to love the animals and their antics and, as a story on its own, many additions can be concocted. This story is a definite favorite because it is so funny, and children can relate to the animals.

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Gesture and Movement During Circle Time: Why not eurythmy gestures?

Kindergarten teachers have at times voiced the question: "What kind of gestures must we do with our poems and songs? Can we do eurythmy gestures?" Over the years I have witnessed teachers trying to illustrate poems with eurythmy gestures which have been more like semaphore waving—well thought out, but empty. We know that the child in the first seven years is an imitative being who learns through imitating movement and gesture, but it is the quality within the gesture that is all-important. Gesture should never be empty, but filled with quality, intention, and feeling.

Many years ago at a Kindergarten Teachers' Conference, Dr. von Kügelgen, the "father" of the Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten Movement, explained that to do undescriptive, unfilled eurythmy gestures made no sense. He used the example that doing all the vowel gestures for "Golden sun in heaven blue" would not be nearly as effective as opening the arms to the imaginary sun while imagining the warmth and glory of it and all that it means for the earth, and filling the movement with this gratitude.

Rudolf Steiner said that it takes seven years to become a eurythmist. In the four-year training course, one learns thoroughly through movement how the vowels, which express our inner life, are related to the planets. For example, the sound *Ah* is connected to Venus; the quality of Venus is love and loving sacrifice. When we say *Ah* our throat is at its most open. As a gesture, we do this naturally without thinking when we open our arms to welcome someone coming towards us. In eurythmy, we make this gesture consciously for that sound by imbuing it with open loving feeling and bringing it so to life that it carries the physical without gravity in a conscious flowing movement while, at the same time, having as a background the planetary qualities, planetary movement and also the three colors and tension points which Rudolf Steiner gave for each sound. Every sound has a foundation such as this and nothing is arbitrary.

The consonants are connected to the zodiac signs in the same way. They are also related to the four elements: *f, s, sh*: fire, *r*: air, *b, p, d*: earth, and so on. What the speech organs do are translated into the equivalent descriptive movement and these movements can be done qualitatively with almost any part of the body, e.g. fingers, legs, shoulders, feet, elbows.

The kindergarten eurythmy teacher uses few movements, but each one is thoroughly penetrated with the above. These are "primal" movements. These qualities are cultivated through endless practice, which permeate the gestures with the healing and up-building substance that the child takes as living imitation. (This is why it is so important for children to have eurythmy before the change of teeth. They imitate cosmic movement!)

Eurythmy therapy is a further study in how to adapt the movements and allow them to penetrate even deeper as a healing for many ailments. But this should be done in conjunction with a doctor wherever possible.

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What Movements Should the Kindergarten Teacher Do?

The teacher should find descriptive gestures that fit the meaning of the song or verse and make them as beautiful as possible, not resort to eurythmy gestures. The teacher should at all times be conscious of the beauty, the purity and truth of the gesture. It should be filled with the soul of the teacher, and weave etheric forms. The child will imitate not only the physical gesture, but also the etheric form that is created. The outreaching arms embrace, the butterfly of the waving hands causes currents in the air around the fingers, and the upward stretch reaches to the heavens, connecting with what is beyond the fingers.

The teachers must also do a variety of movements: clapping, stamping; walking on tip-toe, walking on heels; skipping, hopping; finger-games; and more. Contrasts are important between loud and soft, vigorous and quiet, contraction and expansion, tension and relaxation. The possibilities are endless.

The "filled" gesture is important at other times as well. For instance, when lighting a candle one can make a beautiful "rainbow bridge" gesture with the flame to the wick, or, when setting the table, put the dishes down with care and precision. Passing the food graciously, opening one's arms when calling a child, greeting a friend or parent, beckoning to another, or even the way one lifts a chair: these can all be "filled" gestures.

The gesture of speech is also important, for it is the clarity of our consonants that helps to structure the children. It is how you say the words that is as important as the meaning within them.

When doing animal movements such as a bear walking or, as in the Peter stories, the various animals chewing, the teacher must try to creep into the movement of the animal from within, so that one feels as if one is actually the tortoise chewing. Movement belongs to the etheric kingdom, and it is the etheric that the child imitates.

We need to hold a consciousness in our thought, word, gesture, and deed which will not only form a healthy image for the child to imitate, but help form the healthy physical body of the child.

The task of the teacher is certainly not an easy one, but it is the striving to better ourselves that also penetrates the children and gives them a firm foundation for the rest of their lives.

Estelle Bryer *has been active as a kindergarten teacher, eurythmy teacher, therapeutic eurythmist, and teacher trainer in South Africa for many years.*