The Wonderful Adventures of Brer Rabbit
A Musical for children by Peter Holland and Don Elliott
(Based on the Uncle Remus stories by Joel Chandler Harris)
Promotional Booklet and Study Guide

“A wonderfully appealing children’s show with a great message.”
Charity Apple – The Times News

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About Capstone Theatricals…

In 2004, a group of people who had served as staff members of various touring theatre companies got together and talked about their experiences with those theatres. They discussed what they perceived were the strengths and weaknesses of each theatre and what they would do differently, “if they ran the place.” Although they didn’t know it at the time, it was out of this meeting that Capstone Theatricals was born.

Capstone Theatricals is dedicated to providing high quality theatre at an affordable cost. But, equally as important as what the audience sees on stage, this company values the relationship that the staff of each venue has with us. Capstone Theatricals is dedicated to making your working relationship with us as pleasant as possible. We recognize that each venue is unique with its own personality and that the people who work in the space every day know it better than anyone. We view our relationship with each venue as a partnership. Therefore, we seek the advice and counsel of the people who know the space the best.

With everything we do in regard to mounting and publicizing the show, we want to focus on what we can do for you (rather than what we cannot). For example, if your local newspaper wants a phone interview with a cast member, we will make it happen. If you want a television interview with a cast member once we get in town, we will make every effort to see that its done. If you need to make special arrangements with loading the show into the venue, just let us know and if it is at all feasible, we will do it. If you want a meet-and-greet following a performance, say the word and you’ve got it. Our job is to help you fill the house and to make your overall experience with us pleasant. We will do whatever it takes to make both a reality. Never hesitate to ask us to do those extra things that can add so much...we’re glad to do it. It’s our job!

As we said, we want to create a partnership with each of our venues. That’s why we will seek your advice on ways to make our programming and services better for you. At the end of each of our visits, we will ask you to evaluate our production, staff and supporting materials. Our aim is to make sure that you are completely satisfied with our production and our services.

A lot of production companies provide good programming and want the overall experience to be pleasant...the Capstone Theatricals difference is that we make it a priority.
About Capstone Theatricals’ production of
The Wonderful Adventures of Brer Rabbit
by
Peter Holland and Don Elliott
(Based on the Uncle Remus stories by Joel Chandler Harris)

The Wonderful Adventures of Brer Rabbit is a delightful musical production about a wily rabbit who, with the help of his friend Brer Terrapin, uses his wits rather than his fists to outsmart Brer Fox, Brer Wolf and Brer Bear, as well as Brer Gator and a whole passle of creatures who would love to catch and eat him.

Suitable for grades K-6, as well as the whole family, the production features four of Joel Chandler Harris' retelling of the beloved “Uncle Remus” stories - "Wahoo," "The Yalligator," "The Moon in the Mill Pond," and of course, "The Wonderful Tar Baby."

With catchy tunes such as “We Get Our Kicks,” “I’m the Yalligator,” “Rabbit Barbecue,” and the beautiful “Good Times and Bad,” your audience will be tapping their feet to this down-home country musical.

This show also teaches the important life-lesson that just because one is small or slow, it doesn't make them helpless. It is the quality of the mind that counts most and the quality of the heart. If a person has friends and some common sense, they may have some bad days but they will bounce back and come out on top. This telling of these stories is a more politically correct version than some of its previous incarnations and is a delight.

This show can be added as a matinee performance with our other shows or booked individually.

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The Origins of the Brer Rabbit Tales

Brer Rabbit, which can also be spelled Bre'r Rabbit or Br'er Rabbit or Bruh Rabbit, (with the title "Brer" pronounced /brɛər/) and in some regions is pronounced “Briar Rabbit” (no doubt referencing the most famous Brer Rabbit tale,) is the main character in a series of stories attributed to Uncle Remus. These stories originated in the Southern United States and tell of a wily rabbit who succeeds through his wits rather than with his fists. He is constantly tweaking authority figures and bending social mores as he sees fit. The story of Br'er Rabbit, a contraction of "Brother Rabbit", has been linked to both African and Cherokee cultures. Disney later adapted the character for their Song of the South.

The Brer Rabbit stories can be traced back to trickster figures in Africa, particularly the hare that figures prominently in the storytelling traditions in Western, Central and Southern Africa. These tales continue to be part of the traditional folklore of numerous peoples throughout those regions. In the Akan traditions of West Africa, the trickster is usually the spider (as in the Anansi tales), though the plots of spider tales are often identical to those of rabbit stories.

Many have suggested that the American incarnation, Brer Rabbit, represents the enslaved African who uses his wits to overcome circumstances and to exact revenge on his adversaries, representing the white slave-owners, and through trickery is able to make his life more enjoyable. Though not always successful, his efforts made him a folk hero. However, the trickster is a multi-dimensional character. While he can be a hero, his amoral nature and lack of any positive restraint can make him a villain as well.

For both Africans and African Americans, the animal trickster represents an extreme form of behavior which people may be forced to emulate in extreme circumstances in order to survive. The trickster is not to be admired in every situation; he is an example of what to do, but also an example of what not to do. The trickster's behavior can be summed up in the common African proverb: "It's trouble that makes the monkey chew on hot peppers." In other words, sometimes people must use extreme measures in extreme circumstances.

The American version of the story is said to have originated among enslaved Africans. Brer Rabbit stories were written down by Robert Roosevelt, uncle of President of the United States Theodore Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt wrote in his autobiography, about his aunt from Georgia, that "She knew all the 'Brer Rabbit' stories, and I was brought up on them. One of my uncles, Robert Roosevelt, was much struck with them, and took them down from her dictation, publishing them in Harper's, where they fell flat. This was a good many years before a genius arose who, in 'Uncle Remus', made the stories immortal."

These stories were popularized for the mainstream audience in the late 19th century by Joel Chandler Harris, who wrote up and published many of the stories which were passed down by oral tradition. Harris also attributed the birth name, Riley, to Brer Rabbit. Joel Chandler Harris heard the tales in Georgia. Very similar versions of the same stories were recorded independently at the same time by folklorist Alcée Fortier in southern Louisiana, where the Rabbit character was known as Compair Lapin in Creole French. The stories were retold for children by Enid Blyton, the English children's writer.
The Cherokee Association

Although Joel Chandler Harris collected materials for his famous series of books featuring the character Brer Rabbit in the 1870s, the Brer Rabbit cycle had been recorded earlier among the Cherokees; The "tar baby" story was printed in an 1845 edition of the Cherokee Advocate the same year Joel Chandler Harris was born.

Rabbit and Hare myths abound among Algonquin Indians in Eastern North America, particularly under the name Nanabozho. The Great Hare is generally regarded as the supreme deity among

In "That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community" by Jace Weaver, the origins of Brer Rabbit and other literature are discussed. To say that a story only originates from one culture and not another can only be true when a group of people exist in complete isolation from others. Whereas, the Cherokee did live in isolation from Europeans in the far past, it's also true to say that a substantial amount of interaction happened between, not only North American tribes, but also between Europeans and, more often, those from the slave population during the 18th and 19th Centuries. That being understood, it is impossible to ascertain whether the Cherokee story pre-dated, independently, the African American story. Stories are told around communal fires in the evening and would have been told to travelers and visitors - they are the memorable currency of diplomacy.

In the Cherokee tale about the briar patch, "the fox and the wolf throw the trickster rabbit into a thicket from which the rabbit quickly escapes. There was a "melding of the Cherokee rabbit-trickster ...into the culture of African slaves. "In fact, most of the Brer Rabbit stories originated in Cherokee myths."
Joel Chandler Harris was born in 1848 (although some citations list his birth year as 1845) in Putnam County, Georgia (near Eatonton) to Mary Ann Harris. His father’s identity was unknown since he abandoned his family prior to Harris’ birth. Although he was faced with many hardships due to his impoverished life, his circumstances imbued him with a tender shyness which was so extreme that it actually became an attractive asset which followed him all of his life. For example, as an adult he wore a wide brimmed hat even indoors to cover his red hair. Because of his shyness he never appeared publicly to present any of his works. However, he was well known for his sense of humor in his writings and it is believed that perhaps he hid behind his humor because of his low self-esteem He was an American journalist, fiction writer and folklorist who was best known for his collection of Uncle Remus stories.

Early years. A prominent physician, Dr. Andrew Reid, gave the Harris family a small cottage behind his mansion. Mary Harris worked as a seamstress and helped neighbors with their gardening to support herself and her son. She was an avid reader and instilled her son with a love of language: "My desire to write—to give expression to my thoughts—grew out of hearing my mother read *The Vicar of Wakefield*.”

Dr. Reid also paid for Harris’ school tuition for several years. In 1856, Joe Harris briefly attended Kate Davidson’s School for Boys and Girls, but transferred to Eatonton School for Boys later that year following an undistinguished academic record and a habit of truancy. Harris excelled in reading and writing, but was mostly known for his pranks, mischief, and sense of humor. Practical jokes helped Harris cloak his innate shyness and insecurities about his red hair, Irish ancestry, and illegitimacy, leading to both trouble and a reputation as a leader among the older boys.

His formal education ended by his early teens. At that time, he became a printer’s devil (an apprentice) for the *Countryman*, a local newspaper owned by Joseph Addison Turner. Turner owned the *Turnwold Plantation*, where Harris later moved. It was here, at *Turnwold*, that Harris was first introduced the Negro slaves. He spent many hours with the slaves listening to their folklore. He had an ear for their dialect and committed to memory both their stories and language. It would later prove to be an asset to his career. In the stories of Uncle Remus, Harris was able to capture the reader and listener’s attention by his accurate detail of the Negro folklore of the plantation slave. Although other writers had also imitated the language, they were unable to capture it the way Harris did. Turner’s business collapsed in 1866 with the end of the American Civil War and Harris left *Turnwold*.

After *Turnwold* and *The Countryman*, Harris worked as a typesetter for the *Macon Telegraph*, the *New Orleans Crescent Monthly* and the Forsyth, Georgia, *Monroe Advertiser*. After the *Advertiser* he became as associate editor of the Savannah Morning News. He married Esther LaRose while living in Savannah in 1873. They had nine children but lost three to childhood illnesses. In 1876, Harris moved his family to Atlanta because of an epidemic of yellow fever in Savannah. It was there that he obtained his job with the *Atlanta Constitution*. Harris lived in Atlanta until his death in 1908. He died of acute nephritis and cirrhosis of the liver.
His legacy: Harris used humor to depict issues of the underlying racial climate of the time through his works. In “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story” found in the collection, Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings, Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox are at odds with each other once again. This is a humorous story because Brer Rabbit becomes insulted by the silence of the tar baby. Brer Rabbit expects the tar baby to speak to him since he is “respectable folks”, however he does not realize this is a set-up by Brer Fox. Brer Rabbit later finds himself stuck to the tar baby with hands, feet, and head when he begins to hit the tar baby for not speaking. Brer Fox is “laying low” and watching with delight. Brer Fox, Brer Wolf and Brer Bear then appear, speak to Brer Rabbit and makes fun of him stating, “You look sorter stuck up this mornin”, Harris’ imagery makes this story easy for the reader/listener to picture this tale in his mind and chuckle to himself at the sight of Brer Rabbit stuck to the tar baby.

Throughout his career, Joel Harris actively promoted racial reconciliation as well as African-American education, suffrage, and equality. He regularly denounced racism among southern whites, condemned causing harm to African Americans and highlighted the importance of higher education for African Americans, frequently citing the work of W.E.B. DuBois in his editorials. In 1883, for example, editorials from the Atlanta Constitution challenged those of the New York Sun that alleged “educating the negro will merely increase his capacity for evil.” Harris’s Atlanta Constitution editorial countered, stating if “education of the negro is not the chief solution of the problem that confronts the white people of the South, then there is no other conceivable solution and there is nothing ahead but political chaos and demoralization.” Harris’s editorials were often progressive in content and paternalistic in tone. He was unwavering in his commitment to the “dissipation of sectional jealousy and misunderstanding, as well as religious and racial intolerance.”

Harris’ stories focus on the issues of slavery and white supremacy in the post-American Civil War period as well. Uncle Remus is the narrator and the animals represent the white and black populations. George Tucker Arnold suggests, in an article on Harris published in the Encyclopedia of American Humorists, that tensions between the races are represented by one animal being the stronger creature (Brer Fox) and one the weaker (Brer Rabbit) in nature. The weaker creature obtains triumph not by his physical strength but by his ability to outsmart the other. Thus, these two creatures represent white and black in the society of the time respectively. Perhaps through his humor and his creativeness, Harris had a lesson for us all in social order and how we treat our fellow man.

A NOTE ABOUT CAPSTONE THEATRICALS PRODUCTION OF THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURES OF BRER RABBIT

While the history of Joel Chandler Harris and of these tales is certainly interesting and should be discussed with students, our version deals with the stories in their own right. The issue of race, in our version, doesn’t play into these tales. We treat each story as a tale with a moral: that might doesn’t always make right; that having a good heart and a good mind are of paramount importance; that one should remember one’s roots; and that it is better to use one’s wits rather than one’s fists when dealing with one’s adversaries. We purposely tone down the dialect that Harris has written into the tales and exchange it for a more generic “country” dialect. The tales of Brer Rabbit are timeless and can be used, much like the fables of Aesop some 2300 hundred years earlier, as a method of teaching important life lessons.
“WAHOO”
Brer Fox, with the help of Brer Wolf and Brer Bear, is always trying to devise a way to capture Brer Rabbit and have him for supper. This time they have come up with a whopper. Brer Wolf and Brer Bear tell Brer Rabbit that there has been a death among the creatures of the forest it is up to him to do his “Christian duty” and pay his respects to the dearly departed. The only problem is that Brer Terrapin using a clever disguise, that is easy for him to use, overhears, their plot and, as usual, their plan is foiled.

“BRER RABBIT AND THE GIZZARD EATER”
It isn’t just Brer Fox, Brer Wolf and Brer Bear who have their sights on Rabbit for dinner. One evening when Brer Rabbit and Brer Terrapin are out on the town they find that they creek has overflowed its banks and they can’t just jump across like they normally would. As they call for someone to help them they wake Brer Gator who is sleeping in the creek. He tells Brer Rabbit and Brer Terrapin that he will take them across for a small fee. It isn’t until he gets half way across the creek that he tells them that his fee is rabbit gizzard. Brer Rabbit has to think awfully quickly to get out of this one.

“THE MOON IN THE MILL POND”
Sometimes Brer Rabbit would use his wits to escape his enemies, other times he uses them to play tricks on others because he is bored. “The Moon in the Mill Pond” is an example of the latter. One evening after supper Brer Rabbit and Brer Terrapin are by the pond when they hear Brer Fox, Brer Wolf and Brer Bear approaching to go fishing. Brer Rabbit tells them that the fishing won’t be any good this evening because the moon has fallen into the mill pond. He tells them the fish won’t bite when the moon is in the water. He also tells them that there is a treasure under the moon and he plans to get the moon and the treasure out of the pond. When the others hear there is treasure under the moon they insist on getting the moon out of the pond and that is where the trouble for them and the joy for Brer Rabbit commences. This tale shows the problems in being greedy and believing something that is too good to be true.

“THE WONDERFUL TAR BABY”
Brer Fox constructs a doll out of a lump of tar and dresses it with some clothes. When Brer Rabbit comes along he addresses the tar “baby” amiably, but receives no response. Brer Rabbit becomes offended by what he perceives as the Tar Baby’s lack of manners, punches it, and in doing so becomes stuck. The more Brer Rabbit punches and kicks the tar “baby” out of rage, the worse he gets stuck. Now that Brer Rabbit is stuck, Brer Fox ponders how to dispose of him. The helpless, but cunning, Brer Rabbit pleads, “please, Brer Fox, don’t fling me in that brier-patch,” prompting B’er Fox to do exactly that. As rabbits are at home in thickets, the resourceful Brer Rabbit escapes. Using the phrases “but please, Brer Fox, don’t fling me in dat brier-patch” and “tar baby” to refer to the idea of “a problem that gets worse the more one struggles against it.”
Before the Play

1. Discuss with the children the concept of a fable. Discuss what a moral is. Read a few of Aesop’s Fables and have them try to guess the moral of each of the stories.

2. You might want to have the students read some of the Brer Rabbit stories that aren’t being told in the play to introduce them to the characters. One of the tales that is particularly good is “Brer Rabbit’s Laughing Place.”

3. Both the fables of Aesop and the tales of Brer Rabbit use Anthropomorphism. This is giving human characteristics to animals. As the stories are read—discuss the different characters and what unique human characteristics each character uses. Example: Foxes are traditionally described as being crafty and sly. Brer Fox tends to be the thinker among the three villains.

4. Brer Rabbit was one of the first characters to use Asset-based thinking. Asset-based thinking is a way of looking at the world and at individual situations though the eyes of what’s working and what strengths are present in the situation; what the potentials are. This is opposed to Deficit-based thinking where a person only looks at the negatives. As you discuss some of the other stories have your students identify how the characters employ Asset-based thinking and how this improves the situation. Brer Rabbit always seems to find joy when he is able to figure a way out of his bad situation and almost always ends up in his “laughing place.”

5. Discuss with your students the different people involved in creating a play; the playwright; the director, the choreographer, the actors, the set designer, the costumer, etc.

6. Discuss with your students theatre etiquette. Talk about how it is important to be a good theatre-goer for the sake of the audience around them, as well as the performers onstage. Let the students know the signals to let the actors know that

VOCABULARY AND EXPRESSIONS OF BRER RABBIT

Audacious — Bold, Daring
No Love Lost — Dislike, animosity
Vise Versa — is used to mean the opposite of what a person said is true.
Accommodate — Do a favor for; show a kindness.
Grief — Sadness
Heist themselves up — To pull themselves to a standing position
Commenced — Started
Twixt — Between
Rover — A person who wanders
Reckon — Agree something is right.
Symptoms — Sign or indications of sickness
Reckless — Careless; with no thought of consequences
Seine — Fishing net
Turpentine— Strong smelling oil of coniferous trees; paint thinner and solvent
Lickety split— At great speed; rapidly
Ruckus — Noisy commotion
Cranked — Lopsided; askew
Capers— Tricks
the audience appreciates what they are doing. This can be clapping at the end of a song, at the end of the scene or at the end of the play. Please let your students know if they see something funny - they should laugh. The performers love to hear the audience laugh—but please no talking or whispering unless a character onstage ask you a question or wants some help!

During the Play

1. As the students are watching the play ask them to quietly think about Asset-based thinking and have them identify when all of the characters, but Brer Rabbit in particular, utilize this way of looking at a situation. Also decide if there are any characters who use Negative-based thinking. Which character has the better results?

2. Have the students think about Anthropomorphism (giving animals human characteristics) and how they are utilized in the play. Some of the more obvious observations are: Does the character walk in the same way that the animal walks? Do they talk the same way that the animal talks, etc.

3. They should think about the moral of each of the stories. What is learned from them?

4. Have them identify when Brer Rabbit creates a situation because he needs to get out of a bad situation or when he creates a situation because he is bored.

Post Production Activities

1. Have the students draw a picture of their favorite scene in the play.

2. Ask them to tell what they learned from the play and what they liked about it.

3. Have them create their own Brer Rabbit story. Using the characters in the play have them create a situation where one of the characters finds themselves in a bind and has to create a way to get out of trouble. The students don’t have to limit themselves to just the characters that they have seen. They can create characters based on characters that were talked about such as Brer Turkey Buzzard or Brer Mud Turtle or they can make up their own character such as Brer Horse or Sister Cat.

4. We love to receive letter from students telling us what they thought of the performance. The can be sent to: Capstone Theatricals, PO Box 861382, Tuscaloosa, AL 35486. While we can’t respond to every letter we receive, we want you to know that they are very much appreciated.

Study Guide prepared by Ed Whitehead, Producer/General Manager for Capstone Theatricals and production director.