



# INSIGHTS

*DTC's Teacher Resource*



## *Hetty Feather*

*Adapted for the stage by Emma Reeves*

*from the book by Jacqueline Wilson*

*Directed by Bud Martin*

*Delaware Theatre Company*

*April 19 - May 14, 2017*

## *A Word from the Author...*

"I have always been interested in children, and if I'm watching a documentary about a family with problems, it's how it affects that child that interests me. It's not that I'm interested in childish things, but as a child you're at your most honest and direct and haven't added all the layers of skin an adult has. . . .

"I have always been on the side of odd ones out. . . .If there's anything I want to achieve, it's to have children reading about others slightly different to them, and taking them to their hearts."



-- Jacqueline Wilson, author of the novel *Hetty Feather*, from an interview with Janet Christie.

*Left, Jacqueline Wilson. Below, the cast of the new stage musical Hetty Feather rehearses at Delaware Theatre Company.*



## INSIGHTS

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### Delaware Theatre Company

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**38th Season  
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### HETTY FEATHER

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# Characters and Summary

*A Note to Readers: To assist educators in preparing their students for seeing our shows, the Department of Education and Community Engagement at DTC prepares and shares detailed summaries of the plots of our productions. These summaries disclose important plot points, including the climax and resolution of each play. Furthermore, our study guides are constructed under the premise that the educator has read our summary, and additional articles herein may reference these same plot points. This notice is intended to provide a "spoiler alert."*

## Summary

The play opens as the red-haired Hetty introduces herself and shares the story of her mother giving her up to the Foundling Hospital when she was a baby because the mother could not find work to support her family. Though Hetty remembers her mother's loving embrace, she cannot remember her given name, and the nurses at the hospital name her Hetty Feather. As a baby, Hetty journeys with another foundling child, Gideon, to the country home of Peg, who raises foster babies like Hetty, Gideon, and another boy named Saul, alongside her own child, a boy named Jem. Hetty grows into a strong young girl who enjoys playing make-believe with Jem. She is protective of the introverted Gideon, but she often fights with Saul, who teases her and Gideon.



*Clare O'Malley will play the title character in DTC's production of Hetty Feather.*

One morning after one of their fights, Hetty awakens to find Saul is being taken by Peg back to the Foundling Hospital. Hetty is deeply saddened about Saul's departure and even more distraught to learn that according to the hospital's rules, she and Gideon, too, will have to return there by the time they are six years old. Peg returns home with another foundling baby, Eliza. Hetty runs off and hides in a tree. Jem finds her and consoles her, saying he will come for her when he is old enough. Their conversation is interrupted by a great noise as a circus train makes its way through the countryside. Hetty and Jem are excited and sneak into the circus, and Hetty sees a beautiful red-haired woman, Madame Adeline, riding the trained horses. Madame Adeline invites Hetty to ride with her in the act, and Hetty does. When Hetty returns home, she imagines Madame Adeline is her birth mother.



*Karen Peakes plays Peg, Ida, and other characters in DTC's production.*

The scene shifts to a time a few years later. As Peg takes Hetty and Gideon back to the Foundling Hospital, Hetty reminds Jem of his promise to come and get her when he is older, and he says he will. At the hospital, Hetty and Gideon are separated into the girls' and boys' wings. Matron Bottomly and several other nurses treat Hetty roughly as they cut her red hair short and force her into her uniform dress. As sad as Hetty is about her new situation, she is more concerned about how the fragile Gideon is handling the change. As Hetty becomes accustomed to her new routine of studying the alphabet, learning to sew, and doing other practical activities, she meets a kind woman named Ida who works in the kitchen. Other than Ida, Hetty has difficulty getting along with others at the hospital, and she imagines being with Jem again. One day, Hetty tells Ida she is bored in her class because she wants to read stories rather than just reviewing the alphabet over

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## *Characters and Summary* (continued)

### Summary (continued)

and over. Ida provides her with copies of the *Police Gazette*, and Hetty reads the grisly stories aloud to some of the other girls.



*Terry Brennan plays several characters, including Saul.*

Time passes and Hetty grows older. An outbreak of influenza sweeps the hospital, and Hetty, along with many other children, becomes ill. Hetty survives, but soon learns her brother has called out for her, and she asks Ida for help. Ida disguises Hetty as a boy and smuggles her to the boys' infirmary, where the surprised Hetty finds it is not Gideon, but Saul, gravely ill, calling for her. She comforts him and is grieved when he dies. She vows to help Gideon and disguises herself as a boy to find him on the playground with the other boys. Gideon is an out-cast among them, being too timid to even speak. When Matron Bottomly tries to get him to talk by threatening physical punishment, Hetty interferes. Matron Bottomly punishes Hetty by locking her in the attic all by herself. Hetty is frightened, but Ida comes up and speaks calming words through the doorway. Hetty wishes she and Ida could run away, but Ida explains her background of having been in a workhouse and persuades Hetty to change her mindset. Ida helps Hetty use her imagination to think about being in a warm, loving home instead of the cold attic. Hetty and Ida imagine a happy existence.

When Matron Bottomly returns, Hetty apologizes and rejoins the girls' wing, where she must help new children acclimate to the hospital. Hetty is at first joyful when she sees her foster sister Eliza, now six years old, returning to the hospital. Her joy becomes pain when she hears Eliza talking of Jem's promise to come and get Eliza when he is old enough. Hetty imagines a conversation with Jem where he casts aside his promise to her and the two of them say goodbye to each other. Sullenly, Hetty goes to help Ida in the kitchen, but her bleak outlook at her own future as a servant leads her to insult Ida and her work. Ida asks Hetty's rival, Sheila, to help her instead.

Hetty imagines a conversation with Madame Adeline as her real mother. She then hears Matron Bottomly announce that all the children in the Foundling Hospital have been invited to a festival at Hyde Park celebrating Queen Victoria's fiftieth jubilee. Hetty and the other children excitedly wander through the festival, and when Hetty sees a circus, she gets the idea to look for Madame Adeline. Finding Gideon again, Hetty invites him to leave the festival with her to find the right circus where Madame Adeline might be. Gideon refuses, and he and Hetty say goodbye. Hetty's journey takes her away from the festival and through the streets of London. She finds the circus and Madame Adeline, but is disappointed to realize that her red hair was a wig, and she is not Hetty's real mother. Hetty offers to stay and work with the horses, but Madame Adeline tells her that circus life is difficult and that she cannot let Hetty stay beyond seeing the show.



*Rachel O'Malley plays Madame Adeline, Eliza, and others in Delaware Theatre Company's Hetty Feather.*

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# ***Characters and Summary*** (continued)

## **Summary** (continued)

Hetty wanders the streets of London and meets several unsavory characters. Sissy, a flower-seller, saves her from being accosted and helps Hetty get started selling flowers to earn a few pennies. Just as she starts earning a little money, it is stolen from her. As she realizes what has happened, Ida enters the scene and finds her, and the two hug. Ida reveals that she is Hetty's real mother and explains what happened when Hetty was a baby. Ida shares with Hetty her given name. Hetty, happy knowing her story, tells the audience what happened when she and Ida went back to the hospital and offers glimpses of the other characters' lives, too. Hetty knows that though there are still hardships ahead, she and Ida will find happiness, too.

## **Characters**

*There are six actors in the show, along with two musicians. One actor plays Hetty Feather throughout the show. The other five actors play multiple roles, including the most important characters noted below. The musicians also add atmosphere when additional crowd scenes occur.*

**Hetty Feather** is a spirited and imaginative girl who is a foundling--a child who has been given over by her mother to the Foundling Hospital, an institution which cares for children without parents. Hetty is strong-willed, often impulsive, but also keenly sensitive to her want for love and affection from a family. Hetty's ability to imagine happier times and places, to stand up to troubles and troublesome individuals, and to persevere in difficult situations helps her realize that she can not only survive, but thrive, grow, and find hope for her future.

**Gideon Smeed** is Hetty's "foundling brother," a boy about her same age whom she meets when they are babies and who is cared for by the same foster mother as Hetty. Gideon is timid and lacks Hetty's wit and strength, but his simplicity makes him dearer to Hetty.

**Peg** is Hetty's foster mother. She is warm and caring and loves her foster children dearly. She is also the mother of a biological child, Jem, and has passed on to him her same welcoming manner and compassion. Peg is not wealthy and is able to take extra children into her home in the country and care for them through a financial arrangement with the Foundling Hospital; however, she must follow the hospital's rules and return the children when they are of school age. She has a great heart and tries to make each of her foster children feel safe, loved, and special, even when she knows she cannot fully adopt them.



*Dave Johnson takes on the roles of Gideon and members of the circus, among others.*

**Jem** is Peg's son and Hetty's foster brother. He is several years older than Hetty and is her favorite playmate when she is a child, joining her in her flights of imagination and spearheading adventures with her. He is affectionate to Hetty and kind to his other foster brothers and sisters, a trait which eventually causes Hetty anguish as she seeks to be his favorite of all.

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## ***Characters and Summary*** (continued)

### **Characters** (continued)

**Saul** is another of Peg's foster children and, thus, Hetty's foster brother. Saul is crippled and walks with a crutch, yet like Hetty, he is strong-willed and willing to fight for what he wants. His selfish interests and his habit of teasing Gideon and Hetty, who are younger than he is, make him somewhat of a troublemaker in the family. Peg loves him, though, and at times offers him more attention and compassion than Hetty thinks he deserves.

**Matron Bottomly** is the head nurse at the Foundling Hospital. She is gruff and rough with the children in her care with little sympathy for their emotional needs. Hetty dislikes Matron Bottomly for her disdainful manner and her adherence to rules and structure.

**Ida** works as a kitchen servant at the Foundling Hospital. She is a hard worker, cooking and serving meals for the children, but takes a special liking to Hetty and tries to help the girl through offering extra food, special tasks, practical advice, and an understanding heart.

**Madame Adeline** is a beautiful performer who trains and rides fancy horses in the circus. Like Hetty, she has red hair. She is exotic, speaking with a Russian accent, and makes Hetty feel special when she invites her to perform with her on the horses during a show. She has had a hard life traveling with the circus for many years and knows it is not a good life for a child.



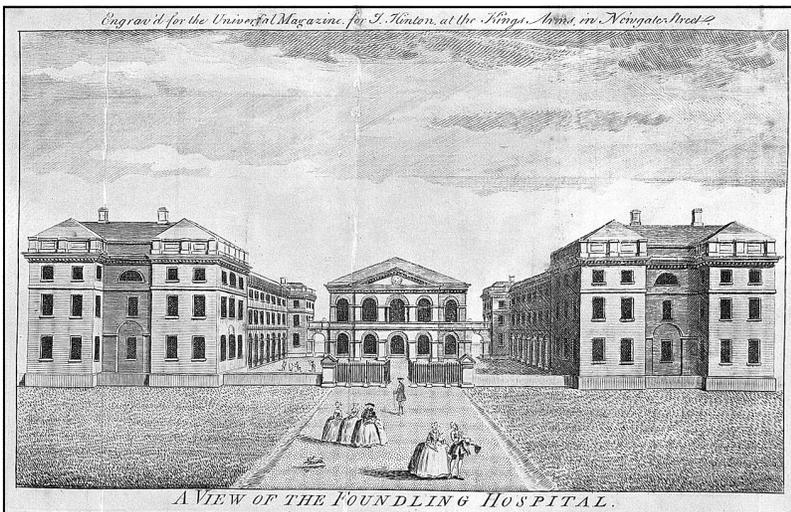
*Michael Philip O'Brien plays Jem, Matron Bottomly, and other characters in Hetty Feather at DTC.*

# Teachable Themes and Topics

## The Foundling Hospital: Truth vs. Fiction

When Hetty recalls both her first weeks of life as an infant, then her life as a school-aged child, she tells of being delivered to, taken from, and then returned to the Foundling Hospital. And while the stage version of *Hetty Feather* is based on a work of fiction, the author of that novel, Jacqueline Wilson, got the idea for her book after doing some charitable work where she learned more about the real Foundling Hospital in London. “Jokingly the director of [The Foundling Museum] said they would love me to write a children’s book about a foundling child.... I loved this idea. The image of a feisty red-haired girl managing against all the odds sprung into my mind,” said Wilson in a 2015 interview with Duncan Hall. The Foundling Museum of which Wilson spoke is a modern-day museum in London which shares exhibits surrounding the many ways artists have worked to help children over the years, with a special emphasis on the history of the real Foundling Hospital in England.

That real Foundling Hospital was established in London when a British mariner and shipbuilder, Thomas Coram, returned to his native country in 1720 after many years’ living in America and was greatly disturbed to see children, abandoned by their parents and ignored by society, suffering as they tried to live alone in the streets of London. The social stigma of bearing a child out of wedlock led many unwed mothers to abandon their children. Whereas other European countries had orphanages and other organizations--usually run by religious institutions—to help these children, England did not, and countless children died from lack of care. Thomas Coram set about to change these circumstances by rallying influential men and women to embrace these children and their plight. By bringing the matter to the attention of respected members of society, including wives of noblemen, members of Parliament, artist William Hogarth and, ultimately, King George II and his wife Queen Caroline, Coram finally secured a charter for the Foundling Hospital, which admitted its first children in a temporary location in 1741. A new, permanent structure was built in 1742, allowing even more children to be rescued from abandonment.



An image of London’s Foundling Hospital. The institution provided care for thousands of children over its nearly 200-year run.

The Foundling Hospital continued to gather public support and approval through the efforts of Coram and, surprisingly, a group of artists who, through their charitable actions, became early governors of the institution. Hogarth, for example, donated several of his own paintings to the Hospital for public display, and he encouraged his contemporaries to do the same. In a win-win situation, the Foundling Hospital offered these artists a public place of exhibition for their work, and the patrons who came to view these great art works also came to know of the institution and the needs of the children themselves. These patrons donated money to the Foundling Hospital and established its social legitimacy by

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## *Teachable Themes and Topics* (continued)

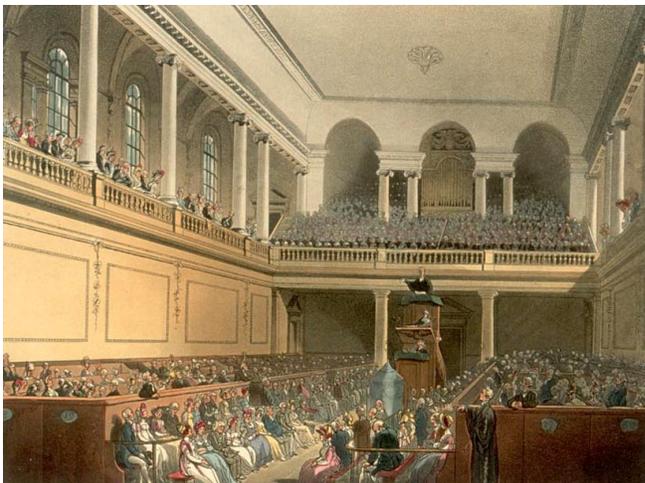
### **The Foundling Hospital: Truth vs. Fiction** (continued)

their attention. Composer George Frideric Handel introduced the “Foundling Hospital Anthem” in a benefit concert performance in the chapel of the hospital. The concert included portions of one of his— at the time lesser-known— works, *Messiah*. It was such a celebrated event that Handel was made a governor of the hospital. He was asked to return for another benefit, which also drew crowds and raised large sums of money for the Foundling Hospital. Handel continued to lead an annual benefit performance of *Messiah* there until his death, and the Foundling Museum continues to exhibit an original score Handel bequeathed to the children’s charity he so loved. The tradition of artists raising awareness of and supporting the Foundling Hospital continued over the years. Over one hundred years after its establishment, Charles Dickens not only donated money to the organization, but also incorporated it into several of his great works such as *Oliver Twist* and *Little Dorrit*, and advocated for its support in nonfiction articles published in newspapers and magazines. And more recently, contemporary artists and authors (such as Jacqueline Wilson herself) have continued the tradition of garnering attention and support for Coram, the new name for the organization which began as the Foundling Hospital.



*Thomas Coram, the founder of the hospital.*

In 1741 when the first children were admitted to the Foundling Hospital, they were given new names, and no records were kept of the names of their parents who brought them. Instead, the parent— mostly a mother—left a token which could be used as an identifying marker if and when she came to reclaim her child. The idea was that, free from having to care for a child, the mother could find work and become financially stable enough to resume her parental duties. Because of that, children were



*View of the chapel inside the Foundling Hospital, where George Frideric Handel and others gave benefit concerts to raise money for the institution.*

able to be fostered as infants and toddlers in outside homes, but most were ineligible for adoption. The artist Hogarth and his wife fostered many children from the Foundling Hospital until they were five or six years old, when they returned to the Foundling Hospital receive their education. Thomas Coram was a strong believer in women’s rights and welfare and insisted that girls as well as boys be given the opportunity to receive an education. Children were taught to read and write and reared to take their place as a member of the working class. Most girls learned domestic skills while boys were mainly brought up to serve in the military. In addition to practical lessons, though, Coram and the governors of the hospital—many of whom were artists themselves—encouraged artistic endeavors such as singing and painting.

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## ***Teachable Themes and Topics*** (continued)

### **The Foundling Hospital: Truth vs. Fiction** (continued)

And of course, religious instruction was a central part of the children's experience, for the benefactors and governors believed that children with a strong moral character would be more likely to find success in the workplace when they aged out of the hospital and less likely to have children out of wedlock, live in poverty, or otherwise fall to society's ills. And as patrons of the art and music exhibits entered the Foundling Hospital, they could see or hear children singing or praying, which again drew from those patrons approval and frequently a financial contribution towards their care.

The Foundling Hospital continued operating virtually as an orphanage until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when the last foundling children were taken in. The 1948 Children Act in England stressed the importance of family care for children, and the institution began a major campaign to identify families who would foster children. In 1954 the last foundling child was placed in foster care, and the name of the institution was changed simply to Coram. Coram now is a leading adoption agency in the United Kingdom. In addition to providing adoption services and support, Coram offers health and drug awareness education, supported housing for homeless teens, and legal services to advocate for children who are wards of the state. In keeping with its tradition of connecting arts and children, Coram also offers music and art therapy for children in need to help them build confidence in themselves as well as provide a means for self-reflection and expression. Coram continues its relationship with adults who came through its system by maintaining and sharing its extensive records of each child's experience with Coram and its predecessor, the Foundling Hospital.

Though the fictional Hetty Feather had a troubled life and disliked her experience at the Foundling Hospital, she was reminded by the teenage flower-seller on the streets of London that the hospital provided her food and shelter, something those who lived hand-to-mouth did not have and sorely needed. And Thomas Coram was responding to that true situation when he envisioned a place that would provide for children who were abandoned on the streets. For over 200 years the Foundling Hospital took care of over 25,000 children, and today, the children's charity Coram continues that mission by seeking loving families for children and providing support services to them to assure they have a chance at a better life.



*The artist William Hogarth, an early supporter and a governor of the Foundling Hospital, created this piece to illustrate the need for a safe place for abandoned children.*

## ***Teachable Themes and Topics*** (continued)

### **Class System in Victorian England**

When Hetty learns from Peg that she will return to the Foundling Hospital to be educated and reared there, she also discovers that her future seems predetermined for her.

**Peg:** ... You Foundling children are very blessed. When you grow up together in that Hospital, they'll teach you all sorts of clever things. Reading, writing, fine sewing. They'll train you up to be a servant girl.

**Hetty:** I don't want to be a servant girl!

**Gideon:** Will I be a servant girl?

**Peg:** No, Giddy. You'll be a brave soldier.

**Gideon:** I'd like to be a servant girl.

Indeed, the Foundling Hospital did provide training for the children to take on these types of roles in the working class. But what if a child had other dreams? Shouldn't schooling prepare children for a greater variety of endeavors or experiences? To modern audiences, this practice of focusing on domestic skills and military readiness might seem strange and somewhat limiting in its scope. But in the England of the 1870s and 1880s, where and when *Hetty Feather* is set, this system was in keeping with common educational traditions.

In the Victorian Age, as well as for centuries beforehand in England, there were three distinct classes of people: the upper class, the middle class, and the working class. The upper class consisted of aristocrats, people who inherited a great deal of money and land and social power from their ancestors. Being born into the upper class meant that a person rarely had to work for a living, for they were granted by birth privileges of money, land, and social status. Though upper class boys attended school, their studies focused on classics—Greek and Latin, the Romance languages, history, and certainly, religion. Their schools, known as “public schools,” were more like what is currently thought of as a private school: exclusive to wealthy males born into well-established families. Job training was not a focus other than teaching religion to prepare younger sons for membership into the clergy, for the oldest son of a nobleman inherited all of his father's wealth and land, eliminating the need for him to learn a trade or occupation. And young women born into the upper classes rarely attended a school as modern children would today. They would instead have tutors who might teach them reading and writing as well as artistic skills—drawing, singing, or playing an instrument, for example. An upper class girl who learned needlework did so for the artistic expression of such—embroidering a picture, for example, rather than learning to sew or mend clothing, for those jobs were intended for servants. Upper class women were prepared for marriage to upper class men, often with arrangements made to strengthen family connections between those in the upper class. The name and family connection were significant; so too were other benefits—greater financial security or the merging or acquisition of land or other important property. Rarely would an upper class person marry someone from a lower social status. Upper class men and women often held the title of “Lord” or “Lady,” further signifying their position in the community. Respectability—good moral character—was very important for upper class women as they were required to be examples for all of society; however, an upper class man could rely on his name and family history over his behavior to maintain his status in the community.

(continued)

## ***Teachable Themes and Topics*** (continued)

### **Class System in Victorian England** (continued)

The middle class was a segment of society that was generally comprised of skilled workers—factory owners, bankers, lawyers, and teachers, for example, or highly skilled tradesmen. Sons of middle class men and women might attend a local grammar school until they were around 10 years old, learning to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic operations, as well as study Latin and religion. After that, middle class boys often were signed to apprenticeships in a particular field—merchants, smiths, bankers, and law clerks, for example—to spend seven years learning a trade before ascending to the level of journeyman. When the young man proved his capability in the trade as a journeyman, he could attain the status of a master at his trade. The masters not only practiced the trade, but also were paid by families to take on new boys as apprentices, having only to provide food, clothing, and shelter to them while using their labors otherwise for free. Though they might eventually find great financial success in their jobs and even afford to keep servants and travel, middle class families were not fully accepted socially into the upper class. Once again, few middle class girls would attend school, instead learning a craft at home and possibly learning to read, write, and do basic math. Girls' education was again a preparation for building a home as wives and mothers and taking part in or supporting the trade of their husbands. Respectability, though, was a prime concern for members of the middle class, for a respectable family could be held in esteem in a community even if they were not able to ascend to the upper class.

The working class was made of people who worked in service to others, either in a domestic setting such as working in the home of a wealthy family, or working in what was viewed as an unskilled trade (factory work or farming, for example). For children of working class parents—those who were laborers or household servants—education was a privilege, not a right. Many families needed their children to work, too, to financially support the family. Despite The Factory Act of 1832 that put a legal end to child labor for boys and girls under the age of nine, it was not strictly enforced, and it wasn't until the 1880 Education Act in England that schooling was made mandatory. Yet that schooling still did not offer opportunities for the working class to explore or prepare for a range of jobs. Many poor children attended “ragged schools,” where there were large classes of children of many ages with only one teacher to instruct them in learning to read. Born into a working class family, a child could expect to follow in his or her parents' footsteps in terms of occupation and social class regardless of talent, interest, or work ethic.

Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a person born into one class in England was almost always destined to remain a part of that class. The idea of “social mobility”—the possibility for working hard, finding success, and raising one's social status—was not generally a part of the British people's experience. Someone like Hetty or Gideon, whose family circumstances were unknown, would be placed into the working class world, with their education at the Foundling Hospital preparing them for those lives ahead. When Hetty tried to persuade Ida to run away with her, Ida knew that it was not easy for a woman to get a job in the first place, and if she did find something, her having a child to care for on her own would be considered a burden at best and a question of her morality at worst, very likely costing her the job she sought or the opportunity to rent a home in a respectable area.

England was not alone in its reliance on birth and inheritance as the prime influencers on a person's social status and opportunity for success. In fact, it was because of the mythic proportions of “the American Dream” story that many European immigrants came to the United States, their having heard “the streets are paved with gold” or tales of those who arrived penniless and became successful entrepreneurs and civic leaders. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U. S. Constitution declares that

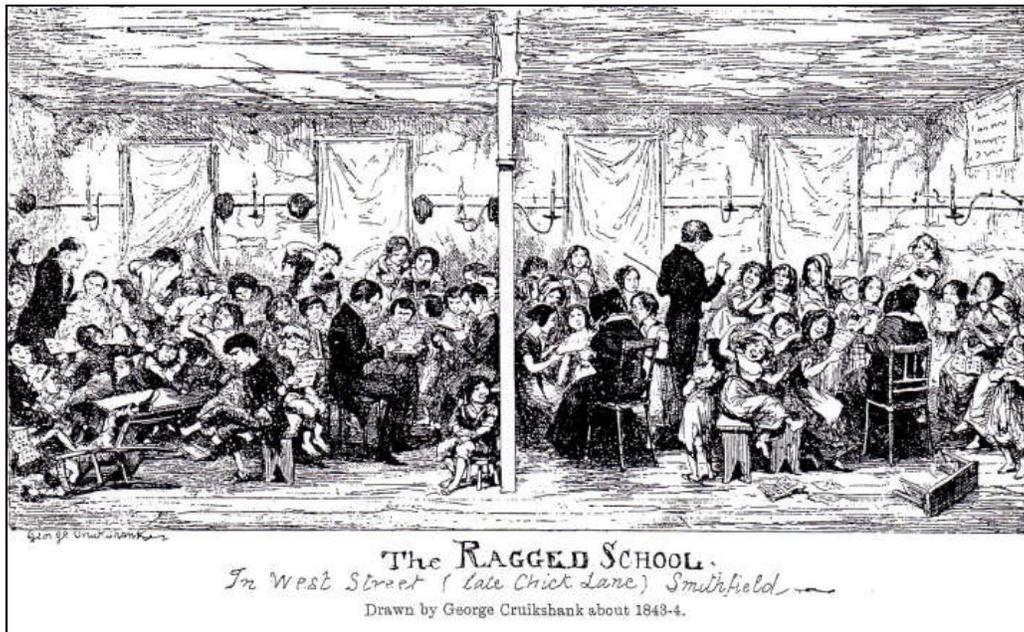
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## ***Teachable Themes and Topics*** (continued)

### **Class System in Victorian England** (continued)

every citizen is due equal protection of life, liberty, and property under the law, and that no law can be made to exclude a citizen or group of citizens their rights and privileges if those same rights and privileges are granted to others. The structure of American government designed by the founders and shapers of the country was and is a structure that emphasizes freedom and equality rather than family wealth or birth. Certainly that drew (and continues to draw) immigrants seeking to pursue a better life for themselves and their children. And America's heritage as a land where all children—boys and girls alike—are given free schooling has been enticing to people who come from countries where only the elite receive education or opportunity.

Though there is some truth to the concept of social mobility in America's being a result of its free public schooling, of a person's individual hard work and perseverance, and the freedom to move within the country to start fresh, there are still inequities that allow those who are born with money or privilege to have easier access to the opportunities for success. Even today in America, the inequity among our own public schools contributes to inequities in safety and security, in quality teaching, in resources and materials, in facilities, and in opportunities for children. Likewise, children in many countries face not the social taboo of reaching upward, but instead face limits ranging from basic survival needs to access to education, housing, or jobs. Hetty Feather faces these limits in the world of Victorian England, with only her dreams and imagination providing a way for her to build a new life beyond the dreary working-class destiny she faces. If we find those circumstances unfair, it is a reminder to us that even today, for children to be able to dream, to explore a variety of career pathways, and to develop their many talents, society must provide them with the foundations of security, education, and opportunity they need to do so.



*Image of a "Ragged School" where poor children received only the most basic education during the Victorian Age.*

## *Teachable Themes and Topics* (continued)

### Page to Stage: Creating the World of Hetty Feather

Author Jacqueline Wilson’s book *Hetty Feather* is a popular children’s book in Great Britain. As a well-known author, Wilson had a ready audience when it came to reading her book, and when she was approached about the possibility of adapting the book for a stage production in the United Kingdom, she was thrilled about the opportunity of sharing Hetty’s story with a live theatre audience.

Delaware Theatre Company is excited to be the first American theatre to produce the show. DTC will use the same script as was used in the British version, a script adapted by Emma Reeves from Wilson’s book. Adapting a novel to dramatic form requires a lot of creating thinking; for example, the main plot and characters are only two facets of what must be lifted from a novel to become a stage play. In addition, the setting of a scene—where and when it takes place—must be able to be conveyed effectively and efficiently to the audience who is watching the play. In *Hetty Feather*, our heroine is seen all over the Foundling Hospital: in her room, in an attic, on a playground, and in an infirmary, for example. Hetty’s story also involves scenes in Peg’s house, in the yard, at the circus, and in the streets of London, to name a few. In a book, the shift from one setting to another occurs through written words and the power of the reader’s imagination. On television or in a movie, the camera can stop recording and start again when the new location is ready for action, and what unfolds before a viewer’s eyes can seamlessly jump from one location to another or one year to another—again, something that can happen immediately for the viewer, even if it takes time during filming to make it happen. But a stage play takes place in real time in front of a live audience, and the time constraints as well as expense of making sets can be a challenge when a story has multiple settings. But Emma Reeves, who adapted *Hetty Feather* from the novel to its script form, imagined one consistent look for the stage—a circus-like atmosphere—that could be transformed in the way it was used to creatively convey new places and events, saving time between scenes and also activating the audience’s imagination. In Reeves’ adaptation, the image of the circus stays front and center through the whole show, and most of the actors take on many roles to play the different characters with whom Hetty comes into contact. And because the set looks like a circus, DTC’s director Bud Martin makes use of this exciting set—with ladders, a lyra (an acrobatic hoop in the air), long strips of fabric called “aerial silks,” and other features—to tell Hetty’s story beyond her visit to the circus.

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*The cast of Hetty Feather at DTC rehearses scenes from the show on the set.*



## ***Teachable Themes and Topics*** (continued)

### **Page to Stage: Creating the World of Hetty Feather** (continued)

In working with the circus elements, director Martin chose key moments from the story that he thought could be made more powerful onstage by using the lyra, the silks, and the ladders. An aerial choreographer was brought into DTC's rehearsal process to explain to actors how they might safely yet artistically move from one pose to another or one apparatus to another. Martin, the design team, and the cast took simple, everyday props and used them inventively to also spark imaginative thinking, bringing to theatrical life Hetty's "squirrel house" in the trees, her haircut in the Foundling Hospital, and her encounter with a circus elephant. Throughout the performance, the audience will see the cast also exercising their acting skills as the actors change costume pieces, voices, and physical mannerisms to become the many characters in the story.



*Musician Liz Filios reviews her music. At her station are some of the many instruments she plays.*

Sound is also an exciting transformer when taking a story from book form to dramatic form onstage. A reader might use his imagination for hearing a train clicking down the tracks or the rumbling of horses' hooves in Madame Adeline's circus act. In DTC's production, a team of live musicians enhances the audience's experience by using instruments to create what is known as a soundscape, an environment or atmosphere that is created for a scene through the use of sounds. The two musicians for *Hetty Feather* play over fifteen instruments (including keyboards, string instruments, a drum set, an accordion, and many percussion pieces like wood blocks, chimes, and a xylophone) to build the soundscape for Hetty's world. They join the cast in singing, too, for several of the songs in the show.

The relationship between the author of a novel and the reader can be very close, for the reader uses that author's words as the sole inspiration for bringing her imagination to life. But one of the most exciting aspects of theatre is in how a group of people comes together to create and share stories. Jacqueline Wilson's original book provides the wonderful tale of Hetty. Emma Reeve's vision for a play lifts Wilson's words from the page to the stage. And the DTC team of Bud Martin, the cast, the musicians, the designers, choreographer, crew, and stage management team use the combination of their creative and technical skills and their imaginations to make Hetty Feather, Madame Adeline, Jem, and the others living, breathing characters every time the lights come up in the theatre. When the audience takes in the sights and sounds of the play, they too become part of that creative team, activating their imaginations and experiencing the world of *Hetty Feather* in a unique and collaborative way.

## *Teachable Themes and Topics* (continued)

### Who is Queen Victoria?

Hetty was surprised and delighted when she and the other foundling children learned they had been invited to attend a festival in Hyde Park celebrating Queen Victoria's fiftieth jubilee.

**Hetty:** It was wondrous! There were merry-go-rounds, helter-skelters, whirling chairs, swingboats, and best of all—circuses!

Hetty's visit to the festival in both the novel and the play are fictional events, but in real life, there was indeed a Queen Victoria in England who celebrated her jubilee in June of 1887. In fact, the term "the Victorian Era" is used to describe the time period and evolving world of the sixty-plus years that Victoria reigned.

Victoria inherited the British throne when she was eighteen years old and became known as the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. She saw England's growth from the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution through the turn of the century which brought new technologies in communications, transportation, and science. Her reign was a time of general peace for Great Britain, and the economy flourished as business and industry boomed within the country. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was essentially the first world's fair, held in Hyde Park, and featured examples of new machines that could manufacture cloth, send messages by wire, or show a single-cell organism. The United Kingdom's strength and talent were displayed to the world, highlighting the achievements of the land and people led by Queen Victoria.



Through the changing business world marked by the industrial revolution, the middle class grew as more and more people were able to find jobs and prosper. Labor laws were enacted to protect children and adults; there were greater opportunities for children to attend school, and middle class families had extra income for leisure time. Men, women, and children took music lessons.

Community bands formed and played in local parks. Families could play or watch sports, or travel and visit seaside resorts in England. The Victorian Era was also known as the golden age for circuses, some of which travelled the country (like the fictional Tanglefield's Travelling Circus in *Hetty Feather*), and others which enjoyed a permanent and prominent location, entertaining audiences for decades.

Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, were known to be devoted to one another. After his death in 1861, Victoria wore mourning clothes for many years, at times even choosing not to wear her crown in favor of a somber bonnet. Yet Great Britain and the United Kingdom continued to grow and flourish throughout the remainder of her reign. At her Golden Jubilee in 1887, when the country celebrated her fifty years on the throne, she travelled through England by train and then by carriage as citizens cheered in her honor. Most likely real children growing up in the Foundling Hospital would have been included in the invitation to public celebrations like the parades that wound through the streets and parks in and around London. Queen Victoria then held a state dinner with many esteemed guests from all over the world, including monarchs and leaders from over fifty countries.

(continued)

## ***Teachable Themes and Topics*** (continued)

### **Who is Queen Victoria?** (continued)

Ten years later, the country celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, marking her sixtieth anniversary as their monarch. By this time, the British Empire included more colonies than ever, and Egypt, India, New Zealand, and other member countries celebrated with England. Victoria, weakened by arthritis and unable to walk distances, still enjoyed the festivities as she rode in her carriage throughout London, writing in her journal afterwards, "The cheering was quite deafening and every face seemed to be filled with real joy. I was much moved and gratified." Thousands of people lined the streets just a few years later after her death in 1901, watching her funeral procession and honoring the memory of the queen who had reigned for 63 years. And for most of those watching the procession, Queen Victoria was the only ruler they had ever known. Though her role as monarch was mostly ceremonial, for true governmental power came from Parliament and Prime Minister, she was still beloved for representing so much of what was good in England—how far the country had come since 1838, and how far and wide the British Empire's impact was felt in the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Queen Victoria in the year of her Golden Jubilee, celebrating fifty years as Great Britain's queen. The year was 1887, the same year the fictional Hetty Feather would have attended her jubilee festival in Hyde Park.*

## **Questions for Classroom Discussion**

### **Knowledge and Comprehension**

1. Why does Hetty's mother turn her over to the Foundling Hospital when Hetty is a baby?
2. Who are Hetty's favorite members of her foster family? Describe ways they make Hetty feel happy or special.
3. Name two things Hetty does not like about going back to and living at the Foundling Hospital.
4. Who is Hetty's real mother?

### **Application and Analysis**

1. Compare and contrast Matron Bottomly and Ida. What is similar about them? What is different?
2. What makes Hetty believe that Madame Adeline is her mother?
3. What causes Hetty's feelings about Saul to change?
4. Why is Hetty sad when Eliza comes to live at the Foundling Hospital?
5. How are Ida and Hetty similar?
6. How does Hetty change as she gets older? What stays the same about her?

### **Synthesis and Evaluation**

1. Were you able to predict who Hetty's mother was? Why or why not?
2. Do you think Jem was lying to Hetty when he said he would come for her? What might be an explanation for his behavior?
3. Do you think Hetty made any poor choices in terms of her actions? If so, what were they? Support your position with examples from the play.
4. In real life, what is good about having an imagination? How is imagination useful?
5. Is Hetty a typical hero for a story? Why or why not?

## **Reflecting and Responding**

One of the most captivating aspects of theatre is the way different audience members react and respond to elements of a show. While one person might be drawn to the comic moments in a play, another person might leave the theatre thinking about a dramatic scene, and yet another audience member might want to talk about the actors' singing or movement. Theatre is an art form designed for a group of people to experience together at the same time, and one of the best things to do after leaving the theatre is talk about or write about what you saw. Use your own ideas, or reflect on the quotation below and use the following guiding questions to start a conversation, a story, or an essay based upon your experience at *Hetty Feather*.

**“When you don’t know who you are,  
you can be anyone you want to be.”**

At the start of the show, Hetty reveals that she does not know her birth mother or family or even her given name. She says these words as she begins telling her story to the audience.

### **Story Starters and Writing Prompts...**

- Do these words have a positive or negative tone? Why do you think this?
- How might the setting of Victorian England be especially meaningful when considering Hetty’s words?
- Who or what influences who we are?
- How much is Hetty able to choose what kind of person she is or becomes? What is in her control? What is not in her control?
- In real life, what choices do we have in terms of being “anyone we want to be”?
- Why might knowing who you are be a good thing? Why might knowing who you are not be a good thing?
- In the show, who is a person who shapes Hetty in a good way? What did he or she do to help Hetty become better or stronger?
- In your own life, who is a person who has shaped you in a good way? What did that person do that you now credit him or her with having a positive effect on your development as a person?
- What kind of person do you want to be? How is what you are now similar to your goals and dreams for yourself? What is different? What steps, changes, or journeys might you make or take to become the self you want to be?
- How much of a person’s identity comes from his or her history? From the influence of others? How much of a person’s identity is self-created or self-directed?

## *Classroom Activities*

1. Ideas for plays and books can come from almost anywhere. The author Jacqueline Wilson got her idea for her book about Hetty Feather upon the suggestion of the director of the Foundling Museum that she write about a foundling child. Visit a museum and choose an object or exhibit as your springboard for writing a short story or play, or look for online public domain photos (such as this photo of schoolchildren in the Library of Congress' online collection <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.38823/?co=dag>) to inspire your writing. Begin by asking and imagining answers to questions such as, "Who is my central character? Why would he or she be linked to this object or be in this circumstance? What does this character want, need, or seek?" Just as Wilson created Hetty's world, create the world for your character and develop his or her story—or a chapter there of. Share your story or play and an image or description of its inspiration with your class.
2. The stage production of *Hetty Feather* incorporates props and sound effects in creative ways to help tell a story. With your class, play the game "Magic Prop," using a yardstick, a roll of masking tape, or other common classroom item as the magic prop. Take turns using that object in a creative way, acting out how through imaginative use, the prop transforms a character or setting from one to another. For example, one student might become a pirate and use the yardstick as a shovel for digging for buried treasure, and the next student might become an explorer and use the yardstick as a paddle for a canoe. After the class has taken turns with the exercise, build upon the experience by incorporating several objects into a short scene or storytelling. Choose a familiar story or make up one of your own, and with a partner or small group, select several "found objects" that can be transformed through imaginative use to aid in bringing the scene to life. Afterwards, reflect with the class on the way both performers' and audience's imaginations were sparked. What was fun about the activity? What was challenging? Consider the types of games and toys (and the number of options) available to American children today compared to children in less developed countries or children in bygone eras. What does this activity make you think about in terms of what children (and adults) need for fun and entertainment?
3. Hetty's early childhood was happily spent with her foster family. Peg, her foster mother, would have adopted her if the rules had allowed her to do so. Hetty learns in her journey that love is what is most important in a family. The real Foundling Hospital, now known as Coram, is a children's charity and adoption agency in London, seeking to help children find permanent, loving homes. Explore modern adoption stories by inviting a speaker from an adoption agency or parents and children who are willing to talk about adoption in their lives to visit your classroom. Prepare interview questions or open up the conversation through asking the participants to tell the story of their experience. Afterwards, discuss the many shapes and sizes that families come in. What qualities do you think are most important in family life?
4. The musicians in *Hetty Feather* use a variety of pieces to create songs and sound effects. Borrow from your school's music department or bring in or make simple "classroom instruments" like shakers, xylophones, tambourines, drums, rhythm sticks, or other pieces. Create a soundscape to accompany a familiar story or scene, identifying and recreating not only specific sound effects, but also expressing the mood or establishing an environment. Or following examples found online such as the performances by Jimmy Fallon and The Roots, take a familiar song and create a new version using simple instruments, creative sound effects, and the human voice. Record or perform your version live for your classmates.

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Page 1--Rehearsal of Delaware Theatre Company's production of *Hetty Feather*. Photo by Breck Willis of Delaware Theatre Company, 2017.

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Page 12--Two images of rehearsal of *Hetty Feather* at Delaware Theatre Company. Photo by Breck Willis of Delaware Theatre Company, 2017.

Page 13--Liz Filios in rehearsal at Delaware Theatre Company. Photo by Breck Willis of Delaware Theatre Company, 2017.

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## Why Go to the Theatre?

### State and National Education Standards Addressed Through Taking Your Students to a Live Theatre Production

When your students view live theatre, they are taking part in a learning experience that engages their minds on many levels. From simple recall and comprehension of the plot of a play or musical to analysis and evaluation of the production elements of a show, students receive and interpret messages communicated through words, movement, music, and other artistic devices. Beyond “I liked it; it was good,” students learn to communicate about the content and performance of an artistic piece and to reflect on their own and others’ emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual points-of-view and responses. And the immediacy of live theatre--the shared moments between actors and audience members in the here-and-now--raises students’ awareness of the power and scope of human connection.

**The following educational standards are addressed in a visit to a performance at Delaware Theatre Company along with a pre-show DTC classroom presentation and post-show talkback session at the theatre.** *(Additional standards addressed through the use of the study guide or through further classroom study are not included here.)*

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

*Reading: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, 6*

*Language: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, and 5*

National Core Arts Standards—Theatre:

*Responding: Anchor Standards 7, 8, and 9*

*Connecting: Anchor Standard 11*

Delaware Standards for English Language Arts (DOE):

*Standard 2: 2.2a, 2.4b, 2.5b, 2.5g, 2.6a*

*Standard 3: 3.1b, 3.3b1, 3.3b2*

*Standard 4: 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.2f, 4.3a, 4.4b*

*Compiled by Johanna Schloss, Associate Director of Education &  
Community Engagement, Delaware Theatre Company, 2016*