

# CHATTERBOX AUDIO THEATER

[www.chatterboxtheater.org](http://www.chatterboxtheater.org)



## rikki-tikki-tavi education guide

For use with the Chatterbox Audio Theater production available  
for free streaming and download at [www.chatterboxtheater.org](http://www.chatterboxtheater.org)  
Written by Marques Brown, Education Director



## about chatterbox

Chatterbox Audio Theater was created in 2007 by four friends with a lot of creativity and ambition but very little money. Based in Memphis, TN, Chatterbox creates fully soundscaped audio works for free streaming or download. With rare exceptions, Chatterbox shows are recorded live, with manual sound effects and as little post-production editing as possible.

Chatterbox is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Every Chatterbox production is available for free streaming and download from iTunes or from the group's website, [www.chatterboxtheater.org](http://www.chatterboxtheater.org).

## mission

Chatterbox Audio Theater is a non-profit web-based community theater that advances the exchange of ideas by channeling creativity and artistic collaboration into recorded audio works that enlighten, entertain, and inspire.

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Study guide designed with help from Heather Klein, [www.heatherkleindesign.com](http://www.heatherkleindesign.com)

## about audio theater



Karen Storchon

Once known as **radio drama**, audio theater is the production of dramatic performances written and performed specifically for audiences to hear. It had its greatest popularity on radio, before television was introduced, during the period known as the “Golden Age of Radio.”

The development of audio theater began as early as the 1880s, when theatrical performances could be listened to over the telephone! In the next ten years, phonograph recordings were all the rage, and music and comedy acts—like those of the vaudeville stage—were recorded and sold all over the country.

Eventually, the comical “sight gags” that were a part of the hilarious appeal of live vaudeville performances had to be adapted into “sound gags,” and “sound effects” for audiences at home listening to their radios or record players. By the 1920s, these techniques were improved upon—and the art form of audio theater was born.

As “radio drama,” it became the most popular form of mass entertainment from the 1920s through the 1940s, now referred to as the “Golden Age of Radio.” Classic shows such as *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, *The Shadow*, and *The Lone Ranger* kept people of all ages glued to their radios. Some of these shows ran for several decades.



## about audio theater (continued)

Television sets began to pop up in American homes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. After WWII, the television started to replace the radio in most American homes as the main source of news and entertainment. By the 1960's, with a few special exceptions, radio networks began shutting down their radio drama productions altogether to make way for television shows, and instead focused on delivering news and popular music.

Since the days that television replaced the radio, audio theater has survived through the efforts of many individual theater groups like Chatterbox. Thanks to technological innovations such as computer software and the internet, audio theater is being resurrected online, and is proving a rapidly growing art form and source of entertainment.

Audio theater also is growing in another way as well. This sensory art form is gaining recognition in educational institutions around the world as an effective teaching method. Audio theater has been employed to teach subjects such as literature, theatre, and technology, but also unexpected fields such as history, social science, and ethics.

## about rikki-tikki-tavi

Rudyard Kipling's "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" first appeared in 1895 as part of *The Jungle Book*, a collection of children's stories set in colonial India. Telling the tale of a heroic mongoose and his battle against a family of evil king cobras, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" is a war story that illustrates, in the simplest of terms, the triumph of good over evil. Creating an imaginary world that appeals to a child's imagination, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" takes place within the confines of a bungalow and small garden which is home to anthropomorphized birds, snakes, muskrats, and frogs.

By emulating values that were characteristic of Kipling's Victorian society—such as loyalty, hard work, and courage—the story serves as an educational morality tale. As controversial as it may seem to us today, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" also implicitly affirms the Victorian assumption of British superiority and its faith in the inherent goodness of empire-building.

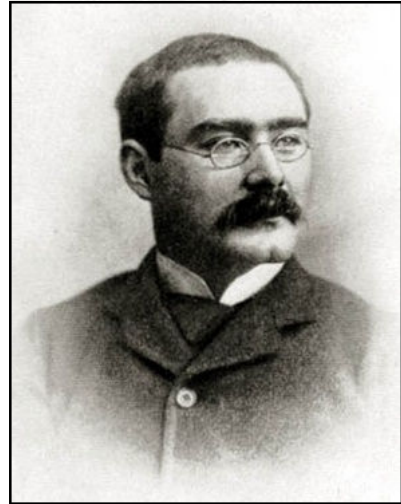
Through the story's suspense and pacing, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" serves as a wonderful example of Kipling's expertise in storytelling and is a testament to why his stories remain popular to this day. "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," both as part of *The Jungle Book* and as an independent story, has appeared in numerous incarnations throughout the twentieth century.

## summary

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi is an orphaned mongoose who is adopted by a Colonial British family: mother, father, and son Teddy. Rikki is introduced to the world of the family's garden, where he meets Darzee and Darzee's wife, two tailorbirds, and Nag and Nagaina, two vicious cobras. Nag and Nagaina develop a diabolical plan to destroy the family. Rikki foils their plan when he fights and kills Nag, who is lying in ambush under the family's bathtub. After Nag's death, a vengeful Nagaina seeks revenge, trapping young Teddy. Heroically, Rikki saves the boy and fights Nagaina in a battle to the death. Good triumphs over evil, and every family—human and animal—rejoices.

## about the author

### Rudyard Kipling



Wikimedia Commons

Rudyard Kipling was born on December 30, 1865 in Bombay, India, to his mother, Alice Macdonald Kipling, and his father, John Lockwood Kipling, who was an artist and principal of the Jeejeebhoy Art School. Kipling's early years were spent in India. In 1871, when he reached the age of six, his parents sent him and his three-year-old sister home to England to live with a foster family and attend boarding school. Nearsighted and physically frail, he was teased and bullied, but nevertheless developed fierce loyalties and a love of literature.

In 1882, at age 17, Kipling returned to India, where he spent the next seven years working in various capacities as a journalist and editor, and where he began to write about India itself and the Anglo-Indian society which presided over it.

In 1892, Kipling married Caroline Balestier, an American. Their honeymoon took them as far as Japan, but they returned, not altogether to Kipling's satisfaction, to live at his wife's home in Vermont. They remained there until 1899, when Kipling returned to England alone. During the American years, however, Kipling wrote *Captains Courageous*, *Many Inventions*, the famous poem "Recessional," and most of *Kim*, as well as the greater portion of the two *Jungle Books*, all of which were very successful.

In 1907, Kipling was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. But his Imperialist sentiments, which grew stronger as he grew older, put him more and more out of touch with the political, social, and moral realities of the day.

Kipling traveled intermittently and continued to publish stories, poems, sketches, and historical works. He died in London on January 18, 1936, just after his seventieth birthday. He was buried beside T. S. Eliot in Westminster Abbey.

## cast & crew

<b>Role</b>	<b>Performer</b>
Rikki-Tikki-Tavi.....	Jerre Dye
Nagaina.....	Kell Christie
Nag / Darzee.....	Marques Brown
Darzee's Wife / Teddy.....	Rae Boller
Darzee's Wife / Teddy (Live Version).....	Lyric Peters
The Big Man.....	Robert Arnold
The Big Man's Wife / Karait.....	Ashley Bugg Brown
Chuchundra.....	Aliza Moran
Musician.....	Jeanne Simmons
Producer.....	Andrew Sullivan
Adaptation.....	Marques Brown
Director.....	Marques Brown
Announcer.....	Tom Badgett
Artist.....	Gina Rickicki

# characters

## **Rikki-Tikki-Tavi**

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, whose name is derived from his characteristic chattering noise, is a young mongoose who, at the beginning of the story, has little experience, but by the end has become a mongoose of legendary strength and fighting ability. As a mongoose, Rikki is the natural enemy of snakes, and his presence in the garden threatens the resident king cobra couple, Nag and Nagaina, who become Rikki's arch-enemies. Rikki is emblematic of the archetypal hero: he exhibits the qualities of courage, strength, and loyalty, and he uses his virtues to fight evil. Prior to arriving in the garden, Rikki had never fought a snake, and his ultimate triumph over the cobras not only protects the lives of the birds and the humans he befriends, but also serves as his coming of age.

## **Teddy**

Teddy is the little boy who lives in the bungalow with his parents. Of all the human characters, he is the most fond of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi. His innocence and vulnerability as a small child make him an easy target for the poisonous snakes of the garden and the most in need of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi's protection.

## **The Big Man**

The Big Man is an Englishman who has just moved, with his son Teddy and wife Alice, into the Indian bungalow where the main action of the story takes place. As an Englishman in India during the late nineteenth century, the Big Man represents imperial England's presence in India and thus gives a historical and cultural context to the story. He and his family take Rikki-Tikki-Tavi into their home and thereby earn his loyalty and protection. The Big Man and his family's gratitude to Rikki for saving their lives earns him a lasting place in their household.

## **Alice (Teddy's Mother)**

Teddy's mother, Alice, lives in the bungalow with her son and her husband, the Big Man. She initially has misgivings about keeping a wild animal as a pet, but Rikki later earns her trust and affection by protecting her and her family from the cobras.

## **Darzee**

A tailorbird who, together with his wife, keeps a nest in the bungalow's garden, Darzee is described as "a feather-brained fellow" because he fails on more than one occasion to competently assist Rikki-Tikki-Tavi against their common enemies, Nag and Nagaina. Darzee, unlike Rikki, is severely lacking in foresight. He begins to sing a song of triumph after the death of Nag but before Nagaina



## characters (continued)

and her eggs are destroyed, for which Rikki scolds him. His lack of foresight serves as a foil to Rikki's own impetus for action. Darzee also plays the role of a bard. He composes songs about Rikki-Tikki-Tavi's showdowns against Nag and Nagaina, which are used to highlight Rikki's heroic aspects.

### **Darzee's wife**

Darzee's wife plays a pivotal role in assisting Rikki against the snakes—and is therefore called “sensible”—by serving as a decoy to distract Nagaina and allow Rikki time to destroy the cobras' un-hatched eggs.

### **Nag**

One of two king cobras who reside in the garden of the bungalow, Nag, along with his wife Nagaina, are Rikki-Tikki-Tavi's arch-enemies. Nag and his wife are depicted as evil. His enormous size—“five feet long from tongue to tail”—and strength make him a formidable and therefore worthy opponent for Rikki, the hero of the story. Prior to Rikki's arrival in the garden, Nag and Nagaina held free rein there. Nag is killed by Rikki-Tikki-Tavi inside the bungalow when he, at Nagaina's bidding, enters it to kill the human family. Nag's name is derived from the Hindi word for snake.

### **Nagaina**

Like her husband Nag, Nagaina is characterized as evil. While Nag is foreboding in his size and strength, Nagaina is dangerously intelligent. It is she who formulates the plan—which Rikki thwarts—to kill the human family in order to rid the bungalow of the mongoose, who is her natural enemy. She is killed by Rikki in her lair, to which she flees to protect the last of her eggs.

### **Karait**

Karait, a small, quick, poisonous snake who lives in the dust, is confronted by Rikki-Tikki-Tavi when he threatens to bite Teddy. Karait is the first snake that Rikki kills, and his success gives Rikki the confidence to battle against the more dangerous cobras.

### **Chuchundra**

A muskrat who lives in the bungalow, Chuchundra is portrayed as a cowardly creature who weeps and whines when he speaks. He tips Rikki off to Nag and Nagaina's planned attack on the Big Man and his family. Chuchundra's cowardliness serves as a foil to Rikki-Tikki-Tavi's courage.

# themes, motifs, and symbols

Literary works often use **themes** (unifying or dominant ideas), **motifs** (recurring subjects, ideas, or other patterns), and **symbols** (an object or image used to represent a larger idea). Below are just a few examples and suggestions of these literary devices to explore in your classroom discussions.

## **THEME: Colonialism**

An important element to the Story of “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” is the setting in which it takes place. The particular area of India and the particular era in history both support the theme of British occupation and colonialism—which the author was in favor of at the time, being of English and of Indian descent, but feeling a greater association with England. The story does not explicitly take a side on the issue, but it is clear that the protagonist chooses to protect the colonial family, as well as other local animals, from the “native savages” in the form of poisonous cobras.

## **THEME: Bravery**

The story of “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” serves as a sort of ‘coming of age’ tale for the young hero mongoose, in which he must prove his worth through his brave acts. He is constantly called upon to jump into harm’s way—despite whatever fear he may feel—in order to protect others. Chuchundra the Muskrat, and at times Darzee the Tailorbird, both serve as foils to his bravery by displaying a certain level of cowardice in the face of danger.

## **THEME: Good vs. Evil**

The basic principals of the story are based on the battle between good and evil. The mongoose represents stealth, bravery, strength, and cunning, but all for the purpose of protecting and serving others, while the Cobras use their powers of persuasion and deadly skill only to serve themselves, in the name of eventual domination. These characteristics are classic indications of good and evil. The fact that Rikki the Mongoose is triumphant in the end, despite his many dangerous trials, sends a hopeful message: with perseverance, good will ultimately triumph over evil.

## themes, motifs, and symbols (continued)

### **MOTIF: Songs and Poetry**

Kipling often made use of poetry and song to enhance his stories, as did many young writers of fiction at the time. In this particular story, we see a variation of styles that serves to represent the differing points of view of the animals who sing them. For example, during the fight between Rikki and Nag, the implied rhythm is sporadic and intense, representing the action as well as the rhythmic roots of the “tribal” and earthy nature of the cobras. Contrast this with Darzee’s “Ballad of Rikki-Tikki,” which is more similar to the traditional hymns and ballads of Western Europe.

### **SYMBOL: Animals and Characteristics**

The most obvious form of symbolism used in “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” one employed by many storytellers throughout history, is the anthropomorphic use of animal characters. Kipling had the advantage of being very knowledgeable about India’s environment and wildlife. He built his story around the very real, naturally occurring conflict between the mongoose and cobra, who often fight for territory. By using the negative view of snakes that people often hold, Kipling was able to create a story of good versus evil in which the animals’ innate characteristics serve to enhance the elements of their personas.

## entry points for teachers

1. Indian culture
2. Colonialism
3. Indian animals/regional animals/Indian jungle animals
4. Audio theater
5. Narrative theater
6. Character: animals as people, people as animals
7. Music in a story
8. Rudyard Kipling
9. Sound effects in a story
10. Onomatopoeia

# curriculum connections

## **English/Language Arts**

1. Literary forms—fiction, folk tales
2. Rhythmic nature of language found in the play
3. Recurring themes
4. Observation
5. Compare and contrast
6. Cause and effect
7. Outcomes, conclusions
8. Figurative Language
9. Make predictions about stories
10. Draw, dictate, or write stories that include settings, characters, problem/solution situations, a series of events, and a sense of sequence
11. Participate in group discussions
12. Express personal opinions about the play
13. After reading or hearing the play, identify the main idea, describe main characters, re-enact or map major plot elements, draw conclusions, and make inferences
14. Dramatize or re-enact story events
15. Describe the plot, characters, and setting in the play
16. Explain a speaker's message and purpose
17. Speak to express an opinion, persuade, or entertain

## **Social Studies:**

1. Show how families change in size and where they live
2. Show how families are similar and different
3. Explain and respect the diversity of people and their cultures

## **Science:**

1. Classify animals by their homes

## shorter activities

1. Write short, original narratives that include characters, settings, and a sequence of events.
2. Performing exercises (act like favorite animal, write and perform scenes or plays, etc.)
3. Compare/contrast "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" with other Kipling works and/or other animal plays.
4. Write about or discuss relationships between music, story, and literature.
5. Adapt a familiar story (an Aesop's Fable, for instance) into play form.

## longer activities

1. The students will write letters about the play to specific people, depending on age. Younger students will write letters to the characters in the play, expressing how they felt about various actions or decisions. Older students will write letters to the actors, discussing choices the actor made in bringing his/her character to life, or techniques used within the play. Older students will also write a letter to a newspaper as a play critic, describing the play he/she heard, the production elements (sound effects, voices, music, etc.) and what he/she thought was effective (or ineffective).

2. The students will listen to samples of percussion and wind instruments that are often used in the art of storytelling. They will discuss the role of music and instruments in plot development, mood, and characterization (e.g., What sound was repeated for the cobras? For certain emotions?). After discussing the use of sound in theater, the students will listen to select pieces of music and document their impressions by writing or drawing.

3. The students will listen to samples of sound effects used in the audio theater piece. They will discuss the role of sound in audio theater, and in theater in general. Students will speculate on what objects or devices were used to create sound effects in the audio theater piece, and will create their own sound effects using everyday objects.

## vocabulary

**Bantam.** A small chicken. *“There, in the warm litter about the melons, very cunningly hidden, he found twenty-five eggs, about the size of a bantam's eggs, but with whitish skin instead of shell.” (29:57)*

**Bottle-brush.** A long, bristled brush used for cleaning the inside of bottles. *“I can fluff up my tail till it looks like a bottle-brush...” (01:09)*

**Brahm.** The Hindu creator-god. *“The great god Brahm put his mark upon all our people when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahm as he slept.” (07:45)*

**Bungalow.** A smaller, one-story house, usually surrounded by a veranda. *“This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed, through the bathrooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee in India.” (00:19)*

**Burrow.** A tunnel in the ground made by an animal. *“One day, a high summer flood washed him out of the burrow where he lived with his father and mother...” (01:22)*

**Fledgling.** A young bird just learning to fly. *“ ‘Well,’ said Rikki-tikki, and his tail began to fluff up again, ‘marks or no marks, do you think it is right for you to eat fledglings out of a nest?’ ” (08:54)*

**Providence.** A gift from God. *“Teddy's mongoose is a providence!” (14:08)*

**Sluice.** A man-made channel for conducting water. *“That's Nag or Nagaina, and he is crawling into the bath-room sluice!” (17:08)*

**Valiant.** Brave; courageous. *“It is all over with Rikki-tikki! We must sing his death-song. Valiant Rikki-tikki is dead!” (35:05)*

**Veranda.** A large, open porch along the front and sides of a house. *“Early in the morning Rikki-tikki came to early breakfast in the veranda...” (04:45)*