

# Playing Beatie Bow



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RUTH PARK

Ruth Park was born in New Zealand, and lived a transient, working-class life for many years as a result of her father's work as a seasonal laborer—pruned and foraged projects in northern New Zealand. Ruth doggedly pursued a serious education in spite of her family's frequent moves, and after studying at St. Benedict's college and Auckland University, she went on to become a contributor and editor to the children's pages of several major New Zealand newspapers. In 1942, she moved to Australia and married another writer, Cliffray Milford, and began publishing novels in the late 1940s—beginning with her groundbreaking debut, *The Man in the South*, which unflinchingly represented the gritty reality of life in Sydney's poorest quarters. Park wrote several novels for adults, a series of memoirs, and an enormous number of radio plays, but it is certainly in her career began writing almost exclusively for children. Her books for young adults explore themes of longing, the difficulties of fitting in, and the journey of discovering one's place in the world.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Allegat Kirk is being backwards in time to the Sydney of 1872—a time when Australia was not a unified country but rather a series of colonies between whom tensions and rivalries over trade and cultural differences were high. The Rocks district—in Allegat's 1980 Sydney—was rapidly being gentrified, redeveloped, and transformed into a commercial area, aimed at drawing tourists and shoppers, and so Allegat's shock at discovering her neighborhood as a rough, dangerous area rife with unrepentant poverty, crime, and disease is palpable. It is not just the physical changes to her hometown, though, that Allegat must contend with when she is thrown into the past—the cultural differences also overwhelm her. As she is forced to wear stiff wooden clothes, use chamber pots and forgo daily baths, Allegat longs for her comfortable, modern life, and as she witnesses the horrible ways women are treated through her encounters with Beatie, Daisy, and the prison rules in the "Toys Canal," an exceptionally dangerous enclave of the Rocks, Allegat recognizes how privileged and easy her "real" life is, and longs for the world which once feared and even repulsed her.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Books for young adults that feature a split-in-time are common—they provide a way for children who might be spoiled, stuck-up, unhappy, or somewhat at odds to reach back

through time and contextualize their own difficulties in the larger scheme of human history. In *Playing Beatie Bow*, Allegat Kirk, devastated by her parents' separation and having grown more than a touch nasty and impetuous as a result, is sent back to the 1800s where she is forced to live a life much harder than her own—initially, only one in the early 1980s. Similarly, *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen tells the story of Hannah Stern, a young Jewish girl in contemporary New York who, after talking at the boring tradition of her family's yearly Passover seder, is sent back in time to 1942 Poland and forced to live through the Holocaust. The sobering events of the past allow Hannah to see her family—their history, their traditions, and the gravity of the suffering that has led to their present-day happiness and liberation—in a new light. Other novels for young people that wrestle with the tensions between worlds at different time periods—and the ways in which time travel allows young teens to appreciate their "boring" or unsatisfactory present moment—include *Both Sides of Time* by Caroline B. Cooney and *The Cat Who Saw Red* written by Katherine Locke.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Playing Beatie Bow*
- **When Written:** Late 1970s
- **Where Written:** Sydney, Australia
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction; Historical fiction; coming-of-age tale
- **Setting:** The Rocks District, Sydney, Australia
- **Climate:** Allegat Kirk finally understands that the reason for her journey to the past has been to help ensure that the phrase, "Gift" is pronounced.
- **Antagonist:** Beatie Bow
- **Point of View:** Third person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Bow on the Big Screen.** In 1986, *Playing Beatie Bow* had become so popular as a defining Australian novel that it was adapted as a film. Despite the filmmakers' ambitious intentions, incorporating Sydney's Rocks district as a fully-fledged set (and a native on an abandoned industrial site, it performed rather poorly at the box office—even so, both the novel and the film remain seminal Australian works.

# Playing Beatie Bow Study Guide

**Yi-Tong Ma**



## **Playing Beatie Bow Study Guide:**

## Decoding **Playing Beatie Bow Study Guide**: Revealing the Captivating Potential of Verbal Expression

In a time characterized by interconnectedness and an insatiable thirst for knowledge, the captivating potential of verbal expression has emerged as a formidable force. Its ability to evoke sentiments, stimulate introspection, and incite profound transformations is genuinely awe-inspiring. Within the pages of "**Playing Beatie Bow Study Guide**," a mesmerizing literary creation penned by a celebrated wordsmith, readers embark on an enlightening odyssey, unraveling the intricate significance of language and its enduring impact on our lives. In this appraisal, we shall explore the book's central themes, evaluate its distinctive writing style, and gauge its pervasive influence on the hearts and minds of its readership.

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