

## RELEASE

“Messing about in boats” and other misadventures

# THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

By Kenneth Grahame

On MASTERPIECE THEATRE

Sunday, April 8, 2007 at 9pm on PBS

[pbs.org/masterpiece](http://pbs.org/masterpiece)

The most charming small mammals you'll ever meet team up with the world's most exasperating amphibian to pursue their merry adventures in MASTERPIECE THEATRE's adaptation based on Kenneth Grahame's beloved children's classic, *The Wind in the Willows*, airing Sunday, April 8, from 9 to 10:30pm on PBS (check local listings). *The Wind in the Willows* is the first MASTERPIECE THEATRE production presented in High Definition.

Dispensing with animation, MASTERPIECE THEATRE relies on the striking animal instincts of some very talented actors. Which is only proper, since Grahame's story features animals acting like people—like slightly barmy Edwardian-era gentlemen, to be exact.

British comedian Matt Lucas (*Casanova*) stars as gadget-crazed Mr. Toad, the irresponsible scion of a great fortune, which he splurges on boats, a caravan, motorcars, and a snazzy wardrobe.

Toad's bosom buddies are the stern Badger, played by Bob Hoskins (*Hollywoodland*, *Mrs. Henderson Presents*); easy-going Ratty, played by Mark Gattis (*Match Point*); and diffident but loyal Mole, played by Lee Ingleby (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*).

Also appearing are Anna Maxwell Martin (*Bleak House*) as the Jailor's Daughter, who befriends the forlorn Toad in prison; and Imelda Staunton (*My Family and Other Animals*) as the Barge Lady, who almost outwits the web-toed schemer after his jail break.

The story's opening scene includes one of the most satisfyingly bucolic passages in literature: “Believe me, my young friend,” says Ratty to Mole as they gently row downriver, “there is NOTHING—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.”

But this dreamy mood is broken by the maniacal entrance of Toad, who darts past in a racing scull—his latest toy. Toad's hilarious misadventures form the exciting core of *The Wind in the Willows*, which started out as a series of bedtime stories told by Grahame to his young son in the early years of the 20th century.

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Like many well-heeled idlers of the day, Toad loses all self-restraint when he encounters his first motorcar. He absolutely must have one; and as soon as he wrecks it, another—and another and another! At wits' end about how to reform their incorrigible friend, Ratty and Mole appeal to Badger, braving the carnivorous weasels in the Wild Wood to reach his den.

There, the three conspire to keep Toad under house arrest at Toad Hall, but the crafty creature eventually escapes, and a life of crime ensues—involving auto theft, prison, and a getaway at breakneck speed aboard a locomotive!

Generations of readers have vivid images of these exploits indelibly etched in their minds, often based on the many illustrated versions of *The Wind in the Willows*. But oddly enough, the first edition of the book in 1908 appeared without pictures. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* quotes Grahame's biographer Peter Green on the reason:

“When asked specifically (apropos the escape on the railway train) whether Toad was life-size or train-size, [Grahame] answered that he was both and neither: the Toad was train-sized, the train was Toad-sized, and therefore there could be no illustrations.”

*The Wind in the Willows* is a Box TV production for the BBC, produced in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, WGBH Boston and NBDtv. It is adapted by Lee Hall from the book by Kenneth Grahame. The producer is Gub Neal. The director is Rachel Talalay. The executive producers are Justin Thomson-Glover and Patrick Irwin, and Rebecca Eaton for WGBH.

Funding for MASTERPIECE THEATRE is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and public television viewers. Rebecca Eaton is the executive producer of MASTERPIECE THEATRE.

Press materials and photography are available at [pressroom.wgbh.org](http://pressroom.wgbh.org) and [pbs.org/pressroom](http://pbs.org/pressroom).

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