

There was an old lady who swallowed a fly

A large old lady accidentally swallows a fly. What is she to do? Liz Rhodes, a primary school consultant from Exeter, discusses ways to teach this delightful tale to year 1 children



This much-loved traditional story provides a wealth of activities and is very cleverly constructed so that the holes in the book work both backwards and forwards.

The story is about a huge old lady who accidentally swallows a fly then swallows a great many animals one by one deliberately as a remedy, until she finally ingests one too many. Repetition and build-up are strong features of the story. It also contains steady rhythm and rhyme, and children love the inevitability of the denouement.

DAY ONE

Shared reading

Start by showing the back of the book to the children (it doesn't have the title printed on it). Ask them to look closely at it. Ask:

- 'Does anyone recognise this book?'
- 'Has anyone got it at home?'
- 'What do you think it will be about?'
- 'Can you suggest a title for the book?'

Then turn the book round so the class can see the title. Draw their attention to the fact that



there is no author's name and ask them if the children can think why this might be.

Explain that traditional stories were very often passed down orally and that no one really knows who first told this story, although it is thought that it originally came from America.

The illustrator's name is on the cover, so explain that she used an old story to make a brand new book and has made exciting use of holes. Ask the children if they can think of other book with holes, such as *Peepo* or *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

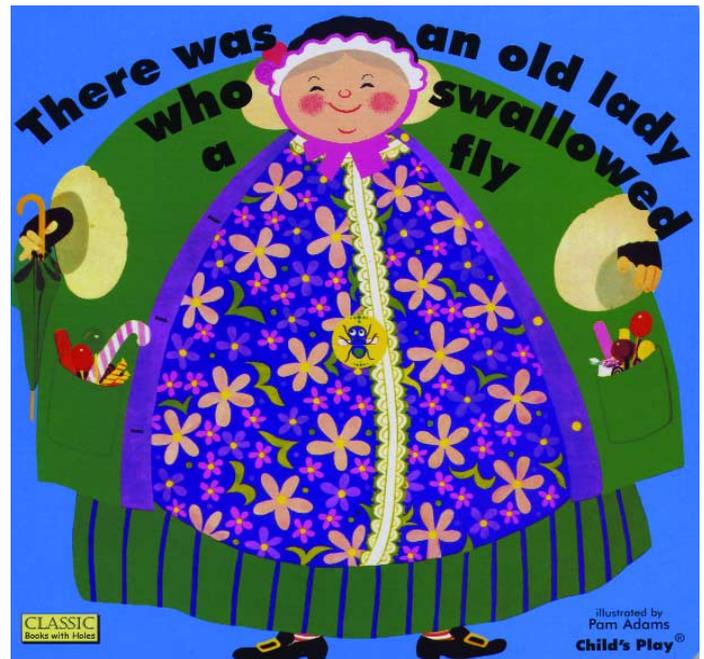
While it is okay to read the story, it is much better if you can sing it. If you don't know the tune, it is in *Apusskidu*, number 21, called *I Know an Old Lady*.

It's a very simple melody, but greatly adds to the overall effect and enjoyment. Get the children to join in and, when the story is finished, ask them whether the ending was a surprise.

Emphasise that the whole story is nonsense. While some people might possibly have swallowed a fly (what would that feel like?), swallowing the other creatures is clearly impossible, so we're not dealing with a real death either.

Word level

Briefly look at the vocabulary (the whole story is printed on one page at the back of the book). Ask the children where they could find out the meanings of words they don't know. Their answers



should include both dictionaries and computer sources.

Independent activity

Get the children to design a different front cover for the book. What kind of front cover do they think makes people want to read a book? Is it the bright colours and exciting illustrations? Are different shapes appealing?

Make sure the children know the importance of putting the title, author and illustrator's names on the cover. If there is a group supported by a classroom assistant, they could try to reproduce the story using role-play.

Plenary

Ask the children who have been doing role-play if they would like to perform for the rest of the class. Use this opportunity to introduce the concepts of playing to an audience who are all facing the same way, and ensure that the actors speak (or sing) to the

audience and don't mask each other.

Look at the children's alternative front covers and ask them which is the most effective, and why.

DAY TWO

Shared reading

Start by asking the children what they remember about the book from yesterday. Ask them:

- 'What is the book called?'
- 'What is it about?'
- 'What happens at the beginning, the middle or the end of the story?'

Sing the text again and discuss the rhyming words.

Word level

Emphasise the rhymes and make sure they understand the concept of rhyming. Rhyming words are those being words with endings that sound the same but which have different beginnings.

Ask the children to think of

other words that also rhyme, such as 'hog', 'dog', 'log' and 'fog'. Explain that the sounds need to be the same, but not necessarily the spelling, as in 'bird', 'absurd' and 'word'.

Independent activity

Working in pairs on the whiteboards, ask the children to make lists of rhymes, not necessarily from the story. Give each pair of children their own starting words. When they are all happy with their lists they can transfer them onto sugar paper.

Another group could have a go at role-play now, but this time using mime with a narrator (this could be a tape recording). Remind them about what they saw yesterday and ask them to think about any improvements they might make.

Plenary

Discuss the children's word lists and see if the whole class can add to them. Look at the mime performance and decide whether it is an effective way of showing the story.



assembled words together so that the whole class can help to sort out the sentences. Remind them that a sentence must make sense. Do this by showing them a nonsense sentence out of the words by using cut-out words; then show how you can change the sentence by rearranging the words.

Independent activity

Get the children into groups of eight so that each one can produce a puppet character from the story. For this, use card, fabric or any other suitable material. Explain that they are making puppets that they can use when they go through the song again. Have ready a large piece of cardboard, which can be the old lady, with a suitable sized hole for all the animals.

Plenary

Sing the song and use the puppets. Ask the children whether they like this way of producing a play.

DAY FOUR

Shared reading

When you next sing the story, emphasise the rhythm. Get the children to clap to the beat and to put their palms face up when there is a pause. Tell the class that today you are focusing on sounds and that it would be good to think of appropriate noises for each verse, in addition to clapping. Most of the sounds will be obvious, but you may need to get the children's imagination going for the spider-bite!

Word level

Have cards with the different animals from the book on them and other cards with words describing each animal. Ask the children to match the cards together. Mention that in some

cases the same word is appropriate for more than one animal, while in others the word is special for one particular character. Put the matching cards up on the flip-chart.

Independent activity

Time to ask the old lady some questions! Ask the children to think in groups about what they might want to know and remind them to end questions with a question mark. Questions should be written on whiteboards and brought to the plenary.

Plenary

This will give everyone an opportunity to surmise who is going to get the sweets that the old lady had in her pocket.

Ask why her umbrella is so small? Does she usually eat a lot? Where did the animals come from? Was the farmer cross? How could she make sure she doesn't swallow any more flies?

DAY FIVE

Shared writing

Building on the questions task from yesterday, introduce *who*, *when*, *what*, *where* and *why*.

Use these words to work out what happened in a well-known story or nursery rhyme. *Who?* The Grand old Duke of York. *What?* He had ten thousand men. And so on. Repeat this a couple of times.

Word level

Explain to the children that, in order to answer questions well, they need to use describing words. Ask them to think carefully so that you can make a list of descriptions which might be used in the story of 'The Three Bears'.

Independent activity

Using the list you have compiled together and the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* and *why* questions, put the children in five groups, one for

each question word, and ask them to work out what happened in the case of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Suggest that they are reporting the story to someone who doesn't know it. The children could head a whiteboard with the question and then write appropriate words underneath.

Plenary

Bring all the whiteboards together and discuss the children's findings. Ask them how the work could be improved.

Finally, celebrate the end of a week's hard work with a grand rendition of *There was an Old Lady*, complete with clapping and animal noises and, if possible, the puppet show. The children have covered a great deal, so a celebration is in order. You could even acquire some of the Old Lady's sweets, though perhaps she should have politically correct carrots and apples. Better than flies, birds, dogs, cows and horses!

5to7

References

- Harrop B (Ed), Blakeley P (Ed), Gadsby D (Ed), Cheese B (Illustrator) (1982) *Apusskidu: Songs for Children*. A & C Black.



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