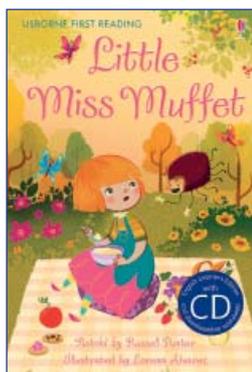


Little Miss Muffet • Teacher's notes



Author: traditional rhyme, adapted by Russell Punter

Reader level: Elementary

Word count: 199

Lexile level: 310L

Text type: Nursery rhyme (extended)

About the story

Little Miss Muffet sits on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey. She's frightened by a spider and runs away. There ends the traditional rhyme, but not this version.

Miss Muffet hides in a wood and soon realises she is both lost and in danger. A big wolf jumps out and threatens to eat her. Fortunately, Seb – the spider who had frightened her earlier – has followed her into the wood. He confronts the wolf and demands Miss Muffet's release. The wolf mocks the little spider, thinking him too tiny to be any threat. Undeterred, Seb spins a strong web that successfully secures the wolf to a tree. Seb leads Miss Muffet to safety and becomes a firm friend, spinning intricate webs for her each day.

The original "Little Miss Muffet" rhyme has only six lines. It was first printed in 1805, and has long been a popular English nursery rhyme. This extended version introduces a third character, far more frightening than the spider, and results in an unlikely friendship.



About the author

Russell Punter was born in Bedfordshire, England. When he was young, he enjoyed making up and illustrating his own stories. His ambition as a boy was to become a cartoonist. When he grew up, he studied art at college before becoming a graphic designer and writer. He has written over forty children's books.

Key words

Your students might not be familiar with some of these words, which are important in the story.

p2 tuffet	p10 sighed
p3 curds	p11 lost
whey	stuck
p4 spider	p12 a deep growl
dropped	p14 shout
beside	p15 dinner
p5 cried (meaning "shouted")	p16 pie
p7 below	p17 cry
p8 called (meaning "shouted")	p19 against
rushed	p20 spun
p9 scaring	p21 tied
	p22 wonderful

Key phrases

p4	Along came
p5	to frighten (someone) away
p10	What a bad place [NB 'what' is used here as an intensifier, not a question word]
p12	ear-splitting howl
p13	to give (someone) a fright
p14	jumped out
p15	my dear
p17	to put (something) down
	Don't worry
p18	I (do) like your style
p19	I'll show you
p23	let's go
p23	to show the way



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Before reading

You could find a toy spider or make one [see the worksheet activity], and put it in a box or a jar. Show students the box or the lid of the jar without letting them see inside, then ask if they like spiders. Is anyone afraid of spiders? Can they say why? You could talk about how most spiders are harmless, but they can give us a fright. Now show students your not-at-all-scary toy spider.

Has anyone heard of Miss Muffet? She was afraid of spiders. What do you think happened when one settled beside her? Show the cover of the book. If students are unfamiliar with the original nursery rhyme, you may like to introduce some of the unusual words – tuffet (a kind of cushion), curds and whey (milk that is separated, usually for cheesemaking; see page 32 in the book) – before you start reading.

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Reading or listening

You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the story, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

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During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

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|---------|--|-----|--|
| pp3-4 | What kinds of animals can you see in the picture? Does Miss Muffet look happy? | p17 | How would you describe Seb Spider's actions? |
| p5 | Does the spider look scary to you? Why do you think he's holding a flower? | p19 | Why isn't the wolf afraid of the spider? What could a spider do to a wolf? |
| pp10-11 | Why are the woods a bad place to hide? | p21 | How do you think the wolf is feeling now? |
| p14 | Would you rather be scared by a wolf or by a spider? | p24 | Would you like a friend like Seb? What web shapes would you ask him to spin? |
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Puzzles

You might like students to work on these in pairs or small groups. If so, ask the "After reading" questions before doing the puzzles.

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After reading

You could ask your students to act out the story in groups of four. One could be the narrator and the other three could be Miss Muffet, Seb Spider and the wolf. They could tell the story in their own words and take it in turns to be the different parts.

Ask students to find out a little more about spiders, and put together a spider quiz, either as a whole class or in groups to test each other. You'll find some surprising facts; for instance, did you know that spiders have blue blood?

Look out for other Usborne English Learner's editions based on traditional nursery rhymes: *There Was a Crooked Man* and *Old Mother Hubbard* are also available at the same level.

Did you know?

Spiders' silk is extremely strong. Weight for weight, it's stronger than steel. But it's unlikely that a spider could spin a thread of silk thick enough to secure a wolf to a tree. And it's very unlikely that a wolf would stay still long enough to let the spider trap it!

