

Three Little Billy Goats

by Clive Sansom

illustrated by Jan van der Voo

Overview

This play is a humorous retelling of a traditional tale. It has a sing-song rhythm and rhyme scheme throughout that support oral reading. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2008*. This play was originally published as part of *Night is a Blanket* (1986).

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, forming and testing hypotheses, inferring, and analysing and synthesising. Use this text to familiarise the children with the format of a play and to encourage lively, expressive reading.

Text features

(This information is intended as a prompt for teachers rather than as a list of teaching points.)

- the characterisation – the tricky, exuberant goats and the greedy, belligerent, gullible troll
- the conventions of a play – the list of characters, the scene and stage directions (written in the present tense, using italics)
- the use of colour coding and upper-case letters to indicate the speakers
- the high level of repetition in the dialogue
- the use of rhyme
- the highly supportive and humorous illustrations
- the hyphenated descriptive phrases – “Nota-bit-silly-goats”, “Mountainy-hilly goats”
- the examples of “y” added to a noun to create an adjective – “mountainy”, “hilly”
- the use of upper-case letters, bold print, and exclamation marks for emphasis
- the narrative structure – setting the scene, the problem, the action (carried out three times), and the resolution
- the humorous synonyms “Clever”, “Not-abit-silly”, “smart”
- the figure of speech “ ’pon my soul”, with “ ’pon” as an abbreviated form of “upon”.

Introducing the text

Find out what the children know about the story of the three billy goats gruff. Together, retell the story, negotiating any differences to come up with one agreed version. (Draw out the idea that there are many different retellings of any fairy tale.) Discuss the sorts of things the billy goats and the troll might say.

Tell the children you have a version of this story for them to read that is written as a play. Discuss how a play is different from a story and review the features of a play format.

As we read, I want you to be thinking about what each of the characters is like and to look for clues in the text and illustrations that support your ideas.

During the reading

Have the students read the whole text the first time through, rather than assigning roles, so they can maintain the flow of the story.

Front cover – Read the title and the names of the author and the illustrator. Draw attention to the word “retold” and make connections to the discussion before the reading.

Title page – *What do these illustrations suggest to you about the characters?* (For example, the unpleasant, sneaky looking troll and the lively, cheerful goats.) Record the children’s ideas to refer back to during the reading.

Pages 2 and 3 – Discuss how the differences between the characters are made clear in the text (the colours of the names and clothing, the numbers on their trousers). Help the children make the links between the colours here and those on page 3 to show which character is speaking. Prompt them to work out what the use of three colours means for the first piece of dialogue.

Explain the purpose of the scene description on page 3. Clarify that references to the characters within the scene directions are in black. Encourage the children to examine the illustrations so they can spot the troll hiding under the bridge.

Read the dialogue on these pages out loud together, with you modelling the sing-song rhythm. If the children don’t seem to be hearing the rhythm, read it out loud again while tapping the beat. Draw attention to the use of rhyme (which also helps to support the rhythm).

Page 4 – Draw attention to the stage directions before reading and explain that they are there to make sure everything happens in the right order. *What new character appears on this page? How do you know?* (For example, the illustration, the colour coding for the new speaker, and the information in the stage directions.) Encourage the children to use troll-like voices! Draw attention to the use of italics and capitalisation for emphasis.

Why would the troll want to live down a hole? (In fact, the troll may live under the bridge but “hole” rhymes with “troll”. This could be an interesting discussion point!)

Page 5 – Support the children in building a picture of the characters. *What can you tell me about Billy Goat One? Is his brother really “far bigger” than him?* Discuss why the Troll repeats the line “To eat grass in the sun!” *How do you think he would say this?*

Page 6 – After reading this page, have the children summarise what has happened so far and encourage them to predict what will happen next, drawing on their knowledge of the story. Refer back to the children’s ideas about the characters. Add any changes based on their suggestions.

Page 7 – Draw attention to Billy Goat Three’s second piece of dialogue. *How is this different from what his brothers said? Does this fit with your predictions about the ending?*

Page 8 – Have the children review their ideas about the characters. *How has the author shown us about the characters without actually telling us? How has he made the play interesting for us to read?* For example, the strong characters, the rhyme scheme, the sing-song rhythm, the dramatic action using the words “pops”, “trots”, “dance”.

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Assign roles (pairs of students could share a role) and encourage a lively reading of the play, with the students using their voices to capture the characters’ personalities. Draw attention to the use of exclamation marks, upper-case letters, and bold print for emphasis.

Create a Venn diagram to show the comparisons between this version and another version.

Explore some of the interesting language in the text, for example, the made-up descriptive phrases and the addition of “y” to form the adjectives “mountainy” and “hilly”.

Revisit the illustrations and talk about how they add to the humorous nature of the play.

Discuss the characterisation. Draw a picture of one of the characters and add descriptive words and phrases around it.

Explore the narrative structure. Have the students identify the introduction, the problem, the repeated episodes, and the resolution. Compare this structure with that of other well-known tales that feature the number three, such as *The Three Little Pigs*.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2008*.

Make the Ready to Read play *The Ant and the Grasshoppers* (Green) available for independent reading.

Perform the play for an audience.