



THE GRUFFALO

by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler

Notes for Teachers

The Book

The Gruffalo is an adaptation of the picture book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler ('a modern classic' *The Observer*).

The Gruffalo is a children's book by writer/playwright Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Axel Scheffler, telling the story of a mouse taking a walk through a deep, dark wood. The book has sold over 3.5 million copies, has won several prizes for children's literature, and has been made into a play.

The Gruffalo was initially published in 1999 in the UK by Macmillan Children's Books and first printed as a 32-page hardback edition, followed six months later by a paperback edition and later by a small-format board book edition. It is intended for young readers aged from three to seven, and is about 700 words long. It is written in rhyming couplets, with a certain amount of repetition but variety within that repetition.

The Story

A mouse strolls through a wood, meeting a fox, an owl and a snake. They all try to eat him, but he scares them away with stories of the terrifying Gruffalo. Then he bumps into a real-life Gruffalo... The quick-thinking mouse explains that he is the scariest creature around and he takes the Gruffalo back through the wood to prove it. When the other animals see the Gruffalo they run away. The Gruffalo gulps in fear and escapes...

Theatrical Style



The theatre company, Tall Stories, has used *The Gruffalo* as a starting point for their story. Whilst they utilise the rhymes in the book, they also use imaginative storytelling, physical representation of the animals, original new songs and a lot of giggles. *The Gruffalo* is scary fun for children aged 3-7, and their adults...

Follow-up activities (3-5 year olds)

This production of *The Gruffalo* uses a variety of physical theatre techniques to create lots of different characters with three actors and a minimal set.



The following ideas aim to encourage children to think imaginatively about the story that they have seen.

Monster Pictures



'A Gruffalo? What's a Gruffalo?'
'A Gruffalo! Why, didn't you know?'
He has terrible tusks and terrible
claws
And terrible teeth in his terrible jaws.'

The Mouse in the story imagines a monster to scare away the other animals. Ask the children to draw pictures of their own invented monsters (with labels showing tusks and claws, etc, if applicable).

Sounds Good

Using the pictures that the children have created ask the class to create a monster noise for each picture. Can they create very different sounds or do all monsters sound the same?

Do the same for other characters in the story – what noises do foxes, owls, snakes and mice make?

In the play, the characters each have vocal traits. Take this exercise one step further – if animals could speak English, how would they talk?

Where did you get that hat?

In the play, the animals are suggested by different costumes. To simplify this, ask the children what kind of hats specific animals would wear. Can they make them out of card and felt tip pens?

Follow-up activities (5-7 year olds)

This production of *The Gruffalo* uses a variety of theatre techniques to create lots of different characters with three actors and a minimal set. The following ideas aim to encourage children to think imaginatively about the story. The exercises are very similar to the ones we use when creating a show!

Thinking in Pictures

To get things moving, split the students into two groups and, as a team game, give them a variety of 'situations' that they have to portray in a 'photograph'. The teams have 5 seconds to create each picture and the best picture wins a point. Sample situations are: Climbing, Swimming, tea party, Space, the zoo.

Move on to places and situations from *The Gruffalo*, perhaps using the deep dark wood, the owl's nest, the fox meets the mouse etc. This will allow students to think about how to create a 'story' visually, on the stage.

Telling tales

For the Gruffalo, we used a picture-book as our starting point – but sometimes we start with nothing. Try coming up with your own story to act out. Going round the class ask each student to tell one word of a story. For example:

Student 1: There	Student 2: was	Student 3: a
Student 4: big	Student 5: green	Student 6: giant
Student 7: who	Student 8: went	Student 9: to
Student 10: buy	Student 11: a hundred	Student 12: sausages...

... and so on. Once everyone has added a word, split the class into groups of five or six and tell them that they have five minutes to show the other group their version of the story. See what they come up with! It will be interesting to see how different their renditions of the same story may be.

Looking good

How can we make a character come alive on stage? How do you determine the way that a character stands, moves and speaks? Ask two students (A and B) to stand in front of the class. Ask a third and fourth student to manipulate their arms and legs and faces, moving them from a neutral position into a character. Perhaps these characters stoop, or lean back, or have their head held high. Ask Student A and B to try to create a voice to match their new positions. Would the character have a squeaky or a low voice? How fast or slow would they speak? Do they have an accent? Try different things. Does a big character need a big voice? What happens if you give a small character a booming voice? Ask the rest of the class to vote on which voice best matches the character.

Using this idea, ask the students to work in pairs to create two characters from pre-prepared character names. Students can create characters based on animals (Mr Hippo, Ms Snail, Mr Rat...) or create from emotions (Ms Cool, Miss Miserable, Terrified Tom etc). Encourage the students to try to use more than their faces to create the character, thinking about how heavy they are, how fast they can move, how straight/bent their legs are etc. Allow the students to create their own characters in this way and then introduce them to the group.

Whose story is it anyway?

Taking the story of the Gruffalo (or perhaps another pre-selected tale) discuss what happens if you tell a story from different points of view. For example, in the story of the Gruffalo – what would the story be like if told from the point of view of the fox? Or the Gruffalo? Or if the mouse was telling the tale to his mates? Ask different students to tell the story using the first person from different perspectives. Do all the characters have the same version? Are there things that a particular character doesn't know?