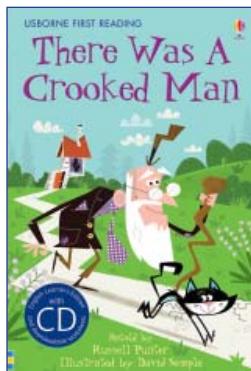# Usborne English

There was a Crooked Man • Teacher's notes

Author: traditional, adapted by Russell Punter

Reader level: Elementary

Word count: 124

Lexile level: 180L

Text type: Nursery rhyme (extended)

About the story

Based on the well-known nursery rhyme, *There Was a Crooked Man* tells of the crooked man finding sixpence, buying a crooked cat and coming home with his new pet and the mouse she has caught. The rhyme continues: the man cooks himself a crooked fish, but his cat snatches it and runs away. The man chases her outside but can't find her until he catches a whiff of fish, tracks it down to the garden shed... and finds his cat with not only the fish but also thirteen hungry kittens.

The traditional first part of the rhyme was first recorded in England in 1840, although by many accounts it has its origins in the English Civil War and refers to a Scottish general, Sir Alexander Leslie, who was fiercely opposed to King Charles' attempt to impose a new prayer book in Scotland and who defeated the King's army at the battle of Newburn, near Newcastle. He may have been considered "crooked" for fighting against the King in spite of accepting an earldom from him. The "crooked sixpence" is thought to refer to the King himself, and the "crooked stile" to the Scottish-English border.

As with many other nursery rhymes, the original political and satirical message has long been forgotten, and it has been a popular children's rhyme since at least the early twentieth century. There are several simple tunes associated with the rhyme, and you may like to search online for examples.

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 twenty children's books.

Key words

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

	crooked	p15	chased
p3	mile		outside
p4	sixpence	p17	hide
p5	upon	p19	followed
	stile		led
p6	bought	p21	shed
p7	caught	p22	sack
p12	smell	p23	snuggled
p13	snatched		against
	dish	p24	kittens

There was a Crooked Man • Teacher's notes

Before reading
You might like to search for some images of things that are crooked, e.g. a lampshade that's on crooked or a picture frame hanging crookedly. (There are some famously crooked buildings: the Leaning Tower of Pisa is the best-known, or the steeple of Chesterfield church in the UK.) Ask the class to describe what these things all have in common, and introduce the word "crooked" if necessary.

Show the class the book cover. What's crooked in the picture? [house, path, hat, stick, mouse, etc.] What's not crooked?

Explain that this book is based on a nursery rhyme. Do students know any other English nursery rhymes, or can they think of any in their own language? [You may have read, or go on to read, *Old Mother Hubbard* which is also available from Usborne as an English Learner's Edition.)

Write a simple word up on the board, e.g. man, and see if the students can think of words that rhyme with it. Try this with several more words to encourage students to think about rhymes.

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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.

p3 A mile is 1.6 km. How long would it take to walk that far? Would it be quicker if the path were straight?

p4 You may like to explain that a sixpence is old English money: there were twelve pence in a shilling, and twenty shillings in a pound. When the rhyme was written, sixpence was of course worth much more than it would be today – easily enough to buy a cat.

p5 Check that students know or can guess what a stile is used for.

p6 Have you ever seen a crooked cat or mouse?

p7 Does the mouse look happy? Why not, do you think? Do you think the cat will eat the mouse? (Look out for it on p11.]

p15 Why does the man chase the cat?

pp16-17 Where do you think the cat is hiding? Where would you hide?

p21 What do you think is in the shed (apart from the cat)? What do you think it is used for?

p25 How's the man feeling now? Who do you think eats the fish in the end?

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Puzzles (pages 26-29)
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
Ask the students if they liked the story. What would they buy if they found some money?
Would they like a pet? Why do you think the man wanted a cat?

The class may like to try their own stories, based on the structure of *There Was a Crooked Man*, working together in small groups. Ask them to choose a character and an unusual adjective to describe him or her, e.g. sparkly boy. They will need to decide where the character goes, what he/she finds, what happens next.

When they have finished, you could ask for volunteers to read their stories out to the rest of the class. You might then ask students to illustrate their rhymes, and put them all together in a book or a class display.