



 Muncle.Trogg

# MUNCLE TROGG BY JANET FOXLEY

## SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time giants ruled over Smallings. But when the humans invented magic killing sticks and fought back, the giants went into hiding. Now they live in secret, deep within Mount Grumble, with only their dragons to protect them.

Muncle Trogg, a ten-year-old giant, lives in Mount Grumble with his family; Ma, Pa, younger brother Gritt and baby Flubb. Gritt is the sort of son a giant can be proud of: big, strong and very ugly. But poor Muncle is tiny – he's so small, he's laughed at for being Smalling-sized.

Muncle often wonders about the Smallings he's meant to look like, so he decides to investigate. Venturing down the mountain, he spies on a little girl called Emily and realises that Smallings aren't simply giants on a smaller scale – their backs are as straight as tree trunks and their knuckles don't even reach their knees. Muncle doesn't look like a Smalling at all!

On the way back to Mount Grumble, Muncle befriends an escaped dragon called Snarg who needs rescuing. Luckily, Muncle's not only small, but very light; he can fly Snarg back to Mount Grumble – and for the first time in his life he gets to look down on the world!

But when Muncle returns home no one believes that he flew a dragon and saw a Smalling. Even worse, Gritt has been on a mission and captured Emily as a gift for the King. And Emily has some bad news – the giants aren't living on a mountain, they're living on top of a volcano! If she's telling the truth it's going to take a lot more than muscle to save them. It's up to Muncle to rescue his new friend, his home and his people.



# AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Janet Foxley was born in Leicester. After university, she lived in Germany before marrying and raising a family in the UK. Janet now lives in a farmhouse in Cumbria where she writes and paints and her husband sculpts.

# AUTHOR MOTIVATION

From: <http://talltalesandshortstories.blogspot.com/2011/03/interview-with-2010-times-chicken-house.html>

## ***What inspired you to write Muncle Trogg?***

'I always knew I was going to tell the story from the point of view of the giants, rather than the humans they encounter, because what I enjoy most in writing is creating imaginary societies with their own particular culture and way of life. Luckily for me, it was this particular 'inside out' take on the fairy-tale world that made the story appealing to Chicken House.'

## ***Which authors/stories did you enjoy reading as a child? How do you think they compare to the children's novels available today? What do you think children of today want to read?***

'The books I can remember devouring and reading over and over again are Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* books. Before that, there was Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series. I didn't discover E. Nesbit or Tolkien until I was grown up, although they must have been around when I was a child in the fifties. There was no teen or YA fiction in those days. Most of the children's books I love and remember particularly well are the ones I read to my children in the 1970s and 1980s: anything by Jan Mark, Helen Cresswell, Philippa Pearce, and Mary Norton's wonderful *The Borrowers*.

It would be wonderful to know what today's children really want to read. They get what the publishers give them. My eleven-year-old great-nephew complains that there is very little for boys who don't like horror or thrillers. And I overheard a girl of about ten complaining to her grandmother in a bookshop that the books



that claimed to be for her age wouldn't last her an afternoon. I think real readers would love the longer, meatier books that they are denied because of the myth that children have a short attention span.'

## THEMES

- Being small
- Feeling proud of who you are
- Friendship
- Family
- Acceptance
- School

## WRITING STYLE

*Muncle Trogg* is for children aged seven and above. It uses devices such as onomatopoeia (Mr Thwackum) and phonetic spellings (King Thortless). The language is playful and easy to read.

## STUDY NOTES & ACTIVITIES

### *Size*

When asked to draw a person, most young children will draw a large head and very long legs - often called a 'headlegger' by those teaching in the visual arts. Heads and, in particular, legs are very prominent when you are shorter than 70cm, perhaps sitting in a buggy or pushchair. Janet Foxley's story relates to this experience and to children's own familiarity with being small in an adult world. It might be useful to recall this experience for your pupils:

Do you remember how big everyone seemed when you were much smaller? Can you remember being in a crowd and only able to see people's legs? Muncle feels like that all the time in his giant world, where everyone and everything is huge!

In a physical education lesson, in a hall, gymnasium or other large space, pupils could be asked to experiment with this idea. For example, some pupils could take giant strides while others make themselves very small, moving slowly or crawling along as low as possible.



In a drama lesson children could work with a partner and improvise on the theme of size. They could act out an initial meeting between a giant and a Smalling, or even the battle that Muncle and Pa perform for the King's birthday. Physical experiences such as these would be a practical way for children to explore this theme before completing written exercises.

Digital cameras could also be a useful way for children to explore size from very low or high viewpoints. Teachers might take pictures to use as visual aids for the tasks below:

Sit on the floor and imagine this is a giant's classroom. What can you see from down there? What are the biggest things you can see? What is close to you? What is far away from you? Describe what you see to a partner, make some notes of your ideas as you talk, then write it down or draw a picture to show to your teacher.

Now imagine being a giant, like Gritt, in the Smalling world, looking down on everything in the room. What can you see that is different?

This technique could be used in a variety of contexts – at school, at home or in the street or countryside – to give pupils new perspectives of the world.

### ***Disgusting Detail***

Part of the appeal of Muncle Trogg is the disgusting detail. Although this needs to be handled carefully, encouraging tolerance rather than teasing, activities can be based on the ridiculous appearance of the ugly giants.

Muncle has 'beautiful skin – grey and dotted with hairy warts'; Ma has bulging eyes and wonky yellow teeth.' What do you think a really beautiful or handsome giant would look like? Describe them or draw a picture.

Flubb is 'as pretty as a toad'! What do you think she looks like? Could you draw her? Do you know any babies, and are they ever naughty like Flubb?



Imagine going to eat with Sir Biblos at the grubhouse, MuckGristle's. Can you remember the food Muncle liked there? What disgusting foods do you think they would serve? Write a menu for this café and compare it with a friend's.

### ***Being Brave***

When investigating the Smallings, Muncle leaves Mount Grumble and goes through a rusty old door and into the forest. The forest, and Muncle's bravery in leaving his home, is an ideal starting point for descriptive or imaginative work.

Muncle feels very brave going out into the Smalling forest. What do you think that forest looks like? Draw or paint a really spooky forest and don't forget to include one of the rusty old doors which leads into Mount Grumble!

What would be frightening about that forest? Tell your partner about a time that you have had to be brave, then write a story about a brave character facing a big challenge.

### ***Structure***

Janet Foxley has structured this story very effectively. Each incident is shaped deliberately to build tension and hold the interest of the reader. It would be interesting to explore this structure with more able children, perhaps as a group. Alternatively, the whole class could contribute ideas. Ask your pupils to attribute each of the following points to part of the story:

- everything is normal
- an obstacle occurs
- the obstacle is overcome
- another obstacle appears
- final resolution



Pupils could then use their understanding of the importance of structure to write a short story, either individually or in groups.

The escape from the palace (Chapter 15) would be useful for this exercise. This activity would need to be guided by a teacher or teaching assistant.

Write a group story where someone gets into difficulty, sees a way of escaping, then finds a big problem. What happens next?

### ***More Fun Activities***

Did you see the tasty treat drawing on page 98? Think of some more disgusting treats and sweets that giants would enjoy!

There are lots of horrible games played on the King's birthday: Bash-the-Badger; Biggest Boil; Hedgehog Bowling. Think of some more games that you think the King would enjoy watching.

Make a dragon mobile with flying dragons, like the picture on page 110.

