

# Tom Thumb

## Summary of the story

*Tom Thumb* is a well-known English fairy-tale about the little boy who is as small as his mother's thumb. The tale begins with a farmer and his wife who are desperate for a child. A magician hears their plea and, by magic, Tom Thumb appears. The world is a dangerous place for little Tom Thumb and the tale focuses on some of his many adventures. He falls into his mother's pie mix, narrowly avoids being eaten, gets picked up by a bird and dropped into a lake, and is finally swallowed by a fish, only to turn up back in his mother's kitchen. He then is kidnapped but escapes by telling the horse to go to the police station with the two robbers. Finally he goes back home to live happily ever after.



## Background to the story

*Tom Thumb* is an English fairy tale, and is generally believed to have been written by Richard Johnson (1573-c. 1659). Johnson's initials appear on the earliest-known copy of *The History of Tom Thumbe* in 1621. It is probable that this tale was based on an existing folk-tale. Comparable early versions of the tale have been found in France, Germany and Denmark.

## Topics and themes

**Size.** Use *Tom Thumb* to elicit size vocabulary and to teach new adjectives like 'big', 'small', 'tiny' or 'huge'. This also provides an opportunity to revise comparative forms, by encouraging students to say what is 'bigger than' Tom Thumb, and what is 'smaller than' him. See the photocopiable activities for an example of this.

**My house.** As a follow-up to the book, ask students to think of the problems they would have at home if they were as small as Tom. This will encourage a revision of house vocabulary and encourage imaginative thinking.

**Colors and parts of the body.** The illustrations in *Tom Thumb* provide an opportunity to revise vocabulary on colors and parts of the body. As the students are reading, encourage them to describe what they see, what Tom is wearing, for example, and what colors are in the illustrations. See the photocopiable activities for an example of how to revise body parts with the help of *Tom Thumb*.

**Animals.** There are at least eleven different types of animal in the book, revise animal vocabulary by setting the students the task of finding as many animals as they can in a short time.

## Making use of the Reader

**Blind man's bluff game.** This game will help to consolidate or to introduce vocabulary for directions. Move desks and chairs around to create the sense of an obstacle course in the classroom, but leaving enough room for the students to walk between the furniture.

Put the students in pairs and explain that one person will be Tom Thumb and the other will be the horse. Tell them that this is a race from one side of the room to another and that the pairs will be competing. Remind them to be careful! Blindfold one of each pair and explain that s/he cannot move unless the other partner gives them clear directions such as 'Three steps forward'. The students, in pairs, then move across the room. The pair that has the best directions and the best comprehension of them will reach the other side of the room first and be the winners.

**Board game.** The students use the events and development of the Tom Thumb story to create their own board game, a simple dice-based board game, with students moving forward with each dice throw and correct answer given to the questions. The game should be played with three or four students. They play the game by throwing the dice and moving the allowed number of spaces forward. When they reach a main 'event' in the story, for example, Tom falling into the pie mix, they must answer a question. If they do not answer correctly, they cannot move forward. The first person to reach the end of the journey is the winner. Make sure that the students are familiar with the format of other board games before you begin.



# Tom Thumb

Put the students in small groups and explain that they will make this board game about Tom Thumb. Show students how to create this board game and then let them design their own. Ask the students to think of questions about the story such as 'What does the policeman say to Tom?', 'How does Tom go to his parent's house?' etc.

Or prepare these questions yourself instead. Give out some pre-prepared pieces of stiff card of around 30cm squared. Ask the students to create their board game. The students will then draw (or stick on) pictures to represent the main events of the story.

To play: check that the students agree on the rules for each game before starting.

**Perspectives.** This is an enjoyable way to introduce the concept of empathy and perspective and for the readers to respond imaginatively to the story. You will need a selection of magnifying glasses. Ask the students to choose one small object in the room, to study it, and to give a small description of it, either orally or in writing. Now ask them to study their object through the magnifying glass and ask them to describe what they see. Can they see all of the object or just a small detail, for example, and does it look like the same object when magnified? Now tell the students to imagine that they are the size of Tom Thumb and to describe the object from his point of view.

This could be followed up with one of several activities. The students could work together on a mime or a dramatization of Tom Thumb in the jungle, for example, or Tom Thumb in the classroom. They could put together a short descriptive story about Tom Thumb in various situations. Alternatively, you could follow this up with a game in which the students prepare questions for Tom Thumb. One student will then sit at the front of the class for a question and answer session, with the student at the front answering as if s/he were Tom Thumb.

## Using the accompanying video or audio cassette

### Viewing/listening for specific information/post-reading/whole class exercise.

Before viewing or listening to the cassette (if the children have already read the book) elicit the main characters from the story and write them on the board. Tell the students to, for example, stand up when they see Tom Thumb or when he speaks, to clap when they see his mother or his mother speaks, to raise their hand when they see the bad men or the bad men speak etc. This will result in an energetic and active viewing or listening exercise.

### During viewing listening – whole class predictions.

Play the video or audio cassette story through in its entirety. The second time through, stop the video or audio cassette every few minutes and ask the students to 'predict' what happens next, then view or listen together to compare their response with the original.

**Simultaneous reading and listening** in groups will help the students with pronunciation and intonation.

**Post-listening.** Get the students to work together on making their own video or audio cassette of the story. Depending on their familiarity with the tale, this could be done by reading the book aloud, or by dramatizing their own version of the story.

## Notes on using the activities in the factsheet

Arouse the students' interest by asking them to look through the pictures in the book, ticking the things they can see. To wind down, the students can draw and color a picture of Tom Thumb, following the instructions in the last activity.

## Answers to the activities

### In the back of the Reader

#### Before You Read

You can see: an apple (pp.2-3), a little boy (Tom Thumb throughout), a fish (pp.6-7), a cake (p.4), a magician (p.2), and a knife (p.7).

#### In the factsheet

**Activity 1.** Remind children where these parts of the body are: arm, leg, hand, foot, face, eye, ear, mouth, elbow and ask the students to write the correct word next to that part of Tom's body.

**Activity 2.** Match the silhouettes to the name. The first is done for you.

**Activity 3.** The children have to join the numbers which together make up a picture, starting with one and joining them in numerical order. (It should look like the picture of Tom on page 2).

**Activity 4.** A pea, a bean, an insect, an ant are smaller than Tom Thumb.



**Tom Thumb**

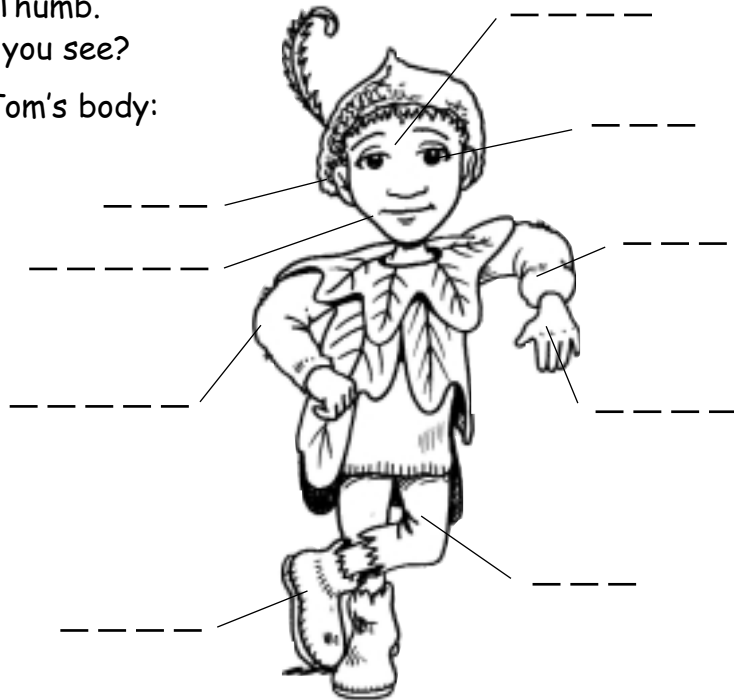
Name.....

**Activity 1**

Look at this picture of Tom Thumb.  
Which parts of his body can you see?

Write these words next to Tom's body:

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| arm  | eye   | ----- |
| leg  | ear   | ----- |
| hand | mouth | ----- |
| foot | elbow | ----- |
| face |       | ----- |



**Activity 2**

Match these pictures to the names.

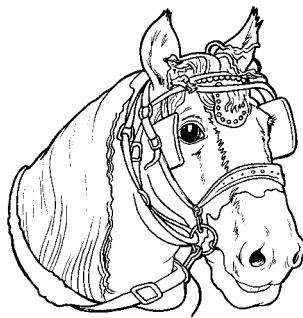
**1** Tom Thumb

**2** The magician

**3** The queen

**4** The horse

**5** The policeman



**4**

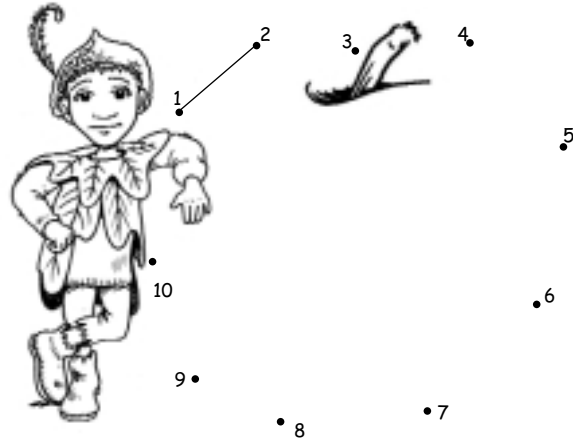


**Tom Thumb**

Name.....

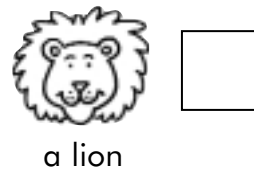
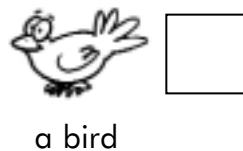
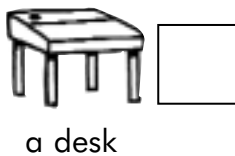
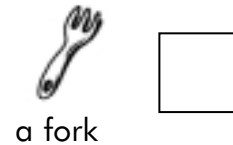
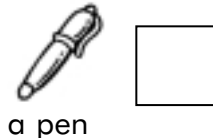
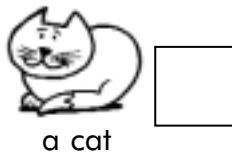
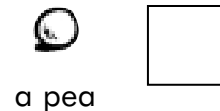
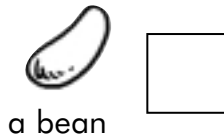
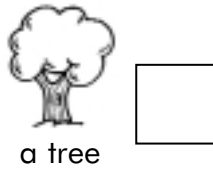
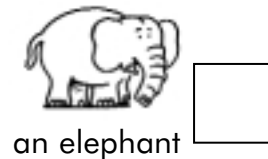
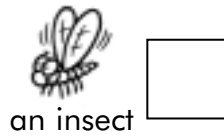
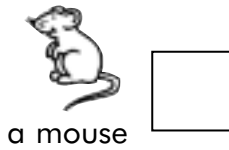
**Activity 3**

The numbers make a picture.  
Start with number one and  
draw a line to make the picture.



**Activity 4**

Tom is smaller than a flower.  
Do you think Tom is smaller than:



Put a  if you think he is.

