

# The Little Old Man Who Could Not Read

by Irma Simonton Black



1 Once there was a little old man who couldn't read. He just never wanted to learn. His wife bought all the food. The little old man stayed at home and made lovely toys out of wood.

2 Children loved his toys, and they

wrote to tell him so. But the old man couldn't read their letters.

3 One day his wife had to go on a trip.

4 "You'll have to go to the store and buy your food tonight," she said. Then she kissed him and left.

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Fiction

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5 The old man went to the store. There were rows and rows of cans, and there were rows and rows of boxes without pictures. What were they? The old man didn't know, and he didn't like to ask.

6 He bought what looked like a can of soup and a box of spaghetti. He bought what looked like a sugar box, an oatmeal box, and a milk carton.

7 The old man went home and said, "I'm hungry. I'll have some soup."

8 He opened a small can. Onion soup!

9 "Flutes!" he said. "I hate onion soup." And he put it aside. He opened a long box that looked like a spaghetti box. But the box had waxed paper in it.

10 "Fiddles!" said the old man. "I guess I'll go to bed."

11 By the next morning he was very hungry. He jumped out of bed and opened a round box. It was full of

grainy white stuff. The old man tasted it.

12 "Salt!" said the old man. "And I thought it was oatmeal!"

13 Then he opened a blue box, and it was full of little white flakes. He tasted that too.

14 "Soap," he said sadly. "Who wants to eat soap?" When he went to get a drink of milk, he found that he had bought buttermilk. He hated buttermilk, but he was hungry, so he drank it.

15 That night when his wife came back, he told her how he got all mixed up with the cans and cartons and boxes.

16 "Please teach me how to read!" he said.

17 So she did. Now when he made his lovely toys out of wood, he could read the letters the children sent to him.

18 And he never—no, never—went hungry again.



## How Well Did You Understand?

- A** Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.
- The little old man in this story found out that
    - going shopping for food was fun
    - knowing how to read was important
    - learning to read was easy
  - The old man had salt instead of oatmeal because
    - the store mixed up his food
    - the boxes looked a lot alike
    - his wife bought the wrong thing
  - The man decided he needed to learn to read because
    - he got letters from children
    - he wanted to read stories
    - he had trouble buying food
  - The next time the man's wife goes away he will probably
    - plan to go away with her
    - buy the right things at the store
    - go to bed without any supper
  - People who cannot read might be in danger if
    - they buy the wrong kind of soup
    - they can't write letters to their friends
    - they eat something harmful by mistake

## Learn about Words

- B** Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

*Directions:* Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- beautiful (1)
- on this night (4)
- drawings or photos (5)
- do not like at all (9)
- away; to one side (9)
- leaped; sprang (11)
- small, flat pieces; chips (13)

- C** too = also  
two = the number after one

Say *too* and *two*. They are homonyms. **Homonyms** are words that *sound* the same but aren't spelled the same and don't mean the same thing.

*Directions:* Look at each word in **heavy type**. Note the paragraph number. Look at the paragraph and find the homonym. Which of the two words fits in the blank in the sentence? Write the word.

- no** (5)  
The man said, "Oh \_\_\_\_! Salt!"
- knight** (15)  
The little old man was glad it was \_\_\_\_ so he could rest.
- would** (17)  
Children loved the toys made of \_\_\_\_

## Think about It

**D** A **fact** is something that is true. An **opinion** is what someone thinks.

**Fact:** The man can't read.

**Opinion:** I think his toys are lovely.

*Directions:* Read each sentence. Is it a fact or an opinion? Write *F* if it is a fact. Write *O* if it is an opinion.

- 1 The little old man made toys.
- 2 I think that reading is fun.
- 3 Soup can be made from onions.
- 4 I think that onion soup tastes good.
- 5 Many people learn how to read.

**E** Most words add an *s* to mean more than one.

toy → toys

But sometimes words change their spelling to mean more than one.

one woman → two women

one wolf → two wolves

*Directions:* Read each sentence. Which of the two words in ( ) fits the sentence? Write the word.

- 6 The little old (man, men) loved making toys.
- 7 When the man went to the store, he saw rows of (box, boxes) with no pictures.
- 8 He tried to buy a (can, cans) of soup that he liked.
- 9 The man's (wife, wives) said she would teach him to read.
- 10 The man learned to read the letters that many (child, children) wrote to him.

## Find Out More

Do you know how many things you read each day outside of school? To find out, keep a list of all the things you read one morning before you get to school. Don't forget things such as food boxes and street signs. Show your list to your family.