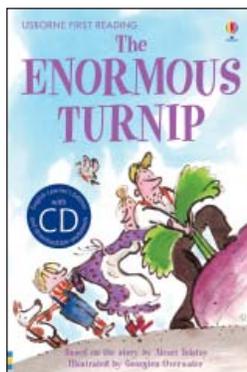


The Enormous Turnip • Teacher's notes



Author: Alexei Tolstoy, adapted by Katie Daynes

Reader level: Lower Intermediate

Word count: 410

Lexile level: 290L

Text type: Folk tale

About the story

A farmer goes to pick a turnip from his field. He chooses a fine-looking one, and tries to pull it up but it just won't move. His wife comes to help but the turnip still won't move. His son joins them, and then the dog. When a cat bites the dog's tail, they all collapse. Only when a bird joins the effort does the turnip finally begin to stir. It turns out to be enormous. The farmer and his family have more turnip to eat than they could ever have wanted, and the farmer decides ruefully to plant carrots the next year.

The story is a folk tale from Russia and was first published in 1865. The most familiar version is the one retold by Alexei Tolstoy.

About the author

Alexei Tolstoy's full name was Count Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoy. He was born in St Petersburg, Russia, in 1817. His second cousin, Leo Tolstoy, was the famous author whose novels included *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. As a young man, Alexei worked in the Russian Embassy in Germany, and then for the Tsar's Chancery (the administrative department responsible for, among other things, state security) back in Russia.

In 1855, Tolstoy went to fight in the Crimean War, where he contracted typhus fever. He was nursed back to health by a woman named Sofia, whom he went on to marry. He enjoyed writing throughout his life, and his published works range from satirical poems and historical novels to a vampire story and plays.



Key words

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

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|---------|
| enormous | p28 | brushed |
| turnip | | dirt |
| p6 huge | p29 | past |
| p8 tugged | p30 | pecked |
| p11 called [meaning "shouted"] | p38 | popped |
| | | ground |
| p12 hugged | p40 | yawning |
| grabbed | p42 | soup |
| p19 barked | p45 | growing |
| raced | p46 | Count |
| p24 ripped | | |
| tore | | |
| yelp | | |

Key phrases

| | |
|-----|--------------------------|
| p10 | puffing and panting |
| p18 | red in the face |
| p22 | as hard as they could |
| p25 | to let go of [something] |
| p27 | to fall over |
| p28 | once more |
| p38 | At last |
| p40 | Time for bed |
| | with a smile on his face |
| p41 | to chop up |



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Before reading

If you can, try bringing a real turnip into the classroom, or otherwise look for a picture. Show the turnip to your students – let them hold it and pass it around – and see if anyone knows what it is. (Store-bought turnips are usually sold with their leaves trimmed, so it may not look exactly like the turnip on the book's cover.) If they don't know the name, they may well know or guess what it is used for. Has anyone eaten turnip before? What kinds of recipes have turnip in them?

Talk about where turnips come from. You could show a photo of turnips growing in a field (with only the leaves showing).

Look at the book's cover with your students. Ask what the characters are doing. Why are they struggling with this particular turnip?

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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.

- | | | | |
|-------|--|-----|---|
| pp4-5 | Who can you see in the picture? Are all the people on pp2-3 shown here? | p30 | Do you think the bird is helping? |
| p9 | What do you think the farmer needs? | p35 | What are some other words for very big? |
| p10 | When do people puff and pant? | p38 | How does everyone feel now? |
| p16 | What's the dog doing in this picture? Can you see the rabbits? What are they trying to do? | p43 | Do the family like turnip soup? How can you tell? |
| p18 | Why are they red in the face? | p45 | What does the family think about turnip soup for breakfast? Can you think of anything else they can make with the rest of the turnip? |
| p24 | How do the farmer, his wife, Jack and the dog look? How does the cat look? | | |
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After reading

Can students think of other examples where a group of people have managed to do something that one person couldn't do alone?

You could ask them: have you ever grown your own vegetables? Did any of them grow really big? Did they taste good?

Read pages 46-47, **About the author**.

Ask the students about an author (or authors) they really like. What has the author written, and why do they like him or her? Would they like to be an author one day? Would they prefer to write for grown-ups or for children?

You could play a game where you make up story titles. Write down some food items on pieces of paper or card, and adjectives on other pieces (use two different colours, or mark one set of cards). The adjectives don't have to be food-related – you'll get more entertaining results if they are quite incongruous, e.g. The Hairy Chocolate Bar. Turn the cards upside down, then take turns drawing one card from each set to make up a title. Students could try designing covers and writing story summaries for the best titles.

