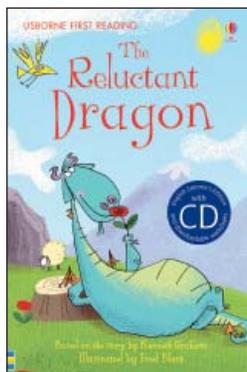


The Reluctant Dragon • Teacher's notes



Author: Kenneth Grahame

Reader level: Intermediate

Word count: 671

Lexile level: 440L

Text type: Modern fairy tale, children's classic author

About the story

One day, a shepherd comes home with terrible tales of a monster with long sharp claws, a long tail and scaly body. His son isn't at all frightened, however, and goes to meet the dragon, who turns out to be very friendly and rather lonely.

When the local villagers hear about the dragon, they panic and send for the famous dragon-killer, Saint George. The dragon isn't at all interested in fighting, and the boy takes Saint George to meet him. Together they make a plan to pretend to fight, and when the fight is over, the dragon will be forgiven and invited to join the village feast.

The plan works brilliantly. Everyone enjoys the fight and the feast afterwards, especially the dragon who has made so many new friends.

About the author

The story was originally written by Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932), world famous as the author of *The Wind in the Willows*. As a child, Grahame lived in the English countryside. He later worked as a clerk at the Bank of England, but he was unhappy in his job and did not enjoy living in the city of London. In his spare time, he wrote stories for his young son that drew on his love of the country and of English tradition.

The story has been adapted and simplified for beginner readers and English language learners, but retains all the freshness and humour of Grahame's original.

Key words

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

reluctant	p29	feast
dragon	p31	nervously
p2 shepherd	p32	cheered
terrified	p33	roar
p9 friendly	p35	charge
p11 thrilled	p37	missed
p12 dangerous	p39	slumped
p14 villagers	p40	invite
p17 saint	p42	plan
fight	p43	tummy
p18 gasp(ed)	p44	jolly [NB rarely
p20 hide		used in modern,
p21 yawn(ed)		everyday English]
p27 pretend		snore
p28 promise		prod
hurt		

Key phrases

p6	That sounds like...
p8	to set off
	Don't worry
p9	He might be...
p10	It does get lonely
p11	all kinds of questions
p14	to find out
p15	to get rid of
	wouldn't hurt a fly
p16	even worse
p19	the longest... I've ever seen
p20	to go away
p25	What can I do?
p26	a perfect place for...
p28	to promise (not) to...
	to look real
p38	There was no way
p40	to learn a lesson



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Before reading

Show your students a picture or pictures of dragons. You might like to include dragons from different cultures, e.g. mythical and medieval European dragons, Chinese dragons etc. Do they know any stories about dragons? (You might like to look in particular at the story of St George and the dragon, since St George is important in this story. You will find a brief summary of the story on www.usborne.com/englishlearnerseditions)

Brainstorm vocabulary relating to dragons. You could group physical elements (wings, claws, scales, fire) and adjectives (scary, powerful, fierce). Try to incorporate some of the following words from the story: terrible, claws, tail, scales, dangerous, hurt, flames, breathe out fire.

Now brainstorm contrasting adjectives along the lines of: gentle, peaceful. Try to include: friendly.

Show the students the book's cover. Does this look like a typical, scary dragon? Do they know what "reluctant" means? What do they think the dragon might be "reluctant" to do?

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.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

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| pp2-5 | What is the difference between "terrible" and "terrified"? Does the shepherd's wife look frightened? What about his son? | p27 | There are four characters on these two pages. Which ones do you think want to fight? What does the boy mean by a "pretend fight"? |
| p8 | The boy says "Don't worry." Do you think his parents are: very worried – a little bit worried – not at all worried? | p29 | What is a feast? What would you like to eat at a feast? |
| p11 | What kind of questions would <i>you</i> ask a dragon? | p33 | Can you find the words to show that the people support Saint George? |
| p13 | What kind of story includes dragons, knights and princesses? (Try to elicit: fairy tales.) Did you notice the title of the book the boy was reading on p4? | p39 | What does "there was no way" mean? Do you think the dragon is really hurt? |
| p15 | Do you know what these words mean: ban, banish, slay? Are the villagers right to be frightened? | p41 | What does "the dragon has learned his lesson" mean? Are the villagers scared of him now? |
| p18 | Now the boy does look frightened! Why? Does the dragon look worried? | p45 | When do people snore? What is the boy's problem? |
| p21 | Can you think of some words to describe the dragon on these two pages? (Examples might be: lazy, cowardly/not brave, funny.) | p47 | Are the dragon and Saint George friends now? Which phrase tells you that? [arm in arm], and what does it mean? |

After reading

Ask your students to describe: the boy, the dragon, the villagers, Saint George. Which character do they like best?

Do you think this story has a message? What could it be? (More than one answer is possible, e.g. don't judge by appearances, it's better to make friends than to fight.)

