

The Girl Who Owned a Bear
By Frank Lyman Baum
(age group: 15-16; 10th grade)

*This story is about a girl called Jane Gladys Brown whose mother leaves her in the care of Nora the maid and goes shopping. While Nora polishes the silver in the pantry, Jane Gladys is left to her own resources. Nestled in the sitting room's bay window, she works on her embroidery, until she is interrupted by the arrival of a mysterious little man with a bald head and a shabby suit. The strange man says he is a book agent. He has a quarrel with Jane Gladys's father, who refused to buy a copy of the Complete Works of Peter Smith, and even threw the book agent out of his office. The book agent wants revenge; but since Mr. Brown is "big and strong and a dangerous man," the agent chooses to exact his revenge from the man's little daughter. He gives the girl the large book he is carrying, first inscribing her name on its first page; then he leaves. Inevitably curious, Jane Gladys inspects the book. It has a red and yellow cover, and is titled **Thingamajigs**. She opens it...*

The Girl Who Owned a Bear

She turned the next leaf, and saw a big picture of a clown, dressed in green and red and yellow, and having a very white face with three cornered spots of red on each cheek and over the eyes. While she looked at this the book **trembled** in her hands, the leaf crackled and **creaked** and suddenly the clown jumped out of it and stood upon the floor beside her, becoming instantly as big as any ordinary clown.

After stretching his arms and legs and yawning in a rather impolite manner, he gave a silly **chuckle** and said:

"This is better! You don't know how **cramped** one gets, standing so long upon a page of flat paper."

Perhaps you can imagine how **startled** Jane Gladys was, and how she stared at the clown who had just leaped out of the book.

to shake

a scartai

a chicoti

inghesuit

alarmed

"You didn't expect anything of this sort, did you?" he asked, leering at her in clown fashion. Then he turned around to take a look at the room and Jane Gladys laughed in spite of her **astonishment**.

surprise

"What amuses you?" demanded the clown.

"Why, the back of you is all white!" cried the girl. "You're only a clown in front of you."

"Quite likely," he returned, in an annoyed tone. "The artist made a front view of me. He wasn't expected to make the back of me, for that was against the page of the book."

"But it makes you look so funny!" said Jane Gladys, laughing until her eyes were moist with tears.

The clown looked sulky and sat down upon a chair so she couldn't see his back.

"I'm not the only thing in the book," he remarked, crossly.

This reminded her to turn another page, and she had scarcely noted that it contained the picture of a monkey when the animal sprang from the book with a great **crumpling** of paper and landed upon the window seat beside her.

a mototoli

"He-he-he-he-he!" **chattered** the creature, springing to the girl's shoulder and then to the center table. "This is great fun! Now I can be a real monkey instead of a picture of one."

a palavragi

"Real monkeys can't talk," said Jane Gladys, **reprovingly**.

cu repros

"How do you know? Have you ever been one yourself?" inquired the animal; and then he laughed loudly, and the clown laughed, too, as if he enjoyed the remark.

confused

The girl was quite **bewildered** by this time. She thoughtlessly turned another leaf, and before she had time to look twice a gray donkey **leaped** from the book and stumbled from the window seat to the floor with a great **clatter**.

jumped

zornait

"You're clumsy enough, I'm sure!" said the child, indignantly, for the beast had nearly upset her.

"Clumsy! And why not?" demanded the donkey, with angry voice. "If the fool artist had drawn you out of perspective, as he did me, I guess you'd be clumsy yourself."

"What's wrong with you?" asked Jane Gladys.

"My front and rear legs on the left side are nearly six inches too short, that's what's the matter! If that artist didn't know how to draw properly why did he try to make a donkey at all?"

"I don't know," replied the child, seeing an answer was expected.

"I can hardly stand up," grumbled the donkey; "and the least little thing will **topple** me **over**."

roll over

"Don't mind that," said the monkey, making a spring at the chandelier and swinging from it by his tail until Jane Gladys feared he would **knock** all the globes **off**; "the same artist has made my ears as big as that clown's and everyone knows a monkey hasn't any ears to speak of—much less to draw."

a rasturna

"He should be prosecuted," remarked the clown, gloomily. "I haven't any back."

Jane Gladys looked from one to the other with a puzzled expression upon her sweet face, and turned another page of the book.

maro-roscat

quick

Swift as a flash there sprang over her shoulder a **tawny**, spotted leopard, which landed upon the back of a big leather armchair and turned upon the others with a fierce movement.

(The Girl Who Owned a Bear by Frank Lyman Baum)

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

1. *Read the text and answer the questions:*

- a. How can you relate the text to the title? Where is the bear?
- b. In your opinion, why was Jane given the book?

2. *Read the text again and choose the best answer A, B or C for the questions*

- a. Why is Jane amused seeing the clown?
 - A. Because he has red trousers
 - B. Because his back is white
 - C. Because she has never seen a clown before
- b. Which character jumped out of the book and landed upon the window seat beside her?
 - A. The monkey
 - B. The donkey
 - C. The bear
- c. Why is the donkey upset?
 - A. Because of the donkey
 - B. Because he can hardly stand up
 - C. Because he has three ears

- d. What colour is the leopard?
A. Yellow
B. White
C. Tawny
- e. Why is the clown happy to get out of the book?
A. Because it is very cramped in there
B. Because he needs fresh air
C. Because he can't read

3. Fill in the sentences with the correct forms of the sound verbs: **crackle, creak, chuckle, chatter, clatter, grumble**

- a. The metal dishdown the stone stairs.
b. I could hear him to himself as he was reading his book.
c. The wood in the fireplace started to
d. They were allabout the company's new politics.
e. The floor boards in the house noisily.
f. He kept on about his new car for hours

4. Match each Word from group A with one in group B to form expressions from the text.

- A. Flat, front, window, rear, knock, puzzled, sweet, leather, fierce, spotted
B. Off, leopard, paper, armchair, legs, expression, view, movement, face, seat

5. Fill in the sentences with the words from the text: **trembled, cramped, sulky, reprovngly, bewildered, clumsy**

- a. You man! You have knocked off my coffee!
b. The boy was because he didn't get the toy he wanted.
c. She spoke to himconsidering him guilty for all her troubles.
d. The whole houseas the train went by.
e. The man lookedat the sight of the pile of money in front of him.
f. We are a bit for space in this little house.

6. *Fill in the correct word derived from the word in bold.*

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| a. It was of her not to say goodbye. | POLITE |
| b. To our he arrived on time. | ASTONISH |
| c. The noisy traffic is a continual | ANNOY |
| d. I don't think this joke is | AMUSE |
| e. The child showed me a beautiful of his house. | DRAW |
| f. Suddenly, there was a roar of in the room. | LAUGH |

7. *Turn the following sentences into the Reported Speech as if retelling the story*

- "I'm not the only thing in the book", he remarked
- "What's wrong with you?" asked Jane Gladys
- "What amuses you?" demanded the clown
- "Now I can be a real monkey instead of a picture of one"
- "My front and rear legs on the left side are nearly six inches too short, that's what's the matter"
- "Don't mind that", said the monkey

8. *Writing*

- Choose one of the characters from the book (the clown, the donkey or the monkey) and describe it. (3-4 lines)
- Imagine what Jane should do with the characters in the book? (example: she should keep them, "repair" them, take them to a circus, etc) (10-15 lines)
- Choose a story you liked very much when you were little. Give three reasons for liking it. (10-15 lines)

TEACHER'S GUIDE

KEY TO ACTIVITIES

Exercise 2

1. B
2. A
3. B
4. C
5. A

Exercise 3

- a. Clattered
- b. Chuckling
- c. Crackle
- d. Grumbling
- e. Creaked
- f. Chattering

Exercise 4

flat paper, front view, window seat, , rear legs, knock off, puzzled expression, sweet face, leather armchair, fierce movement, spotted leopard

Exercise 5

- a. clumsy
- b. sulky
- c. reprovngly
- d. trembled
- e. bewildered
- f. cramped

Exercise 6

- a. impolite
- b. astonishment
- c. annoyance
- d. amusing
- e. drawing
- f. laughter

Exercise 7 (possible answers)

- a. He remarked that he was not the only thing in the book.
- b. Jane Gladys asked what was wrong with her.
- c. The clown demanded to know what amused her.
- d. The monkey noticed that then she could be a real monkey instead of a picture of one.
- e. The monkey explained that what was the matter with him was that his front and rear legs on the left side were nearly six inches too short.

f. The monkey advised her not to mind that.

Frank Lyman Baum (1856 –1919) was an American writer of children's books, his best known writing being the Oz books. As a child he had a bad health, thus he spent most of his time at home, especially reading. He showed interest in theatre and journalism, but his real success came when he started publishing his fantasy novels and short stories. In 1897 he wrote and published *Mother Goose in Prose*, a collection of Mother Goose rhymes written as prose stories, and illustrated by Maxfield Parrish. It was followed by *Father Goose, His Book*, a collection of nonsense poetry. *The Oz* books form a book series that begins with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and that relates the fictional history of the Land of Oz. Other well-known works include: *Dot and Tot of Merryland*, *The Master Key*, *An Electrical Fairy Tale*, *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, *Queen Zixi of Ix* and *Sky Island*. The following story appeared in *American Fairy Tales* in 1901.

Baum is considered a very important figure in the history of American fantasy and also the first author to create fantasy writing with a strong American character. As a fairy tale lover (since his childhood) he studied both the traditional and literary tales (especially Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen) and wanted to create his stories (like E. Nesbit) in a different manner, to make fantasy appear in the very real life. In his introduction to *Wizard of Oz* he claims that *'the old-time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as "historical" in the children's library; for the time has come for a series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and bloodcurdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale.'*

The present story, *The Girl Who Owned a Bear*, answers this very desire of the author. We are not talking about two different worlds, a real one and a fantastic one, and a girl who travels back and forth between them. Here a common girl encounters magic in her world, but the characters are not the ones we got used to in fairy tales. They are depicted from the real world, but given special (maybe magical) features: animals can talk, they are rational, characters can jump out of a book, etc. Despite this, the whole story looks like a game little children play in their room or with their friends, when they imagine their toys can speak and play different roles. It looks like a dream come true in childhood.

Compared to Grimm and Anderson, Baum does sanitize the stories for children, taking out the violence and the sexual connotations, even if, at a specific level he keeps some moral lessons, but adapted to the real life. Just

like Jane lets the character out of the book, Baum lets the inner child out to create his own world of fantasy.