

## Story Study: The Gruffalo

### Key themes and ideas:

*The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler tells the story about a mouse as he walks through the woods. On his way, the mouse encounters several dangerous predators, but using some clever thinking, is able to scare them away. He tells them he is going to meet his friend, the Gruffalo, who is described as an ugly, terrible, fearsome creature. This causes the other creatures to flee in fear. The mouse laughs, saying “there’s no such thing as a gruffal—” Before the words are even out of his mouth, a real Gruffalo appears! The mouse is forced to think quickly, and comes up with a plan that will prove to the Gruffalo that the mouse, not the Gruffalo himself, is the scariest creature in the woods. The two go walking together and all the other creatures turn and run from the sight of big, ugly Gruffalo, who himself believes they are all running away from the mouse. Eventually, even the Gruffalo runs away from the clever mouse, leaving him to enjoy the woods and a meal in peace. The story is about quick thinking, cunning, imagination, and avoiding danger.

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### Read the Story

Before reading *The Gruffalo* ask your child/children to look at the cover pictures, read the synopsis on the back of the book and ask your child/children to think about what a Gruffalo might be. Ask them what they think the story might be about.

Read the story slowly asking the child/children to pay attention to the pattern of the story and the rhyming words.

Recap the story asking your child/children what it was about and who the mouse met along the way.

### Discussion Questions & Topics

#### To consider before the session:

- The mouse is the smallest character in the forest. Why is he the only one to get food in the end?
- The story seems to suggest that brains are more valuable than brawn (physical strength). How does it show this?



- The protagonist (the mouse) survives because he tells clever lies. What is the danger of reading a story where the protagonist wins by telling lies?
- How does the story use fun to make things more interesting? For example, how does the rhyme scheme make things more fun?
- The story makes a lot of use of repetition. What is the value of repetition?
- The mouse uses imagination to survive in his environment. How does imagination help you to survive in your environment?

**Discussion with your child/children during the session:**

1. Why does the mouse tell everyone about the Gruffalo? And why does everyone run away when he tells them what the Gruffalo likes to eat?
2. Where does:
  - a. The owl live?
  - b. The fox live?
  - c. The snake live?
3. The mouse tells a lot of lies in this story. He gets away with it but almost gets caught. What is the danger of telling lies?
  - a. Has anyone ever told you a lie?
  - b. How did it make you feel?
  - c. Have you ever told a lie? Why?
4. The mouse is the weakest creature but in the end he wins. Does life work like this sometimes?
5. Is it better to be strong or smart? Why? Give reasons for both.
6. The mouse uses imagination to survive in his environment. How does imagination help you to survive in your environment?
7. How are the mouse and the Gruffalo similar? How are they different?

**LEARNING ACTIVITY 1: Asking Questions & Story Review**

**Instructions:**

This activity is designed to help your child/children gain the confidence to formulate and ask their own questions, as well as give an additional review of what happens in the story of *The Gruffalo*.

1. Write the following questions words in large letters on pieces of paper:

**WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY? WHEN? WHICH? HOW?**

Explain to your child/children that you will now use these words to ask questions about *The Gruffalo*. You, as the person leading the activity, will start the question-asking, and your child/children will do their best. However, whenever a child has their own question about the book, they can ask the whole group.

2. Use some of the questions below, as well as some of your own, to begin the conversation:
  - **WHO...**
    - ... is the Gruffalo?
    - ... is afraid of the mouse?
  - **WHAT...**



- ... does the mouse eat? What does a Gruffalo eat?
  - ... happens when the other animals see the Gruffalo?
  - **WHERE...**
    - ... does the mouse live? The fox? The snake?
    - ... do you think the Gruffalo lives?
  - **WHY...**
    - ... does the fox not eat the mouse? Why does he run away?
    - ... isn't the mouse afraid of the Gruffalo, like the other animals?
  - **WHEN...**
    - ... does the mouse think he will see a Gruffalo?
    - ... does the Gruffalo decide not to eat the mouse?
  - **WHICH...**
    - ... animal in the story is the biggest? The smallest? The smartest?
    - ... animal is the owl afraid of?
  - **HOW...**
    - ... many characters are there in the story?
    - ... does the mouse manage to go through the woods without getting hurt?
3. Many of these questions will lead to deeper questions. For example: Who is afraid of the mouse? → How do you know? → Why do you think that is so? → What sort of actions does fear make them do?

Encourage your child/children to come up with these deeper questions as they also try to formulate answers. The activity should progress from easy questions with simple answers (how many characters, where does the snake live) to more complicated questions, some of which may not have an answer (where does the Gruffalo live? What will happen next time the Gruffalo sees a mouse?)

4. As you continue reviewing the book and the following activities, encourage your child/children to continue forming and asking questions. Questions will help them gain a deeper understanding of the story and the ideas being discussed, as well as encourage them to think creatively and to ask questions of the world around them.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY 2: Imaginary Creatures

### Supplies:

- Blank paper
- Drawing supplies (crayons, markers, pencils, etc.)

### Instructions:

1. Look back at the pages of *The Gruffalo* when the mouse describes different characteristics of a Gruffalo ("He has terrible tusks," "turned out toes," "purple prickles," etc.). Ask your child/children where they think the mouse got all of these traits from—did he see the Gruffalo first, or did he use his imagination?



The mouse used his imagination to create the Gruffalo in his own head, even though the Gruffalo turned out to be real. Now your child/children will get the chance to imagine their own creature, and give it any traits or characteristics they want.

2. Distribute paper and drawing supplies to your child/children. Explain that, as they come up with their own imaginary creatures, they should come up with the answers to the following questions:
  - What does your creature look like? Give it at least 3 distinct traits (can be done in a drawing or an explanation)
  - What does your creature eat? How does it gather or hunt or cook its food?
  - Where does your creature live? Why did it choose that habitat?
  - What is your creature's name?

Give your child/children plenty of time to create their creatures. If some children say they are finished early, ask them to add more traits to their creature, or to think about some more questions they may want to answer about the creature.

3. When all creatures are finished, give each child an opportunity to present their creature. In their presentations, they should answer the 4 questions listed in Step 2. Also, for each presentation, let the other children formulate and ask their own questions of the presenter (How many years can your creature live? What its favourite weather?). If there is only one child in your suggestion, you should ask these questions of the child.

If a child gets stuck trying to answer a questions, encourage them to be creative like the mouse in the story, and to think quickly on their feet (there are no wrong answers—anything they say will work!). If they get truly stuck, open the questions up to the whole group, and encourage them to supply possible answers. However, let the child who imagined the creature in the first place make the final decisions on each answer.

4. When all of the presentations are done, display any drawings your child/children have created on the wall, or somewhere in the room. Now, you must watch out for these creatures—maybe one will be real, just like the Gruffalo!

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 3: Gruffalo Traps

#### Supplies:

- Blank paper
- Drawing supplies (crayons, markers, pencils, etc.)

#### Instructions:

1. If your child/children enjoyed the act of imagining and drawing their own creatures, give them another challenge: **Design a Gruffalo trap.**

Tell them to imagine they are trying to catch a Gruffalo. What would they need to catch one? What sort of trap would they set? What sort of bait would they use? Encourage them to use the story to gather clues and information about the Gruffalo that may help them to design a good trap.



2. Repeat the latter steps of **Activity 2**, giving your child/children drawing supplies and plenty of time to design their traps, then present their traps to the rest of the group. The group can then ask questions about each trap, about how it works or why it was designed/imagined the way it was.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITY 4: Gruffalo Word Creation

##### Supplies:

- Paper
- Pencils
- Scissors

##### Instructions:

This is a spelling activity designed for children who are starting to become confident with spelling, but can be used to build language skills in more advanced children.

1. If you have enough children in your session, break them into groups. If not, this activity can be done with just one child. Distribute paper, scissors, and pencils to your child/children.
2. Instruct each group to write out the words "THE GRUFFALO" on a sheet of paper. Make sure to leave a small space between each of the letters.
3. Have your child/children cut out each individual letter on the paper. This will leave them with 11 small pieces of paper, one letter per piece.
4. Challenge your child/children to spell as many different words from the 11 letters as they can. One child in each group should write down the words they discover on another piece of paper. (Examples: RUG, FROG, GOAT, HAT). You can help your child/children if they are having difficulty with correctly spelling some of the words.
5. When your child/children have finished with THE GRUFFALO, feel free to add new words from the story to give them more letters: SNAKE, FOX, OWL, etc. Allow them to continue building words as long as they stay engaged. Challenge them to come up with long words, with sets of words that rhyme, with words in a specific category (animals, verbs, places, etc.).
6. For slightly older children, this activity can be turned into a competition. Groups will compete against one another to come up with the most words in a certain period of time. The game can consist of different rounds, with the number of rounds depending on time and the level of the children.

Suggested rules to the game are below.

- In each round, children will be given a new set of letters (use the words above, then feel free to add more words from the book to extend the game). Letters should be written down and cut out before the start of each round.
- Each round should last two to five minutes (you can choose the length based on ability of children and total time available for the session). You will be the official timer.



- Only words written on to the word sheet before the timer ends count towards a group's score.
- Only valid words will count toward a group's score, and each word can only be counted once per round. This means:
  - No made-up or misspelled words
  - No using the same letter twice in one word, unless that letter appears more than one in that round's set.
  - No using letters from outside that round
  - No repeating words.
- Scoring can work as follows:
  - 1 or 2 letter word = 2 points
  - 3 letter word = 4 points
  - 4 letter word = 8 points
  - 5 letter word = 16 points
  - 6 or more letter word = 32 points
- Scoring for children who require easier maths can work as follows:
  - 1 or 2 letter word = 2 points
  - 3 letter word = 3 points
  - 4 letter word = 4 points
  - 5 letter word = 5 points
  - 6 or more letter word = 6 points
- Scoring should be done after each round. Rounds should be added together, and total scores kept by you in a place visible to all groups.
- The team with the most points at the end of all of the rounds wins.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 5: Gruffalo Masks

#### Supplies:

- Crayons or coloured pencils
- Scissors
- String
- Gruffalo Mask templates

#### Instructions:

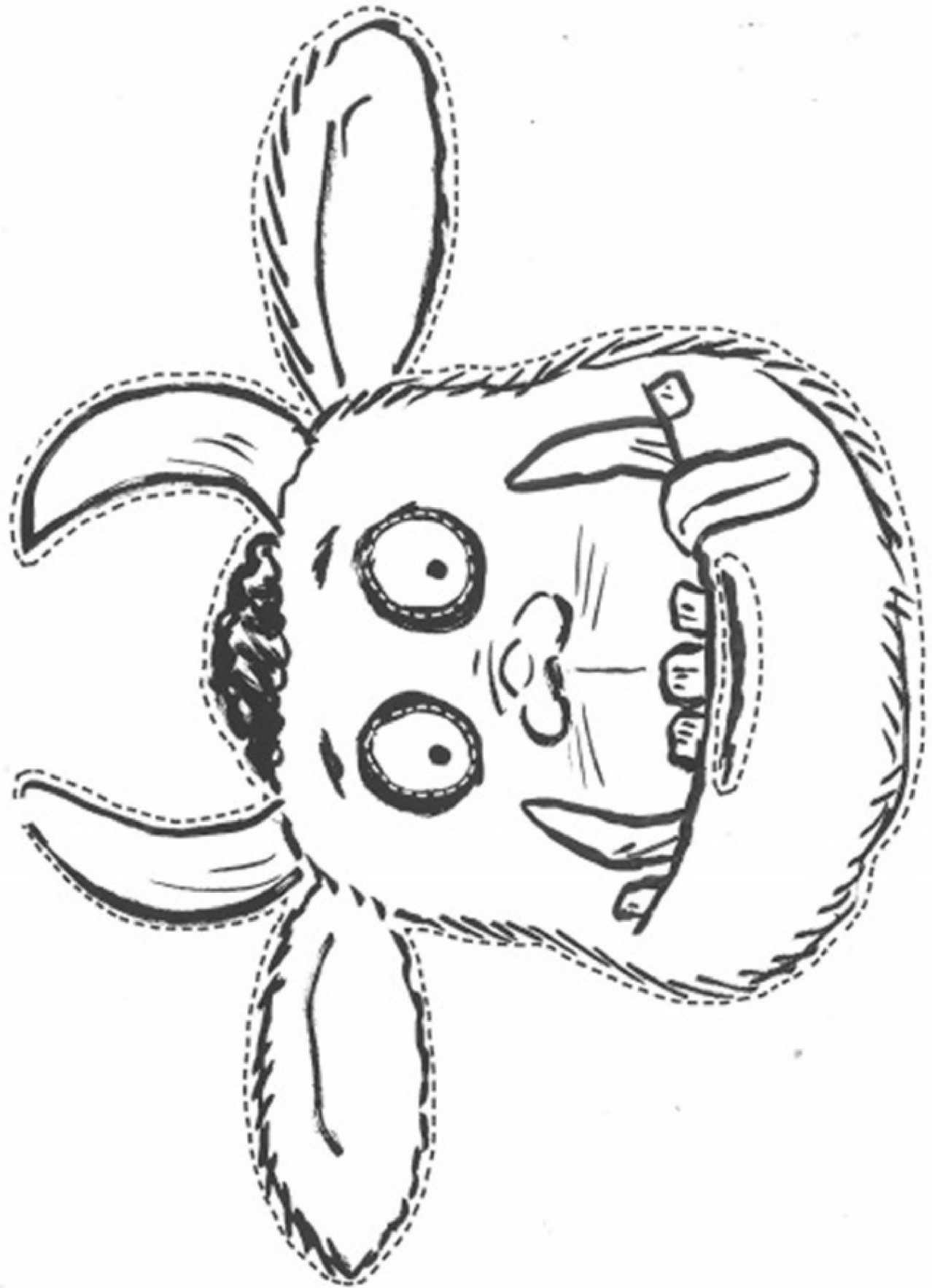
1. Your child/children will now get the chance to act like the Gruffalo. Each child should be given a print-out of a Gruffalo mask.
2. Give your child/children enough time to colour in their mask. They can either try to make their mask unique with different colours or try to make it close to the character in the storybook.
3. Once coloured in, have your child/children use scissors to cut out their masks. Then, have them carefully cut out the eyes. Younger children may need hands-on assistance for this.
4. Help your child/children to tie string onto their mask so it will sit comfortably on their head, with their eyes lined up with the holes cut out of the mask. Obviously, head



sizes will vary, so make whatever adjustments are necessary for each child to have a wearable mask.

5. Once all the masks are complete, allow your child/children to walk around and interact in different ways. This can mean asking each other questions about being a Gruffalo, recreating the story, having certain children pretend to be the mouse/owl/snake/fox, etc.







## LEARNING ACTIVITY 6: Fox Tracks

### Supplies:

- |                                |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| - Thick cardboard (corrugated) | - Glue  |
| - Scissors                     | - Paint |
| - Pencils                      | - Paper |

### Instructions:

1. Flip to the page of *The Gruffalo* featuring the Fox. Ask your child/children what they know about foxes. Where do foxes live? What do foxes eat? How do foxes behave? If your child/children are familiar, allow them to tell you or the group what they know about foxes. Let them study the pictures closely for clues.

2. Read the following Fox Facts to your child/children to fill in their knowledge of the animal:

**FOX FACTS:** Foxes are a close relative of the dog, though they only grow to the size of a cat. A male fox is called a **dog fox**, while a female is called a **vixen**. A baby fox is called a **cub**. They live in **underground dens**, which they dig themselves (*show picture in book of fox coming out of the ground*). They are **omnivores**, meaning they eat just about anything—plants, berries, bugs, small animals, etc. They are also known to scavenge human food that gets left out, so be careful what you eat around them! Foxes are very **sensitive observers**—they have an excellent sense of smell, eyes they can see even at night, and ears so strong they can supposedly hear the ticking of a watch from 40 meters away!

The **Cape fox**, also known as the silver-backed fox, is a small fox, **native to Southern Africa**. It has black or silver grey fur with a belly of yellow fur and the tip of its tail is always black. It can mostly be found in Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa (especially the Cape region, the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the North-West province).

The Cape fox is **nocturnal** and is most active just before dawn or after dusk.

Another fox common in South Africa is the **Bat-eared fox**.

The main feature of the Bat-eared fox is its **large ears** which are ideal for hearing prey in the bushveld of South Africa.

Their hearing is so good that they are even able to hear movements of insects or prey **underground**. The Bat-eared fox forages with its ears close to the ground where it will stop to listen then start digging furiously when it hears its prey moving below.

3. Now that your child/children know a bit about foxes, ask them how they might know if there is a fox in the area. What clues would there be? Let them guess before telling them:

Foxes mostly come out at night, so you're unlikely to see one during the day. What you will see, though, that tells you a fox is in the area, are **fox tracks**. Hold up the picture to



FOX



the right of fox tracks, and explain to your child/children that these are the footprints foxes leave behind.

4. Your child/children will now do an art activity making stamps of fox prints. Distribute cardboard, pencils, scissors, and glue.
5. Each child should have **two pieces** of cardboard. One piece will be the back of the stamp, and the other will be used to make the track. On the one piece, your child/children should use a pencil to **draw** their best version of the print above. There should be one main section and four toes.
6. Once they've drawn their track, use scissors to cut out each little section of the paw print. Then, using glue, they should arrange the individual parts of the track onto their other piece of cardboard, so that it forms a 3D version of the print. Then, leave the stamps in a safe place to allow the glue to dry.
7. When the stamps are dry, distribute paint and paper. Your child/children can use scrap paper or cardboard to lightly brush paint onto the 3D part of the stamp, then press the stamp onto paper. They should apply light pressure to the back of the stamp, so that the paint transfers to the paper, but not too much pressure (because that will flatten the stamp). As the facilitator, make sure they do not use too much paint—otherwise their track will come out as a big blob. For young children, you may need to distribute the paint yourself, helping each child individually.
8. Once your child/children get the hang of their stamps, see if they can make a **trail of paw prints** across a piece of paper. Encourage them to imagine what the fox is doing on that trail—are they hunting, playing, exploring, or running away from something scary?
9. When the stamped paper is dry, either display them or allow your child/children to take them home. Then, encourage your child/children to keep an eye out for tracks in real life—look to the ground for clues about real foxes living in your area!
10. **OPTIONAL:** This activity can be repeated using the tracks of any animal your child/children can think of... even a Gruffalo or an Imaginary Animal. Your child/children can use the same stamp method to make a Gruffalo track, or a track for the imaginary animal they created in Activity 2.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 7: Owl Bird Feeders

#### Supplies:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cardboard</li> <li>- Pencils</li> <li>- Flour</li> <li>- Water</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small bowl</li> <li>- Newspaper</li> <li>- Paint brush</li> <li>- Bird feed (seeds)</li> <li>- String</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

#### Instructions:



1. Flip to the page in *The Gruffalo* with the owl. Ask your child/children what they know about owls. Where do owls live? What do they eat? How do they behave? Again, let them study the pictures in the books for clues, and volunteer any information they already have.
2. Read the following Owl Facts to your child/children:

**OWL FACTS:** Owls are a member of the bird family. They are mostly nocturnal, meaning most owls only come out at night. Like most birds, they live in **nests** they build up in trees. They are mostly **carnivores**, hunting insects, small mammals, smaller birds, and fish, but they will also eat seeds. Owls have incredible eyes, capable of seeing prey from very far away. They are also known for their sneakiness—they are one of the quietest birds. This helps them sneak up and swoop down on their prey, grabbing them with their strong claws.

3. Once your child/children are familiar with owls, explain you will do an art activity based on the owl, making a **bird feeder**. Distribute cardboard, pencils, and scissors.
4. Using the owl in the book as a guide, have your child/children draw the outline of an owl onto their cardboard. They will **NOT** need to draw details (eyes, mouth, feathers, etc.). Once the outline is drawn, they should use scissors to cut out the shape.
5. While your child/children are drawing and cutting, mix a small bit of water into a pile of flour in a bowl. Continue adding water and mixing until the two form a **paste**. This will act as a **glue**. Be sure not to add too much water, as the result will be too runny.
6. Once your child/children have their owl outlines and you've prepared the paste, lay out newspaper on a flat surface (table or floor) and, one at a time, help them transform their silhouette into a bird feeder.

For each owl, use a paintbrush to coat the whole cardboard in your flour/water paste. Then, **coat the wet paste in bird seed**. Depending on how much bird feed you have, there are two methods here: first, to spread the seeds out onto the newspaper and press the gluey cardboard into it (this will get the newspaper wet after a few uses, but will make for a thorough coat of seeds), or you can hold the gluey cardboard above the newspaper and sprinkle the seeds onto the flour paste glue from above.

7. When the seeds have been stuck on, leave the cardboard out to dry. Make sure you do not lay them flat, as the glue may stick to the drying surface (an option to avoid this is doing each bird feeder one side at a time, but that will require more time overall).
8. When the bird feeders are dry, help your child/children to poke a small hole in the top using scissors. Then, feed a piece of string through the hole. This string can be used to hang the bird feeder from a tree, the side of a house, or anywhere where birds may come to eat.
9. Encourage your child/children to hang their bird feeders in a place where they can safely observe it. They can watch the birds that come to feed on it, and see what types they are. They can report back in a later session with what kinds of birds they observe. Remind them that, if they want to see an owl, they will have to wait until the sun goes down. It won't be easy to spot the owls in the dark, but give it a shot!



## LEARNING ACTIVITY 8: Snake Mobiles

### Supplies:

- Paper plates
- Paint
- Paint brushes
- Markers
- Scissors
- String

### Instructions:

1. Flip to the page in *The Gruffalo* that shows the snake. Ask your child/children what they know about snakes. Have they seen them around where they live? Do they know where snakes live? What do they eat? How do they behave? Ask your child/children if they are afraid of snakes. Ask them to explain why they might be afraid, or if they've had any scary experiences with snakes. Then, ask if any of them have had good experience with snakes.
2. After discussing snakes for a short while, present the following Snake Facts for your child/children:
  - **SNAKE FACTS:** Snakes are a type of reptile found on **every continent** in the world (except Antarctica). There are over **3000 types** of snakes. Some of them are venomous (poisonous), but many are not. They are **carnivores**, eating other animals. However, they **do not chew** their food—they have special jaws that let them swallow food whole! They can live just about anywhere, creating burrows under houses, in piles of sticks, in trees, etc. Snakes have a number of fascinating traits: they have **no eyelids** (meaning they never blink), they are **cold blooded** (meaning they need the sun for warmth), they are covered in **scales**, and they periodically **shed their skin**, pushing off the outer layer as a new skin grows underneath it, they **smell** with their tongue and have **internal ears** but not external ones. Some species of snake, such as cobras and black mambas, use **venom to hunt and kill** their prey but others, like Pythons, kill their prey by tightly wrapping around it and suffocating it in a process called **constriction**. There are lots of interesting snake species in the world. Some sea snakes can breathe partially through their skin, allowing longer dives under water and some land snakes are huge! For example, the **Anaconda** is found in South America that can reach over 5m (16ft) in length.

**NOTE:** Time allowing, do some research about the types of snakes present in your area. Figure out how to tell different species apart, and learn if any are venomous! If so, show your child/children a picture so they know which snakes to watch out for!
3. Now your child/children will get to create a snake-related craft, a **mobile**. Distribute paper plates, paint, and paint brushes to your child/children.
4. Instruct your child/children to paint **both sides** of their plate in whatever pattern and colours they want their snake to have. They may need to do this one side at a time in order for the



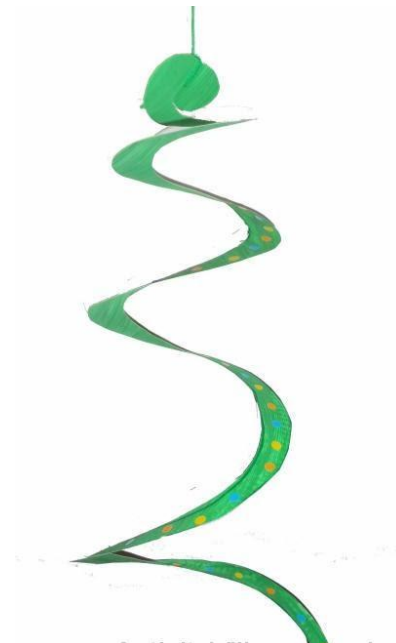
plates to dry properly. They can also use markers or other colouring materials to customize their snake.

- When all plates are painted and dried, show your child/children how to use a marker to make a spiral on one side of their plate (see first picture). In the very middle of the plate will be the snake's head, so your child/children can draw some eyes and mouth if they wish.



- Use scissors to cut along the spiral line. This will let the snake unfold up and down. Then, use the scissors to make a small hole somewhere near the snake's head. Give each child a short piece of string to slip through the hole and hang the snake up (see second picture).

- When hung, the mobiles should be able to spin and bounce in the wind. Encourage your child/children to hang their projects up somewhere, where the breeze might catch their artwork. If they are afraid of snakes, maybe this can be a way for them to get comfortable around them (except the venomous ones!). They can also use the facts they learned about snakes to help other people learn more about snakes.



### LEARNING ACTIVITY 9: Map the Mouse's Walk

#### Supplies:

- Paper
- Colouring materials (pencils and crayons)
- A list of the animals the mouse meets along his walk (but not in order)

#### Instructions:

- Distribute the paper and colouring materials to your child/children.
- Hold up the list of animals the mouse meets along his journey. If your child/children are young, go through the list with them and ensure that they know all of the animals that appear on the list.

3. Ask your child/children to map out the mouse's journey from memory and to illustrate who he meets along the way.
4. Give them time to draw as much detail as they'd like to on their maps.
5. Once your child/children have completed their maps, flip through the pages of The Gruffalo storybook to see how close they were to remembering the correct order of animals the mouse came across.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are many other great activities for The Gruffalo to be found online.

Some of our favourites are from [teachingideas.co.uk](http://www.teachingideas.co.uk) and we encourage you to explore what they have to offer for further learning and exploration of this story and others.

For example, this PDF is a great resource for The Gruffalo:

[http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/sites/default/files/thinkinghatthegruffalo\\_1.pdf](http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/sites/default/files/thinkinghatthegruffalo_1.pdf)

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*Thanda is a non profit organisation based in rural Mtwalume, KwaZulu Natal South Africa. Our curriculum is made up of activities that we have developed over 12 years. The ideas and inspiration for our activities come from is a wonderful combination of educators, books, websites, YouTubers, and other places and people on the internet. We are very grateful for all of them. Where we use ideas or activities directly from a source, we always endeavour to give credit to the creator. We do not endeavour to profit from these story studies, we only wish to add value to the lives of people we may have the opportunity of crossing paths with.*

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Thanda is a non-profit Organisation based in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa  
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