

## Reading Comprehension Home Learning

Read the text and answer the comprehension questions.

# The Truth About Little Miss Muffet

Little Miss Muffet is a well known nursery rhyme. You may well have heard it before. There are a number of different versions of the rhyme but this one is the most popular.

**Little Miss Muffet**  
**Sat on a tuffet\*,**  
**Eating her curds and whey\*\*,**  
**There came a big spider,**  
**Who sat down beside her**  
**And frightened Miss Muffet away.**



### \*What is a tuffet?

Miss Muffet may have been sitting on a small grassy mound – a tuft of soft grass. Another possible meaning of a tuffet is a 'three-legged stool'. In some versions of the rhyme, Miss Muffet is sitting on a cushion or a buffet – a word for stool from the north of England.

### \*\*What are curds and whey?

In the process of making cheese, milk is mixed with a substance called rennet. The result of this is that the milk turns into curds, which are solid like lumps in cottage cheese, and whey which is a watery liquid.

### Who was Miss Muffet?

Miss Muffet was a real person! Her name was Patience Muffet and she was the daughter of a Dr. Thomas Muffet who lived between 1553 and 1604. Although almost every child in Britain has heard of Little Miss Muffet, the history books tell us much more about her father than they do about Patience herself. As well as being a medical doctor, Dr. Muffet was fascinated by the world of insects and spiders, a subject that people had not studied much up to that time. He wrote two books:

*The Silkwormes and their Flies;*  
*The Theater of Insects and Lesser Living Creatures.*

He admired silk worms so much that he was inspired to write the first of these two books in verse.

## Why did Miss Muffet run away?

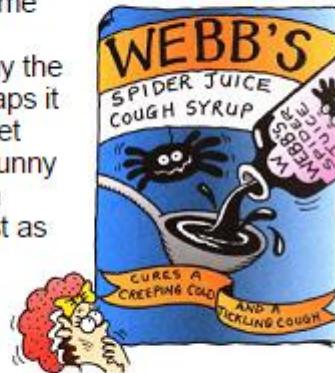
In those days it was thought that spiders could help cure illness. Some people used to wear a spider in a nutshell when that had a high temperature and others believed that swallowing a spider wrapped in a ball of butter could help them get better. It is thought that Dr. Muffet was interested in finding out whether spiders could be used to cure the common cold. It is said that he used to treat his daughter with spiders when she was ill.



## Why is Miss Muffet still famous today?



It is probably truer to say that it is the rhyme about Miss Muffet that is famous – not Patience herself. No one can be sure why the rhyme has become so well known. Perhaps it was because the story of Little Miss Muffet inspired artists and illustrators to create funny pictures of a frightened girl fleeing from a spider. In fact, the spider has become just as famous as the girl!



1. Complete the table about Dr. Muffet.

Name	Dr. Thomas Muffet
Year of birth	
Occupation/job	
Books published	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Silkwormes and their Flies</li><li>2. The Theater of Insects and Lesser Living Creatures</li></ol>
Year of death	
Name of child	

2 marks

2. When Dr. Muffet wrote his book in 1599, it was described in the following way:

*The Silkwormes and their Flies. Lively described in verse by T. M. (Moufet) countre  
farmer, apprentice in physicke...*

What is it about the language used that tells you this description was written a long time ago?

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1 mark

3. How do the cartoon jokes make the reader think differently about the information?

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2 marks

4. Some of the sentences begin with phrases such as the following:

***It is probably truer to say ...***

***It is thought ...***

(a) What do such phrases tell you about the information in these sentences

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(b) Find one more phrase that expressed the same idea as the phrases in **bold** above.

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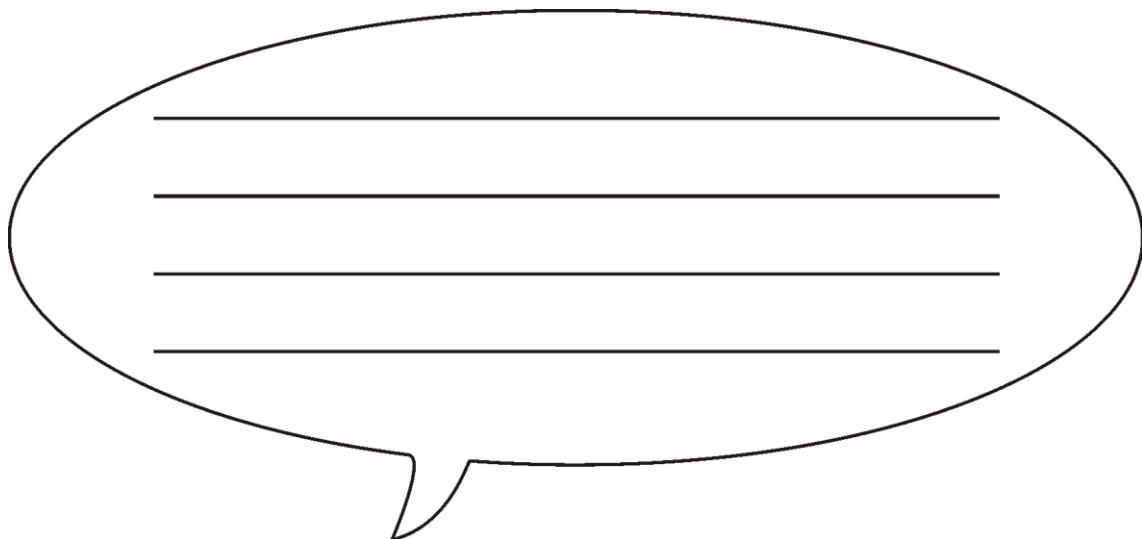
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2 marks

5. Look at the section called **Why did Miss Muffet run away?**

Using the information in that paragraph, imagine what Dr. Muffet is saying to Patience, as he is putting the spoon to her mouth.



2 marks

6. *The Truth About Little Miss Muffet* is a collection of short texts written for different purposes.

Which **three** of the following can be found?

Texts written to:

inform

give instructions

complain

amuse

give an explanation

persuade

1 mark