

Teachers' notes 1

Introduce your class to Thomas –
a boy who appears to be full of excuses!

The Tall Tales of Thomas O' Malley is the story of a boy who – to put it politely – likes to embellish the truth. Unfortunately, it appears that Thomas' latest tale might have a ring of truth about it as he squelches into his classroom and launches into his most spectacular story yet. Could the events he described really have happened – or is it just the product of an overactive imagination?

Literacy Framework

The story poster can be used as part of Unit 1 'Stories with familiar settings' or as an example of an alternative version of a traditional story, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, for Unit 2 'Traditional stories'. Of course, it could also be a fun standalone literacy activity to tie in with Comic Relief's Red Nose Day!

Talking points

Gather the children on the carpet and share the story. If you have access to an interactive whiteboard and are a subscriber, you might want to display the online version of the poster that can be accessed at www.scholastic.co.uk/childedplus

After your first reading, use the following talking points to explore the characters and setting:

- What locations are referred to in the story? Thomas' tale takes place in a classroom but his own story references another location – his home. However, Thomas doesn't live in an ordinary home; he lives in a hotel. Ask the children if they can point to any clues in the text that suggest this setting.
- Do the children think this is the first time that Thomas has told one of his stories? If not, why not?

Again, look at the text and ask the children to point to examples to support their argument, such as Miss Spellman's dialogue ('*You're late again!*').

- Is Thomas' story believable? It sounds very far-fetched – but is there any evidence that his story might be true? (His shoes are squelching, his clothes are torn, and he has pondweed on his shoulders.) Could there be another, more real, explanation for why Thomas is all wet?
- Invite the children to think about the character of Thomas. Do they think he is naughty and always getting into trouble? If his story is to be believed, then he is quite heroic, escaping from a horrible slime monster. Do the children think Thomas would be the type of person they could trust? If not, why not?

Story structure

Reread the story. Challenge the children to think about whether the poster extract is the beginning, middle or end of a story. After finishing the extract, ask for a show of hands to vote for each option and choose some children to explain their reasons.

Encourage the children to focus on the character of Thomas. What makes his story so interesting? (We don't know if he is telling the truth.) Ask the children to consider what impact it would have on the extract if we already knew if Thomas' story was correct. Would it add more humour to the piece? Would it remove some of the suspense?

Do the children think that the extract is the end of the story? What might happen next? Will Miss Spellman march Thomas straight to the headmaster's office or will Thomas own up to the truth? Explore some possible endings orally with the children.



Teachers' notes 2

Use the poster story as the starting point
for some colourful tales of your own

Thomas likes to take the truth and exaggerate it – a lot! The following activities explore the character of Thomas and the colourful stories that he uses to get out of trouble. Children will be invited to think about the consequences of telling lies by comparing this story with *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*.

Getting into character

In pairs, invite one child to take on the role of the teacher and the other to play Thomas. Give the children playing Thomas one of the event cards (from **Photocopiable 3**), which gives a Thomas-style reason for being late for school. Encourage the children playing Thomas to elaborate on their story – giving it a start, middle and an ending. Then, get the pairs to swap roles and cards.

Afterwards, gather the children together. Ask confident pairs to share some of their weird and wonderful excuses. Which ones were the best?

Comparing stories

Why does no one believe Thomas? Is it right to always lie all the time? Read the children *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* by Mairi Mackinnon (Usborne, ISBN 9780746085592) and compare the two stories. In both, the main character gets into trouble for telling tales – even when they do end up telling the truth.

Do the children think that Thomas, like the boy in the story, is really telling the truth? How would it feel to not have people believe you? Invite confident children to hot seat the character of Thomas and explore these feelings through class questioning.

My tall tale

Refer back to the character role play (using the event cards) and explain to the class that they are going to plan out their own version of the story – replacing Thomas' tall tale with their own. Use copies of the

story template on **Photocopiable 4** to structure this activity, inviting children to write their own 'excuses' in the boxes. Remind them that these can be as inventive and imaginative as they like.

The completed stories can then be paired with a colourful illustration showing the monsters and other weird creations that the children have invented as their excuses.

Secrets and lies

Sitting in a circle, invite volunteers to share experiences of when they told a lie to get out of trouble, or even to stop someone else getting into trouble. How did it feel to tell the lie, and what were the consequences? Remind the children of the character of Thomas. By telling lies and making excuses, no one believed him. If Thomas asked them for help or wanted to confide a secret, would they trust him?

Draw two stick figures on the board. Under one write *Always tells the truth* and under the other write *Never tells the truth*. As a class, attach adjectives to the two figures to describe what they might be like. Be prepared for choices to be less black and white than you would imagine! Compare and contrast the two lists and ask the children to decide who they would rather have as their best friend.

It's the truth!

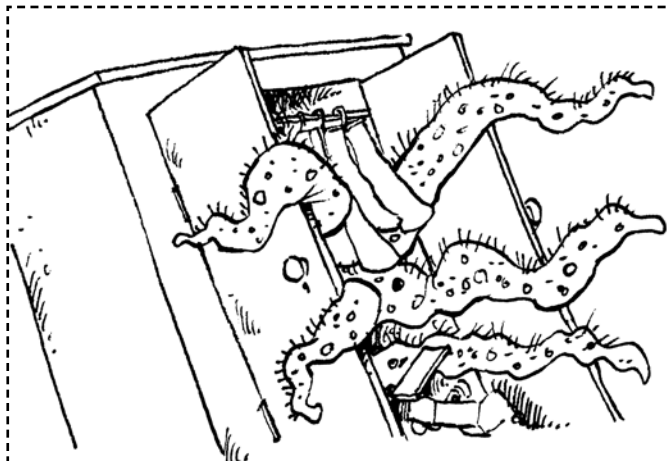
Why not end your session with a fun game. On a piece of paper, get the children to write three sentences about themselves. One must be true and the other two can be made up.

Then, in turn, invite individual children to take the 'truth seat' and read out their three statements. It is up to the rest of the class to decide which one they think is the true statement. Encourage the children, when thinking up their statements, to choose ones that will be difficult to guess – even by their friends!



Event cards

I was late for school because...



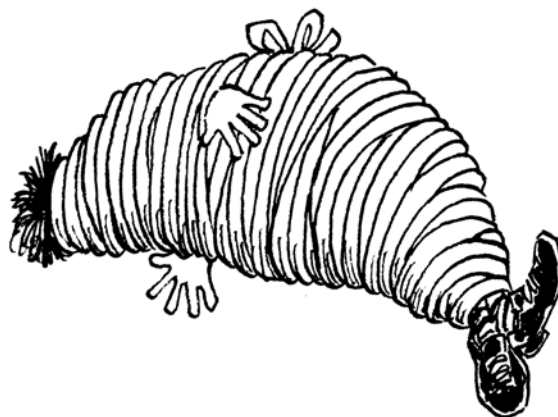
There was a monster in my cupboard.



Aliens knocked on the door.



We took a wrong turn.



My sister tied me up.



My breakfast ran away.



Our house fell down.



My tall tale

Name _____ Date _____

“So tell me again why you were late for school,” asked the teacher.

“You won’t believe me, but...”

First...

Then...

And finally....

“It’s the truth! Honest!”

