

## There Was An Old Lady

I once heard a story about an old lady who lived alone in a village. One day, something drastic happened to her. For some reason, I don't know why, she swallowed a fly. Maybe she was riding her motorbike with her mouth open; maybe she was practising for the Fly-Eating World Championships; maybe she was just hungry. We'll never know.

Anyway, once she had swallowed the fly, there was only one thing to do. The old lady knew that spiders were natural predators of flies. It seemed logical to her to swallow a spider to catch the fly. Again, I don't know why. Unfortunately, the spider didn't do her any good. Instead, it simply wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her. It did not catch the fly.

The old lady pondered her problem in the garden. Her next dim-witted idea landed in the tree next to her. In a matter of seconds, she'd swallowed a bird. Its goal was simple: catch the spider that had so far failed to catch the fly. Birds are not known for doing as they are told. This one was no exception. Instead of catching the spider, it simply built a nest in her stomach and refused to move.

Now, the lady had a problem. She was feeling rather full but she couldn't go through the rest of the day with animals living inside her. She was supposed to be meeting Ethel for cream tea in the afternoon. This wouldn't do.

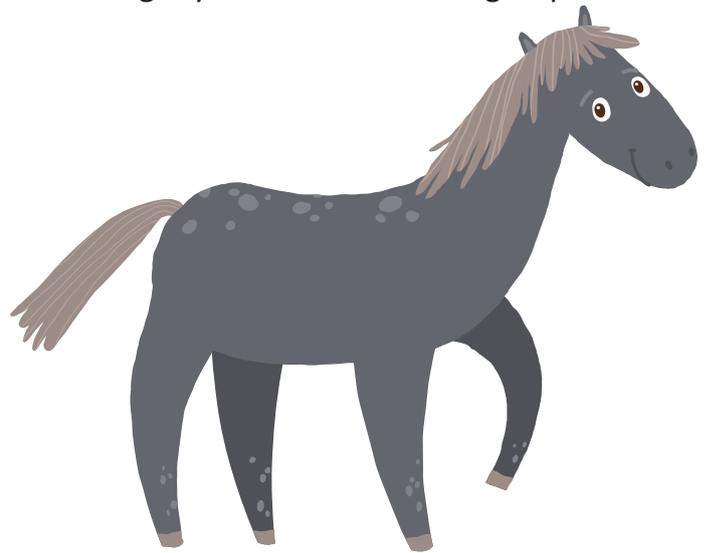
Spying her raggedy cat in the corner, her next move became inevitable. Down the hatch the moggy went. If it could do the simple job of catching the bird that was supposed to have caught the spider that had hopefully caught the fly by now, the poor lady would feel a lot better.

It didn't work. Cats are even less likely to do as they are told than birds. This poor feline curled into a ball and fell asleep pressed against her liver. The old lady was in quite a pickle.

Over the course of the morning, the poor old dear became increasingly desperate. Down went the neighbour's dog to fetch the cat. When that didn't come back, she resorted to the goat in the field next to her cottage. It bleated and ran around inside her, but the situation remained unchanged.

In the end, there was only one animal left in the village. The woman knew it was a crazy idea but, so far, nothing had worked. Even though her stomach was bloated with all of the animals (and she was pretty sure the dog and the cat were having a fight in there), she had to try it.

The farmer brought his horse round to her front door. The old lady took a deep breath and opened her mouth. To the farmer's surprise, she managed to swallow the whole horse. However, he wasn't so surprised when her stomach made a strange, groaning sound. He ducked behind the water butt just in time to see the poor old lady explode. He was slightly concerned when a group of bewildered animals wandered off down the track.



## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the word “drastic” tell you about what happened to the old lady?
2. Which word or phrase tells you that spiders eat flies?
3. Write a definition for pondered.
4. Find a word that has a definition closest to “was definitely going to happen”.
5. Find two words that show how the old lady's appearance changed over the text.

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**R**

Give one of the reasons why she might have swallowed the fly.

**S**

What caused the old lady to explode?

**E**

Why did the woman swallow the animals in the order she did?

**R**

Who owned the horse?

**S**

How many animals did the old lady swallow in total? What were they?

Answers:

1. It was a serious/bad thing
2. Natural (predator)
3. Gave lots of thought to/thought about for a while
4. Inevitable
5. Scrawny/bloated

R: Riding her motorbike with her mouth open, practising for the Fly-Eating World Championship or she was hungry

S: Swallowing the horse

E: Look for answers explaining that it was a food chain/each animal eats the one before it

R: The local farmer

S: Fly, spider, cat, dog, goat, horse (6)