



## The Apple Dumpling

### Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes

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#### CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

MILDRED, *a farmer's widow*

HEN #1 / CHILD #1

HEN #2 / CHILD #2

GOOSE #1 / CHILD #3

GOOSE #2 / CHILD#4

YOUNG WOMAN

HUSBAND

WIFE

YOUNG LORD

MOTHER

PUPPY (*barks only*)

OLD MAN

*\*Performance notes can be found on the pages following the script*

## Scene 1 – Mildred’s Cottage

[**Stage Set:** MILDRED'S cottage. On a table are two large tins marked in large letters, “flour” and “sugar,” plus spice jars and a basket filled with plums. The plums can be real or plastic. On a backdrop, paint three sections. On the first side, show a cottage interior with a window and plum tree branches out the window, laden with plums. In the middle section, show a pasture. On the far section, show the exterior of an old man's cottage.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Hello, everyone. Welcome to our performance of "The Apple Dumpling," a folk tale from England. It is brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

**NARRATOR:**

Once upon a time in England there lived a farmer’s wife whose name was Mildred. Though her husband died many years before, this old lady lives on her own just fine, thank you (*gestures to Mildred*). Well, most of the time. Except for days like today, when she gets a hankering for something.

**MILDRED:**

Oh, I am feeling a hankering!

**NARRATOR:**

And then that's all she can think about.

**MILDRED:**

ALL I can think about is apple dumpling. Mm, hmm! Tasty morsels of apple and butter baked in flour and sugar-coated- oh my! I MUST have one for dinner tonight.

**NARRATOR:**

Though she was a practical lady, too.

**MILDRED:**

Let's see. (*looks at table*) What do I have? I have sugar. I have butter. There’s flour, cinnamon, and nutmeg. That’s all well and good. But something is missing. What could it be? (*looks to audience*) Oh, my goodness— it’s apples! I have no APPLES! (*puts hands on hips and looks at audience*) I can’t very well make an apple dumpling for dinner tonight without APPLES, now can I?

[MILDRED gestures out the window to the plum tree.]

**MILDRED:**

All I have are these plums. (*lifts the basket of plums, sets it down, and looks out the window to the plum tree branch, laden with plums*) More than I know what to do with. These plums won't get me very far in having an apple dumpling for dinner. Unless... Mmm, here's a thought...

[MILDRED takes a shawl from a hook. She places a napkin over the plums in the basket and walks to the edge of her cottage. She looks left and right, as if looking both ways before crossing a street, and goes to the middle section of the backdrop, an area that presents a pasture.]

## Scene 2 - Pasture

[**Stage set:** In front of the middle section of the backdrop.]

[Several HENS and GEESE enter. They strut, flap and squawk across the stage. YOUNG WOMAN enters, chasing them. She looks tired. She holds a cloth bag bulging with something soft. HENS and GEESE peck at MILDRED's feet. HENS make squawking sounds like "Cluckaaawww!" GEESE make honking sounds.]

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

*(pants as if she has been running and gently swats Hens and Geese away from Mildred's skirt)* My goodness!

[HENS and GEESE lower their voices so the audience can hear YOUNG WOMAN and FARMER'S WIFE when they talk.]

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

I have been chasing my flock all over the hills today, ma'am (pronounce: MAM). I hope they're not bothering you.

**MILDRED:**

No, my dear. They are a fine... *(to audience)* ...noisy... *(to Young Woman)* My goodness, they are an active flock!

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

Thank you! *(points to basket)* Say, what fine-looking plums you have! I can smell the fresh plums from here! *(breathes deeply)* Ah!

**MILDRED:**

Yes, these are the best of the season. However, the thing is, there is nothing I like better than an apple dumpling for dinner. But I have NO APPLES!

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

My goodness! You want apples, but have plums. And here my family likes nothing better than plum jelly with our goose at dinner. But we have no plums!

**MILDRED:**

Well now, this could be a lucky turn for us both! How about a swap? I have this basket of plums *(pats the basket)* so I can trade them for some apples.

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

I would be happy to trade with you if only I had some apples! But I have none, not a single

apple to my name. (*brightens*) But say, I wonder. Would you consider a bag of feathers for your plums? You could make a right soft pillow for your home with these downy goose feathers. (*holds up the bag of feathers*)

**MILDRED:**

Well, I don't know. I already have all the pillows I need at home.

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

Such a pity! Then there is nothing to be done. (*sighs*) My family will just have to do without plum jelly, again.

[YOUNG WOMAN looks longingly at the plums. She sighs again, this time more loudly.]

**MILDRED:**

Oh very well. Why not? (*to Young Woman*) One person pleased is better than two disappointed. Maybe I can use the feathers to get my apples - somehow. Okay, here they are (*hands basket of plums to Young Woman*).

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

(*takes the basket*) Thank you! My family will be so happy! And here you are. (*gives bag of feathers to Mildred, turns and waves*) Have a good day!

[YOUNG WOMAN walks offstage, followed by HENS and GEESE.]

**MILDRED:**

You're more than welcome.

**YOUNG WOMAN:**

(*to Hens and Geese*) Now, come along, you. (*to Mildred*) Goodbye!

[HENS and GEESE follow YOUNG WOMAN offstage.]

**MILDRED:**

(*calls to Young Woman offstage*) And to you! (*to audience*) I wonder what I'll do with these feathers. Ack, what have I done? I'm further than ever from getting apples for my apple dumpling.

[HUSBAND and WIFE enter. Each holds a basket filled with beautiful flowers. They are arguing in loud voices. MILDRED watches them.]

**WIFE:**

Cotton!

**HUSBAND:**

Straw!

**WIFE:**

It is not!

**HUSBAND:**

'Tis, too!

**WIFE:**

*(points to Mildred)* Look! Here is someone who can settle the matter! Good mother, answer us this! If you were making a pillow for your grandfather's chair, don't you think the best thing to stuff it with would be COTTON?

[HUSBAND and WIFE stare at MILDRED.]

**MILDRED:**

*(shakes head)* Cotton? Well, maybe...

**WIFE:**

*(to Husband)* I told you so!

**HUSBAND:**

Let her finish! She was about to say "or maybe NOT." Because she knows very well that STRAW would be better than cotton, since you only need to go to the barn for it!

**WIFE:**

Husband, you are just being cheap. Straw will just poke through to Grandfather's behind every time he sits down. COTTON is the only filling to use!

**MILDRED:**

*(firmly)* No, no. I have the answer to your problem, and it's neither straw nor cotton!

**WIFE:**

What, then?

**MILDRED:**

*(opens the bag and holds it out for both Husband and Wife to see)* A FEATHER seat cushion is the best. As for me, a few apples for apple dumpling or a nice bouquet of flowers would serve me just as well!

**HUSBAND:**

You mean?

**WIFE:**

These flowers?

[HUSBAND and WIFE are delighted. HUSBAND gives WIFE a handful of flowers, and she combines those with her own.]

**WIFE:**

Here you are. (*hands over the bag of feathers*) Enjoy.

**FARMER'S WIFE:**

(*gives the bag of feathers to Husband and Wife*) And there you are. For your grandfather's pillow.

**HUSBAND:**

Done, and done!

[HUSBAND and WIFE slap one hand together in a victory gestures.]

**WIFE:**

Well, who would have believed it? This lady solved our problem AND settled our disagreement. Thanks for everything. (*turns to exit*) Bye, then!

**HUSBAND and WIFE:**

Bye!

[FARMER'S WIFE waves. HUSBAND and WIFE skip offstage.]

**MILDRED:**

(*turns to the side of the stage where Husband and Wife have just left*) GOOD FORTUNE TO YOU BOTH AND LONG LIVES! (*to audience*) Well, at least the flowers are pretty. And it's good to see those two go home smiling.

[YOUNG LORD appears from the opposite side of the stage.]

**YOUNG LORD:**

What's with all the shouting, if I may ask?

[MILDRED did not hear YOUNG LORD enter. She jumps.]

**MILDRED:**

Oh! (*curtseys*) So sorry, Young Lord. Well, actually it was a good-bye to two new friends. They settled a matter between them, and left as happy as can be. Though if you don't mind my saying so, it looks like something is troubling you?

**YOUNG LORD:**

*(drops his head, kicks at an imaginary rock in the middle of the road, and shoves his hands deep into his pockets)* Ah, there is nothing to be done. The court jeweler has not finished with the ring I ordered. Now I must go to my lady love with empty hands. I have nothing to bring, to show her how much I care.

**MILDRED:**

Ah, but you shall have a gift for your lady! *(to audience)* Though I may NEVER have my apple dumpling! *(offers the bunch of flowers to Young Lord)* Here, go ahead. Take these to her.

**YOUNG LORD:**

Ah gracious lady, these are beautiful! *(smells the flowers)* They're perfect! And for your kindness, I have a gift for you.

[YOUNG LORD takes a gold chain from around his neck. He offers it to MILDRED.]

**MILDRED:**

What is this?

**YOUNG LORD:**

Take it, dear lady. A fair trade for your generosity.

**MILDRED:**

What? This chain is made of pure gold!

**YOUNG LORD:**

What if it is? It's my gift, to you.

**MILDRED:**

I cannot accept this.

**YOUNG LORD:**

Ah, but you must. And I must be on my way. Farewell!

[YOUNG LORD turns and quickly exits, smelling the flowers.]

**MILDRED:**

*(holds the chain in her hand)* For heaven's sake, I never expected THIS! *(holds up chain)* A gold chain! Why, I could sell it at market and buy all the apples I want, and still have a handful of shillings left over! I must head to town quickly, before the sun sets!

[MILDRED starts to exit. MOTHER, CHILDREN and PUPPY enter and pass in front of her. MOTHER and CHILDREN look sad and are dragging their feet while PUPPY happily leaps about



the stage, then to MILDRED. PUPPY skips over to MILDRED and wraps arms around MILDRED's feet.]

**PUPPY:**

Woof! Woof!

**MILDRED:**

Such a sweet pup! (*leans over to pet Puppy, then, to Mother*) You are lucky to have such a darling little thing.

**MOTHER:**

(*sighs*) I don't feel so lucky these days.

**MILDRED:**

Whyever not?

**MOTHER:**

Ah, the truth is today we ate our last crust of bread. And there is not a farthing left in the house to buy more!

**MILDRED:**

Not a farthing! Well! Never shall it be said of me that I have an apple dumpling for supper while my neighbors do not have bread!

[MILDRED takes the gold chain from her neck and places it over MOTHER's head.]

**MOTHER:**

(*amazed*) What is this? You are giving me a gold chain?

**MILDRED:**

But it is already yours.

**MOTHER:**

I'm amazed, truly! Why, this chain is worth enough for our whole family to eat for weeks!

**CHILD #1:**

Fish and chips!

**CHILD #2:**

Yorkshire pudding!

**CHILD #3:**

Kidney pie!

**CHILD #4:**

You LIKE kidney pie?

**CHILD #3:**

I mean, Yorkshire pudding!

**All CHILDREN:**

*(cheer)* Yea!

**MOTHER:**

Dear woman, we are speechless. But we have nothing to give you in return for such a generous gift!

[PUPPY jumps at MILDRED's feet, yapping in a friendly way.]

**PUPPY:**

Woof, woof! *(Puppy hugs Mildred's legs )*

**MILDRED:**

I think, if you're willing, I'll accept this little one. *(pets Puppy again)* Hi, cutie.

[MOTHER and CHILDREN hug MILDRED. They join hands to form a ring and dance around her. Then they grab each other's hands and skip off the stage, leaving MILDRED and PUPPY together on stage. MILDRED pets PUPPY and speaks to her or him.]

**MILDRED:**

What was I thinking? *(sneezes)* I'm allergic to dogs! Ah, what a day! A basket of plums for a bag of feathers. A bag of feathers for a bunch of flowers. *(sneezes again)* A bunch of flowers for a gold chain. A gold chain for a puppy. *(sneezes)* Who knew this is where I'd end up? Oh well. It is a dear thing. Come with me, little one.

[MILDRED moves to the edge of the backdrop, where an old man's cottage is shown.]

### Scene 3 – Old Man’s Cottage

[**Stage set:** In front of the far section of the backdrop, where the exterior of an old man’s cottage is shown.]

[OLD MAN comes out of his cottage. He stretches and yawns very loudly.]

**MILDRED:**

Good day, sir. (*sneezes*)

**OLD MAN:**

Good day.

**FARMER’S WIFE:**

(*sneezes, more loudly this time*) Gracious, I just can’t seem to stop.

**OLD MAN:**

That endless sneeze CAN’T be a good thing.

**FARMER’S WIFE:**

I’m afraid it started as soon as I got this new puppy. (*sneezes*)

[Actors from the same edge of the stage where the old man’s cottage is portrayed move a simulated apple tree into view. The apple tree has removable apples on its branches. (See **Performance Notes** for detail.)]

**MILDRED:**

(*points to apple tree*) Why, that is a fine tree of apples! I didn’t notice it before.

**OLD MAN:**

Aye! But an apple tree and its apples are poor company when a man is growing old. I would give the bounty of them away if only I had a puppy like that one to play on my doorstep and keep me company.

[PUPPY hops over to Old Man, barking in a friendly, frisky way. PUPPY wraps its arms around one of the OLD MAN's legs.]

**PUPPY:**

Woof, woof, woof!

**FARMER'S WIFE:**

Well, I'd say my puppy has found a companion with you. Kind sir, what would you think if my puppy made a new home with you - would you part with a few apples from your tree?

**OLD MAN:**

*(pets Puppy)* Are you kidding? I would love to keep this puppy. I have more apples than there's coal at Newcastle. Have as many as you like. *(motions to Puppy, who happily skips behind him as Old Man exits)*

**MILDRED:**

*(picks several apples from the tree, puts them in her pockets, and turns to face audience)* These apples are perfect for my apple dumpling.

[OLD MAN returns, carrying a basket. PUPPY follows.]

**OLD MAN:**

I said, as many apples as you'd like. Help yourself. Really! *(hands Mildred the basket)*

**MILDRED:**

Isn't this marvelous! Thank you! Don't mind if I do, then.

[OLD MAN exits, followed by PUPPY.]

**MILDRED:**

Maybe I will have just a few more. *(picks more apples from the tree and puts them in her basket)* These apples are just perfect. I'll be able to bake PANS of apple dumplings, with plenty to share. *(tries to lift basket)* Ah, but how will I carry the basket home?

[HUSBAND and WIFE enter.]

**WIFE:**

Ah, hello there! The lady who gave us the goose feathers. How nice to see you again!

**HUSBAND:**

Do you need help with that basket?

**MILDRED:**

What perfect timing! I must say that would be welcome.

**FARMER'S WIFE:**

So tell me, how did the feather seat cushion work out?

**WIFE:**

I already started it! This will be the softest seat cushion ever for my grandfather!

**HUSBAND:**

He can't wait. (*picks up the basket*)

**MILDRED:**

You know what? Here's a thought.

**WIFE:**

What is it?

**MILDRED:**

Do you two like apple dumpling?

**WIFE:**

It's our favorite!

**MILDRED:**

Great! When we get to my cottage, why not stay for dinner? You can have some of my very own apple dumpling!

**HUSBAND:**

That's great!

**WIFE:**

You don't have to ask us twice for THAT.

**HUSBAND:**

Let's go!

**MILDRED:**

(*to audience*) What a turn of events! All of life is give and take. Now I'm going to have an apple dumpling tonight AND company to share it with!

[As FARMER'S WIFE, HUSBAND and WIFE exit, NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

(*looking at the three characters as they exit*) Will you look at that? (*to audience*) The old lady Mildred started out with a hankering and look what happened! After giving things away over and over, she ended up with what she sought in the first place, and company for dinner, too! So that's our story of "The Apple Dumpling." The end.

[If you have a curtain, close it now. If you do not have a curtain, fade the stage lights. Whether or not you have stage lights, all the other actors come onstage at this time and bow to the audience.]



## Performance Notes for The Apple Dumpling

### THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY:

1. Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
2. Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
3. Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



### COSTUMES

- FEMALE CHARACTERS – Long, dark skirts with pale simple tops. They can also wear aprons and braids or chignons if they have long hair.
- MALE CHARACTERS – Dark pants and pale or white shirts with sandals or comfortable shoes. They can also wear fake facial hair or have mustaches and beards drawn on with simple hypoallergenic cosmetics.



- HENS – Draped white or yellow fabric and felt ears clipped into hair with hairpins.
- GEESE – Draped white fabric and felt ears clipped into hair with hairpins.
- PUPPY – Draped furry fabric and felt ears clipped into hair with hairpins.



## PROPS

### Scene 1

- A coat rack or wall hook.
- A shawl, hanging on the coat rack.
- A table.
- Two large tins (one marked “FLOUR” and the other “SUGAR”)
- Several spice jars.
- A butter dish or a stick of butter made form cardboard.
- A bowl or basket filled with plumbs. Plumbs can be real or fake.
- A napkin or cloth to cover the plumbs with.
- A large basket for OLD MAN to give to FARMER’S WIFE for apples.

### Scene 2

- A large cloth bag filled with feathers or something that looks like feathers for YOUNG WOMAN to give to FARMER’S WIFE.
- Two bouquets of flowers for HUSBAND and WIFE to give to FARMER’S WIFE.  
A long gold chain for YOUNG LORD to give to FARMER’S WIFE. You might wrap the chain in gold tin foil so it is exaggerated and glitters.

### Scene 3

- Apples that are detachable from the tree (see set notes for how to accomplish this).



## SETS

Create a set that shows two small cottages, FARMER'S WIFE's cottage on one edge and OLD MAN's cottage on the other. In the middle is a pasture. The set stays on stage for the whole play. You can paint one large backdrop that shows all three locations, or paint three separate backdrops.

Paint the backdrop for FARMER'S WIFE's cottage to show a log cabin interior with one large window. Outside the window the branches of a plum tree are visible and there are many plums on the branch. It is important that the audience can see the table where she wants to prepare the apple dumpling. Her cottage can also be created using large painted boxes and plain fabric for a roof. Her shawl hangs on a coat rack or a hook that is attached to one of the "walls".

In the middle of the set is the pasture. It would be good to show a road at the bottom of a backdrop to suggest the road FARMER'S WIFE travels when she leaves her cottages and starts her adventure. You may bring onstage round green cutouts to represent bushes along the way.

The cottage at the other edge of the stage belongs to OLD MAN. The audience should see the exterior of his cottage.

The apple tree is a separate set piece. The tree can be painted onto the backdrop or it can be made out of cardboard and attached to the backdrop. You can trace a tree with several branches onto cardboard and cut it out, then paint it to look like a tree and attach to backdrop.

Whether you paint the tree onto to the backdrop or make it from cardboard, you will need to put Velcro on the branches. Cut at least





eight small squares of Velcro and place onto branches. These are the place where the apples will be attached.

The apples should be sturdy and overly large. They can be cut out of paper and laminated or cut out of cardboard. On the back of each apple, place a small square of Velcro the same size as those on the tree (but the opposite side of the Velcro material) so that the apples can be attached and removed from the branches.