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Jack and the beanstalk
(after the English folk tale, adapted for stage)

This play was written for a small school English drama group. The actors were aged 12–14 years old. It was performed several times – first at a district drama competition, next at the regional competition organized by Tambov Regional In-service teacher-Training institute, where it won the second prize, and finally it was shown as part of the "Good Luck" contest, organized by the British Council in the city of Noginsk, Moscow region.

The main idea behind the play was to give the young actors an opportunity to freely express themselves through English, and, at the same time, to provide them with extra language practice. According to the conditions of the regional contest, the running time of the performance was to be between seven and ten minutes, which made the task rather challenging, but at the same time all the more interesting for it. This is what the authors and the actors said about their drama experience:

Natalia Zholobova, co-author, teacher of English: *"I loved the way children grew more interested in English. They realized how much they can do with a little language and to see other people appreciate their work was a reward in itself".*

Alexey Konobeyev, co-author: *"It's amazing how quickly they learned to act and how much fun we all had staging it!".*

Sonya Rossoshanskaya, "Jack's mother": *"I feel now that I speak English better. I loved acting in English! Can we do another one, please!"*

Characters:

Narrator

Jack

Jack's mother

Gnome

Ogre

Ogre's wife

The gnome's wife

Narrator: Once upon a time, long, long ago, before you or I were even born, there was a poor widow, who lived in a tiny cottage. She was very poor. She had practically nothing. Nothing, except one cow and one son, a lad whom she called… (*the narrator motions his hand, the curtain opens*).

Mother: Jack, Jack, where are you? Do you hear me?

Jack: I'm here, mum. What do you want?

Mother: What shall we do? What shall we do?

Jack: What's wrong, mum?

Mother: Milky-white doesn't give a drop of milk. We have no money. If we have no money, you have no supper!

Jack: Don't cry, mum. I'm sure I'll bring you good luck!

Mother: What good luck are you talking about, my silly boy? We must sell Milky-white.

Jack: All right, mum. It's a market day today. I'll sell it. Why not? I'm sure.

Mother: I'm tired of our poverty. Take the cow and sell it at the market! But be careful.

Jack: Don't worry, mum. Goodbye! Come on, Milky-white! (*Jack comes to a green lawn made from a sheet of green cloth with flowers sewn on to it.*)

Jack: What a nice place to rest. Fresh water in the stream and green grass… Cow, where are you? (*Moo! – goes the cow*). Such a clever cow!
Gnome: Good morning, Jack!
Jack: Good morning. Do you know my name?
Gnome: Yes. Where are you going, Jack?
Jack: I'm going to the market, to sell our cow.
Gnome: Is it a good cow?
Jack: It is the best cow in the world, sir!
Gnome: But does it give milk?
Jack: Not only milk, but also cream, sour cream, yoghurt and cheese as well. What will you give me for such a treasure?
Gnome: I'll give you … five… beans!
Jack: Five beans, sir? Did you say five beans, sir?
Gnome: Five magic beans. They'll bring you luck! Take them, they are magic beans!
Jack: Magic beans... What should I do with them?
Gnome (*running away*): Just throw them over your shoulder when you return home.
Back at home.
Mother: Back, already, Jack! I can't believe it! Have you got good money?
Jack: Better than money, mum! I got beans, five magic beans that bring good luck!
Mother: What?! You silly boy, gave away my cow for a few beans! Take that! Take that! (*spanks Jack*)
Jack: Mother, they are magic.
Mother: As for your magic beans, they go out of the window! Go to bed now, no supper for you!
In the morning. There is a green bough in the window.
Mother: Jack, wake up, get up! Something terrible has happened! This beanstalk has grown in the garden, overnight!
Jack: So the gnome was right, he told me the truth! One must catch fortune by its hair! I'll climb the beanstalk and find out what the gnome meant.
Mother: Be careful, Jack!
Narrator: So Jack climbed and climbed, climbed and climbed, till at last he saw a big tall house. There was a big tall woman in front of the house, right on the doorstep.
Jack: Good morning! Would you be so kind as to give me some breakfast?
Woman: It's breakfast you want! My husband is an ogre, he kills and eats people. You'd better go away, for he'll soon be back home.
Jack: I am hungry, ma'am. Will you give me something to eat? You are a kind woman.
Woman: I am too kind. Get in, take your food and go away! Come on, I'll give you some mash. Sit down.
Jack: Thank you very much, ma'am. It's really very good. Oh, what's that noise? What's happening? The house is shaking!
Woman: It's my husband coming back home! What shall I do? Quick! Hide, and don't even breathe!
Ogre: Fee, fi, fo, fam,
I smell the blood of an Englishman!
Be he alive or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

Woman: Oh, nonsense, nonsense, there is no one here. Come on now and eat your nice breakfast.
Ogre: Mash. I don't like mash. I tell you, I smell the blood of an Englishman.
Woman: It's your imagination. Eat your breakfast, it's getting cold!
Ogre: Is that all the food we have?
Woman: In a little while you'll have your lunch.
Ogre: Wife, bring me my gold. I want to count my money.
Woman: How heavy it is!
Ogre: What a beautiful sight. One, two, three… (*He begins to count gold coins but falls asleep, his head on the table, snoring.*)
Woman: Get out, quick! Take some money, my poor thing. Run away!
Jack: thank you for saving me and my mother!
Back at home.
Jack: Mother, wasn't I right about the beans? They are really magic!
Mother: Oh, so much money! You'd better get a job, my silly boy. But better gold than nothing!

Follow-up created by the authorst of the script.

Mother: Jack, look at my new dress! How clever you are to get the money from the ogre. Our life is so much better now!
Jack: Yes, it is good. But now I want some toys to play with. Money is no fun without toys.
A knock on the door. Jack opens the door.
Jack: Mother, it's the gnome who bought our cow for five magic beans!
Gnome: And now I want my part of the gold!
Mother: What gold? The ogre's gold?
Jack: We will give you no gold. You already have our cow. Shame on you!
Gnome: I know it is not fair. But my wife will beat me if I don't bring her the money.
A loud knock on the door.
Gnome: It's her! Quick! Hide me!
The gnome's wife: Where is my husband? And where is my money? Why are you so slow, you stupid man?
Jack: Don't shout! How bad of you! You don't love your husband!
Mother: And we will not give you any money. But we can buy something from you. My Jack wants a toy.
Gnome's wife: Do you want a magic flute? It makes people dance. My husband dances all days long and does not do any work. I don't want it anyway.
Jack: All right, let me try it!
Music, everybody dances. Curtain.

Staging suggestions: To represent Jack's house we made a light folding book-like construction from cardboard and wooden planks. On it we painted the interior of the house – a bench, a shelf with plates, a small fireplace. The lawn was made from a sheet of green cloth with paper flowers sewn on to it, and for the beanstalk we used a plastic plant sprig. The house was on the left part of the stage, the lawn in the middle, and the ogre's house was represented by a bench and a table in the right part of the stage. The narrator would step forward and backward from the right wing.