***Grimm’s Fairy Tales***

***Chapter 5***

### ***The World and Seven Young Kids***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Synopsis:***

An old mother goat lives with her seven beloved little kids. One day she decides to forage for food in the woods. She warns the children not to let the wolf into the house. "The old scoundrel often disguises himself," she says, but the little goats can recognize him by his gruff voice and black feet.

Soon after the mother leaves, the wolf arrives and tells the kids to open the door. "Mother's back," he says. The little goats aren't fooled. They point out that their real mother has a sweet voice, "and your voice is rough and gruff."

The wolf then eats a piece of chalk to make his voice softer. He returns to the goats' home, but he still can't fool the seven kids: they know their mother doesn't have black feet like his. So the wolf makes the miller daub his paw with flour. Back at the goats' house, he manages at last to make the kids think he's their mother. They open the door; he rushes in. They try to hide, and he finds six out of the seven and gobbles them down. He never finds the baby goat hiding in the clock case.

At last the mother goat comes home to her ruined house. She calls her children's names one by one, but there's no answer until she comes to the name of the youngest goat, who's hiding in the clock case. The mother goat is devastated when he tells her what has happened. Sobbing, she heads off into the woods with the youngest kid. There they find the wolf snoring under a tree.

The mother goat examines the wolf and notices that something is squirming in his belly. Maybe her children are still alive! She has the littlest kid fetch scissors, a needle, and some thread. When he returns, his mother carefully cuts open the wolf's belly. One after the other, the other kids emerge. They are unharmed because "In his greed, the monster had swallowed them whole."

Somehow, the wolf sleeps through this process. The mother and her kids fill his belly with stones, and she sews him back together.

The wolf wakes up feeling thirsty. He heads to the well, his stomach heavy, and leans over to get some water. Weighted with the stones, he overbalances, topples into the water, and drowns. The goat family rejoices.

This story seems like a hybrid between "The Three Little Pigs" and "[Little Red Riding Hood](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Grimms-Fairy-Tales-Selected/character-analysis/#Little_Red_Riding_Hood)." It's meant to frighten children into learning a lesson, but the level of tension never rises very high. The danger is swiftly resolved, and the ending is so unrealistic that it couldn't scare too many young readers.

Seven and three are powerful numbers in folklore. There are no [Grimm](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Grimms-Fairy-Tales-Selected/author/) families with four or five offspring; 3, 7, and 12 are the usual quantities, with an occasional brood of 6. In the Old Testament, 7 often signifies completeness. It takes God six days to create the world, and he rests on the seventh. The Pharaoh dreams of seven fat oxen and seven lean ones. Jacob serves Laban for twice seven years, and the walls of Jericho collapse after seven days. A family of seven little goats seems like just the right size, and it makes emotional sense that the seventh goat goes uneaten. In the Old and New Testaments combined, the number 7 is used almost 800 times.

The wolf swallows six of the kids whole. As seems appropriate for a moralistic tale, his greed will be his downfall. He also tears the house apart. Still, the conflict isn't drawn out for long. Almost before the goats have been swallowed, their mother comes home, slits the wolf open, and rescues her squirming children. Even for a fairy tale, the notion that a wolf would sleep through all this is impossible to believe, but the fact that it could never happen is reassuring in its own way. Making the story less believable also makes it less scary.

This story has strong ties to the much more disturbing account of Cronus in Greek mythology. Cronus is the son of Earth (Gaia) and Sky (Uranus). With his wife, Rhea, he has six children. Learning that one of his sons will kill him, he eats five of his children at birth. Rhea manages to save the youngest, Zeus, by getting Cronus to eat a stone instead. When Zeus is old enough, he banishes Cronus and the other Titans.

But the Greek myth is a story about the nature of power and the threat one's heirs present. "[The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Grimms-Fairy-Tales-Selected/the-wolf-and-the-seven-little-goats-summary/)" is merely a cautionary tale about letting in strangers.

***Summary:***

* A mother goat has seven kids (which is actually what they call baby goats—for real). She goes to the forest, and warns the kids to keep an eye out for the wolf, who can be recognized by his black feet and rough voice.
* The wolf comes knocking and disguises his feet and voice. The kids all scramble to hide, but he finds and gobbles up all but the youngest.
* Mama goat returns and is distraught to only find the youngest at home.
* They locate the wolf snoozing, and suspect that the other kids are still alive in his belly. The wolf is sleeping so deeply they cut open his belly, and out leap the kids, all safe and sound.
* They stitch stones into the wolf's belly, and he drowns when he goes to take a drink in the well. Problem solved.
* By the way, if you're looking for another tale like this one, you might check out "Tale 26," a.k.a. "Little Red Cap."