

There are plenty of funny characters in books and stories, and Uncle Podger is one of them. Read an extract from the book "Three Men in a Boat" and work with the reading comprehension activities below.

Three Men in a Boat

"Three Men in a Boat" is an 1889 novel by Jerome K. Jerome, a humorous account of a leisurely boat trip three friends take up the River Thames. As they row along, different scenes and comic incidents remind the narrator, J., of people and experiences from his past. In this extract, Harris volunteers to compile a list of the things they'll need to take with them on the boat while ordering the other two, George and J, to do all the actual work. This trait reminds J. of his Uncle Podger.



You never saw such a commotion up and down a house in all life, as when my Uncle Podger undertook to do a job. A picture would have come home from the frame-maker's, waiting to be put up, and Aunt Maria would ask what was to be done with it, and he would say: "Oh, you leave that to me. Don't you worry yourselves about that I'll do all that"

And then he would take off his coat, and begin. He would send the girl out for nails, and then one of the boys after her to tell her what size to get, and in a moment have the whole house in pandemonium.

"Now you go and get me my hammer, Will," he would shout, "and you bring me the ruler. Tom; and I want the ladder, and I had better have a kitchen-chair, too. Jim, you run round to Mr. Goggles, and ask him if he will lend me his spirit-level. And Maria, I want somebody to hold the light for me. And when the girl comes back, she must go out again for a bit of picture-cord. Tom, come here, I want you to hand me up the picture."

And then he would lift up the picture, and drop it, and it would come out of the frame, and he would grab hold of it so as to save the glass, and cut himself, and then he would **spring** round the room, looking for his handkerchief. He could not find his handkerchief, because it was in the pocket of the coat he had taken off, and he did not know where he had put the coat, and all the house had to **leave off** looking for his tools, and start looking for his coat while he would dance round and **hinder** them

"Doesn't anybody in the whole house know where my coat is I never came across such a set in all my life Six of you' - and you can't find a coat that I put down not five minutes ago!"

Then he'd get up, and despite finding that he had been sitting on it, would call out: "Oh, you can give it up! I've found it myself now. Might just as well ask the cat to find anything before expecting you people find it."

And, when half an hour had been spent in tying up his finger, and a new glass had been got, he would have another go, the whole family standing round in a semi-circle, ready to help. Two people would have to hold the chair, and a third would help him up on it, and hold him there, and a fourth would hand him a nail, and a fifth would pass him up the hammer, and he would take hold of the nail, and drop it.

We would find the nail for him, and then he would have lost sight of the mark he had made on the wall, and each of us had to get up on the chair, beside him, and see if we could find **it** and we would each discover it in such a different place that he would call us all fools, one after another, and tell us to get down. And he would take the ruler, and re-measure.

At last, Uncle Podger would get the spot fixed again, and put the point of the nail on it with his left hand, and take the hammer in his right hand. And, with the first blow, he would **smash** his thumb, and drop the hammer, with a yell, on somebody's toes

Aunt Maria would mildly observe that, next time Uncle Podger was going to hammer a nail into the wall, she hoped he'd let her know in time so that she could make arrangements to go and spend a week with her mother while it was being done.

"Oh you women, you make such a fuss over everything." Uncle Podger would reply, picking himself up. "Why, I like doing a little job of this sort."

And then he would have another try, and, at the second blow, the nail would go clean through the plaster, and half the hammer after it, and a new hole was made; and, about midnight, the picture would be up- very crooked and insecure, and everybody dead beat and wretched - except Uncle Podger.

"There you are" he would say, stepping heavily off the chair and **surveying** the mess he had made with evident pride "Why, some people would have had a man hired to do a little thing like that!"

A. Read the text again and answer the questions below.

1. When Uncle Podger did a job around the house, what effect did it have on the rest of family?

- a. Everybody wanted to help.
- b. Nobody knew what they were doing
- c. The house became a scene of confusion
- d. There were lots of arguments

2. What is Uncle Podger doing in paragraph 3?

- b. asking
 - C. ordering
 - d. explaining
3. In paragraph 5, Uncle Podger thinks the rest of the family is
- a. incompetent
 - b. slow
 - C. ignorant
 - d. careless.
4. What does the word "it" in paragraph 8 refer to?
- a. the nail
 - b. the chair
 - c. the sight
 - d. the mark
5. Why does Aunt Maria want to spend a week with her mother?
- a. to take a break from her routine
 - b. to avoid all the confusion in the house
 - C. so as not to see the house being destroyed
 - d. so as not to see Uncle Podger getting hurt
6. How did the family feel when the job was done?
- a. exhausted
 - b. satisfied
 - C. insecure
 - d. proud
7. What is true of Uncle Podger, according to the text?
- a. He is skilled at doing odd jobs around the house.
 - b. He has good leadership skills
 - c. He works carefully and methodically
 - d. He prides himself on being able to do small jobs around the house.



B. Match the words highlighted in the text with their meanings.

1. spring		a. stop doing something
2. leave off		b. hit violently
3. hinder		C. examine carefully
4. smash		d. jump or move quickly
5. surveying		e. make it difficult for someone to do something