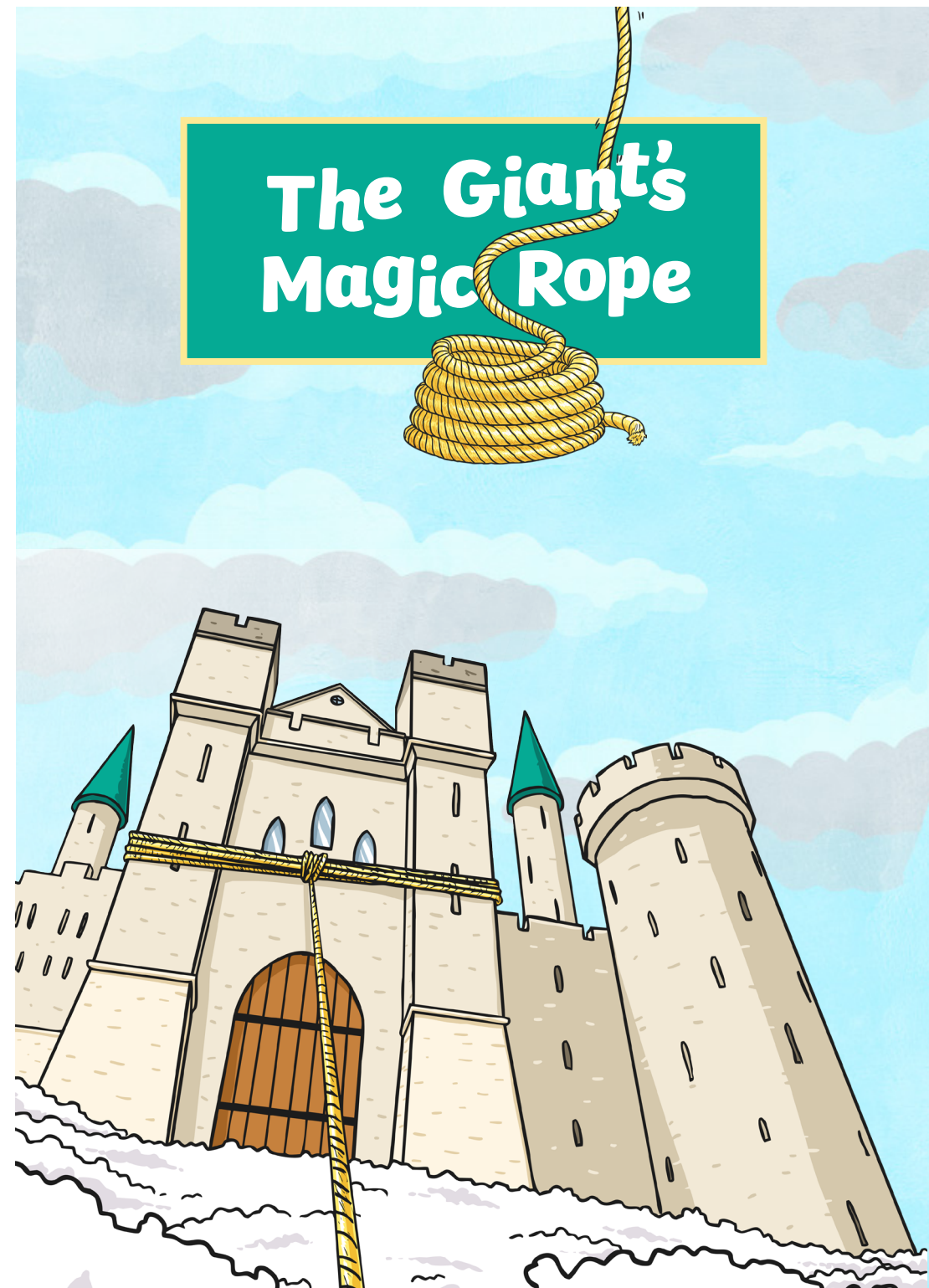
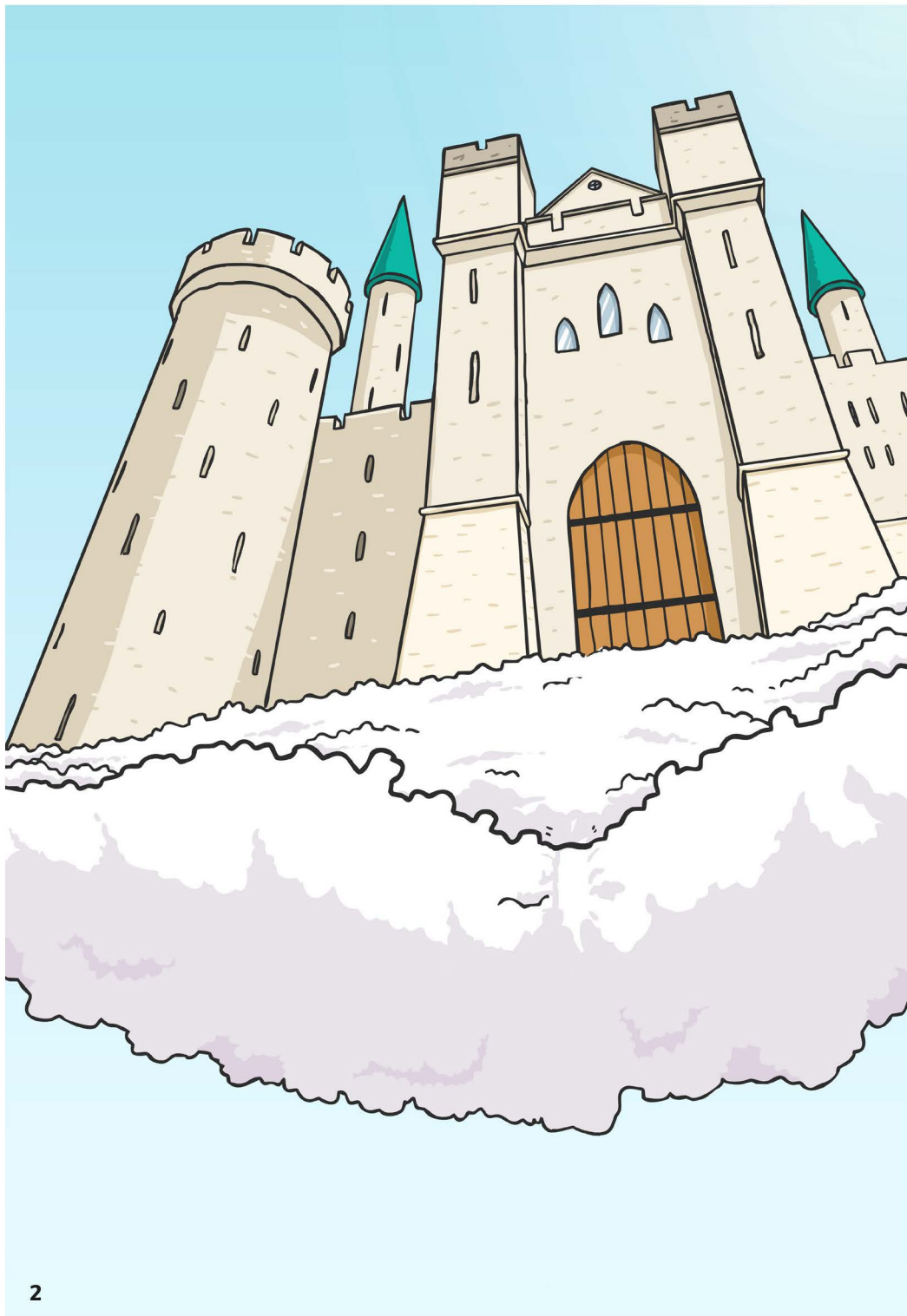


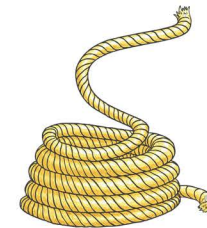
The Giant's Magic Rope





“Hey!” he called over his shoulder towards the castle. At this sound, the two giants whipped round and stared – their new prize was getting away! They immediately raced towards Jack, who stepped off the edge of the cloud with the cow beside him. As the makeshift parachute billowed out, the giants heard Jack shout from underneath, “What do they teach you at giant school? Don’t you know it’s wrong to steal?” All they could do was watch glumly as Jack and the cow floated gently back to the ground, where they both enjoyed a scrumptious meal of fresh vegetables.

No one is quite sure what happened to the two giants, but some say that every rumble of thunder is actually Mr and Mrs Giant arguing about whose fault it was that they’re now poor AND hungry!





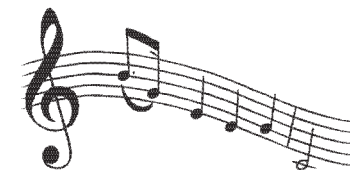
Once upon a time, a giant lived with his wife in a vast castle in the clouds. They were very happy together because, in addition to their beautiful home and enormous garden (which was full of delicious fruit and vegetables as well as stunning displays of flowers), they owned two incredible magic treasures.

The first was a little brown hen. She didn't look much but then she didn't have to, because instead of laying ordinary eggs each day for the couple to eat for their breakfast, when the giant commanded, "Lay!" Henny replied,

"Yes master," and laid an egg of purest gold. This made the giant and his wife very rich, so they could always buy whatever they wanted.

Secondly, they had a beautiful golden harp. It wasn't any ordinary harp either; any time the giant commanded, "Play!", the harp would reply,

"Yes master," and magically play the most beautiful music. It was never the same tune twice, and everyone was always delighted to hear it.





The boy, whose name was Jack, leapt quickly to the end of the golden rope and swarmed up it after the giant. It's a good thing he had a head for heights, because soon he was racing into the sky. Just ahead of him, with the terrified cow hanging over his shoulder, was the giant. Jack was determined to catch him. "Stop, thief!" he cried again, "Come back with my cow!" But the giant was just too quick and got away.

The moment he got back to the castle, the giant put down the cow and set about untying the thick rope from around the walls, meaning to drop poor Jack back down to earth with a bump! As he did so, he called to his wife to come and see the new treasure he'd found.

However, while they were congratulating themselves on having this tasty morsel, they failed to notice Jack sneaking into the castle garden and gathering up the ends of the golden rope. The boy quietly unpinned a gigantic red-and-white tablecloth from the castle's washing line and tied the corners with the rope. Whispering "Shhhh!" to the cow, he quickly fashioned a harness for her and for himself, attaching both to the tablecloth. Then he led her back to the edge of the clouds.



Mr and Mrs Giant were the talk of the clouds. They went on expensive holidays, built an elaborate extension onto the castle, held lavish parties and generally lived the high life. The trouble was, they weren't at all grateful for their good fortune and they never once thanked Henny and the Harp.

As a result, one day it all came an end. When the giant came into the kitchen and commanded, "Lay!" Henny ruffled her feathers, clacked her beak and shouted,

"No, no, no! You shall have no more of my golden eggs!" Nothing the giant could say would change her mind. Down in the dumps at the thought of losing all that gold and wanting something to cheer himself up, he commanded, "Play!" to the harp.

But the harp, too, had had enough: it shouted, "No, no, no! You shall have no more of my beautiful music!" It twanged its strings in a cacophony of terrible discords and fell silent.



Hand over hand, mile after mile, on he went down the glittering rope, until at last he found himself stepping down into the garden of a little house near a wood. Leaning against the wall was a cowshed, from which came the lowing of a cow who wanted her breakfast. Stooping down, the giant peeped inside the door; right in the entrance stood two buckets full of creamy, fresh milk. After all that climbing, the giant was thirsty, so he drank them both down in huge gulps, smacking his lips. It was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted – if only he could have this milk for breakfast every day!

Off in a nearby field, he spotted a young boy gathering vegetables into a bucket. The giant made up his mind immediately: grabbing the cow and tucking her under his arm, he dashed back to the dangling end of the rope and started climbing up. Of course, the poor cow was petrified and started to moo hysterically. This brought the lad rushing back to the cottage, where he saw his precious cow disappearing up towards the clouds! “Stop, thief!” he yelled, “Come back with my cow!” But the giant ignored him and kept on going.



What to do? When Mrs Giant heard about it, she decided the best thing would be to sell both hen and harp and be done with them. "At least you'll get some money for them," she sniffed. "That way, we won't have to start selling all our beautiful furniture and jewellery yet."

Heavy-hearted, the giant picked up both hen and harp and trudged off to the market place. On the way, he bumped into a very curious-looking stranger. The stranger admired the giant's possessions and offered to buy them at once.

"How much will you give me?" asked the giant. The stranger looked around to see if anyone else was watching, and then slipped a hand inside a deep pocket and brought out... a piece of tatty, frayed old rope! The giant was very surprised, but the stranger whispered,

"I wouldn't give this to just anyone, you know, but I trust you to use it well. This is a magic piece of rope, and worth more gold than you could ever carry." The giant thought this sounded wonderful and handed over his hen and harp immediately. Off went the stranger, with the hen smirking over her shoulder, while the giant set off back to the castle, proud of his great bargain.



Well, when he got home, he was in so much trouble with his wife! "You fool!" she yelled, "What good's a bit of old rope? We needed money!" and she threw the rope out of the nearest window. That night, the pair of them went to bed at opposite ends of the castle, in a sulk.

In the morning, the giant awoke to find a strange, glimmering light coming through his bedroom window. How strange! Going outside, he discovered a golden rope – as thick as his arm – wrapped around the castle and snaking away to the edge of the clouds. He peered cautiously over the edge and saw that it seemed to reach all the way to the earth below. Well, what would you do in those circumstances? Of course, the giant started climbing down...

