

"There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe" was first published in 1794, but its origins are probably at least two hundred years earlier. It might well have been a cautionary tale directed at children—not to misbehave—or at mothers—not to have so many children but to manage their tempers with the ones they DO have.



Unusual Mothers in History No. 36 The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe



Illustration by Jessie Willcox Smith

There was an old woman who
lived in a shoe
She had so many children, she
didn't know what to do

She gave them some broth without any
bread

Then whipped them all soundly and put
them to bed



Discussion Questions

1. Do you find this Tale of Abuse and Neglect as Disturbing as I do? Specifically, do you have nightmares about innocent little children being Strangled In Their Beds by a particularly aggressive Toenail Fungus? What species?
2. People who live in Footwear as children have a 5-in-7 chance of Raising Their Own Children in Shoes. Taking into account (a) medical advances (e.g., Leeches v. Penicillin) and (b) diet (e.g., broth w/o any bread v. Pop Tarts), **CALCULATE** (I) the number of O.W.'s direct descendants (HINT: $22 \text{ generations} \times 14 \text{ cosine } Y + 1843 \text{ population of Flanders} = \text{"SKILLIONS"}$) and (II) 4th-quarter Footwear Mortgage Foreclosures, U.S.A.
3. **SO WHERE ARE THEY?** Is the suburban landscape Teeming with shoe-houses? Why aren't your tonier neighborhoods chock full of multilevel Boots boasting Genuine Leather Uppers? What about billboards for Keds Kabin Kommunities on Interstate 40?
4. How do you feel about O.W.'s practice of Whipping Her Children Soundly **At Bedtime**, vis-à-vis, say, **Before the Broth**, or first thing in the morning, or just whenever she's Feeling a Little Cranky?
5. **WHY CAN'T EVERY MOTHER BE EXACTLY LIKE**
6. **YOU???**

Happy Mother's Day!