

Setting

The Old Oak Tree is set in the country Canada, which is in the region of North America. Encourage students to locate Canada on a world map, if you have one.

The flag of Canada can be seen on **page 12**. It features a maple leaf, which has been an emblem on many Canadian coins, coats of arms, and military badges since the nineteenth century. Maple trees have been important to both indigenous Canadian peoples and later settlers. Its sweet sap is used to produce maple syrup, which your students may have tasted before, such as on pancakes or waffles.



Students may be familiar with Canada from the classic children's book *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by L. M. Montgomery. We have made a few references to the book:

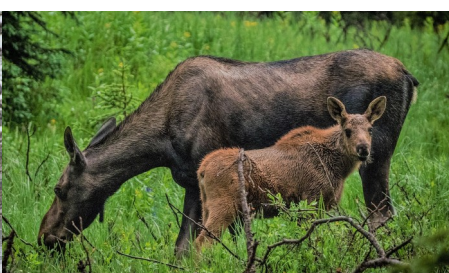
- our house does not have gables (the triangular sections at the end of a pitched roof), but does feature the colour green (**pages 2-3, 16**)
- the letters “A G G” are on the letterbox (**page 2**), and on the book Moose is reading (**page 4**).

Characters

The animals in the story are modelled on species of moose, mouse, sparrow, and squirrel found in Canada. Depending on where you are in the world, your students may have seen other species of these animals before. What makes the animals in the story different from those they have seen before? Consider the size of the animal, colour, markings, ears (size, shape), tail (size, shape, position, thickness), legs (length, width), feet (hoofs or paws, number of toes), wings (size, shape), beak (size, shape, colour), antlers, etc.



Eastern moose (bull)



Moose (cow and calf)



White-throated sparrow



House mouse



American red squirrel

Moose are a species of deer – the largest and heaviest! Moose antlers are broader and flatter than the antlers of other deer species, such as red deer, caribou (reindeer), and elk. We have included antlers on Moose in the story, to make the animal recognisable. However, we have not been scientifically accurate! Usually, only male moose (bulls) grow antlers, and they lose them before winter and regrow them in spring. Female moose (cows) only grow antlers in exceptional circumstances, usually due to testosterone production caused by hormonal imbalance or tumours.

A note on language is necessary regarding “moose” and “mouse”. These words appear similar (same consonants and same final vowel). However, they have different vowel sounds and their plural forms are quite different. The plural of “mouse” is “mice”, while the plural of “moose” is just “moose”, *not* “mooses”, “meece”, etc. A young moose is called a “calf” (plural: “calves”).

Story

Oak trees are commonly found in the United Kingdom and, to a lesser degree, in North America. Acorns are the type of nut which oak trees produce. Oak trees usually start producing acorns in late summer into autumn. They usually change colour from green to brown as they ripen. This can take a couple of months, a year, or two years, depending on the species of oak. Many cultures have used acorns for food throughout history, and they are also eaten by animals such as mice, squirrels, birds, and deer.

To grow an oak tree from an acorn, acorns are picked in autumn while they are still on the tree. The acorns then need to be kept cold over winter. Some people keep them in the refrigerator. The acorns can then be planted in the spring. Often they are first planted in a small pot and kept inside, and then transferred into the ground after they have started to grow. The young tree may be tied to wooden stakes (like on **page 15**) to help them grow straight upwards.

Although we do not formally cover seasons this year, students will have some experience of seasons from daily life. Canada experiences four seasons in a year, which are depicted on **pages 14-15**.

Season	Months
summer	June, July, August
autumn	September, October, November
winter	December, January, February
spring	March, April, May

Other parts of the world also experience summer, autumn, winter, and spring, but not all places experience them in the same months of the year.

Encourage your students to notice details on **pages 14-15** that indicate each season:

- Spring: blue sky, green grass and trees, flowers, birds and butterflies.
- Summer: blue sky, slightly more yellow grass and trees, no flowers, the animals are wearing T-shirts and shorts because it is warm.
- Autumn: pale sky, brown leaves, leaves that have fallen off the trees, the animals are wearing long sleeves and trousers because it is getting colder.
- Winter: cloudy sky, falling snow, snow on the ground, no leaves on the trees (except one brown one on the new tree), the animals are wearing sweaters and hats because it is cold.

Mathematical concepts and language

A variety of words are used throughout the story to indicate subtraction. Students should be able to recognise and understand these words wherever they appear.

Word or phrase	Synonyms	Definition
subtract	minus, take away	These words indicate subtraction. While subtract can be used as a verb (“I subtract 3”), it is unhelpful to attempt to place these words into standard grammatical categories when we read an equation aloud. What is important is that they correspond to the “—” symbol.
left	remaining	“Left” is the past participle of the verb “leave”. We use it to refer to the result of the subtraction: how many acorns are “left” or “remain” on the tree. We are <i>not</i> using “left” here to mean the opposite of “right” (direction).
equals		This word introduces the result or answer of a calculation. It corresponds to the “=” symbol.
no		We can use this word to refer to zero (0).

The important subtraction word *not* here is “difference”. “Difference” is an important word in mathematics, but much more complicated than the other subtraction words because the “difference” between two numbers is always the greater number minus the lesser number, and is therefore always positive. In later years we will introduce this as the distance between two numbers on the number line, but right now we just want to introduce subtraction.

Students will learn in time that while addition has the commutative property that $a + b = b + a$, subtraction does *not* have this property. Order is therefore important, and this has an impact on how we will go about learning subtraction.

In this book we move from counting to subtraction. Basic subtractions with one two-digit number and one single-digit number, or two single-digit numbers are performed by counting back. Students may be able to do this mentally, by saying the numbers aloud, or using a visual aid. On **pages 5, 9, and 10**, they can count the acorns on the page. On **pages 6, 7, and 8** we cannot see all the remaining acorns due to their location on the tree. If necessary, provide your students with a number line or counters. They also have the option of counting on their fingers from **page 6** onwards. Alternatively, you can draw 15 acorns on the board when you begin the story, and then cross them out or erase them as you read.

For students requiring extension

If students are able to perform the subtractions without visual aids, encourage them to practise and memorise subtractions of pairs of the counting numbers from 1 to 9. This will help them develop the instant recall skills needed for us to do column subtraction later.

$9 - 0 = 9$	$8 - 0 = 8$	$7 - 0 = 7$	$6 - 0 = 6$	$5 - 0 = 5$	$4 - 0 = 4$	$3 - 0 = 3$	$2 - 0 = 2$	$1 - 0 = 1$
$9 - 1 = 8$	$8 - 1 = 7$	$7 - 1 = 6$	$6 - 1 = 5$	$5 - 1 = 4$	$4 - 1 = 3$	$3 - 1 = 2$	$2 - 1 = 1$	$1 - 1 = 0$
$9 - 2 = 7$	$8 - 2 = 6$	$7 - 2 = 5$	$6 - 2 = 4$	$5 - 2 = 3$	$4 - 2 = 2$	$3 - 2 = 1$	$2 - 2 = 0$	
$9 - 3 = 6$	$8 - 3 = 5$	$7 - 3 = 4$	$6 - 3 = 3$	$5 - 3 = 2$	$4 - 3 = 1$	$3 - 3 = 0$		
$9 - 4 = 5$	$8 - 4 = 4$	$7 - 4 = 3$	$6 - 4 = 2$	$5 - 4 = 1$	$4 - 4 = 0$			
$9 - 5 = 4$	$8 - 5 = 3$	$7 - 5 = 2$	$6 - 5 = 1$	$5 - 5 = 0$				
$9 - 6 = 3$	$8 - 6 = 2$	$7 - 6 = 1$	$6 - 6 = 0$					
$9 - 7 = 2$	$8 - 7 = 1$	$7 - 7 = 0$						
$9 - 8 = 1$	$8 - 8 = 0$							
$9 - 9 = 0$								