

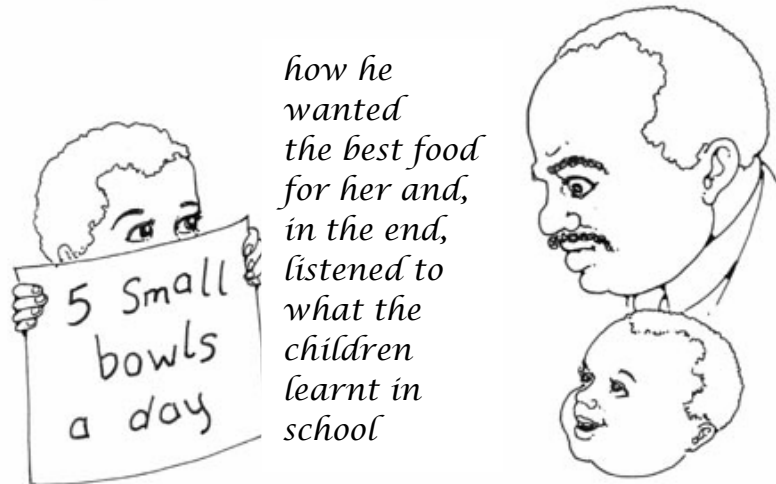
## UNCLE GEORGE FEEDS HIS BABY



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### 1 Uncle George



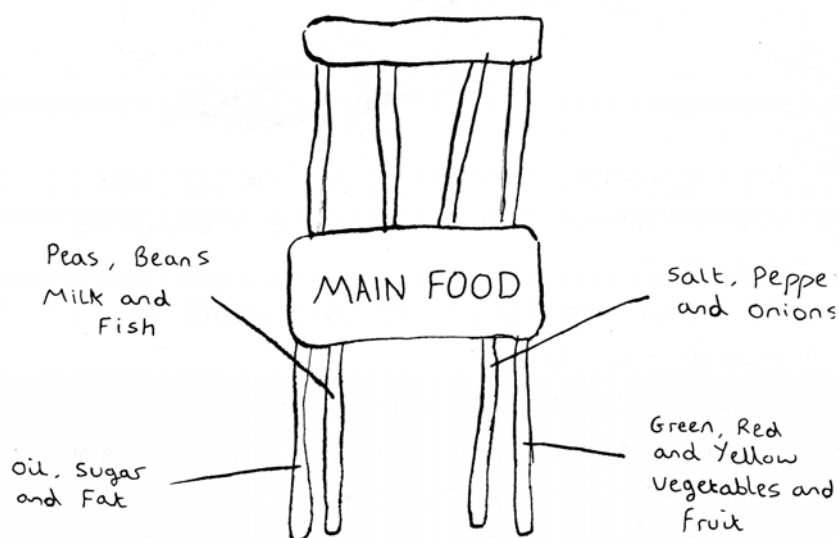
Last year Uncle George came to live in our house. At first I did not like Uncle George. He talked all the time. He talked very loudly. He did not talk to children. He did not listen to children. In fact, Uncle George did not seem to listen to anyone.

Uncle George was big and strong. He left home early in the morning, and came home late at night. When he came home he ate and ate...and ate. Auntie Sarah cooked his food. We all liked Auntie Sarah.

Auntie Sarah was going to have a baby...a first baby. Uncle George told us about the baby. "It will be a boy," he said. "He will be fat. He will be very, very clever. Later he will be a doctor...or a famous runner...or the president." "I only want a boy," said Uncle George. "He must grow up big and strong like me. He will need good food."

My name is Sam. My sister Nana and I go to school. She is in class five. I am in class three. In class we learn about good food. Good food helps us be healthy. My teacher says we need different kinds of food. We need our main food, like maize, rice, cassava or plantains. But this main food is not all we need. Every day we need to add different kinds of food to this. We add food like beans and peas and groundnuts, and milk and fish. We add foods like oil and fat and sugar. Often these are cooked or mixed with our main meal. We add green, red and yellow vegetables and fruit. We also add things like onions, salt and pepper to make our food taste good.

My teacher says, "Every day we need to mix foods like this. These different foods are like a chair with legs. The seat is our main food. The legs hold up the seat and make it strong." I told my teacher about the new baby. She said, "Your Auntie Sarah needs good food. She is carrying the baby inside her. She has to feed two people now." "So she needs a chair too," I said. "Yes," laughed my teacher, "a good strong one."



I drew a picture of a chair and labelled it. I took it home. That night I told them what my teacher said. Uncle George saw the picture. "You cannot eat a chair," he said. "Sam wants Auntie Sarah to eat a chair!" Uncle George laughed, "Ha ha ha," He hit me on the back. I went out of the house. I was unhappy. Uncle George was laughing at me. But next day I heard Uncle George talking with Auntie Sarah. He was talking very loudly. "Food," said Uncle George. "You must eat the right food. You are going to have a baby. You must mix different kinds of foods to make you and the baby strong and healthy."

"How do you know about food, George?" said Auntie Sarah. "Did the children tell you?"

"Oh no," said George. "I read it...I read it in a book. I always read books."

"What a liar!" I thought.

Uncle George talked about the baby every day. He loved that baby, even before it was born. He told us about the baby's food. He wanted the best food for his baby. One day he came home with a tin of milk powder. "This is the best food," he said. "Look at the baby on the tin." The baby on the tin looked very fat and happy. "This tinned milk is good," said Uncle George. "It is expensive. Good things are expensive." I looked at my sister. We both smiled.

At school the health worker came. She helps us with our health club. She told us about mother's milk and milk from tins. She said, "Milk from mother is better. It gives all the food a baby needs. It makes a baby strong and helps keep the baby well. It is the best and safest way to feed a baby. It is the best way to stop the baby

getting diarrhoea. Babies who have diarrhoea lose water from their bodies. They become weak.”

“But Sam got diarrhoea when he was little,” said Nana. “I remember he was very ill. I remember the smell. And Sam had milk from our mother.”

“All babies get diarrhoea,” said the health worker. “But babies who drink their mother’s milk do not get it very often. Perhaps they get it once a year. Babies fed on bottles get diarrhoea much more often. Sometimes they get it ten times, or even more. This is very dangerous. They become weak and thin. They can die.”

So we made a poster. It said “Mother’s milk is best. It makes your baby strong. It keeps you baby healthy” .

When we got home we did not speak to Uncle George. We left the picture on the table. Uncle George came in that night. He ate his food. We saw him looking at the poster. He called us.” Come here,” he said. “What is this?” he asked.

“It is from school,” we said. “We were taught this.”

“The health worker told us,” said Nana. “She and the teacher always talk together. She comes to our school every week. She helps us with our health club.”

Uncle George said nothing. Later on I heard him talking with Auntie Sarah. “This tin,” he said, “is not very good for babies. Your milk is better...much better.”

“How do you know about milk?” said Auntie Sarah. “Did the children tell you?” “The health worker told them,” said George.

I began to think, “Uncle George is getting better. He listened to us. He looked at our poster.”

## 2 The new baby



The baby came...it was a girl. We called her Ruth. Uncle George was happy. "I wanted a girl," he said. "I always said so. Girls can be doctors, and runners, and presidents...and mothers as well."

Ruth grew strong and happy. She drank milk from her mother for six months. Later her mother gave her small amounts of other food. Her first food was porridge. It was soft and easy to eat. She ate five times a day. Sometimes Uncle George would feed her. She went on drinking her mother's milk as well. Auntie Sarah went to the clinic every month.

The health worker told Auntie Sarah, "Your baby must weigh more every month." So every month they weighed the baby. The health worker and Auntie Sarah marked Ruth's weight on a card. The health worker said, "This card shows the road to health. Ruth is healthy. She is on the right road."

Auntie Sarah said, "Yes, she is eating well. I can feel her. She is heavier every month."

Soon Ruth was nine months old. She crawled round the floor and was beginning to stand up. She was fat and happy. "Ruth is growing well," said Uncle George. "Soon she will eat big meals in the evening like me." He patted his big stomach.

"Can I tell you what I learned at school?" I asked.

"Yes," said Uncle George. "Is it about food?" "Yes", I said.

"Go on then," said Uncle George.

"You are big and strong," I said. "You hear? I said STRONG, not FAT."

"Yes, I am strong," said George. He smiled at me.

"Your stomach is big," I said. "You can eat a lot of food every evening."

"So I do," said Uncle George. "It makes me strong."

"But your little girl only has a small stomach. Like this..." I held up my fist. "Ruth cannot eat very much at one time. She is growing quickly. Also she plays all day. She needs a lot of food too. When she is two years old she will need half the food you get."

Uncle George looked at my fist. He shook his head. "How can she eat enough?" he asked.

"She must eat often, five or six small meals every day. She needs breast milk too. She needs different kinds of foods for growing and playing. Peas and beans will help her grow. Foods cooked with oils or fats are good for her too. You can mix a little oil or fat with her porridge. Our teacher calls these foods "Energy rich foods". They help us run and play."



“I remember what you said about mixing foods,” said Uncle George. He remembered. He did not laugh at me. That is when I began to like Uncle George.

We have a garden at school. We grow spinach, and carrots, and pumpkins, and tomatoes. Our teacher tells us, “Remember to eat these foods. Remember to eat orange and yellow fruit, such as mangoes and pawpaws. People who do not eat these foods get ill often. Sometimes they cannot see in the dark. Sometimes they do not study well.”

Nana and I started to plant vegetables in our garden at home. First we planted some spinach. Uncle George saw us. “What are you doing?” he asked.

“These dark green leafy vegetables are good for us,” said my sister. “We learned about that at school. I want to see well at night. I want to be healthy. I want to do well at school. These vegetables can help keep us healthy. Yellow and orange fruit also help.”

Later on I heard Uncle George talking to Auntie Sarah. “I shall grow vegetables and fruit,” he said. “They are good for our little girl.”

“How do you know about vegetables and fruit, George?” said Auntie Sarah. “Did the children tell you?”

“Yes, the children told me,” said Uncle George. He did not say, “books”. He did not say, “health worker”. He said, “CHILDREN”. He said, “THE CHILDREN TOLD ME”. My sister and I were very happy.

I **do** like Uncle George.

## A NOTE TO TEACHERS

### About the story

This story is suitable for Middle or Upper Primary classes. Though it was written for African schools it has been adapted in many countries round the world to suit different cultures and dietary practice. Some stories deliver just one message but this story is full of health information and needs to be 'unpacked' quite carefully .

The primary health messages are nutritional; emphasising the right way to balance meals and also the importance of good breastfeeding and weaning practices . Growth monitoring is also stressed as is the importance of energy food and green fresh vegetables and fruit. The story needs illustration and some parts may need to be very carefully gone through on the blackboard. For this reason the story may well be best presented **after** one or two lessons on nutrition rather than as an introduction.

The second set of messages are just as important as the first. They are related to life skills and particularly deal with the growth of respect between the children and Uncle George. (In the longer published version George goes on to gain even more affection by taking in and helping to save the health of a malnourished relative, so becoming a hero figure to ten-year old Sam.) There are also important messages here about equal opportunities for girls and boys.

### Activities recommended

Apart from the usual activities of drawing and drama here there is much chance for classroom discussion , possibly based on role play and linked with the children's own experience both of feeding customs for younger brothers and sisters and of trying to communicate new ideas learned at school with adults, particularly male relatives. One very productive and very challenging exercise here would be to get children to retell the story from *Auntie Sarah's* point of view. How do they think she feels. Can she say what she feels?