1. **Three Bears:** The three bears have shared various relationships as the story has evolved. In Southey's early version, the one we read here, the bears are not described as a traditional family of father, mother, and child. Although they share a home, they may not be related.

   The Three Bears are the joint protagonist of the story. They are introduced and described in the story before Goldilocks arrives. Many versions of the story are simply titled *The Three Bears*, with no mention of Goldilocks. Over time, as Goldilocks has gained recognition with the story, her name has been included in the title. In these earliest versions, all three of the bears are male, referenced by masculine pronouns.

2. **Who lived together in a house of their own:** Note that these bears do not live in caves or any place normally associated with bears. From their first moment on the page, these bears are the epitome of civilized, human society. These bears live in a house, the symbol of community, not barbarism.

3. **Little, Small, Wee Bear:** Although Goldilocks (or one of her predecessors) is the only human in the story, the smallest bear often becomes the sympathetic protagonist for tellers, writers, illustrators, readers, and listeners of the story, especially children. As the three bears changed familial status through various retellings, the smallest bear became 'Baby Bear,' the child of the two bigger bears. Most often the baby bear is male, but sometimes it's gender is not designated. The youngest bear is rarely portrayed as female.

4. **Middle-sized Bear:** As the three bears transformed into a nuclear family through various retellings, the middle-sized bear acquired feminine traits and became the mother/wife in the family.

5. **Great, Huge Bear:** As the three bears transformed into a nuclear family through various retellings, the largest bear acquired masculine traits and became the father/husband in the family.

6. **Porridge:** Porridge is a "soft food made by boiling oatmeal or other meal or legumes in water or milk until thick" (WordNet). Note that the bears are not introduced as carnivorous. The concept that they have cooked porridge for their meal, as well as the other clues of civilized behavior, lessens the anxiety over Goldilocks' welfare during the story.

7. **They walked out into the wood while the porridge was cooling, that they might not burn their mouths:** The bears while appearing civilized in their habitat, are also refined in their behavior. They do not plan to gulp their food or eat it before it is cool. Instead, they practice patience and decide to go for a walk while waiting for the proper time to eat their breakfast. The bears are polite and peaceful, at least until their home is wrecked by a trespasser.

8. **A little Girl named Goldilocks:** Goldilocks is not present in Southey's original version. The trespasser is a little old Woman instead. Goldilocks has actually enjoyed many incarnations and names.

   Twelve years after Southey's story was first published in 1837, Joseph Cundall changed the old woman into a young girl named 'Silver Hair' in the version he published in his *Treasury of Pleasure Books for Young Children* (1849). He apparently felt there were too many stories with old women, and wanted to present a young girl in the story instead. Then in 1858 the character was dubbed 'Silver-Locks' in *Aunt Mayor's Nursery Tales*. Next she became 'Golden Hair' around 1868 in *Aunt Friendly's Nursery Book*. Finally, in *Old Nursery Stories and Rhymes*, illustrated by John Hassall (circa 1904), she became Goldilocks. The name has stuck and been used the most often ever since (Opie 1974, 199-200).
9. She could not have been a good, honest little Girl: The narrator's commentary on Goldilocks' integrity is not usually included in the story. I included these words from the original description of the old woman by Southey/Jacobs. James Marshall's picture book version of the tale is more judgmental of Goldilocks than most versions, portraying her unerringly as a selfish, rude child.

10. First she looked in at the window, and then she peeped in at the keyhole; and seeing nobody in the house, she lifted the latch: Goldilocks doesn't knock on the door first. She cases the joint and then enters when she determines no one is home. These are not the actions of someone planning to do good. These are the actions of someone far from innocent and inexperienced.

11. The door was not fastened, because the Bears were good Bears, who did nobody any harm, and never suspected that anybody would harm them: The Bears, through their innocence, become the classic victims of a home intruder. Since they are good, they trust the world at large and neglect locking their door.

12. Opened the door, and went in: Some scholars have speculated that this tale of an intruder was adapted from Snow White's uninvited intrusion into the seven dwarfs' home in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Snow White was looking for refuge as she escaped with her life. Goldilocks doesn't appear to have a menacing backstory, only rude curiosity or perhaps homelessness.

13. So first she tasted the porridge of the Great, Huge Bear, and that was too hot for her: Here begins one of the key literary devices which has contributed to this story's continued popularity and success. Goldilocks begins to test three sets of items in sets of three. She tries each of the three bears' porridge, chairs, and beds. Her discoveries and the pattern of discovery adds to the story's charm. Later, the bears will discover the intrusion in sets of three with their own similar but different responses.

   The number and/or pattern of three often appears in fairy tales to provide rhythm and suspense. The third event often signals a change and/or ending for the listener/reader. A third time also disallows coincidence such as two repetitive events would suggest.

14. Said a bad word about that: I included these words from the original description of the old woman by Southey/Jacobs. Goldilocks usually doesn't use bad words, but just repeats the narration, saying for example: "This porridge is too hot!"

15. But just right; and she liked it so well that she ate it all up: Note that the smallest bear suffers the most from Goldilocks' intrusion. She eats all his breakfast, breaks his chair, and sleeps in his bed. The other bears only suffer minor inconveniences in comparison. For this reason, the baby bear often becomes the protagonist of the story, the character that readers, especially children, relate to the best.

16. She fell fast asleep: In this version of the story, Goldilocks falling asleep in a strange home gives her some sympathy. Either she is simply unrepentant or completely destitute. When we view her intrusion as that of a homeless or vagrant child without a home, food, bed or civilized training, her pathos, and consequently her sympathetic qualities, is heightened. Of course, she could just be a spoiled child who lives by the motto, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine!" The interpretation is up to the teller and the listener.

17. Somebody has been at my porridge!: Southey used different fonts and text sizes to represent the three bears' voices. I have varied the text sizes respectively in honor of his creative publishing choices.

18. They were wooden spoons; if they had been silver ones, Goldilocks would have put them in her pocket: I included these words from the original description of the old woman by Southey/Jacobs. Goldilocks, while a house breaker, home wrecker, and food stealer, is not described as an outright thief. The line does provide food for thought about Goldilocks' moral limits in the story, if any exist.
19. **Their bed-chamber:** Goldilocks' intrusion into the bedchamber is the ultimate trespass in the story and consequently the last one to take place. Except for illness and other extenuating circumstances, guests are not usually invited into the bedrooms of homeowners. So far Goldilocks has intruded where a guest might be invited. Goldilocks' limitless audacity is illustrated by her outrageous entrance into the bedroom and testing of the beds.

20. **And here she is!:** Here we have the climax of the story. All of the story's events have been leading to this confrontation. What will happen? This simple story is a great tool for teaching about plot building and climaxes to students, young and old.

21. **Out Goldilocks jumped:** In most traditional variants, Goldilocks jumps out the window and runs home, vowing to never trespass again. She learns her lesson, but restitution for her crimes is not described in the traditional versions.

22. **Taken up by the constable and sent to the House of Correction for a vagrant as she was:** I included these words from the original description of the old woman by Southey/Jacobs. Goldilocks isn't usually threatened with prison or a halfway house, most likely because she is a little girl. However, many modern day authors and playwrights have explored Goldilocks' illegal activities and their consequences. More than one play and short story has centered on the theme of Goldilocks' trial for breaking and entering. The theme is also popular for mock trials in law schools. To read more about these interpretations, visit the Modern Interpretations of Goldilocks and the Three Bears page.

23. **But the Three Bears never saw anything more of her:** This story rarely ends with a "lived happily ever after" ending. The Bears have been the victims of breaking and entering as well as robbery. Goldilocks has survived and hopefully learned her lesson, but we usually aren't rooting for her anyway. Our best consolation is that the bears never see her again.

Many fractured versions of the tale involve Goldilocks apologizing for her antics either as a child, or even as an adult years after the event. Sometimes Goldilocks and the baby bear become friends. The modern variations and endings are numerous.