

Familiar Fairy Tale Picture Books Transformed into Teen Novels

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Once upon a time in faraway places, stories were told around campfires and hearths among family and friends. Eventually these oral stories were written down and some were illustrated. Two of the best-known names in written folk literature are the Frenchman Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers of Germany. In 1697 Perrault published a collection entitled *Tales of Mother Goose*, and from 1812 to 1815 Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm published a collection of tales they had recorded from many storytellers (Darton 1999).

Folk literature from the oral tradition to the printed word encompasses four major types: legends, myths, fables, and fairy tales (Norton 1999). The most popular type of folk literature published today for children is the fairy tale, sometimes referred to as "magic" or "wonder tales" because of the presence of magic in the stories. Fairy godmothers and evil witches abound in fairy tales. Library shelves are full of illustrated versions of fairy tales, and in the last few years, familiar fairy tales have been expanded by skillful authors into novels for teens.

Characteristics of Fairy Tales

Fairy tales from the oral tradition share certain literary characteristics. The plot is simple and to the point. Within this direct plot are special features. Repetition was used to give the storyteller a break, such as this question from the Snow White story: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, / Who is fairest of us all?" In fairy tales, time passes quickly. In Paul Zelinsky's retelling of the story of Rapunzel, for example, twelve years pass in one paragraph: Rapunzel is a baby, then one sentence later she is twelve years old. Action happens quickly as well. There are no long, detailed descriptions of scenes to slow the plot. For instance, in the story of Rumpelstiltskin, we know only that the miller's daughter is locked in a room filled with straw. In Paul Zelinsky's retelling of the tale, elegant illustrations present visual knowledge of the room in the absence of descriptive text.

Sparsely described settings are also common in fairy tales. A nonspecific, open setting makes the tale every person's story. "Once upon a time," and "Once in a land faraway" create an open setting accessible and inviting to everyone. However, clues in the text and illustrations let the reader speculate about the setting. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, retold and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman, the story clearly takes place in a forest.

Characters in folk tales are also flatter, less well-developed than they are in well-written modern stories and novels. Fairy tale characters are either "good" and have no flaws, or they are "evil" with no redeeming features. Good characters,

like Snow White and Cinderella, are models of how to behave. Bruno Bettelheim in his book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, maintains that black and white morality shown by fairy tale characters is clear to children. For instance, children understand that murder is wrong. The stepmother in the Snow White tale was evil, and she was wrong to try to deceive and kill Snow White.

Fairy tales not only have certain literary elements in common; they also contain a basic pattern that is repeated over and over. Kernels of the Cinderella story are found in *Tattercoats*, *The Brocade Slipper*, *The Talking Eggs*, and in modern movies such as *Pretty Woman*. Recently, several authors have turned familiar fairy tales into complex stories suitable for teens, such as *Cinderella 2000*, by Mavis Jukes, and *Ella Enchanted*, by Gail Carson Levine. Each of these original novels has at its core the kernel of a single fairy tale. In these novels, the kernel is there, but details and literary elements have changed and expanded.

Fairy Tales and Novels for Teens and for the Classroom

Once a familiar fairy tale is changed into a novel for teenagers, it becomes a more complex story. Characters become more fully realized in these retellings. Readers learn the weaknesses and strengths of main characters, such as Orasmyn and Belle in Donna Jo Napoli's *Beast*. The author adds subplots and complications to the stories that were not present in the fairy tales. Rather than a simple fairy tale, some young adult novels are transformed into realistic fiction; others retain their fantasy elements. Gillian Cross's *Wolf* is a marvel of pieces from "Little Red Riding Hood" but is devoid of talking wolves or other happenings typical of fantasy. On the other hand, Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted* maintains the cruel magic of a curse on a young maiden.

Consider the possibilities for pairing stories for middle school and high school students. Challenge students to compare an illustrated fairy tale with a novel clearly based on a familiar tale.

For example, read Lisbeth Zwerger's *Hansel and Gretel* to a class and discuss the kernel of the story: The mother dies, the father remarries, and the stepmother wants to get rid of her two stepchildren. Hansel and Gretel become hopelessly lost in the woods, but they find a candy house. The witch who lives there captures them, intending to eat them. The children manage to push the witch into the oven, and they are saved. Then have students read *The Magic Circle* by Donna Jo Napoli and search for the kernel of the Hansel and Gretel story, looking for similarities and differences. Several features of the novel will intrigue readers. For instance, the narrator is the

witch, who was a healer until she was tricked by demons. She isolates herself so that she will not be tempted to eat children. By the time Hansel and Gretel appear at her house, she has carefully arranged her life to avoid evil. But the children tempt her, and she knows that she will not be able to resist eating them. She sacrifices herself in her own oven rather than live with the knowledge that she has eaten children.

Offering students the opportunity to compare a picture book with a teen novel allows us to review familiar tales with students. Some teens may not know traditional fairy tales. Here is a chance to acquaint them with an aspect of cultural literacy they may have missed in their childhood. For teens who loved fairy tales when they were younger, reading and discussing familiar tales will feel comfortable or even nostalgic. This feeling may entice reluctant readers to explore novels with the kernel elements of a fairy tale.

The titles of picture books and teen novels that follow are grouped by nine popular tales, for easy comparison. The picture books are traditional versions, beautifully illustrated. No parodies or other cultural variations are included. This is a selected list of titles based upon my fondness and admiration for particular illustrators. Certainly there are still more titles available. The teen novels recommended are suitable for middle school and high school students with some variation in age levels, as noted in the commentary. Through comparing picture books and teen novels, we have one last chance to introduce fairy tales to older readers, to introduce readers to the beauty of book illustration, to encourage critical thinking, and to expand cultural literacy. Beauty, Beast, Cinderella, Hansel, Gretel, Jack, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Rumpelstiltskin, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White can make all of that possible.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

• Picture Books

Mayer, Marianne. *Beauty and the Beast*. Illus. by Mercer Mayer. New York: Sea Star Books, 2000.

Gr. K-3. Mercer Mayer's dramatic and richly painted illustrations enhance the familiar romantic story of the love between an enchanted prince and a beautiful young woman.

McCaughrean, Geraldine. *Beauty and the Beast*. Illustrated by Gary Blythe. New York: Carol Rhoda Books, 2000.

Gr. K-3. This spare retelling combined with almost surreal illustrations creates a mysterious feel to the classic tale.

• YA Novels

McKinley, Robin. *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty & the Beast*. New York: HarperCollins, 1985.

Gr. 5-10. This novel has mesmerized readers for years with its beautiful language, believable characters, and magically satisfying story.

McKinley, Robin. *Rose Daughter*. New York: Greenwillow, 1997.

Gr. 6-12. Robin McKinley revisits and expands the Beauty and the Beast story as she explores the transforming power of love.

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Beast*. New York: Atheneum, 2000.

Gr. 7-12. Orasmyn, a Persian Prince, cursed by a fairy, becomes the Beast and tells an absorbing story from his viewpoint as a lion. Belle, a French beauty, plays a traditional role and redeems him.

CINDERELLA

• Picture Books

Brown, Marcia. *Cinderella*. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

Gr. K-4. Winner of a Caldecott Medal, this French fairy tale follows a familiar story line enhanced by pastel illustrations that shimmer with delicate beauty, humor, and timelessness.

Craft, K. Y. *Cinderella*. New York: Seastar Books, 2000.

Gr. K-3. Adapted primarily from The Arthur Rackham Fairy Book and Andrew Tang's *The Blue Fairy Book*, Craft's lavish illustrations reflect an imaginary setting of seventeenth and eighteenth century France. The text is embellished elaborately with borders and illumination of the first letter on each page. Full-page illustrations rendered in oil over watercolor add romance and mystery to a familiar story.

• YA Novels

Jukes, Mavis. *Cinderella 2000*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2000.

Gr. 6-10. Ashley Ella Toral is plagued with an embarrassing stepmother and twin stepsisters when all she wants is to spend New Year's Eve at the Ocean Crest Country Club with a special boyfriend. Clever and humorous trappings of the traditional Cinderella story will entertain teens who dream of romance but are hampered with everyday problems.

Levine, Gail Carson. *Ella Enchanted*. New York: HarperCollins Juvenile Books, 1997.

Gr. 4-7. Lucinda, a fool of a fairy, gives Ella the curse of unerring obedience. The result is a miserable childhood as Ella struggles against becoming a victim to whichever child discovers her curse. This novel has won important recognition as a 1998 Newbery Honor, a 1998 American Library Association's Notable Book, and a 1999 International Reading Association's Young Adults' Choices.

HANSEL AND GRETEL

• Picture Book

Lesser, Rika. *Hansel and Gretel*. Illus. by Paul O. Zelinsky. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1999.

Gr. K-3. Based on the first transcription and first printing of the Grimm tale, this winner of a 1985 Caldecott Honor, presents the tale of two children who outwit a witch to return to their grateful father. Zelinsky's beautifully shadowed illustrations complement the spare but dramatic text.

• YA Novel

Napoli, Donna Jo. *The Magic Circle*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1995.

Gr. 5-8. The Ugly One, with her twisted back and her eye for beauty, is the village midwife and healer. She learns to be a sorceress and to call demons while protected in a magic circle. One small mistake, one break in the circle, and she "is snatched by a demon and becomes the Ugly Witch. Demon voices urge her to eat a child. To escape people she isolates herself in a forest until Hansel and Gretel appear to tempt her. This is a fascinating story from the witch's viewpoint.

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

• Picture Books

Howe, John. *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998.

Gr. K-3. John Howe's version shows a terrifying, black-ar-

mored giant from whom Jack steals the hen, a sack of gold, and the golden harp. The classic English fairy tale is embellished with elegant visual sweeps of the beanstalk and the castle in the sky.

Kellogg, Steven. *Jack and the Beanstalk.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991.

Gr. K-3. Kellogg's familiar humor marks detailed illustrations of a plucky young boy and a grotesque ogre and his wife.

- YA Novel

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Crazyjack.* New York: Delacorte Press, 1999.

Gr. 4-7. Seven years after his father's disappearance, Jack plants the beans and begins a search for his father. He finds a giant who's a wife beater and treasures that differ from those found in the traditional story. Jack wins back Flora, his true love, and comes to terms with the death of his father. This novel is a well-written adventure with a satisfying ending.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

- Picture Books

The Brothers Grimm. *Little Red-Cap.* Illus. by Lisbeth Zwerger. New York: North-South Books, 1995.

Gr. K-3. This translation from the German presents a close retelling of the original story. In her art Zwerger brings out a surprising comic side to the tale while maintaining a somber background of muted earth tones.

Hyman, Trina Schart. *Little Red Riding Hood.* New York: Holiday House, 1983.

Gr. K-3. The detailed, charming country feel of this Grimm fairy tale is due primarily to Hyman's signature illustration style of pretty borders and expressive characters. A Caldecott Honor.

- YA Novel

Cross, Gillian. *Wolf* New York: Holiday House, 1991.

Gr.7-9. A vagabond mother, an educational program on wolves, a terrorist for a father, and a grandmother who banishes Cassy from her home combine brilliantly in this psychological thriller. Winner of the 1991 Carnegie Prize, the novel's narrative subtly dances around and through the tale of Little Red Riding Hood.

RAPUNZEL

- Picture Books

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. *Rapunzel.* Illus. by Maja Dusikova. New York: North-South Books, 1997.

Gr. 2-4. Dusikova's dreamy illustrations picture Rapunzel and the prince much younger than the characters in Hyman's retelling. Also, in this version Rapunzel does not give birth.

Rogasky, Barbara. *Rapunzel.* Illus. by Trina Schart Hyman. New York: Holiday House, 1987.

Gr. 2-4. This traditional retelling is enhanced by Hyman's beautifully detailed illustrations using full pages for important events and smaller pictures built into borders for lesser events.

Zelinsky, Paul O. *Rapunzel.* New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1997.

Gr. 2-4. Winner of the 1993 Caldecott Medal, this distinctive book reveals definite Italian and French influences in the architecture, landscape, and characters' costumes contained in Zelinsky's exquisite oil paintings.

- YA Novels

Geras, Adele. *The Tower Room.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Gr. 7-10. In the first of three books readers meet three young women: Megan, Alice, and Bella. In this book Megan is a modern-day Rapunzel. She falls in love with Simon, a young man who climbs the scaffolding into the Tower Room that Megan shares with her two best friends at an all-girls boarding school. The updated covers for paperback editions of this trilogy will appeal to teens wanting to read about romance.

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Zel.* New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1996.

Gr.7-12. Once again Napoli humanizes a witch in a fairy tale. Most of the story is told through the viewpoint of Zel's "mother," a witch who sold her soul to the devil and stole another woman's child. The setting for this Rapunzel story is fifteenth-century Switzerland.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN

- Picture Book

Zelinsky, Paul O. *Rumpelstiltskin.* New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1986.

Gr. K-3. Zelinsky expands his simple text with elegant illustrations. Winner of a 1987 Caldecott Honor, this retelling is based upon the 1819 Grimm version.

- YA Novel

Napoli, Donna Jo and Richard Tchen. *Spinners.* New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2000.

Gr. 6-10. Questions about Rumpelstiltskin's past are answered in this newly created story of two spinners. One spinner is a beautiful young woman, the other is a deformed man, scorned by the one he loved.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

- Picture Book

Hyman, Trina Schart. *The Sleeping Beauty.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000.

Gr. K-3. At once sinister and richly illustrated, Hyman brings this classic tale to life with fascinating artistic details of a romantic world of kings, queens, knights, ladies, and fairies.

- YA Novels

Geras, Adele. *Watching the Roses.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Gr. 8-12. On Alice's eighteenth birthday she is attacked and withdraws to her bedroom where she lies as if in a coma, but readers learn about her as she writes in a diary. References to roses abound, and Alice must ultimately save herself from her "sleeping death."

McKinley, Robin. *Spindle's End.* New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2000.

Gr.7-12. McKinley expands the story of Sleeping Beauty in this spellbinding novel of adventure, love, humor, and magic. Much more than a retelling of a familiar tale, this one will surprise with a twist at the end.

Yolen, Jane. *Briar Rose.* New York: Tor Books, 1993.

Gr. 8-12. This fascinating and unusual story blends the tale of Sleeping Beauty with the tragedy of the Holocaust. After her grandmother's death, Becca discovers a mysterious box of memorabilia and begins a search for her grandmother's origins. The novel is part of a fairy tale series created by Terri Windling.

SNOW WHITE

- **Picture Books**

Reins, Paul. *Snow White*. Illus. by Trina Schart Ryman. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000.

Gr. K-3. Cozy illustrations show Snow White looking like a young Elizabeth Taylor, and the seven dwarves looking fatherly. The Queen, Snow White's jealous stepmother, is surrounded by appropriately evil trappings in this classic, beautiful rendition of the Grimm tale.

Jarrell, Randall. *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Illus. by Nancy Ekholm Burkert. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972.

Gr. K-3. This large format book presents the familiar Grimm tale, and Burkert's illustrations emphasize a rich, majestic medieval setting. A Caldecott Honor Book.

- **YA Novel**

Geras, Adele. *Pictures of the Night*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Gr. 9-12. The third novel in the trilogy of YA fairy tales by Geras features Bella as Snow White. Eighteen-year-old Bella is a dynamic, independent character with a lovely singing voice. The summer before college she lives a carefree life touring with a band of seven musicians in London and Paris. Bella suspects her jealous stepmother of trying to kill her after encounters with two mysterious women.

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Darton, F. J. Harvey. *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 3rd edition. Revised by Brian Alderson. London: British Library, 1999.

Norton, Donna E. *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 5th edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999.

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