

HOW TO FRACTURE FOLKTALES:

Assisting Years 2 and 3 students to write
their own fractured folktales



By Edel Wignell

It's surprising to note that more than 150 fractured folktales (or fractured fairytales) have been published in recent years. Not only are they enjoyable for writers to create, they are fun for children to read and dramatise and to attempt to write their own.

(I am using the term 'folktales' in preference to 'fairytales', as tales about fairies have been popular in recent times, and children think that the term applies to stories about winged creatures. Folktales, being part of the oral tradition [myths, legends, folklore, superstitions], have been handed down by word of mouth over the centuries.)

Folktale structure

The pattern or structure of British and European folktales—honed by storytellers—is satisfying for listeners.

- Often they include several 'good' characters (usually three) and one 'baddie', providing conflict.
- There is a problem to solve, and good triumphs over evil.
- A sequence of (usually) three events leads to a climax and a fast resolution. (However, some are more complex.)

Children who have heard and read many folktales in lower primary know this structure (though they may not be able to analyse it) and are able to use it as they create their own stories.

What are fractured folktales?

These tales take well-known stories and reshape them by any or all of the following means:

- changing the point of view
- introducing characters from several tales
- playing with the title
- changing the setting: time and place
- speculating on what may have happened before or what could happen after.

Children can write their own fractured folktales

Familiarity with folktales makes children's creative efforts satisfying. Notes on ways in which the tales can be fractured follow, with examples of published tales that can be found in libraries.

A. Familiarity

For enjoyment of fractured folktales, children need to be familiar with the originals, so their first step is to hear or read them. During the early years, many children have opportunities to hear and read the popular Western tales, on which most of the published fractured tales have been based. They are able to appreciate the writers' skill and are ready to experiment with the fracturing process themselves.

B. Beginning

- Children can suggest the titles of the folktales that they know and, in groups, revisit them for familiarity with their details.
- Select several published fractured tales for reading, and discuss the changes that have been made to them (see examples below).
- In pairs or threes, children choose any character in a folktale and re-tell it from that character's viewpoint.

C. Ways in which folktales can be fractured

1. Viewpoint of the 'baddie'

Some of the most popular fractured stories have been told from the point of view of the 'baddie'. In folktales, wolves are usually bad and witches are ugly. But when the baddies are the narrators, the stories are delightfully different from the originals! Several examples of this literary take are listed below.

- Richard Tulloch, 2008, *Twisted tales: Six fairy tales turned inside out*, ill. Terry Tenton, Random House (ISBN: 978 1 74166 274 0): The stories 'Cinderella', 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'Briar Rose/Sleeping Beauty', 'Rumpelstiltskin', 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Jack and the beanstalk' are told from an alternative viewpoint.
- Edel Wignell, 2011, *Long live us!*, ill. Peter Allert, IP Kidz (ISBN: 978 1 92147 946 5): The greedy troll (from the folktale, 'The three billy goats Gruff') lives under the bridge. Hungry, he hatches a plan to trap the 'goodies' and the 'baddies' from four folktales, as they pass over the bridge.

- A Wolf (Jon Scieszka), 1989, *The true story of the three little pigs*, ill. Lane Smith, Viking (ISBN: 978 0 14054 451 0): The hero is a timid wolf who wants to borrow a cup of sugar to make a birthday cake for his granny. Unfortunately, he sneezes, blowing down the houses of the little pigs.

- Toby Forward, 2005, *The wolf's story*, ill. Izhar Cohen, Walker Books (ISBN: 978 1 84428 016 2): The wolf argues that the whole episode was a series of accidents and he was found guilty on circumstantial evidence. From the pages of the book, the wolf stares at the reader and invites, 'Would you like to come and sit a bit closer while I tell you about the kid?'

2. Viewpoint of another character

- Emily Gravett, 2008, *Spells*, Macmillan (ISBN: 978 0 23053 136 9): A frog finds an old book of spells and has an idea: he could become a prince!
- Mini Grey, 2003, *The pea and the princess*, Red Fox (ISBN: 978 0 09943 233 3): A modern version of the tale, told from the point of view of the pea.

3. Change of character or characters

- Babette Cole, 1987, *Prince Cinders*, Puffin Books (ISBN: 978 0 14055 525 7): Prince Cinders takes the Cinderella role, and his three burly brothers are the wicked siblings!
- Eugene Trivizas, 1993, *The three little wolves and the big bad pig*, Egmont Books (ISBN: 978 0 68981 528 7): Both the characters and the background are changed so that the dwellings are a concrete house, a concrete bunker ... and a flower-power bower!
- Raymond Briggs, 1970, *Jim and the beanstalk*, Puffin Books (ISBN: 978 0 69811 577 4): When Jim climbs the enormous beanstalk growing beside his bedroom window, he discovers a very old giant needing help, so he provides false teeth, glasses, a wig ...

4. Play with a title or change a word in a title

A title change can be a springboard to a new story.

- Lauren Child, 2002, *Who's afraid of the big bad book?* Hodder Headline (ISBN 978 1 84456 409 5): As Herb lies down, he hits his head on a book of fairytales and falls asleep. Soon he meets Goldilocks, Cinderella and other characters.



- Dianne Bates, 2001, *Cinderfella*, ill. Peter Viska, Puffin Books (Aussie Nibbles) (ISBN: 978 0 14131 265 1): Cinderfella is the brother of Burnt and Crisp. They win a trip to the fun capital of Uranus ... and he is left behind. Then his hairy Dogfather transports him to Earth, where he meets Princess Esmerelda and falls in love.

5. Change the setting to a different time or place

- Shirley Hughes, 2003, *Ella's big chance*, Red Fox (ISBN 978 0 09943 309 5): Set in the 1920s with a fashionable family, this version has a horrid stepmother, bullying stepsisters and a delightful ending without a prince!
- Bob Graham, 2006, *Dimpty Dumpty: The story of Humpty's little sister*, Walker Books (ISBN: 978 1 40631 901 9): In this version of the 'Humpty Dumpty' nursery rhyme, background characters rise to the occasion and share the limelight at the appropriate moment.
- Anthony Browne, 2010, *Me and you*, Doubleday (ISBN 978 0 55255 910 2): A modern, prosperous family of three bears goes for a walk before lunch. At the same time, a girl from a poor part of the city becomes lost and enters their house.
- Shannon & Dean Hale, 2008, *Rapunzel's revenge*, ill. Nathan Hale, Bloomsbury (ISBN: 978 0 74758 743 9): In an American Wild West setting, Rapunzel is imprisoned in a tree in a large forest and rescued by rogue Jack. She becomes his partner in crime, the charges being horse thieving, kidnapping, jailbreaking ... and more!

6. Expand the story

Characters from one folktale can interact with those of another. Start with simple tales and few characters. Children who enjoy creating stories and are ready for complications will see the possibilities. Plots of tales might be completely changed, and can include many surprises.

- Allan Ahlberg, 2007, *Previously*, ill. Bruce Ingman, Walker Books (ISBN 978 1 4063 1350 5): What were the characters in familiar folktales and nursery rhymes doing before their well-known adventures began?
- Hilary Robinson, 2004, *Mixed up fairy tales*, ill. Nick Sharratt, Hodder Children's Books (ISBN 978 0 34097 558 2): Twelve fairytales are told briefly, with cartoon-style illustrations on the opposite pages. Each is cut into four parallel sections so the reader can mix and match to create zany variations.
- Ben Brown, 2008, *The apple*, ill. Tracy Duncan, Puffin NZ (ISBN 978 0 14350 292 0): On the way to visit her granny, a little girl in a hooded red coat picks up a golden apple. First, she meets a wolf who takes the apple, and then other folktale characters become involved.
- Mini Grey, 2006, *The adventures of the Dish and the Spoon*, Red Fox (ISBN 978 0 09947 576 7): The nursery rhyme is expanded to include what happened next in the story of the two lovers who ran away.

- Allan Ahlberg, 1977, *Jeremiah in the dark woods*, ill. Janet Ahlberg, Penguin UK (ISBN 978 0 14130 496 0): A plate of jam tarts cooling on a windowsill goes missing, and Jeremiah Obadiah Jackanory James sets off to find the robber. During his quest he encounters a wolf, three bears, a frog prince ... and more.
- Anthony Browne, 2004, *Into the forest*, Walker Books (ISBN 978 1 84428 559 4): A boy is sent to deliver a cake to his grandmother's house. He is told not to go through the forest, but he does. Soon, he meets folktale characters who want the cake ...

Creative activities

Fracturing folktales provides an excellent opportunity for creativity in many curriculum areas:

- Discussion, sharing and writing can lead to drama—a group presenting their story as mime, shared reading, radio drama or acting.
- As children love to join in saying 'Little pig, little pig, let me come in' and other repeated phrases in folktales, they can be encouraged to create choruses, chants and songs to add to the pleasure of dramatic expression for both participants and audience.
- Suggestions for art and craft activities flow rapidly when children are involved in creating fractured folktales for drama: sets, murals, dioramas, collage, costumes and identifiers of all kinds for characters and settings.

Reference

The internet is dotted with resources that can be used for the topic of fractured folktales. This particular database, 'Magpies', is an online subject guide to children's literature. It is compiled by Dr Kerry White with Rayma Turton and David Turton, and is an excellent resource for teachers. The location is <<http://www.magpies.net.au>>

About the author

Writer, compiler, journalist, poet (and former teacher) Edel Wignell has more than 90 published books for children. As a short story, her book *Long live us!*, illustrated by Peter Allert (2011, Interactive Publications, Brisbane), won the 1997 Holiday Fantasia Literary Competition for a fractured fairytale. For the picture-story, Edel suggested adding a mystery element to the illustrations to add to the surprise as the story reaches its climax. For further information, please visit <<http://www.edelwignell.com.au>>. For further information on *Long live us!*, visit <<http://ipoz.biz/Titles/LLU.htm>>. For book orders, visit <<http://tinyurl.com/qza4bbe>>.

