Familiar fairy tale picture books transformed into teen novels

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 step-by-step guide to help them.

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. Rather than a simple fairy tale, some young adult novels are transformed into realistic fiction; others retain their fantasy elements. Gillian Cross’s Pretty Woman is a good example of this transformation. By adding elements of realism, Cross makes the classic fairytale more accessible to modern readers.

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 of the original tales. For instance, in the Snow White tale, the stepmother in the original story was evil, and she was wrong to try to deceive and kill Snow White. In the novel Beauty and the Beast, the stepmother is presented as a flawed, human character. She is not a one-dimensional villain. This makes her more relatable to modern readers.

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 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.

There, but details and literary elements have changed and expanded. 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 the Beast tale. The author adds subplots and complications to the stories that were not present in the fairy tale. 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.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

- Picture Books
  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.

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

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

- **Picture Books**
  - 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.

  - Gr. K-3. Adapted primarily from The Arthur Rackham Fairy Book and Andrew Lang'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**
  - Gr. 6-10. Ashley Ella Toral is plagued with an embarrassing stepmother and twin stepisters 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.

  - 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**
  - 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.

  - 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 her castle. The Ugly Witch's 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**
  - Gr. K-3. John Howe's version shows a terrifying, black-armored 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.


LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

- **Picture Books**
  - 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.

  - 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.


RAPUNZEL

- **Picture Books**
  - 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.

  - 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.

  - 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**
  - 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.
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
  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
  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
  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
  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.”

  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.

  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
  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.

  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
  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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**Works Cited**


Fairy tales help to fuel the imagination of children, as it takes them into another world that is so different from ours, where there are, fairies, mermaids and magic. Enhances Understanding of the Abstract. An abstract concept is the concept of an idea or thought. For example, in Beauty and the Beast, we see that the beast was cursed for being cruel, but later, he was transformed into a handsome prince. Your children can have a good mental workout, discussing what changes in his character enabled Belle to develop feelings for him and eventually break the curse.

Fairy Tales Transformed?: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder. By Cristina Bacchilega. Length: 458 pages, 4 hours. Description. Fairy-tale adaptations are ubiquitous in modern popular culture, but readers and scholars alike may take for granted the many voices and traditions folded into today’s tales. In Fairy Tales Transformed?: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder, accomplished fairy-tale scholar Cristina Bacchilega traces what she terms a “fairy-tale web” of multivocal influences in modern adaptations, asking how tales have been transformed from Maurice Sendak’s Caldecott Medal–winning picture book has become one of the most highly acclaimed and best-loved children’s books of all time. A must for every child’s bookshelf. Introduce a new generation to Max’s imaginative journey with this special anniversary edition.

—Teen Vogue

This title has Common Core connections. #1 New York Times bestseller, March 14, 2018. (show less). Recommended by Genevieve Nnaji. A quirky, cautionary tale from beloved New York Times bestselling picture book creator Oliver Jeffers! There was once a man who believed he owned everything and set out to survey what was his. “You are mine,” Fausto said to the flower, the sheep, and the mountain, and they all bowed before him.