

## Elements of a Fairy Story

A **fairy tale** is a fictional story that may feature folkloric characters (such as fairies, goblins, elves, trolls, witches, giants, and talking animals) and enchantments, often involving a far-fetched sequence of events. The term is also used to describe something blessed with unusual happiness, as in "fairy tale ending" (a happy ending) or "fairy tale romance," though not all fairy tales end happily. As a genre in literature they have their roots in the oral tradition. Fairy tales with very similar plots, characters, and motifs are found spread across many different cultures. Fairy tales also tend to take on the colour of their location, through the choice of motifs, the style in which they are told, and the depiction of character and local colour.

A **fable** is a brief, succinct story, in prose or verse, that features animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities), and that illustrates a moral lesson (a "moral"), which may at the end be expressed explicitly in a pithy maxim.

A fable differs from a **parable** in that the latter *excludes* animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as actors that assume speech and other powers of humankind.

### Special beginning and/or ending words

~ Once upon a time...and they all lived happily ever after. Sometimes, there's a surprise ending...

### Good character

~ Do you see a kind, innocent character? Is the good character clever? Is s/he helped by others?

### Evil character

~ Do you see a witch? A demon? An evil stepmother/rogue uncle? A henchman to the villain?

In the end, the evil character usually loses...

### Royalty

~ Is there a castle? A prince? A princess? A king? A queen?

### Poverty

~ Do you see a poor working girl, a poor family, a poor shepherd? – Do you see poor people trying to eke out a living to have enough to eat

### Magic and Enchantments

~ Do you see magical things happening? Do you see talking animals/objects? You might see fairies, trolls, elves, goblins, dragons, etc.

## Re-occurring Patterns / Numbers

~ Do you see any patterns? Often, you'll see things, phrases, tasks appear in "threes," "sixes," and/or "sevens"

## Environment

~ What about castles, mystical cities of glass, gold, in the sky, underwater? Impenetrable forests, cascading rivers, high mountains? Storms, droughts, plagues?

## Universal Truths

~ The tale may touch on some universal experiences (i.e., coming of age) or hopes (i.e., to have enough food and love)

## Common motifs ~

- Talking animals / objects
- Cleverness / trickster / word games
- Traveller's tales
- Origins ~ where do we come from?
- Triumph of the poor
- Human weakness explored (i.e., curiosity, gluttony, pride, laziness, etc.)
- Human strengths glorified (i.e., kindness, generosity, patience, etc.)
- Trickster (sometimes a hero, sometimes on the side of evil but humans benefit)
- Tall story (slight exaggeration – hyperbole)
- Magic words or phrases; repetition of phrases/words (*abracadabra!*)
- Guardians (fairy godmothers, mentors, magical helpers, guides, etc.)
- Monsters (dragons, ogres, evil creatures, etc.)
- Struggle between good and evil, light and dark
- Youngest vs. Oldest (sons, daughters, sibling rivalry)
- Sleep (extended sleep, death-like trances)
- Impossible tasks (ridiculously mind-numbing, fantastic effort needed to complete, etc.)

- Quests
- Gluttony / Starvation (there's a fine line between eating for survival and succumbing to temptation)
- Keys, passes (opening new doors)
- Donors, Benefactors, Helpers

### **Ways Fairy Tales Have Been Interpreted**

When you think fairy tale, you think, "children." But pay close attention to the stories and you will see bigger meanings meant not just for children.

#### ***Jungian Archetypes***

man's collective subconscious, collective dream, shared experiences, deepest desires, fears

#### ***Freudian Psychoanalysis***

the id, the ego, the superego are always warring – our primal needs at odds with our consciences

#### ***Feminist Theory***

aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality; themes: fertility, discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy

#### ***Morphology***

analyzes the *function* of each character / action = a tale is composed of thirty-one elements and eight character types; Vladimir Propp, Russian fairytales

#### ***Historic Analysis***

seeing tales a way to preserve history, legend, and customs

## ***Moral Lessons***

Charles Perrault's versions all end with a lesson

*This rather splendid summary comes from <http://www.surfturk.com/> - the website of English teacher Ms Valerie Gokturk, of Paul D. Schreiber High School (Port Washington, NY)*