

The Ark presents

Fairytale Away From Me

A child in a dark blue puffer jacket and blue sneakers is climbing a concrete staircase with a red carpet. The child is holding onto a dark metal handrail with their right hand and has their left arm raised. A small white crown icon is positioned above the child's head.

**Classroom Activity Pack:
Using Fairy Tales to Challenge Stereotypes**

Introduction

Mythical, magical, fantastical, idealistic, romantic, delightful, awe-inspiring – fairy tales have been childhood staples for many generations and similar versions of many of the most common stories appear in countries all around the world.

A fairy tale is a folkloric story with many magical creatures in it. Most fairy tales revolve around the ‘good versus evil’ battle, where the good always find ways to overpower the bad and emerge victorious.

However, many of the stories reflect the times and attitudes prevalent when they were written and can seem very outdated today. The stereotypes presented in fairytales can be limiting for children today, reinforcing perceptions of male and female roles that have evolved since the tales were first written. Fairy tales can play a powerful role in shaping children’s perspectives about themselves and others, such as how males and females are “supposed” to behave, by reinforcing traditional ideals of femininity such as beauty, innocence and passivity.

We aim for this pack to be used to further explore the themes and experience of attending a performance of our theatre show *Far Away From Me* with your pupils. The show is inspired by the classic fairy tale *The Princess & The Pea* but is in a contemporary setting. Many of the established conventions and ideas in the original story are questioned and reimagined.

Session 1

Exploring stereotypes in Fairy tales

Activity 1

People, Places
and Magical
Objects in
Fairytales

Divide the class into groups of 5 or 6. Prepare enough slips of paper for one per group, writing the name of one of the following fairy tales on each one:

Cinderella. Snow White. Sleeping Beauty. Rapunzel. Hansel and Gretel.

Ask each group to choose one of the slips of paper. Tell them they are going to be exploring that story over the next two sessions. (If they are not familiar with the story they could find a version of the story in the library or on the internet).

Ask the group to recap the story as a group.

Ask each group to divide a sheet of paper into three columns and write the following title at the top of each column:

Column 1: **People** | Column 2: **Places** | Column 3: **Magical objects**

Ask each group to make 3 lists noting the People, Places and Objects that appear in their story.

Ask them to think about what happens in the story:

Does someone get into trouble or difficulty?

Does someone need help?

Who needs help and where does the help come from?

How are the male and female characters represented?

Are there any magical properties about the places and objects described in the story?

Session 1

Activity 2

Significant Moments in the story

Ask each group to choose one significant moment in the story – ask the group to create a frozen picture (a still image using just their bodies, no props!) of that moment – giving clues about who is in the picture and what is happening.

When they have made their images ask each group to simultaneously bring the scene to life as a silent moving picture – adding movement to the image without words.

After 10 seconds ask them to finish in a second still image.

Give the groups a few minutes to practise moving from the first image to the second image as a silent moving picture.

Share the images with the rest of class, starting with image 1 and moving to image 2.

Ask the class to see if they can identify who is in the images and what is happening and thus guess which story is being represented.



Session 1

Activity 3

Identifying the Stereotypes

As a whole group, note what characters were shown in the different images – do they fit into the following stereotypes often found in Fairytales?

The Feeble Father: He is dominated by his wife, often his second wife, the stepmother to his children (see below – the evil stepmother) and as a result doesn't stand up for or protect his children.

The Evil Stepmother: She attacks her stepchildren out of jealousy or natural wickedness. She is often punished in horrific ways.

The Damsel in Distress: She is beautiful, innocent, and passive. Usually someone or something attacks her and her response is to wait until she is rescued. She is usually rewarded for her good behaviour through marriage to a Prince.

The Handsome Prince: He is usually the hero who stumbles upon the Damsel in Distress and saves her. If he is not a Prince he is often a hunter and skilled with a sword.

The Witch: An old and ugly woman who punishes the innocent and is seen to be cruel and wicked.

Session 1

Activity 4

Hot-seating

Tell the class you are going to find out more about some of the characters from the stories. Ask for 5 volunteers to be hot seated as one of the characters they played in the scene. Choose characters which fit into the above stereotypes – here are some examples:

- the Damsel from *Sleeping Beauty*
- the Prince from *Cinderella*
- the Feeble Father- the father from *Hansel and Gretel*
- the Evil Stepmother from *Snow White*
- the Witch or Enchantress from *Rapunzel*

Ask the 5 volunteers to sit in front of the class and answer questions in role as the character they are playing. Ask the rest of the class to ask the volunteers (one at a time or one after each other) questions to find out as much as they can about the characters. Ask the volunteers to be true to how the characters were represented in the story.

Importantly, the rest of the class who are asking the questions are out of role e.g. they are not playing a character in the story, they are playing themselves.

They might ask questions such as :

What did you do in the story?

How do you feel about what happened in the story?

What do you think about the other characters in the story?

What do you think they think about your character?

How do you feel about what happened?

What do you think will happen next?

What do you think will happen for your character in the future?

Session 2

Challenging the Stereotypes

Activity 1

Class discussion:
Thinking about
the stereotypes
encountered in
Session 1

Tell the class that in this session you are going to think more about the stereotypes that you explored in Session 1.

Fairytale characters tend to be archetypal characters i.e. they are repetitive and fit into specific patterns and stereotypes. One of the first stereotypes they may notice is that the main female characters is usually passive and often in some difficulty, yet they do not take an active role in saving themselves or in solving the problem but instead have to wait until someone else - usually the Prince- saves them. They don't do anything proactive and rarely get to use their brains to work out a way to save themselves.

Ask the class to think about the way the Princesses or the Damsels are represented in these Fairytales and how passive the young females in those stories are depicted as being. Ask questions to promote critical thinking as this may encourage the children to be more open-minded and start to question these stereotypes: *Is this true for girls in real life? Do girls just sit around waiting to be saved?* (Hopefully they will say that's not true).

A character's appearance is an important indicator in fairytales.

The Princess or Damsel is also described as being pretty and beautiful. This is seen as being a very important part of who they are. Often they are so beautiful that the Prince falls in love at first sight and it is their beauty alone that will attract and keep the Prince.

Beauty is linked to being good. Sometimes you may meet a good character who is not beautiful but they are usually under a spell and will eventually be turned back to their young, beautiful selves. The reverse then is also true: wicked and evil characters are described as being ugly, such as the Witches and Ugly Sisters.

What does the class think about this idea of linking goodness to appearance?
What is problem with this idea in real life?

Session 2

Activity 1

Continued

The stereotype for the **Prince** is that he's always clever, brave and heroic as he appears and saves the Damsel. This stereotype can also be limiting and damaging to boys as through this they are told not to cry or be afraid; they are only ever shown as being brave and in control - never shy, nervous or worried. What do the class think about this portrayal – *Is it fair that the Prince is never allowed to be nervous or afraid or can never be seen to cry?*
Is it fair for boys to be represented this way?

When the Prince and Princess meet they immediately fall in love and get married. *Is that how things really work? How might this idea be damaging to people's expectations?*

Afterwards all we hear is that they live happily ever after. What do the class think about this idea – *Is this a fair expectation? Do people really fall in love as soon as they meet and then live happily ever after?*

Another stereotype is the **Evil Stepmother** who is cruel and nasty to her step-children and the **Feeble Father** who mistreats his children under the influence of the Evil Stepmother.
Is this a fair representation of step-families?

In general the stereotype is that older women cannot be trusted which is true of the Evil Stepmother and the of last stereotype we encountered in the first session, the Witch, the old hag who casts spells and wants to capture and harm children or the innocent Damsel - this is another perception we can look at and challenge.

Note: With the popularity of Disney's Frozen, and other recent reworkings of classic tales that have started to challenge and subvert these stereotypes, you may find that the children reference these storylines and characters.

Session 2

Activity 2

Cross the room if you...

This is a game to show that we are all different and that we don't fall into these neat stereotypes.

Divide the class in 2 groups– standing on either side of the room facing each other. When you call out a statement ask the pupils to cross the room if it is true for them - and to stay where they are if it is not true for them.

Statements: **Cross the room if you ...**

Are an active person / have always liked climbing - trees, walls etc
like moving and dancing / like animals / like doing sports / are good at solving problems / like to cook / like drawing, making things, doing art / like doing drama / like science and doing experiments / are a good listener / have lots of friends / have a good memory / find it hard to sit still / like doing things on your own / like doing things in a group / like reading books / like to write stories or poetry / can add numbers in your head / like doing maths / like singing and listening to music / play a musical instrument / are good at remembering a tune if you hear it once / like building 3-D constructions – lego, bricks, minecraft / like doing jigsaws / are interested in how things work / like playing games on a console or computer / are good at giving directions, reading maps.

You can change and amend the statements to suit your class. The idea behind the statements is to go beneath the surface of assumptions that might re-enforce gender stereotypes by creating an environment where individual responses give a truer picture and hopefully your class will demonstrate how these simplistic stereotypes are no longer true for girls and boys today.

Session 2

Activity 3

Making our own fairy tales

Tell the class they are going to have the chance to make up their own fairy tale but with a modern twist. Ask the class to work in the same groups as Session 1. This time they are going to make up their own fairy tale- but with a few changes.

Ask them to include 2 or 3 of the ideas below in their story (you and your class can add your own):

- The Prince is shy and nervous and is scared of something (e.g. – the dark, heights, spiders, etc – they can choose what)
- The Princess or Damsel is active, strong and brave
- The Prince gets into difficulty and needs help
- The Princess uses her brains and thinking powers to solve problems
- The so-called Ugly people are good, loyal and brave. The so-called Beautiful people are wicked and selfish.
- The older women are respected and trusted.
- The Stepmother is part of the solution in the story and helps the children.
- The Witch is an older woman; she has long hair and a big nose, she does have magical powers but she is not cruel or evil and does not want to eat children. She uses her powers to do good.
- The Prince is selfish and lazy and doesn't do anything to help anyone else.
- The Princess is beautiful but evil and is hatching a wicked plan to get her own way.
- The Princess decides to go to University rather than get married.
- The Prince decides he doesn't want to live in a Palace and have everything done for him. He decides to do something completely different – like explore the North Pole or teach in a school in the middle of the rainforest.

Changing the Places and Magical Objects:

As part of their planning each group should also look at some of the Places they

Session 2

Activity 3

continued

listed in Session 1 and see if they can find modern alternatives in order to relocate their story in the present.

For example – a tower could become a block of flats, the woods could be a city park, a market place could be a shopping centre, a cottage could be an apartment.

Each group should then look at the list of the Magical Objects listed in Session 1 and, as a group, see if they can come up with modern alternatives:

For example – a talking mirror could be a tablet or smart phone, a cauldron could be a microwave, a poisoned apple could be poisoned chewing gum.

Putting all these elements together, ask each group to create their own story. In order to help the groups create their story, ask them to think of 3 significant moments in the story – a moment at the beginning of the story, a moment in the middle of the story and a moment at the end of the story. They can introduce each moment with a frozen picture (still image), then bring the picture to life and end each scene with a final frozen picture.

It may take the groups some time to develop their story. They could use a storyboard in their planning process – representing the characters as stick-people and giving speech bubbles to record dialogue.

Each group should present their stories to the class when they have been completed. As a class- note what stereotypes have been challenged and altered.

Ask for volunteers to come forward to be hot-seated as before as the new characters they have created.

About Joanna Parkes

Joanna Parkes is an experienced Educational Drama practitioner who has worked nationally and internationally on a wide range of projects in educational and community settings. She was Program Officer for the Outreach/Education department at the Abbey Theatre, with responsibility for working with older people and community groups.

Since 2004, Joanna Parkes worked extensively in primary schools, designing and implementing educational drama projects, delivering teacher training and producing resources for teachers. She taught Under-graduate and Post-graduate students at St Patrick's Teacher Training College, Marino Institute of Education

Joanna is the co-author (with Sarah Fitzgibbon who is running our CPD session on *Drama & Fairy Tale in the Classroom* on Sat 24 Jan 2015) of the book *Step By Step - A Cross-Curricular Use of Drama in the Classroom*. Step By Step is a practical guide to bringing the new Irish Educational Drama Curriculum to life in your classroom.



About The Ark

The Ark is a unique, purpose-built cultural centre in the heart of Dublin's Temple Bar, where children aged 2 -12 can explore theatre, music, literature, art, film, dance and more.

The programme of world class performances, exhibitions and creative workshops changes every few weeks, so audiences both young and not so young can expect a different experience every visit. The Ark gratefully acknowledges the support of its principal funder the Arts Council and also its other annual supporters: the Department of Education and Skills, Temple Bar Cultural Trust and Dublin City Council.

ark.ie

Far Away From Me

Far Away From Me is a brand new theatre show by Amy Conroy, inspired by *The Princess and the Pea* and infused with the wild energy of aerial performance, dance music and great storytelling.

Kevin is a little prince...at least that's what his mum tells him.

Kevin likes the idea of this, of being a prince on a horse, a beautiful brown horse with a white splotch down his nose, and galloping across the kingdom. His kingdom.

From his bedroom behind the eighth door, on the eighth floor of a tall building (one of eight in a row), Kevin's towering imagination takes him on some high-flying adventures. But there's a storm coming and he needs to decide what's real and what's not real as his fast paced fantasies land with a spectacular bump right there on his bed.

Far Away From Me is running at The Ark from Thu 12 Feb - Sun 15 March. See ark.ie/events

Activities created by Joanna Parkes

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We would be very happy to receive any feedback, images or recordings made by the children in your class.

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The Ark

