

The Dark Side of Fairytales

"The line between good and evil runs through every human heart."

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn



Warm up

- Do you think people are naturally good or bad? Give real-life examples to support your idea.
- How do people learn what is right and wrong? Which has more influence: family, culture, or personal experience?
- Are rules always necessary, or should people decide for themselves? When is it acceptable to break a rule? Give an example.
- Why are people attracted to things they know they shouldn't do? Is this about curiosity, pressure, or something else?
- Are there things humans should not try to discover? Think about science, technology, or society.



1. Work in pairs or small groups. Choose ONE statement and discuss it. Say if you agree or disagree, give an example, and respond to your partner.

Example: "I think people do behave differently when no one is watching. For example, some people break rules online because they feel anonymous."

Rules are made to be broken.

Curiosity often leads people into trouble rather than progress.

People don't need rules — they need consequences.

People justify bad decisions more easily than they admit them.

People behave differently when they believe no one is watching.

Once a line is crossed, it becomes easier to cross it again.



2. Look at the images below and discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.



The Little Mermaid



Little Red Riding Hood



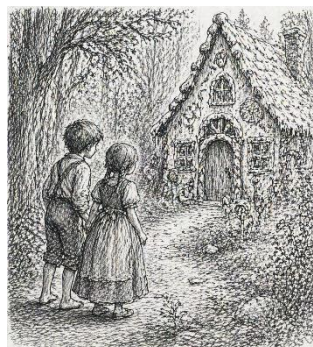
Cinderella



The Pied Piper



Beauty and the Beast



Hansel and Gretel

- Can you briefly summarise each story?
- What do you think the story is trying to teach?
- Where do you know these stories from (book, film, childhood, etc.)?
- Are the versions you know closer to Disney-style versions or to the more traditional ones?
- Do you know who wrote the original versions, or when they were written?



3. In pairs or small groups, choose 1–3 stories. Each person reads a different story, retells it to a partner, and discusses the following questions.

The Little Mermaid



Written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1837 in Denmark, *The Little Mermaid* was far darker than modern adaptations. Fascinated by the human world and longing not just for love but for an immortal soul, the mermaid made a dangerous deal with a sea witch, giving up her voice in exchange for legs. However, every step she took felt as if she were walking on knives, a pain she had to endure in silence. By the time the prince fell in love with another woman, she had already sacrificed everything for him and was suffering greatly. She was then given a final choice: kill him and return to the sea, or die. Refusing to harm him, she threw herself into the water and dissolved into sea foam. Instead of simply disappearing, she became a “daughter of the air” and was forced to spend hundreds of years doing good deeds in the hope of eventually gaining a soul. Her fate depended partly on the behaviour of children, whose actions could either shorten or extend her time. The story explores sacrifice, identity, and the painful cost of desire.

Little Red Riding Hood



Before it was written down by Charles Perrault in 1697, *Little Red Riding Hood* had existed as a spoken story across rural Europe, particularly in France and Italy. These versions were often darker and changed each time they were told. In many of them, the story went like this: the wolf reached the grandmother’s house first, killed her, and disguised himself in her clothes. When the girl arrived, he calmly offered her food that had been made from her own cut-up grandmother, without her realising. Trusting him, she ate and got into bed with him. Only then did she realise something was wrong. There was no rescue. The story ended with the wolf eating her. These early versions functioned as harsh warnings about deception and the dangers of trusting strangers, especially those who appeared calm, friendly, or charming.

The Pied Piper



Recorded by the Brothers Grimm and based on a German legend from the town of Hamelin, *The Pied Piper* may reflect a real historical event in 1284, when more than 100 children disappeared without explanation. In the story, a mysterious piper was hired to remove a plague of rats, which he did by leading them into the river with his music. When the townspeople refused to pay him, he returned, playing a different, hypnotic tune. This time, the children followed him out of the town and disappeared into a mountain or cave, never to be seen again. The story reflects deep fears about broken promises, authority, and the consequences of greed and betrayal.

Beauty and the Beast



Written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756 in France, *Beauty and the Beast* focused on moral growth rather than romance. After her father had stolen a rose, Beauty chose to take his place in the Beast's castle. Although she was free to move around, she was expected to stay, and each evening the Beast asked her to marry him. She refused, yet he treated her with kindness. When she asked to visit her family, he allowed her to leave, trusting that she would return. However, her jealous sisters, who were envious of her life in the castle, persuaded her to stay longer. Believing she had abandoned him, the Beast fell into despair and began to die. By the time Beauty returned and realised she loved him, he had already begun to lose hope. She agreed to marry him, breaking the spell and transforming him into a human prince. Her sisters were turned into statues, forced to watch her happiness until they overcame their jealousy.

Hansel and Gretel



Collected by the Brothers Grimm in 19th-century Germany, this story reflected the harsh realities of famine in Europe, when food shortages forced families into desperate choices. In some early versions, the children were abandoned by their own mother. Lost in the forest, they discovered a house made of bread and sugar and began eating it out of hunger. However, the house belonged to a witch, a figure that would have felt real and threatening at the time, as belief in witchcraft had been widespread in early modern Europe. She locked Hansel in a cage, feeding him to fatten him up and intending to eat him, while forcing Gretel to prepare the oven. As Gretel was realising what was about to happen, she tricked the witch and pushed her into the oven, burning her alive. The story explores survival, fear, and the moral complexity of extreme situations.

Cinderella

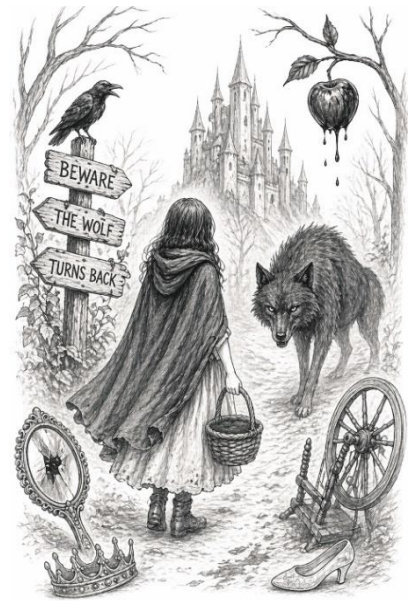


Popularised by Charles Perrault in 17th-century France and later retold by the Brothers Grimm in Germany, *Cinderella* was originally far more brutal than modern versions. After a royal ball, the prince searched for the woman he had danced with by asking women across the kingdom to try on the slipper she had left behind. Determined to marry him, her stepsisters cut off parts of their feet to force them into the shoe, attempting to hide the blood. The prince was briefly deceived, until birds revealed the truth by pointing out the blood. In the Grimm version, the punishment was severe: at Cinderella's wedding, the same birds blinded the sisters as punishment. The story reflects a harsh moral world in which ambition and deception are exposed and punished without mercy.



4. Discuss the questions below about the stories you shared in the previous activity.

- Did any of the details surprise you, or were you already familiar with these darker versions?
- Why do you think these stories were originally so dark? What purpose did that serve in the past?
- Modern versions are often less violent and avoid extreme punishments. Why do you think this has changed, and do you think something important is lost because of it?
- What role do stories like these play in society today? Are they still relevant, or have they lost their purpose?
- Do you know any similar stories from your own culture? Have they also changed over time?



Narrative Tenses

→ Past Simple – sequencing main events

The past simple is used to present the key actions that move the story forward, forming the main narrative sequence.

Example: The wolf killed the grandmother and waited in her bed.

→ Past Continuous – setting the scene

The past continuous is used to describe ongoing actions or situations in the background.

Example: The girl was walking through the forest when she met the wolf.

→ Past Perfect – establishing prior events

The past perfect is used to refer to actions that occurred before a specific moment in the past.

Example: The wolf had killed the grandmother before the girl arrived.

→ Combining the tenses

Narrative tenses are often combined to show the relationship between events and create a more precise and layered narrative.

Example: When the girl arrived, the wolf had already killed the grandmother and was waiting in her bed.

arrived → main event (past simple)

had killed → earlier action (past perfect)

was waiting → background (past continuous)



5. Fill in the blanks with the correct narrative tense (past simple, past continuous, or past perfect).

Many years ago, there lived a wealthy man known as Bluebeard, named for his strange and unsettling blue beard. He had been married several times, but no one knew what (a) *had happened* (happen) to his previous wives. Some believed they had simply disappeared, while others feared something far worse.

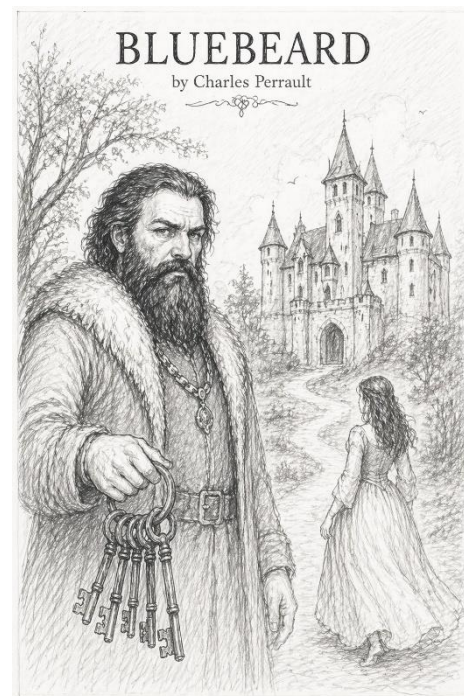
One day, he married a young woman and invited her to his grand house. While she (b) *was exploring* (explore) the rooms, he gave her a set of keys and told her she could open every door except one.

After a few days, her curiosity grew. By the time Bluebeard (c) *left* (leave) for a journey, she had already decided to open the forbidden room. When she unlocked it, she (d) *discovered* (discover) a hidden chamber where the bodies of his former wives hung from the walls, the floor stained with blood.

Shocked, she dropped the key. Although she (e) *tried* (try) to clean it, the blood would not disappear. The key itself seemed to betray her.

When Bluebeard returned, he quickly realised what she (f) *had done* (do). As he (g) *approached* (approach) her, he told her she must die and gave her a short amount of time before he would carry out the punishment.

At the last moment, her brothers arrived, killed Bluebeard, and (h) *saved* (save) her life.



6. Discuss in pairs or small groups.

- Had you heard of this story before?
- What do you think is the moral of the story?



7. Write a short fairytale (120–180 words).

Include a clear structure, a moment of tension, and a moral. Use narrative tenses.

Need an idea? A magical object that changes someone's life but has a dark secret / a dangerous journey to save someone / a broken rule with serious consequences / a deal with a mysterious stranger that goes wrong