5 Reasons why fairy tales are good for children

By [Saoirse Docherty](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/blog/reading/2014/06/5-reasons-why-fairy-tales-are-good-for-children#author-bio) June 2014

*"If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."* Albert Einstein

This morning the press, and public, went into uproar over headlines claiming evolutionary biologist and writer Richard Dawkins thinks fairy tales are harmful to children. After a quick look at [Dawkins' personal Twitter feed](https://twitter.com/RichardDawkins), and his subsequent [interview with The Guardian](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/05/richard-dawkins-fairytales-not-harmful), it seems that his comments have been misunderstood. Nevertheless, in light of the conversation, we look at five reasons why fairy tales are in fact great for children...

**1. They boost a child's imagination and cultural literacy**

A child's imagination is a powerful and unique thing. It's not only used to make up stories and games, it's a key factor in their creative thoughts and can define the type of education, career and life they have. With this imagination comes a cultural literacy; fairy tales often include different cultures and ways of doing things. They teach children about cultural differences in the world outside their own gifting them a curiosity to learn new things and experience new places.

**2. They teach us right from wrong**

Standing strongly within fairy tales of magic horses and glass slippers is a moral backbone. It's in a fairytale's DNA to have a strong moral lesson, a fight between good & evil, love and loss, and these lessons rub off on our children.

According to *The Telegraph,* Mrs Goddard Blythe, director of the Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology in Chester, said: "Fairy tales help to teach children an understanding of right and wrong, not through direct teaching, but through implication."

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Fairy tales teach children that good will always triumph and, while this may not be true in aspects of the real world, the lesson is simple and important. Be the hero, not the villain. Learn to hope for better.

**3. They develop critical thinking skills**

Following on from the last point, and as Richard Dawkins has pointed out, fairy tales teach children critical thinking. They see the consequences of characters decisions and learn that what will happen to them depends on the choices they make. Not all characters can be good role models, even 'the goodies' can be damsels in distress, or reckless (or feckless) princes. What the stories do teach though, is that when bad things happen, you have decisions to make. If you make the right ones, everything might just turn out OK.

**4. They can help children deal with emotions themselves**

Not only do fairy tales prepare our kids for society and making moral decisions, they teach them how to deal with conflict within themselves. Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, who specialised in the importance of fairy tales in childhood, believed that fairy tales can aid children in dealing with anxiety they are, as yet, unable to explain. In fairy tales children are often the main character and more often than not will win against the story's evil. Readers can relate to this and find a fairy tale hero in themselves. Watch any Pixar film for guidance on this one.

**5. And finally, they are great fun!**

I have very fond memories of curling up in bed and disappearing into another world where dragons fly and princes fight. My memories of overwhelming excitement when my dad came home with the latest Harry Potter book still makes my smile. The games I played with my friends in our garden were indisputably improved by our imaginations, which were still swimming in last night's story.

Whether it's for indirect moral lessons, improving their imaginations or because your child can't put that book down reading fairy tales should be encouraged. Read them together, help your kids invent their own and make sure they know can win against any wicked witch.

**Influence of Fairy Tales on Children**

By [Elizabeth Danish](https://www.healthguidance.org/entry/author/elizabeth-danish), August 2018

Fairy tales have been around as long as anyone can remember, and have been told to children since we first started having them. We tell them stories of fairy tales when they go to sleep, and they watch Disney re-enactments and shows that reinforce them further. They get read at school and generally they are everywhere while we’re growing up and while our children are growing up. But what are the impacts of these stories? We so happily expose our children to these stories, but in some cases they can be scary and carry obscure and unusual messages. Before we subject our children to these stories we should examine their content and see what kind of impact they may be having. Here we will look at the influence of fairy tales on children and whether this is something that should be encouraged or avoided.

**The Hero’s Journey**

Fairy tales have come under much scrutiny and are widely studied. This is partly because of their status in popular culture but also because they are such early examples of storytelling and this allows us to learn more about the fundamentals of storytelling in general, and about the psychology behind it.

In particular, one very interesting deconstruction of the fairy tale was provided by one Joseph Campbell. Campbell wrote the famous book ‘The Hero With a Thousand Faces’ which looks at how almost all fairy tales and the majority of our modern stories as well follow a very basic pattern that speaks a ‘universal human truth’. While the situations vary and the characters differ, there are nevertheless similarities in terms of the plot and the process that are eerily similar. This can be best seen in fairy tales because they are so old and that means that in some ways they can be considered a very fundamental and distilled type of story on which others are based.

The hero’s journey essentially begins with the hero being in a small village or community. Some sort of catalyst or call to action occurs – often he is sent on a quest, or the village is destroyed, or his Father is killed (or a combination of these catalysts). The hero is then forced to leave the community on a quest for the item or revenge and along the way he will meet a trickster and a wise old man, along with a series of companions. He will be given some kind of boon or weapon that he can use in his quest and he will encounter a damsel who will be trapped in a castle or dungeon, usually along with the treasure (often the woman herself is the treasure). The hero will then use his magical item/weapon and his new companions to overcome the enemy and at the same time he will undergo some kind of transformation that will bring him new abilities or insight. He will then return to the village he started off in along with his bounty and the love of the damsel (often a princess) and he will be hailed as a hero.

This view of fairy tales is one that conforms to Jung’s theory of ‘archetypes’ and the global unconsciousness which is the source of all our shared thoughts and ideas. We all have the same characters crop up in our dreams and stories (the hero, the old sage, the damsel, the trickster… ) because we all face the same issues and have the same urges and desires. The hero’s journey then comes from a universal truth and reflects the story that we all go through.

In other words this is a coming of age story and it represents the way most of us go through our lives. We stay at home until a certain age at which point we leave our parent’s care in order to go on a journey and to meet our partner, earn some money and then set up our own family now as the head of the family.

**Self Image**

Some studies have suggested that girls who read a lot of fairy tales or have a lot of them read to them have lower self images than others. This could also be because of the conventional image of the princess – of being slim and beautiful and attracting men from around the world – like sleeping beauty, ‘Bell’ from Beauty and the Beast, or Helen of Troy. Any of these emphasize looks as the most important feature of those princesses (you rarely hear about the over-weight-yet-smart-and-kind princess). This of course is not a great message to send in that it again stifles ambition, but it can also be damaging for the self image of those girls who perhaps do not conform to the stereotype and are powerless to do anything about it. This may be worsened by cartoon versions of princesses who again are typically portrayed as slim and beautiful.

**Reality**

Another problem that some might find with fairy tales is that they are often far removed from reality. Many women end up waiting out for their man that fits the image of ‘Prince Charming’ and who will ride in on a steed and rescue them – whereas the reality is often a beer-guzzling sports fan. Likewise they expect to wed in huge castles and attract everyone from their village (though at least with the wedding reality does become a little more like the fairy tales). For men there are rarely challenges as heroic as fighting dragons and the reality tends to be more along the lines of fighting deadlines and pushing pencils. This can lead to something like dissatisfaction for those whose lives do not pan out quite as they hoped and fairy tales might put too fine a point on this. Fairy tales also tend to focus very much on the hero’s journey – the coming of age – and don’t tend to give much space to what happens after the hero and the princess ride off into the horizon. What then?

This is all the stuff that eventual mid-life crises are based on, and drumming home an ideal of what life should be like could in this sense be a bad idea. However bear in mind that in some cases the children will be perfectly happy with the way their lives go – and as the hero’s journey is something ingrained in us all, it might well be that we would have had that sense of dissatisfaction either way.