

Exploring Power and Privilege in Fairytales: a student work ebook



Lessons and exercises based on analysing how modern and classic fairytales represent power and privilege and developing skills in creating fairytales that challenge those notions

SHELLEY MCNAMARA

Qwiller
www.qwiller.com.au

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First published 2017 by QWILLER

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Cataloguing data

Author: Shelley McNamara

ISBN: 978-1-925624-39-7

Title: *Exploring Power and Privilege in Fairytales: a student work ebook*

Publisher: Shelley McNamara

Editor: Shelley McNamara

Proofreader: Jessica Nelson

Cover image: <http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/190000/velka/fairy-tale-illustration-1473274953KV.s.jpg>

Cover design: Toby Andrews www.lilypad.com.au

Typeset in Adobe Garamund Pro and Tekton Pro Cond

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Symbolism in fairytales

Symbolism is when symbols or images are used to represent something more than the original. Meaning is often attributed to the symbol of the object, person, relation or event.



Look at the image below. Consider the elements that suggest the fairytale genre. Discuss the following question with a partner. Jot your ideas below.

What other ideas do you think are being conveyed about the following things in the image?



<https://pixabay.com/en/moon-fairy-tales-worlds-boy-books-1275774/>

Boy:	<hr/>
Moon:	<hr/>
Trees:	<hr/>
Sky:	<hr/>
Earth:	<hr/>
Birds:	<hr/>
Books:	<hr/>
Hot air balloon:	<hr/>

How symbolism is created

Symbolism is represented through various elements such as:

- Colour:** Colours depicted signify ideas and values. For example, yellow can signify hope, red can signify passion, blood or danger, black can signify darkness, danger or an inability to see clearly and white can represent hope.
- Landscape:** This refers to the physical environment as well as the time and day depicted. For example, a calm ocean landscapes suggest peace, whereas the ocean in a storm suggests danger.
- Objects:** These can be anything that is relevant to the story. A golden chalice, for example, represents wealth and royalty. Objects can also refer to people depicted. For example, a witch symbolises magic and power.
- Icons:** These are images represented as signs, drawings, portraits, emblems, pictures or logos. They are used to make something easily recognisable and to portray something more than the original images. For example, a logo represents the service of a company.

Interpreting symbolism in fairytales



To assess the effectiveness of symbolism consider how characters, settings, events and relationships are portrayed.

Below is explanation of how symbols are represented in the image with fairytale elements.

<https://pixabay.com/en/fantasy-landscape-mystical-2657122/>

- Colour:** The colours of the green/brown earth symbolise nature, whereas the blue and grey colour of the sky and mountains symbolise mystery. The gold hand holding the face symbolises importance and richness.
- Landscape:** The mountains symbolises a deep wisdom of the earth.
- Objects:** The decorative staff the woman is holding symbolises wisdom and ancient knowledge. The fact that a woman is holding it suggests that she is master of this ancient knowledge. She holds her hand out, symbolising peace and a offering of help.
- Icons:** The golden hand holding the face symbolises decadence or royalty. As the face appears to be meditating, a deep contemplation and seriousness are symbolically portrayed.

A consideration of cultural heritage is important when interpreting symbolism. In Indian culture, for example, a bride wears red as a symbol of prosperity and fertility, whereas in western culture a white wedding dress is associated with purity of the soul.

Task 1.4: Interpreting symbols



Time: 20 mins

a In the table below, identify examples of symbols and explain the ideas the symbols communicate. An example has been completed as a guide.

Symbol	Symbolism examples	The ideas the symbol communicates
Colour	Blood red	Danger, life force, death
Objects	Glasses	Clarity, intelligence, being studious
Icons	Australian flag	Australian values, patriotism

b Below is an illustration titled *Folktales of Bengal* from 1912. Identify the following symbols:



Colours: _____

Objects: _____

Landscapes: _____

Icons: _____

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AFolk-
tales_of_Bengal_053.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AFolk-
tales_of_Bengal_053.jpg)

c Brainstorm ideas about one of the following potential symbols or choose your own:

- A tree or garden
- A house
- A computer game.

d Brainstorm potential characters and a setting that goes with the symbol you chose.

e Write a descriptive paragraph about your chosen character in the setting. Include ideas about your symbol to develop an understanding of your character and what is important to them. Use your own paper.