



HOW TO WRITE A FAIRY TALE

THE CARTERHAUGH SCHOOL
SMITHSONIAN ASSOCIATES
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PROMPTS FROM THE TALK

- If your life was a fairy tale, how would you write it? What tales would you borrow from to make sense of it? What kinds of characters, set pieces, and enchanted objects would be a part of your story?
- A lot of fairy tales involve breaking taboos (“violating the interdiction.”) What’s a fairy-tale rule that you think should be broken?
- What’s your favorite object in your house? If that object were enchanted, how might that story go?
- What’s the most magical place in your hometown? What kind of fairy tale would begin there?
- If you had a magical helper, what would they look like? Sound like? How would they help you?
- Write a story featuring the following functions: interdiction, violation, complicity, counteraction, guidance, struggle, and victory
- Write a scene between a Hero and an Anti-Hero
- Write a story where Propp’s functions are all in reverse order
- What fairy tale upsets or annoys you the most? How would you fix it?
- What fairy-tale character do you most identify with? Why?
- What do you think is the most important message from your favorite fairy tale? How can you amplify that message?



A vertical black and white illustration of a woman climbing a stone wall using a rope. The woman is wearing a patterned headscarf and a long, textured dress. She is positioned on the left side of the frame, reaching up to grip the rope. The wall is made of large, rectangular stones with some small plants growing from the crevices. The background is dark and indistinct.

5 STRATEGIES FOR RETELLING FAIRY TALES

Strategy #1: The Different POV

- Example: *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire

Strategy #2: Beyond Happily Ever After

- Example: *The Sleeper and the Spindle* by Neil Gaiman

Strategy #3: Moving the Setting

- Example: *Cinderella is Dead* by Kalynn Bayron

Strategy #4: The Mashup

- Example: *Fables* by Bill Willingham

Strategy #5: Filling in the Gaps

- Example: "Stronger Than Time" Patricia C. Wrede

FURTHER READING

- *Marvelous Transformations: An Anthology of Fairy Tales and Contemporary Critical Perspectives* edited by Christine A. Jones and Jennifer Schacker
- “On Fairy-Stories” by J. R. R. Tolkien
- *Morphology of the Folktale* by Vladimir Propp
- *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* by Wolfgang Iser
- “Folklore ‘Phenomenologically’ Speaking: Filling in the Gaps” by David Neal and Michael Robidoux
- *The Folklore Muse: Poetry, Fiction, and Other Reflections of Folklorists* edited by Frank de Caro
- *Spellcraft: Write Like a Witch* by Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman ([purchase by clicking here!](#))

- Creative Works Mentioned:
 - *Cinderella* [Disney Film]
 - *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire
 - *The Sleeper and the Spindle* by Neil Gaiman
 - *Fables* by Bill Willingham
 - “Stronger Than Time” by Patricia C. Wrede



THANK YOU!



The
Carterhaugh
School of
Folklore and the Fantastic

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