

# Fairy Tales Enhance Imagination and Creative Thinking

by Olga Sidlovskaya

Early childhood is the age of fairy tales. Language used in fairy tales is uncomplicated and doesn't exceed a child's comprehension capabilities. Any fairy tale is, by definition, simple yet mysterious. Hardly does one begin the narration with "Once upon a time . . ." that children calm down and are carried away into the world of their fantasies. Fairy tales support the development of imagination and creative thinking, one of the fundamental psychological formations of the pre-school childhood. The imagination of a child is the soil from which sprouts and grows to perfection a scientist, an inventor, an artist.

Fairy tales are one of the best means of developing this important psychological process of the early childhood — imagination. The style of a fairy tale is easy to understand for a child. Children cannot reason logically at this age, and fairy tales do not overburden them with logic. No child likes to be instructed directly, and fairy tales never teach children in this way. At most, fairy tales hint at what would be the best thing to do in this or that situation.

Fairy tales set forth and help to resolve moral problems. Most children identify with positive characters; fairy tales teach kindness and virtue and they nurture such faculties in a child. Every fairy tale proves that it is best to be good.

When reading or reciting fairy tales to a child, we introduce her to the world of coded situations and problems, to the world of experience, enigmas, and mystery. Imagination development necessitates enriching sensory experience. The more a child hears, sees, and experiences, the more she knows and acquires. This means that she possesses more elements of reality in her experience, and so her imagination is considerably more productive and much more active.

Yet the environment of a fairy tale is not enough for developing imagination, for how the narration is presented is extremely important to how it is perceived and comprehended. This is where adults step in — psychologists, parents, teachers, and other people responsible for the upbringing and development of any given child. During this period, when representational thinking is rapidly developing, the material needs to be presented so that the child can see the action of a fairy tale in its most vivid, representational way. Television and theatre are not the only means of acquiring such experience; one can play the plot out, live through it. Role playing should be arranged so that all senses are activated.

When we started fairy tale therapy, we noted that children are not moved by the stories deeply enough after merely reading to them. It is difficult for them to reconstruct such details of the plot as landscapes or the kind of nature presented. Children do not easily imagine either the forest that Ivan the Prince goes through or the place where the magic oak grows. Illustrations help, but not every book has them and not every episode of narration is accompanied with pictures. We decided to draw with children, restoring all the episodes after having read



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them, and we saw that every child perceives fairy tales differently. Drawing helped children to like the story better and to immerse themselves more deeply in the action. Also, their own drawings helped them to recite the tale later on.

Then, as the next stage, children constructed the landscape of a fairy tale on the floor with the help of multi-coloured, differently-shaped forms, both big and small, and with various fabrics of different textures. “Ivan the Prince went into the fields,” said the story, and we spread fabrics with daisies and cornflowers on the floor. We built the forest that Little Red Riding Hood went through with fabrics. In that forest (which consisted of a number of fabrics of different hues of green), there was also a creek (a long light blue strip of chiffon) and a meadow with poppies (chinz fabric with the printings of big poppies on it).

Later, when we played out the fairy tale, Red Riding Hood *listened* to birds singing in the forest, she *picked* poppies, *washed* her face in the stream. Building fairy tale landscapes assists children in grasping the meaning, and it prompts deeper understanding of the characters. We always stress the necessity of telling children about the nature of the country from where the fairy tale came, about the place where its authors lived. If it is a Japanese fairy tale, we talk about Japan, if it is “Little Red Riding Hood,” we tell about the nature of France. Introducing children to the culture of the tale helps them to understand that every nation has its own fairy tales and that the names of heroes are not the only thing that makes them different.

Also, we tell fairy tales with the help of small pieces of fabric. We model the story. Fabrics of different textures and colours are used, such as those found in abundance at everyone’s house. As the tale is being told, children relate its characters to fabric pieces. In the beginning of the narration, a child can associate the Prince with a piece of blue velvet and lay the piece out on the table in front of him. As the narration goes on, the child continues to lay out pieces, associating them with landscapes, heroes, magical objects, and so on. It is worth mentioning that toward the end of the fairy tale the same Prince can be associated by the same child with the golden, glittering, or brocade fabric. It is important that such changes help us as adults to track changes in the child’s perception of a fairy tale, as well as to compare his perception with ours. This is very important.

The next stage is to *live through* the tale using the sense of smell. When asked, children showed that their knowl-

edge of smells is insufficient. Some children seemed to be surprised when they heard that everything around them smells differently. We made a collection of smells. We put different herbs and objects that have a definite smell into photo film containers. We collected mostly objects that have a strong or definite smell: cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, walnut, mustard, bay leaves, sweet peas, tarragon, horseradish, mint, different kinds of fruit and vegetables, wood, metal objects (paper clips, nails), newspapers, perfumes of different types, orange and lemon peelings, iodine, sunflower oil, honey, vanilla, tea, coffee, cocoa, dry milk, and others.

When reading or telling a fairy tale, the first assignment is to select smells or scents that can be associated with the characters. It can be a single sample or a whole collection of scents. For this purpose, we specifically use tubs to be used as containers for any given combination. For instance, *a forest smell* is always complex and combined. In this case children put perfume fragrances together with the samples of forest plants, mushrooms, trees, and flowers. They enjoy selecting the *right* sample.

Next we make compositions representing the smell of the location where the action takes place — a house, a room, a castle). This kind of activity adds to the experience of a fairy tale; it deepens and broadens it.

To answer the question of how it smells inside the hen-legged hut, children have to decide together what smells could be associated with the interiors of Baba Yoga’s hut. By doing this, children learn to reason, to consider such important details as features, peculiarities, and eccentricities of the characters, which is of great help in developing their imagination and creativity.

We use noises and sounds for the same purpose. We have collections of bells, drums, and rattles, as well as various jars filled with small objects, which when shaken make various sounds and noises. Jars can be filled with dry peas, millet, semolina, water, broken egg shells, dry orange peelings, metal shavings, and so on. To make noises and sounds, we use voice as well. For example, when depicting noises of a forest, some children wave fabrics, some pour water from one glass to another, others imitate the cooing of a dove, and someone can be slowly shaking a jar with buckwheat. Isn’t this product of imagination wonderful? We often accompany this activity with environmental soundtracks of nature such as forests and water. Another device that we use is to have some children close their eyes and listen to the noises that other children are creating, and later everybody makes a sketch of what they imagined when listening.

Children's creativity and imagination is also developed when thinking about and making the costumes of a fairy tale character. We do not sew costumes, we combine them using the collection of fabrics of different size, colour, and texture. A child of either sex enjoys dressing up — everyone enjoys the activity. When children choose the fabric strip they think can be associated with their character, they wrap it around themselves. The task of an adult in this activity is to direct and help the child.

After children finish making their costumes, they have fun in front of the mirror, looking at themselves and each other. Then we start thinking out each character's dance. Music for the dance is chosen together, although the dance should be spontaneous. When the playback starts, the child comes out to the middle and starts dancing. When he is about to finish this improvised dance, others are invited to join in. Children surround the dancer in a circle and repeat the moves. This allows each child to perform the dance of every fairy tale character.

Thus, with the help of these diverse activities — nature presentation, costume making, dances, smell collections, sounds, and music — children are actively learning to understand the world of any given fairy tale, as well as the world of magic generally, through creative experience. They come to see fairy tale characters more clearly, they sympathise with their feelings on a deeper level, they become acquainted with the rich and diverse object world of the country in the fairy tale.

Adults witness the fantastic landscape of the tale as it was made by children themselves. Children can switch roles easily because costumes are not made specifically for one person and they can be thought out in the process, as the tale is being staged.

As this improvised performance unfolds in front of the viewers, the smells which children associate with certain episodes are offered to the public. For example, when the Princess makes her appearance, a tub with various fragrances is carried out. Or when the mouse is cooking dinner in her hut, one can sense the smells of vegetables and herbs. Also, the entrance of each character is accompanied by music and dancing. All of this creates that unforgettable atmosphere of a fairy tale which thrills children.

During these activities, a child's imagination and creativity improve, as she creates and constructs the tale independently. Children enjoy showing this kind of independence. It is in the free activity that children start composing and taking part in tales.

Thinking out fairy tale plots should be initially supervised by adults. Preschoolers enjoy creating the end of the tale, making their own interpretation of the story, the beginning of which was given to them. Especially appealing to them is the opportunity to play the magician. When they work on the continuation of the story, they say *magic words* that transform them into wizards. We explain to them that this role is given to them only for a certain time, until the bell rings, after which all the players will turn back into themselves. We use a timer which is well hidden from the players. When it is time to finish, it suddenly gives a signal and children take it for a *magic bell*.

In our fairy tale therapy room, there is the wizard's throne — a chair covered with beautiful fabrics — and his robe; the fabric is chosen by children. Here we start creating a fairy tale. Whose turn it is to play is defined by throwing lots or as children wish, which is slightly more difficult for pre-schoolers. Children seat themselves in the magic chair, and taking on their image, begin the narration. It goes on until that person's imagination is exhausted. Then his place is taken by another. Everything is taped, and later the text is edited and read aloud, so that children can hear the story as outsiders. This version is also played out.

Fairy tales serve as the wrapping paper for various, even most well-known psychological methods and devices. In spite of the impressive technological progress which takes the rationalisation of our life to the limit, both children and adults are drawn to another magical world, to the world of a fairy tale where the riches of the national experience are enclosed. This should not surprise us, for fairy tales are the treasury of human relationships; they not only stir our imagination and help us to create, they also charge our lives with positive emotions, they unite different nations and generations. So let fairy tales help everybody, both the little ones and adults, both children and their parents, to enjoy life, to smile more often, to feel happy because we have touched the world of open-mindedness and purity.