



**WORLD LITERATURE
CLUB (10-14)
WEEK 1: FAIRYTALES**





Introduction...

Throughout history and across the world people have been telling stories. Probably the most universal and easily recognised form is the fairy tale/folk tale. Today we are going to be tracing the history of Cinderella, a story that you will all know. However, hopefully you will come to realise that you only know a very small part of the story – the British/American version. In fact, Cinderella is one of the most recognised stories around the world. The themes from the story appear in the folklore of many cultures. We cannot know exactly how many versions of Cinderella there are, but the number falls between 345 and 1,500 versions of the tale.

Questions to think about as you read through the extracts:

- ◇ *What is it about this story that has made it last throughout history?*
- ◇ *How do you think this story travelled around the world?*
- ◇ *How does the same story change between different countries? What does this tell us about different cultures?*
- ◇ *Are fairy tales just for children? Or are they for everyone? Are they sometimes scary?*
- ◇ *How are fairy tales being used today? For example – is Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings like a fairy tale? Is Frozen a fairy tale?*
- ◇ *Why do you think it is important we learn the stories of other countries?*
- ◇ *Why do you think it is important that other countries learn our version of the story?*
- ◇ *Is the story of Cinderella important to your life in any way?*

Extract 1

There once was a cave-master called Wu. He married two wives. One wife died. She had a daughter called Yeh-hsien, who from childhood was intelligent and good at making pottery on the wheel. Her father loved her. After some years the father died, and she was ill-treated by her stepmother, who always made her collect firewood in dangerous places and draw water from deep pools. She once got a fish about two inches long, with red fins and golden eyes. She put it into a bowl of water. It grew bigger every day, and after she had changed the bowl several times, she could find no bowl big enough for it, so she threw it into the back pond. Whatever food was left over from meals she put into the water to feed it. When she came to the pond, the fish always exposed its head and pillowed it on the bank; but when anyone else came, it did not come out.

The stepmother knew about this, but when she watched for it, it did not once appear. So, she tricked the girl, saying, "Haven't you worked hard! I am going to give you a new dress." She then made the girl change out of her tattered clothing. Afterwards she sent her to get water from another spring and reckoning that it was several hundred leagues, the stepmother at her leisure put on her daughter's clothes, hid a sharp blade up her sleeve, and went to the pond. She called to the fish. The fish at once put its head out, and she chopped it off and killed it. The fish was now more than ten feet long. She served it up and it tasted twice as good as an ordinary fish. She hid the bones under the dunghill.

Next day, when the girl came to the pond, no fish appeared. She howled with grief in the open countryside, and suddenly there appeared a man with his hair loose over his shoulders and coarse clothes. He came down from the sky. He consoled her, saying, "Don't howl! Your stepmother has killed the fish and its bones are under the dung. You go back, take the fish's bones and hide them in your room. Whatever you want, you have only to pray to them for it. It is bound to be granted." The girl followed his advice, and was able to provide herself with gold, pearls, dresses and food whenever she wanted them.

When the time came for the cave-festival, the stepmother went, leaving the girl to keep watch over the fruit-trees in the garden. She waited till the stepmother was some way off, and then went herself, wearing a cloak of stuff spun from kingfisher feathers and shoes of gold. Her step-sister recognized her and said to the stepmother, "That's very like my sister." The stepmother suspected the same thing. The girl was aware of this and went away in such a hurry that she lost one shoe.

The caveman sold the shoe in T'o-han, and the ruler of T'o-han got it. He told those about him to put it on; but it was an inch too small even for the one among them that had the smallest foot.

Yeh-hsien then came forward, wearing her cloak spun from halcyon feathers and her shoes. She was as beautiful as a heavenly being. She now began to render service to the king, and he took the fishbones and Yeh-hsien, and brought them back to his country. The stepmother and stepsister were shortly afterwards struck by flying stones and died.

Extract 2

The wife of a rich man fell sick, and as she felt that her end was drawing near, she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, "Dear child, be good and pious, and then the good God will always protect thee." When winter came the snow spread a white sheet over the grave, and when the spring sun had drawn it off again, the man had taken another wife.

The woman had brought two daughters into the house with her, who were beautiful and fair of face, but vile and black of heart. Now began a bad time for the poor stepchild. In the evening when she had worked till she was weary she had no bed to go to, but had to sleep by the fireside in the ashes. And as on that account she always looked dusty and dirty, they called her Cinderella. It happened that the father was once going to the fair, and he asked his two stepdaughters what he should bring back for them. "Beautiful dresses," said one, "Pearls and jewels," said the second. "And thou, Cinderella," said he, "what wilt thou have?" "Father, break off for me the first branch which knocks against your hat on your way home."

And so he returned with a hazel stick. Cinderella thanked him, went to her mother's grave and planted the branch on it, and wept so much that the tears watered it. It grew and became a handsome tree. Thrice a day Cinderella went and sat beneath it, and wept and prayed, and a little white bird always came on the tree, and if Cinderella expressed a wish, the bird threw down to her what she had wished for.

It happened that the King appointed a festival which was to last three days, and to which all the beautiful young girls in the country were invited, in order that his son might choose himself a bride. And as Cinderella wept at this, the stepmother said "Thou goest not with us, for thou hast no clothes and canst not dance; we should be ashamed of thee!" On this she turned her back on Cinderella and hurried away with her two proud daughters.

Cinderella went to her mother's grave beneath the hazel-tree, and cried, "Shiver and quiver, little tree, Silver and gold throw down over me." Then the bird threw a gold and silver dress down to her, and slippers embroidered with silk and silver. She put on the dress with all speed and went to the festival. She danced till it was evening and when Cinderella wished to leave, the King's son was anxious to go with her, but she escaped from him so quickly that he could not follow her. However, as she ran down the staircase the maiden's left slipper was left behind. The King's son picked it up, and it was small and dainty, and all golden. Next morning, he went with it to the father, and said to him, "No one shall be my wife but she whose foot this golden slipper fits."

And when the King's son came to the house, the two sisters tried on the shoe but could not even get their heels into it and so Cinderella had to be called. She first washed her hands and face clean, and then went and bowed down before the King's son, who gave her the golden shoe. Then she seated herself on a stool, drew her foot out of the heavy wooden shoe, and put it into the slipper, which fitted like a glove. And when she rose up and the King's son looked at her face, he recognized the beautiful maiden who had danced with him and cried, "That is the true bride!" The stepmother and the two sisters were terrified and became pale with rage; he, however, took Cinderella on his horse and rode away with her.

Extract 3

Beautiful as the dawn was Rhodopis; her mouth was pure of evil speaking; her two hands were pure of evil doing, and her forehead shone with the light of the Double Truth. Amid the papyrus reeds on the bank of the river she left her pure white garments and a pair of tiny gilded sandals. Then she flung herself lightly on the bosom of old Father Nile. But as she disported herself in those sacred waters, lo! there came flying toward her a mighty eagle. Above the papyrus reeds he hovered and spied among them the gleam of gold. Down to the earth he swooped, seized one of the beautiful gilded sandals, and soared again up to the heavens. Rhodopis cried out and stretched forth her arms, but already the eagle was lost to sight in the bright beams of Ra, the Sun.

Now it chanced that at that very hour there sat before the Temple of Ptah in the great square of the royal city of Memphis, the King himself, administering justice, on his head the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. As he spoke there came suddenly soaring above the square a mighty eagle, and lo! from the eagle's beak there fell into the great King's lap a maiden's tiny gilded sandal. In great astonishment, the King picked up the trinket and held it forth at arm's length in the palm of his powerful hand.

"What maid beneath the sun," he cried, "could wear such dainty footgear?" And as he gazed upon it, there rose in his mind a vision of what she must be like whose foot would fit that tiny sandal. Into the robes on his bosom, he thrust the little thing. "Write out for me a royal proclamation," he ordered. "Let all the maidens in my land try on this sandal," said the King. "She whose foot it fits, and she alone, shall be my queen."

Days passed and the King was in despair. The more difficult it seemed to find the mysterious maiden, the more certain he became that she, and she alone, was fitted to be his Queen. At length there came one morning to the Chief Scribe the peasant whom the King had released from his tax and whispered privately into his ear: "Go to the Sphinx by the great pyramids in the desert. There comes every day at daybreak to greet the rising sun, a maiden beautiful as the dawn."

The Scribe bore the news at once to the King, and the very next morning, just as the first faint rays of the sun came gleaming through the palm trees, and crept across the green Nile valley to the sandy edge of the desert, the King, wrapped well from public sight in a cloak, made his way with the Scribe to the spot where rose the three great pyramids.

No sooner had the King beheld the maiden's rosy face, reflecting all the tinge of the sun, than he said. "This is indeed the one. O maiden that shinest like the sun!" he cried, "does this belong to thee?"

The maiden smiled as she saw what he held in his hand, then she put forth one slender bare foot and slipped it easily into the sandal. In another moment she drew from beneath her the other foot, and lo! there was the mate to the wonderful slipper. So, the King asked Rhodopis—for Rhodopis it was—to be his Queen.

Where do these stories come from/originate? Match each extract to its country and date:

Extract 1	Ancient Egypt	1812
Extract 2	Germany	7 BC-AD 23
Extract 3	China	AD 860

Questions to think about:

What are the differences between the stories?

What are the similarities?

Which is your favourite story? Why?

How does the character of Cinderella change?

Your own Cinderella

Write your own Cinderella story, using the extracts as inspiration. Remember to include as many techniques as possible! (Metaphor, simile, repetition, character description, senses, colour).

POETRY

Cinderella by Sylvia Plath

The prince leans to the girl in scarlet heels,
Her green eyes slant, hair flaring in a fan
Of silver as the rondo slows; now reels
Begin on tilted violins to span

The whole revolving tall glass palace hall
Where guests slide gliding into light like wine;
Rose candles flicker on the lilac wall
Reflecting in a million flagons' shine,

And glided couples all in whirling trance
Follow holiday revel begun long since,
Until near twelve the strange girl all at once
Guilt-stricken halts, pales, clings to the prince

As amid the hectic music and cocktail talk
She hears the caustic ticking of the clock.

MORE CINDERELLA...

World literature is about discovering all the different ways stories can be told – whether it is in rhyme and verse, through music, through dance or film. Here are some other resources that take the world of Cinderella one step further...

BOOKS

- ◇ *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah
- ◇ *Princess School: If the Shoe Fits* by Sarah Hines Stephens and Jane Manson
- ◇ *I Was A Rat* by Philip Pullman
- ◇ *Bound* by Donna Jo. Napol
- ◇ *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill* by Gail Carson Levin
- ◇ *The Cinderella Society* by Kay Cassidy

FILMS

- ◇ *Ever After*
- ◇ *Ella Enchanted*
- ◇ *A Cinderella Story*
- ◇ *Happily N'ever After*
- ◇ *Into the Woods*

DANCE

- ◇ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3nzuIMNRfg> a beautiful production by the Birmingham Royal Ballet
- ◇ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QGGbT5HGxY> the waltz scene from the most recent film adaptation
- ◇ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyLsSej6UGo> stepsisters' dance by the English National Ballet

MUSIC

- ◇ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYmmCbwNWPs> Music for the Opera and Ballet by Prokofiev
- ◇ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgLvp3UUJPw> Into the Woods – 'On the Steps of the Palace'

If you wanted to explore more, this amazing website contains heaps of information about folk and fairy tales:

<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/index.html>