Introduction to the Unit

The Rationale

Students read plenty of different genres throughout their academic careers, so it's easy to assume they are getting a balanced diet and have sufficient "muscle memory" of genre characteristics.

In fact, we've gotten an extra nudge about this from the Common Core—which seeks an equal proportion of informational and literary text in the elementary school. But remember that text type alone (literary or informational) doesn't guarantee a distribution of genres within either category. For example, are students reading widely from biography, personal narratives, primary sources, narrative nonfiction, charts, maps, and other varieties of information? Or are they mostly reading one kind of informational text? The same question prevails for literary genres.

Moreover, *sampling* genres is not the same as *studying* genres. Knowing the characteristics of any genre is a helpful contributor to students' comprehension. It gives them a framework for understanding. Is it a fairy tale? Then there should be evidence of some of those iconic fairy tale words (*once upon a time, happily ever after*). There should be good guys and bad guys (or girls), perhaps a "royal" setting, a bit of magic, and the power of three. In the end, honor should prevail over evil, from which we can all learn a lesson. If students realize that they should be looking for these elements when reading *The Princess and the Pea* or any fairy tale, they'll be more intentional about finding them—and recognizing when their thinking has gone offtrack.

A single unit such as this one can't ensure the kind of balance we want long term, but it can provide a model of what we mean by explicit genre instruction.

With fairy tales as the focus of the unit, let's think about the ultimate goal of any unit teaching: helping students learn how to learn. I call it the learning pathway. With this unit, the pathway is How to Study a Genre. To that end, during your introductory lesson you'll share with students the talking points in the following chart, Learning Pathway: How to Study a Genre. Also, see Appendix 3, at **resources.corwin.com/boyleslessons,** for Genre Checklists for Students that students can use independently to analyze any text for its genre features.

Learning Pathway

How to Study a Genre

Share these prompts with students.

If you know the genre, think about what you *expect* to find:

- *Genres build characters in different ways: What kinds of characters do you expect to meet in this genre?*

- *A genre develops problems in different ways; some genres do not contain any problem: Does this genre include a problem? If so, what kind of problem will characters probably encounter in this genre and what will go into solving the problem?*

- *A genre is usually based on either fantasy or reality and sometimes a combination of both: Will you expect fantasy, reality, or a combination of both in this genre?*

- *Particular "genre words" are often associated with a genre: What kind of words are often connected to this genre (like detective, moral, once upon a time)*

- *Most genres have text features related to the genre: What text features might you see in this genre (such as headings, bolded words, chapter titles)?*

If you aren't sure about the genre, start with what you do know and narrow the possibilities:

- *In order to determine the genre, you need to first decide if a text is literary or informational: Does this text look like it will be a story, or is it more like a nonfiction article with information? Why?*

- *To determine a literary genre it's also helpful to consider whether it is mostly fantasy or reality: If it's a story, does it look like it could be true— or is it definitely a fantasy? Why?*

- *Sometimes even if you're not sure about the genre, you can make a good guess based on what you have observed: Based on your best guess, what genre might this be? (Think of a couple of possibilities.)*

The Inquiry Question and Discussion Points

The main question students will answer throughout this unit is **How many ways can you tell a fairy tale?** When I first considered a unit on fairy tales, I was thinking about various versions of one tale, for example, *Cinderella*. But *Cinderella*, even in its multiple iterations, is still, well, *Cinderella*, and didn't seem complex enough to warrant an entire month of study for intermediate grade students. But what about examining all of the kinds of things an author could do with a fairy tale to change it up? An author could change the setting—or modernize it—or switch the point of view—or choose a different format for telling the story. The list goes on, but those will be the fairy tale varieties addressed here. You'll want to get this unit going with some questions to transport students' thinking back to the magic of fairy tales, as well as helping them focus on what it means to study *any* genre. To get started, see Unit Preview Questions and Discussion Points: for Studying a Genre: Fairy Tales.

Next, because we want to know from the outset where we ultimately want to take students, I list questions under Questions for End-of-Unit Discussion About a Genre (Fairy Tales) Integrating All Texts. These are questions you might pose at the end of this unit. That is, with any unit teaching, after completing all of the anchor books, we need to circle back to the inquiry question itself, to consider the books together. The questions help students synthesize their thinking across texts and wrap up the study in a thoughtful way.

Questions for End-of-Unit Discussion About a Genre (Fairy Tales) Integrating All Texts

- Which fairy tale variation did you personally enjoy the most and why?

- If you had the opportunity to speak to a children's book publisher, what fairy tale variation would you advise that person to consider for future books? Why?

- In which of the texts that we read were the genre characteristics (features of a fairy tale) the most obvious to you? Explain your thinking with specific examples from the text you chose.

- Which of the fairy tales we read seemed the most creative to you? Why? Give examples.

- What advice would you give to students studying a genre in general?

- What advice would you give to students studying the fairy tale genre?

- Think about the blog post we read at the beginning of this unit: "*Why We Need Fairytales.*" After completing this unit, do you agree more or less with that author? Explain your thinking.

Unit Preview Questions and Discussion Points

for Studying a Genre: Fairy Tales

- *Introduce the term* genre *and name a few genres. Discuss what it means to study a genre. (See the chart Learning Pathway: How to Study a Genre.)*

- *Now, talk specifically about the characteristics of a fairy tale and what to look for when that is the genre of the text you are reading. Ask students to name a few fairy tales.*

- *Introduce the inquiry question: How many ways can you tell a fairy tale? Ask students for some examples of nontraditional fairy tales. (To get them started, you might need to give an example such as* The True Story of the Three Pigs, *which tells the story from the wolf's point of view.)*

- *Introduce the four fairy tale books selected for close reading. Show the cover and perhaps an illustration inside to pique students' interest. Do not explain the full story.*

The Focus Standard

The study of any genre is a good match for College and Career Readiness Anchor (CCRA) Standard 5: "Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole." (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R, Craft and Structure, para. 2). I think this is especially well suited to a genre study that looks at variation within the genre because then students get to probe complexities beyond just the expected genre features. Don't forget, too, the more subtle features of structure (the second part of this standard): how parts of a text are connected to each other. This can easily be applied to the study of fairy tales—but should apply equally to the analysis of all texts. The specific work around Standard 5 in this unit will appear in different places each week depending on where it fits most authentically within the systematic close reading of the text.

The Anchor Texts

The first text listed below is a blog post intended to be read by the students themselves and discussed during a unit kickoff lesson (discussion questions are provided on page 160). The remaining four texts are picture books, one of which will be read closely and studied during each week of the unit.

"Why We Need Fairytales," an article adapted from a blog post by Emerald Lugtu (provided on page 160)

This article, to be read by the students themselves, initially came from a blog post that caught my attention. The blogger was a high school student at the time, and her articulation of the value of fairy tales even for mature readers seemed the perfect introduction to this unit for intermediate grade kids who just might think they're too cool for "baby stories." It was a little long, and the author (who blogged under the name *Aliceinreaderland*) allowed me to adapt (shorten) it so it could work for this book. Lexile: 730.

The Princess and the Pizza by Mary Jane Ausch and Herm Ausch

I teach close reading lessons with numerous modernized fairy tales when I visit classrooms. I tried *not* to include this one in this curriculum because, honestly, I use it a *lot* and wanted to explore new options. But in the end, it's still one of my all-time favorites; I thought other teachers and students should have the opportunity to enjoy it for close reading too. This is a book where complexity and fun come together. Complexities include a humorous voice that relies on plays on words (you'll discover how the authors arrived at the clever title, a spin on the original *Princess and the Pea*). Then, there's intertextuality where characters from other fairy tales make cameo appearances in this story. And notice, too, the new

take on the fate of the princess—not the typical outcome for a damsel in distress. Don't be deterred by the Lexile of 540 and the grade equivalent of 3.8, which don't account for these nuances.

The Cowboy and the Black-Eyed Pea by Tony Johnston

Read this book next to examine yet another version of the *Princess and the Pea* and compare it to the *Princess and the Pizza*. This one is set in the Wild West and illustrates how setting can make a difference to a story. Examine the story details that make good use of Wild West dialect, gear, clothing, and the like. The Lexile measure is 510, but the grade level equivalent is 5.1.

Extra! Extra!: Fairy-Tale News From Hidden Forest by Alma Flor Ada

This book's format as a series of newspaper articles—local news, sports, international news, op-ed pieces, kiddie page, advertisements, and more, speaks to both its creativity and its complexity. In this book, characters from numerous fairy tales come together as well-known tales are depicted as "news." The lead local item is young Jack's disappearance up a sinister looking beanstalk—and many townsfolk weigh in about what to do next. Reports are updated on three different dates along with the results of the race between the tortoise and the hare (sports), and an international crisis—tracking the whereabouts of Geppetto, father of Pinocchio. Complexities include knowledge demands: the text-to-text connections and prior knowledge of fairy tales, and structure, a story told as a series of newspaper articles of various formats. No Lexile or readability measure is available.

Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude by Kevin O'Malley

Above all, this book shows how point of view makes a difference in writing. A boy and a girl have been charged with writing a fairy tale together. The story starts with the girl telling the story, and it's all-pastel ponies and damsels in distress, pretty much what you'd expect from a stereotypic "girl world." The young boy, however, is having no part of this, and he lobbies for a hero named Ralph who is a motorcycle dude. The writers volley back and forth for the supremacy of their own voice. In the end, happily ever after emerges as a compromise. The complexity here is in the structure of the text: multiple speakers with different points of view. Lexile: 550.

Other Texts Useful for Studying Fairy Tales

To extend this study of fairy tales or to use texts other than those identified above, you might want to consider the following titles. One cautionary note is that the Lexile levels are apt to be lower than those prescribed for the intermediate grades. Recognize that these levels do not reflect the concept of *studying* these tales as a *genre* or of analyzing the features that set them apart from more traditional tales.

- *Goldilocks and Just One Bear* by Leigh Hodgkinson

- *Little Red Writing Hood* by Joan Holub

- *Seriously, Cinderella is SO Annoying* by Trisha Shaskan (and many other titles in this series, *The Other Side of the Story,* published by Capstone)

- *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka

- *Once Upon a Time: Writing Your Own Fairy Tale* by Nancy Loewen

- *Frozen* (Little Golden Book) by R. H. Disney

The Unit's Two Assessments

Featured Reading Standard 5: Genre and structure

Featured Writing Format: Narrative writing

See the Unit Curriculum Map for Close Reading for where these assessments might fit into your study of fairy tales. Also, for more information about the rationale behind these two assessments and how they differ, as well as guidance for using the provided rubrics, refer to Step 9 on page 43 and Step 10 on page 50. Also, for evaluating students' performances, see page 45 for the Rubric for Content-Based Assessment (Task 1) and Standard-Based Assessment (Task 2). Turn to page 293, The End of the Story: Reflecting on Student Work, for some sample student work and commentary.

Task 1: Content Assessment

In this unit you have studied a genre: fairy tales. Specifically, you have studied fairy tales told in different ways. Please respond to the questions below. Your answers should relate to the four anchor stories we have read:

- *The Princess and the Pizza*

- *The Cowboy and the Black-Eyed Pea*

- *Extra! Extra!: Fairy-Tale News From Hidden Forest*

- *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude*

1. Which tale that we read do you consider to be the closest to a traditional fairy tale based on what you have learned about characteristics of a fairy tale? Explain using evidence from the text you selected.

2. Compare two of the fairy tales we studied. What is the same about each one? What is different? You can talk about the plot (what happens), but you also need to talk about the structure (how the story was put together).

3. Choose one of these fairy tales and rewrite it, telling it in another way. For example, if the story is not written as a newspaper article, you could rewrite it as a newspaper article or as if two people were writing the story together or as if the story is taking place in a different setting. You could also consider including fairy tale characters from other stories.

Task 2: Learning Pathway and Standard Assessment

Access the texts below using these links. You will read *Thumbelina.* You will view *The Story of Leaping Beauty* and the original story of *Sleeping Beauty.*

*   *Thumbelina:* http://shortstoriesshort.com/story/thumbelina/

*   *The Story of Leaping Beauty*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edS6i-2z4H0 (YouTube)

*   The original story of *Sleeping Beauty*: http://www.agendaweb.org/videos/short-tales/sleeping-beauty.html (YouTube)

1. Watch the video of the original story of *Sleeping Beauty.* In what ways is this a *traditional* fairy tale? Write an explanatory paragraph giving at least three reasons with examples from the video.

2. Compare *The Story of Leaping Beauty* to the original story of *Sleeping Beauty.* Find three similarities and three differences. Use examples from both stories as evidence.

3. Read the story of *Thumbelina.* Rewrite it as a newspaper article, or as if it were happening somewhere else, or as if two people were writing it together. You could also consider including fairy tale characters from other stories.

Unit Curriculum Map for Close Reading

How Many Ways Can You Tell a Fairy Tale?

TEXT	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
				Unit Preview	Kickoff Lesson
				See Unit Preview Questions and Discussion Points	Read and discuss the blog post "Why We Need Fairytales" by Emerald Lugtu. Discussion questions are provided at the end of the article
The Princess and the Pizza by Mary Jane and Herm Ausch	Objective: R1 Close Reading	Objective: SL1; R5 Close Reading Follow-Up	Objective: R6 Author's Purpose or Point of View: Identifying Point of View	Objective: R9 Text-to-Text Connections: Compare Two Versions of the Same Story	Objective: W3 Narrative Writing
	Read closely to answer text-dependent questions	Discussion addressing the text's key words, summary message; collaborative task relating to genre characteristics	Reread the story to identify and elaborate on the author's point of view about princesses	Compare *The Princess and the Pizza* to the original tale of *The Princess and the Pea* by Hans Christian Andersen	Rewrite the ending of this story to change it in some way
The Cowboy and the Black-Eyed Pea by Tony Johnston	Objective: R1 Close Reading	Objective: SL1; R5 Close Reading Follow-Up	Objective: R4 Word Choice: Vocabulary	Objective: R3 Story Elements: Setting	Objective: W3 Narrative Writing
	Read closely to answer text-dependent questions	Discussion addressing the text's key words, summary message; collaborative task relating to genre characteristics	Reread the story to identify vocabulary that fits with the "Wild West" setting	Reread the story to focus on setting and how the story would change with a different setting	Rewrite the story so that it takes place in a different setting

TEXT	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Extra! Extra!: Fairy-Tale News From Hidden Forest by Alma Flor Ada	Objective: R1 Close Reading for First Half of Text	Objective: R1 Close Reading for Second Half of Text	Objective: SL1; R2 Close Reading Follow-Up	Objective: R5 Genre and Structure: Characteristics	Objective: W2 Explanatory Writing: Write a News Article About a Fairy Tale
	Read closely to answer text-dependent questions	Read closely to answer text-dependent questions	Reread three *Hidden Valley News* articles in order to summarize the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*	Review the kinds of newspaper articles in this text; look for evidence of the five Ws, *who, what, when, where,* and *why* plus *how* questions	Write a news article about a previously read text in this unit (*The Princess and the Black-Eyed Pea* or *The Princess and the Pizza*)
Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude by Kevin O'Malley	Objective: R1 Close Reading	Objective: SL1; R5; R6 Close Reading Follow-Up	Objective: R6 Author's Purpose or Point of View	Objective: R4 Word Choice	Objective: W3; R6 Narrative Writing; Author's Purpose or Point of View
	Read closely to answer text-dependent questions	Discussion addressing the text's key words, summary, and message; collaborative task relating to genre characteristics and point of view	Reread parts of the text to dig deeper into point of view: What did the girl care about? What did the boy care about?	Reread selected parts of the text to identify how author's word choice strengthens the story's point of view	Write a fairy tale with a partner and think about how point of view made a difference to your story and the process of writing your story
	Culminating Discussion	Content Assessment	Standards-Based Assessment		
	Respond orally to text-to-text connections for studying this topic. (See Questions for End-of-Unit Discussion Integrating All Texts)	Students complete the content assessment task integrating all texts in this study	Students complete the standards-based assessment task using cold reads		

GENRE

WHY WE NEED FAIRYTALES

by Emerald Lugtu

Once upon a time . . .

No matter our age, most of us can remember those words that began fairytale adventures. Most of us can also remember the fuzzy feeling that settled over us like fairy dust by the time the story ended. Perhaps that's one good reason why fairytales are important: they make us happy.

The funny thing is that many fairytale heroes and heroines are not very heroic at all. Jack from *Jack and the Beanstalk* was a thief. The Princess from *The Princess and the Pea* was not a very gracious guest. She did a *lot* of complaining about that uncomfortable bed.

Yet we still want to root for fairytale characters. Why? Because they're human. We look at them and in some ways, we see ourselves. Sometimes *their* mistakes are sort of like the mistakes *we've* made. We can learn lessons from them—like don't take apples from strangers (*Snow White*). Don't forget to invite everyone to your party (*Sleeping Beauty*). Read the fine print when signing contracts (*Rumplestiltskin*).

Fairytales also give us a chance to see the good things about ourselves. They help us realize that good often triumphs over evil and that if we work hard, we can succeed. Sometimes fairytales make us feel brave. Maybe if we'd been given the chance we would have tamed the dragon. We would have gone to the ball. We would have been strong enough to pull the sword from the stone. We, too, could have been heroes!

Some people say that fairytales are ridiculous because they don't show life the way it really is. Wishes on stars don't come true. If you fall down a rabbit hole you'll probably sprain your ankle, not have tea parties with mad hatters. Some parts of fairytales *aren't* true. But they do send us messages that are real—like "don't be afraid," or "you can do this!" and "they all lived happily ever after."

Maybe the best part about fairytales is that they remind us to dream. They help us dare to believe that there's our very own happy ending somewhere out there just waiting to happen. Yes, with imagination and creativity there really can be [a] happy ending.

Source: Adapted from an essay by aspiring writer Emerald Lugtu titled "Why We Need Fairytales."

Think About

This article was adapted from a post by Emerald Lugtu on her blog Alice in Readerland. When she wrote this, she was a high school student. Think about the questions below as you reflect on this article and begin this unit on fairy tales.

- Why do you think Emerald Lugtu wanted to write this post for her blog? What was her purpose?

- What details in this post seem especially important? Why?

- What do you think the author means when she says, "We look at them [fairy tale characters] and in some ways, we see ourselves?"

- The author gives us lots of reasons why we need fairy tales. In your opinion, what is the most important reason of all? Explain using examples of fairy tales that you know.

- Why do you think this post was selected to introduce this unit? How can it guide us as we read the fairy tales in this unit?