About the authors and the original texts

The brothers Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859) were German scholars. They were educated at the University of Marburg. Jacob was interested in medieval literature and language, while Wilhelm was a literary critic. After several years in Kassel, the brothers worked at the University of Gottingen. They then moved to Berlin, where they spent the rest of their lives. Both brothers wrote numerous academic works as well as fairy stories, and Jacob Grimm’s contribution to linguistic theory (Grimm’s Law of sound shift) was a major development in the study of dead languages.

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) was born in Odense in Denmark. His childhood was one of poverty and neglect and at the age of 14 he ran away from home to join the theatre. His first poetry and prose was published in 1822 and he travelled extensively throughout Europe, Asia and Africa. He wrote more than 150 stories for children, including ‘The Ugly Duckling’, ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, ‘The Snow Queen’ and ‘The Little Mermaid’.

The Thousand and One Nights, from which ‘The Fisherman and the Giant’ has been adapted, is a collection of stories from Arabia. The king hates women. He marries a new woman every day and killed her the next morning. But then he married Sheherezade. She told him a different story every night but not the ending so he had to wait until the next night. After a thousand and one nights, she had no more stories, but by then the king loved her and did not kill her.

Summary

The Table, the Donkey and the Stick
This is the story of three brothers. Two of them are cheated out of magic possessions – a table that makes food and a donkey that makes gold – by a jealous old man, and made to look foolish in front of their neighbours when they try to demonstrate the magic. The third brother hears about this and, when he encounters the same man, he uses his magic possession – a stick which beats people on command – to regain the magic table and the magic donkey. All ends happily.

The Prince and His Servants
A poor prince sets his eyes on a beautiful princess. Her jealous mother does not want her to marry so every time a suitor comes, she sets him some impossible task and finally kills him. The prince gathers around him a group of servants with extraordinary powers. Fat Man can eat anything, Long Arms can reach anything, Quick Eyes can see anything, Big Ear can hear anything and Cold Man can cool anything. All of them help him to win the hand of the princess. The defeated queen leaves and they live happily ever after.

The Glass Box
When Hans meets an old woman and tells her he wants money, she shows him how to get money, gold and jewels in return for a glass box. However, because she is impatient, he does not give her the glass box but keeps it for himself. He learns how to use the glass box to summon one of three large dogs that ensure he will never be poor again. Later, he uses the magic powers of the box to help him to meet Princess Anna, who has been imprisoned by her unhappy father. He uses it again to save himself when he is sentenced to death for trying to woo the young woman. Even the old king is happy when Hans and Anna marry and become the new king and queen.

The Fisherman and the Giant
A poor fisherman releases a giant from a gold jar in which he has been imprisoned for over 300 years. At first, the angry giant wants to kill the fisherman, but later agrees to help him get rich. He shows the fisherman a blue and gold sea where he can catch beautiful fish. The fisherman is paid handsomely for them by the king. But when the king tries to cook them, people appear as if by magic and destroy the fish. The king insists on seeing where the fish come from and finds, near the blue and gold sea, a king imprisoned by the man’s queen. He tricks the queen
into releasing the king and then kills her. The two kings become friends and send beautiful things to the fisherman and his family.

**The White Birds**

When ten brothers are banished by their stepmother and changed into birds, their sister, Elisa, sets out to find them. She learns that she can break the spell if she makes coats for the birds from golden flowers, but only on condition that she doesn’t speak until she has finished the coats. She follows these instructions and, while she is making the coats, she meets a king who takes her to his country. The king’s jealous younger brother plots against her and persuades the people that her silence is sinister and her search for the special flowers is connected with a plot to kill the king. However, one of the birds warns the king of his brother’s plans to burn his wife to death. The king returns in the nick of time to save her and throw his brother from the city walls. Elisa, meanwhile, has finished the coats and, when she puts them on the birds, they change back into her fine brothers.

**Background and themes**

**Fairy tales as a genre:** Fairy tales are a sub-genre of folktales involving magical, fantastic or wonderful episodes, characters, events, or symbols. The other two genres are myths and legends. Like all folktales, they are fictional stories, often in timeless settings and in generic, unspecified places, with one-dimensional characters (completely good or bad). Fairy tales have a typical pattern structure. The hero is usually a humble, simple, naïve human. He believes in the miraculous and respects nature. He is confronted with a prohibition which requires him to carry out a task related to it. His goal is usually marriage, the acquisition of money, survival, wisdom or a combination of these. On his way, he will meet enemies or friends. The villain is often a witch, ogre, monster, or evil fairy who uses words and power to exploit, control, and destroy, intentionally for personal gain. He has no respect or consideration for nature or other humans. A friend is usually a mysterious creature or character who gives the protagonist gifts to help him undergo a miraculous or marvelous change. There may be a temporary setback which will require miraculous or marvelous intervention to reverse the wheel of fortune. These wonder tales function to entertain, inspire, and enlighten us. They still appeal to us because of their richness and effectiveness as symbolic artistic communication.

**Kindness:** These five fairy tales, from at least three different countries, share common themes. All involve a search, either for love or money, or both. All end happily, at least for the main characters. Kindness is also present throughout the stories: men, women, fairies, strange creatures, all show kindness to the hero or heroine. Where kindness is shown, it is usually, although not always, repaid.

**Jealousy:** Jealousy is also present throughout. A mother is jealous of her daughter, a man is jealous of the magical possessions of his lodgers, a servant is jealous of her mistress, a king is jealous of his brother, a king is jealous of his wife’s lover. Jealousy usually leads to punishment. So love and money, kindness and jealousy… the raw material of life plus a sprinkle of magic to make everything come right for the kind people in the end.

**Discussion activities**

**Before reading**

1. **Group work:** Put students into small groups and ask them:
   a. to make a list of people and things they expect to find in fairy tales.
   b. to work together to retell a fairy tale from their own cultures that they know well.

2. **The Table, the Donkey and the Stick**
   **Before reading**
   2. **Guess:** Have students speculate about the relevance of the table, the donkey and the stick in this fairy tale.

3. **While reading**
   3. **Write: A letter to Jack**
      Have students write the following letter: Imagine you are Tom or Bob and write a letter to your brother Jack. Tell him the story of the magic table / the magic donkey and the jealous old man.

4. **After reading**
   4. **Guess:** Have students compare their predictions about the role of the table, the donkey and the stick in this fairy tale. Were they right?

5. **Role play:** Put students into groups of six. The characters are: Tom, Bob, Jack, their mother, the jealous man. Tell students that there is one extra character – a friend of the jealous man’s – with whom he plans the tricks. Have them act out the story.

**The Prince and His Servants**

**Before reading**

6. **Guess:** Ask students to read the title of this tale and answer the following questions: Why does the prince need a servant? What is a good servant? What can he do for the prince?
Five Famous Fairy Tales

While reading
7 **Guess:** (after reading the first paragraph on page 7)
Divide the class into two groups and get them to
guess the reason for the queen’s attitude. The students
in one group guess why she laughed and the other
guess why she does not want the princess to marry.
Then get them to share their views.

8 **Role play: Dinner with the queen** (page 11)
The prince ate with the queen and the conversation
was cold. Ask the students to role play this
conversation.

9 **Discuss: The best servant** (page 13)
The prince won with the help of his servants. Ask
students to discuss which of the five servants was
most important to him.

After reading
10 **Guess:** The prince married the princess and they lived
happily ever after. Have the students speculate: *What
did they and their servants do for the people?*

11 **Discuss: A new impossible job**
Put students into small groups and ask them to think
up an impossible job for the prince and his servants,
even with their special powers. Then ask the groups
to describe their jobs and choose the best (i.e. the
hardest) one.

The Glass Box

Before reading
12 **Guess:** Have the students speculate what is in the
glass box.

While reading
13 **Discuss: Kindness** (pages 14 and 15)
Have students read pages 14 and 15 and then discuss
in pairs:
*Was Hans a kind person? Why, do you think?*

14 **Discuss: A new life** (page 15)
Ask students to read page 15 ‘He suddenly had many
friends.’ Get the students in groups and ask them to
discuss: *How did Hans’s life change when he was rich?*

After reading
15 **Role play:** Get students to work in pairs and imagine
the conversation between the princess and Hans when
he tells her the story of the old woman and the three
dogs.

16 **Discuss: Dogs’ help**
Ask students to discuss in groups how each of the
dogs help Hans: *How did the dogs with eyes like eggs
help Hans? And the one with eyes like oranges? And the
dog with eyes like plates?*

The Fisherman and the Giant

Before reading
17 **Guess:** Ask students to look at the picture on page
24, and ask them. *Who are these men? What does the
man on the ground do? How can you tell? Why is the big
man angry? What is he coming out of?*