

The Missing Link: Addressing the Lack of Fairy Tale Resources for Teens Online

by Ray MacLeod

With movies like *Snow White and the Huntsmen*, *Red Riding Hood*, and *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* in theatres and shows like *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time* on television, it appears that fairy tales have regained popularity in the media. Teen programmers and educators should regard this trend as an opportunity to provide lesson plans and projects that teens can do in the classroom and programs at the public library to entice teens to read traditional renderings of these tales and modern adaptations. This reach should extend online where educators and librarians can engage with youth online through social media, forums, and with other online resources. Why then is there such a gap in regard to space dedicated specifically to fairy tales online. Many online resources on fairy tales are directed towards children, look laughably outdated in terms of their graphic design, and do not feature useful or fun ways for teens to interact.



Each release of a new movie on fairy tales is an opportunity to encourage literacy and direct teens to exciting and innovative print and multimedia materials and to generate learning and activity in teen programs. Using Web 2.0 technology and fairy tale themed websites with fun interactive interfaces can draw teens in and offer them a way to engage "... with an aspect of cultural literacy they may have missed in their childhood..." or for the teens who are already acquainted with these myths, fables, and tales, they will "... feel comfortable or even nostalgic..." with this content. Also, providing these connections to literature and educational media might even encourage those reluctant readers to find a title that they may enjoy (Chance, 2003, para. 10). Finding innovative ways to promote literacy and critical thinking in the middle school years and to continue those pursuits on through high school is important for teen development. The following are some tips for starting up a website about fairy tales for young adults:

+ Engage *effectively* on social media

When used effectively, social media can be a powerful tool. When launching a website or a page on your library website devoted to fairy tales for teens, create Facebook and Twitter accounts as well. Promote these resources through the library and through the local school system. Produce timely updates that are relevant, informative, and fun. Use this medium intelligently: promote library resources that coincide with the release of a film in theatres, ask questions and spark debate, and promote upcoming teen programs.

+Allow teens to *voice* their opinion and provide *opportunities* for participation

Provide forums, blogs, and spaces for teens to post their reactions to fairy tales. It is important to engage middle school teens and get them talking. It is important to provide some structural cues, but also to allow teens to form their own opinions and to actively engage with both traditional fairy tales and the modern adaptations. Rita Soltan (2007) claims that:

“Engaging upper elementary and middle school readers in the discussion of themes developed around the basic framework of the classic stories through character analysis and comparison of versions is not only a way to revisit the stories within a new context, but a venue for encouraging critical thinking and interpretive thought” (pg. 34).

Allowing teens to come to *their own* conclusions is so important for keeping them engaged and interested.

+Provide frequent learning *moments*

Showcase illustrations, art, and various cultural interpretations of fairy tales on the site. Feature a quick facts section or add trivia or other games to encourage learning! Webpage space is a resource that should not go to waste!

+Encourage *creativity*

The Winnipeg Public Library’s virtual teen space called “Booked” provides an area where teens can submit their poetry, photography, writing, and other art. This would be an excellent avenue to explore for a Fairy Tale themed website or page on a public library website. Provide a new fairy tale each month and encourage teens to interpret these classic tales in their own way.

SurLaLune Fairy Tales: A Review

As previously mentioned, it is often difficult to find a comprehensive, trustworthy online resource for information about fairy tales and publications about fairy tales. SurLaLune Fairy Tales acts as a wide reaching directory for history, publication information, and discussion about fairy tales for different groups. It is an excellent resource for both students and teachers to use as reference. Also, this resource provides a wide range of information for academics to use. While SurLaLune’s comprehensive coverage of the heritage of a wide range of fairy tales from Baba Yaga to the Ugly Duckling is unprecedented, there are certain ways that this website could be improved upon in order to reach more people, particularly teens, in order to capture their interest and get them talking about and reading fairy tales.

Strengths

Content: When one reaches the homepage, they can glance at the left side of the screen and see a list of many different fairy tales and fables. Each features an annotated version of the tale so the reader can get acquainted with the basics of the story but are encouraged by the site monitor to read the full version of the story. This is incredibly helpful as a basic directory. There is section devoted to similar tales across cultural lines which is important for brevity. Also there is a section for modern interpretations which targets the fairy tale in literature, poetry, music, film, and theatre. This wide range of information is infinitely helpful and useful for teens to use in school and for their own leisure.

Discussion Board: SurLaLune features an active discussion board where various topics about fairy tales and folklore are discussed. This would be an excellent resource for an inquisitive teen because it features topics such as: feminism in fairy tales and fairy tales for boys. Much of this content is more academic (the topic “Uncanny in fairy tales” as an example), but it provides a great community of people interested in the topic and willing to view these traditional stories with a critical state of mind. This is especially important for older teens who are questioning their world and want to learn about certain things from various angles.

Ways to Improve

Organization: On the main page, SurLaLune showcases a scrolling widget with 2013 Fiction and Non- Fiction. Also, within each page for each fairy tale, there is a book gallery of different books related to the fairy tale. While this content is organized under particular categories, it could also be organized into age groups so students, teachers, and general web surfers would know which materials are best suited for their age group.

Layout and Design: Overall, the website itself is very dated. It does not feature links to her social media except for her Blogspot on the main page (she is connected via Twitter and Facebook as well). The web design is skewed more towards the feminine so this may limit the amount of people that actively use the site.

Audience: This website does not suffer from lack of content. It is an incredibly valuable resource. However, there is a mix between academic content and content for younger users and educators. This website could be improved by dividing the website by creating a “Teen Space” where this information was

grouped in fun and informative ways. Also, a gallery of books and multimedia could accompany each fairy tale so that teens would have the ability to explore each story further on their own time.

SurLaLune Fairy Tales acts as one of the internet’s best resources for information on fairy tales. It is certainly a pertinent and comprehensive resource. However, it could be updated and reworked to be more usable for teens, educators, and librarians.

References

- Chance, R. (2003). Familiar fairy tale picture books transformed into teen novels. *The Alan Review*, 30 (2).
- Soltan, R. (2007). Fairy tale characters breathe new life: A fantasy book club approach for tweens. *Children & Libraries: The Journal Of The Association For Library Service To Children*, 5(2), 34-39.
- Heiner, H. (2013). *SurLaLune Fairy Tales*. Retrieved April 3, 2013 from <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>
- Winnipeg Public Library. (2013). *Booked*. Retrieved from <http://wpl-teens.winnipeg.ca/views/default.cfm>

