

World Fairy Tales

by Emma Stewart

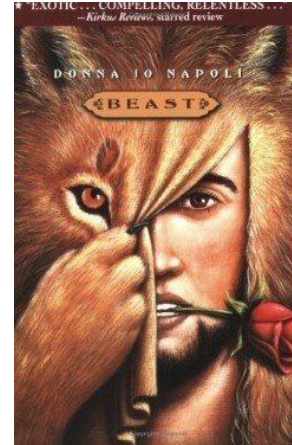


One of the virtues of the fairy tale is that it is universal to most world cultures, all of which have their own mythologies and folklore to draw upon. However, the word “fairy tale” often conjures up a very specific and limited vision of what the genre can encompass. In popular understanding, the conventions and aesthetics of the fairy tale are usually confined to a quasi- historical, quasi-fantastical Western European setting. This list recommends young adult novels that expand beyond those limits, whether they draw upon folklore from other parts of the world or transfer Western fairy tales to new settings. Either way, the books in this list have a range of multicultural content that will certainly enrich any young adult collection.

Beast, by Donna Jo Napoli. 2000. Ages 14+.

Beast moves the much beloved story “Beauty and the Beast” to historical Persia. Prince Orasmyn, who narrates the story, falls out of favour with a djinn and is turned into a lion for his sins. Orasmyn leaves his home and travels across the world in search of his humanity and the woman who can break his curse with her

love. *Beast* is dense with historical and cultural detail about Orasmyn's Islamic faith but does not read as dry or scholarly, thanks to the author's lush prose. However, it has some sexual content that is likely not appropriate for younger teens.



Book of a Thousand Days, by Shannon Hale. 2007. Ages 12+.

Set in Mongolia and based off the fairy tale “Maid Maleen”, it tells the story of Dashti, a servant who is bricked up in a tower with her mistress, Lady Saren, for seven years when Saren refuses to marry the lord her father has chosen for her. Dashti must keep herself and her mistress alive and safe from outside threats while contending with her own budding love for one of Lady Saren's suitors, Khan Tegus. *Book of a Thousand Days* is a powerful and bittersweet tale of friendship, loyalty and love, and readers will find a strong and engaging narrator in Dashti.

The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind, by Meg Medina. 2012. Ages 12+.

All of Tres Montes believes Sonia is blessed by God, because at the moment she was born, the greatest storm in living memory was calmed. As she grows up the whole village expects her to intercede with God, but she does not think herself gifted, and is

wracked with guilt over her inability to work miracles. Her Tía Neli finds her work in the capital at Casa Masón, where she can be treated like all the other girls, but when her brother Rafael finds himself in danger Sonia discovers that there might be some ways that she can effect change in the world after all. Medina, a Cuban-American writer, spins a light and moving modern folktale out of Sonia's story with a strong sense of place and a lyrical narrative voice.

Guardian of the Dead, by Karen Healey. 2010. Ages 14+.

Ellie Spencer, a compelling and engaging narrator, attends Mansfield College boarding school in New Zealand in with her best friend Kevin and the cute but mysterious Mark. When helping out at a friend's staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Kevin seems to fall under the spell of one of the actresses... who just happens to remind Ellie a lot of one of the fairies in Shakespeare's play. Not only does Ellie have to save Kevin, and maybe strike up something with Mark, Ellie also has to figure out the identity of a serial killer running around town stealing people's eyes. Healey steepers her story in native Maori mythology and culture and offers a wide spectrum of positive representation, criticizing colonialism in New Zealand and including a prominent asexual character.

Seven Daughters and Seven Sons, by Barbara Cohen and Bahija Lovejoy. 1982. Ages 12+.

One of seven daughters, and knowing that her family will fall into poverty after the death of their father with no sons to take care of the family, Buran dresses herself as a boy, takes on the name Nasir, and leaves Baghdad to earn her fortune. In the city of Tyre, she not only becomes widely known as a brilliant merchant but also becomes

close friends with Prince Mahmud... while still in the guise of a young man. A sweet and unconventional romance based off an Iraqi folk legend, *Seven Daughters and Seven Sons* is a simple story that will appeal to those who like a touch of genderplay in their fairy tales.

Shadow Spinner, by Susan Fletcher. 1998. Ages 12+.

Marjan is overheard telling stories in the marketplace by Dunyazad, sister to Shahrazad, the Sultan's wife. Shahrazad is also the heroine of *The Thousand and One Nights*, who staved off her own execution by telling the Sultan stories every night. After three years of this, though, she is running out of stories and insecure about her place in the Sultan's heart. Marjan is hired by the sisters to help keep the stories going, but in the process, she becomes deeply entangled in harem politics and ends up in fear for her own life. This is a witty and suspenseful approach to a well-known story, and as the heroine deals with a permanent disability from a childhood injury, *Shadow Spinner* offers good representation for teens with disabilities.

Shadows on the Moon, by Zoë Marriott. 2011. Ages 14+.

When soldiers come to execute Suzume's father for plotting against the Moon Prince, Suzume accidentally saves herself by means of magic: she discovers that she is a shadow-weaver, able to craft illusions from the fabric of the world. She uses that talent to keep herself safe from her villainous new stepfather, disguising herself as a servant and biding her time until she can destroy Lord Terayama. But soon Suzume finds herself trapped between two choices: love, or revenge. Marriott tells a beautiful and heart-

wrenching Cinderella story rooted in Japanese mythology with a main character sure to appeal to young women and plot twists galore.

Silver Phoenix, by Cindy Pon. 2009. Ages 14+.

Threatened with marriage to a repulsive older man in order to save her family from misfortune, Ai Ling runs away from home and sets out for the Palace of Fragrant Dreams in search of her missing father. Along the way, she is rescued from drowning by the handsome Chen Yong, who is himself on a quest to find his birth parents. Aided by Ai Ling's mysterious visions, they brave the dangers and demons of the road as they journey to the Palace together. The first book in the mystical "Kingdom of Xia" series, this fast-paced novel leaves enough threads unresolved that its readers will clamour for more.

Sun and Moon, Ice and Snow, by Elizabeth Day George. 2008. Ages 10+.

The girl known only as the Lass, the youngest unwanted daughter of a large family, has the talent of communicating with animals—a talent which saves her life when she encounters a polar bear in the wild. The polar bear, however, is himself cursed, and invites the Lass to live with him in his ice palace for a year and a day, after which her family will be gifted with riches and success. Based off the Norwegian story "East of the Sun, West of the Moon", which itself plays off "Beauty and the Beast" and "Cupid and Psyche" archetypes, this adaptation of a little known, slightly weird, but highly entertaining and romantic fairy tale will have strong appeal to fans of the author's popular *Princess* series.

Toads and Diamonds, by Heather Tomlinson. 2010. Ages 12+.

Set in India, this novel is based off the fairy tale of the same name by Charles Perrault. Diribani, the good and kind sister, is blessed by a goddess to have jewels and flowers fall from her mouth whenever she speaks; her prickly stepsister, Tana, is likewise cursed to have toads and snakes fall from *her* mouth when she talks. However, these gifts and burdens are not what they first appear to be, and both sisters must learn together how to negotiate the fate that the gods have given them. The appealing lead characters and rich setting will make this a highly engaging read for teen readers who will likely be drawn in by the beautiful cover.

