

GETTING IT OFF THE PAGE!

Fairy and folk tales emerge from an oral tradition. Once they are committed to print their form is solidified. Have you ever tried to tell a story exactly as it was printed? If so, you know just how stilted it can sound. As librarians, both your mission and respect for the printed word will make this a difficult exercise. Please know that before the printed word there was the spoken word, and for thousands of years stories continued to evolve based upon the teller, the listeners, and the world they dwelt in. This exercise merely rekindles that process of readjusting the ancient stories and the truths they hold, so they can best be communicated by you in this time and place. Following is a process by which you can breathe your own unique life into those.

1. **Choose** a fairy tale, folk tale, or a story from your own childhood or experience.* Start with a simple story that grabs your attention and you enjoy.
2. Read, reread, or mentally review the tale.
3. **Create an 'outline' of the story.** We are a language-based culture. I would like you to get away from language at this point in your discovery. Stories are just a series of images. Thus, create an outline to be just that, a series of images that will help you recall the sequence of your story. Don't worry about artistic skill. Actually, the more artistically skilled you are the longer and harder this process will be. In shapes or symbols or literal forms and with occasional words, if you need them, create a visual prop on a large piece of paper that will help you remember the sequence of events, and important characters. You might choose to use color and texture to represent emotional states. You might choose to have your images take on a larger shape that reflects the shape of the tales. For instance, some stories come full circle to where they began. Other stories introduce characters and conflict, reach a summit, and then resolve. Some stories from unfamiliar cultures introduce unusual patterns. See if you can reflect the larger shape of the tale with the placement and relationship of your images.
4. Put away the written tale. Using your unique outline, **tell this story** to a willing listener. Find someone who will listen attentively and not offer suggestions or criticism. (This unfortunately sometimes rules out family!) The objective is to become comfortable using your own words to share the sequence of events.
5. **Guided Imagery** - Find a comfortable spot, away from distractions, and *close your eyes*. Do a little deep breathing into your belly to calm, relax, and center yourself. If you are having any tension, acknowledge it by tensing up that particular muscle and then letting it go. Now, create in your mind's eye the first scene of your story (keep your eyes closed for the entire exercise). Paint the open scene of the story with as many specific details as you can, drawing on your own imagination to tell you about the space and utilizing all of your available senses. Look for what makes the space special, different, specific to this tale. Try to employ as many senses in your investigation of place and characters as you can. Once you have a detailed opening scene in your mind's eye, allow your imagination to work like a camera. Film your story in complete detail. Like a camera, your imagination can allow you to take a close up shot on something important, or pan so that the larger world of the tale becomes evident. You can fast forward through parts that don't seem important or are endlessly repetitive.

You can slow down the camera to catch important actions or episodes or details. If you forget a section, you can always rewind! Paint your final scene with the same care and detail as you gave the opening. When you have finished find another willing listener to whom you can **tell this expanded version**.

If you are having a hard time focusing for this exercise, then set up a tape recorder, press the record button (don't forget tape!) and with your eyes closed describe each sequential image that you are seeing in your mind's eye. As you tell, try very hard to imagine every detail before you speak it. Don't listen to yourself, allow the next scene or image in the story sequence to define what you will say. When you have finished, find a willing human and retell the story with the details you have discovered.

6. There are a million ways and reasons to tell any story. All you need is one. That one is very important and will shape your telling. Take a contemplative moment now and think about one thing you really like about this story or one reason you'd want to share it with others. For instance, I love the story of *Hansel and Gretel* because it affirms one of a child's greatest fears (abandonment) and models how you can overcome any difficulty if you build trusting relationships and use your wits. You might like *Snow White* because of the evil queen's inability to accept aging gracefully! You might like *Little Red Riding Hood* because you want to put the fear of G-d into children about talking with strangers. You might want to tell *Little Red* to dispel children's fears that a single mistake will end everything. This story could do either. How you tell it will depend upon your motivation, **your reason for telling it**. Figure out why you want to tell the story you've been working with.
7. With that reason in mind make another film of your tale picking and choosing primarily details and behaviors that will feed into your reason for telling. For instance, if I am telling *Little Red Riding Hood* to warn children away from strangers, then in my film (Which I am making with my eyes closed in a relaxing and secluded environment) I will emphasize certain scenes and images, such as the mother warning the daughter, the daughter flaunting that warning by leaving the path, and the wolf's approach because she left that path. When you have completed doing this you will have a highly revised tale that, yes, you should go and tell to a willing listener.

At this point you now have a story ready for a larger audience.

- * Please note that this process should not be utilized with the work of a known author, unless you have their permission to do so.