

## Multicultural Cinderella Stories

Excerpt from *TEACHER'S GUIDE TO CINDERELLA* - State Street Ballet, Rodney Gustafson, Artistic Director

The Cinderella story is perhaps one of the most well known fairy tales in our culture. But did you know that the story has more than 3,000 variations around the globe as well? The version most Americans know best first appeared in Frenchman Charles Perrault's *Tales of Mother Goose*, a collection of fairy tales for children, in 1697. The popular Walt Disney animation was based on this version. Perrault simply wrote down a story that had been well known all over the world for more than 1,000 years. The story is known as "Ashputtle" in France, "Yeh-Shen" in China, "Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters" in Africa and "Vasilisa the Beautiful" in Russia.

A few important details stay the same in all of the stories. The Cinderella character's mother has usually passed away, and the father has remarried. She is forced to perform menial tasks for her stepmothers and stepsisters, like starting fires and cleaning. In some stories, the girl's name (Cinderella – Cinder Ella or Ashputtle) refers to her daily chore of cleaning up the cinders and ashes. The stories usually mention the stepmother and stepsisters' jealousy of Cinderella's natural beauty and gentle personality. Then, when a prince or king begins searching for a wife, competition develops between the sisters. Because of Cinderella's kindness, though, she is given help from fantasy-like people: a fairy godmother, magical animals, etc. Below are a few Cinderella stories from around the world.

### **France**

In the French version, "Ashputtle," the fairy godmother takes on the form of a little white bird. The bird perches on a tree near Ashputtle's mother's grave and grants wishes to the young woman. On the night of the prince's ball, Ashputtle is left at home because of her filthy, messy appearance, while the stepmother and stepsisters travel to the party. The bird dresses Ashputtle in a gold and silver dress with silver and silk shoes, and she sneaks off to the palace. At the ball the prince falls in love with her beauty, but her stepfamily does not recognize her in her pretty clothing. After the ball the prince searches for the woman who lost the slipper. The stepsisters try to fit their feet into the tiny slipper by cutting off a toe or a chunk of one's heel, but neither attempt works. Then Ashputtle tries on the shoe, and the prince realizes she was the woman he had fallen in love with.

### **China**

The Chinese fairy tale involves a cave chief's young daughter, Yeh-Shen, and a secret pet fish. Yeh-Shen's stepmother is angry when she finds out the girl has kept the fish secret, so she kills it and cooks it for dinner. A spirit tells Yeh-Shen what happened to the fish and that the fish's bones contain magical powers. After taking the bones out of the garbage, Yeh-Shen asks the bones to dress her nicely for the spring festival. The spring festival is where young men and women find husbands and wives. Her wish is granted, and she gets a pretty gown, a feather cloak, and golden slippers. Yeh-Shen loses one of the slippers at the festival, but a merchant finds it. The merchant takes it to a king as a gift. The king then looks for the owner of the slipper, and when he finds Yeh-Shen, they get married.

### **Africa**

An African version of the story, "Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters," is different than most other versions in that there are only two daughters, and their father is the only parent alive. Nyasha is the Cinderella character, Manyara is the evil sister, and Mufaro is their father. A serpent appears in Nyasha's garden one day, and she treats it nicely but thinks nothing about it until much later. When word arrives that the king is searching for a wife, the family gets ready to go see the king. Manyara sneaks off during the night before everyone leaves so she can meet the king first. On her trip through the woods by herself, she meets a hungry little boy, an old woman and a strange man. Manyara is rude to all of them. When Nyasha follows the same trail later that day, she meets the same three people and is polite and helpful to them. When she finally reaches the kingdom, she finds Manyara, who has been frightened by a serpent in the king's chambers. Nyasha enters the chambers and realizes the serpent cornering her sister is the same one that she found in her garden. The serpent then changes into the king, and he tells Nyasha that he was also the little boy, the old woman and the strange man in the woods. Because of the kindness she showed him when he was in different forms, the king chooses to marry Nyasha.

## **Russia**

The Russian tale is called “Vasilisa the Beautiful.” This version is different than most other Cinderella stories because there is no prince or king and no glass or golden slipper. Vasilisa’s evil stepmother sends the girl to get a needle and thread from her aunt, but it is a trick: the aunt is not an aunt at all – it is Baba Yaga, a witch whose house walks around on chicken legs and is surrounded by a fence made of bones. Inside the house is Baba Yaga’s pet, a talking cat. Out of kindness, Vasilisa feeds the cat, who rarely gets any food from the witch. When Vasilisa meets Baba Yaga, she is locked in the house and told that she will be eaten the next morning. To thank Vasilisa for the food, the talking cat gives her a towel and a comb and helps her run away. If she is close to getting caught, she should throw down the towel and it will turn into a wide river. If that doesn’t stop Baba Yaga, Vasilisa should throw down the comb and it will become a thick forest. Vasilisa runs home and throws down the towel and comb on her way. When she gets home safely, Vasilisa tells her father what happened and he kicks the stepmother out of the house for her evil actions.

## **Some of the Other Cinderella Stories by: Name of Story & Country of Origin**

*Little Sister and the Month Brothers* - Czechoslovakia

*Tattercoats* - England

*The Magic Orange Tree* - Haiti

*The Wicked Stepmother* - India

*Fair, Brown, and Trembling* - Ireland

*Lily and the Wooden Bowl* - Japan

*Katie Woodencloak* - Norway

*The Wonderful Birch* - Russia

*Rashin-Coatie* - Scotland

*Kao and the Golden Fish* - Thailand

*The Story of Tam and Cam* - Vietnam

## **Books**

*Walt Disney’s Cinderella : A Read-Aloud Storybook* by Della Cohen, Mary Hogan (Editor)

*Cinderella : A Creative Tale from the collection Once upon a Time* by Charles Perrault

*Cinderella : The Story of Rossini’s Opera* by Alan Blyth

*The Gift of the Crocodile : A Cinderella Story* by Judy Sierra, Reynold Ruffins (Illustrator)

## **Alternative Cinderella Stories:**

Cindy Ellen : *A Wild Western Cinderella* by Susan Lowell, Jane K. Manning (Illustrator)

Smoky Mountain Rose : *An Appalachian Cinderella* by Alan Schroeder, et al

Little Gold Star : *A Spanish American Cinderella Tale* by Robert D. San Souci, Sergio Martinez

Cendrillon : *A Cajun Cinderella* by Sheila Hebert Collins, Patrick Soper (Illustrator)

Petite Rouge : *A Cajun Twist to an Old Tale* by Sheila Hebert Collins (Narrator)

Sumorella : *A Hawaii Cinderella Story* by Sandi Takayama, Esther Szegedy (Illustrator)

Domitila : *A Cinderella Tale from the Mexican Tradition* by Jewell Reinhart Coburn

Angkat : *The Cambodian Cinderella* by Jewell Reinhart Coburn, Edmund Flotte (Illustrator)

Abadeha : *The Philippine Cinderella* by Myrna J. De LA Paz, Youshang Tang (Illustrator)

Kongi and Potgi : *A Cinderella Story from Korea* by Oki S. Han (Illustrator), Stephanie H. Plunkett

Tam Cam : *A Vietnamese Cinderella Story* by Nguuyen Nhuan

Yeh Shen : *A Cinderella Story from China* by Ai-Ling Louie, Ed Young (Illustrator)

Naya, the Inuit Cinderella by Brittany Marceau-Chenkie, Shelley Brookes (Illustrator)

The Golden Sandal : *A Middle Eastern Cinderella Story* by Rebecca Hickox, Will Hillenbrand (ill.)

The Persian Cinderella by Shirley Climo, Robert Florczak (Illustrator)

Cendrillon : *A Caribbean Cinderella* by Daniel San Souci, et al

Fair, Brown and Trembling : *An Irish Cinderella Story* by Jude Daly (Illustrator)

The Egyptian Cinderella by Shirley Climo, Ruth Heller (Illustrator)

Rough-Face Girl by Rafe Martin, David Shannon (Illustrator)

Sootface : *An Ojibwa Cinderella Story* by Robert D. San Souci, Daniel San Souci (Illustrator)

The Turkey Girl : *A Zuni Cinderella* by Penny Pollock, Ed Young (Illustrator)