

The Water of Life

A folktale from Europe, retold by Anna Conomos

A video of the story is available at www.storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-water-of-life

Synopsis

A beloved king is old and dying, the only thing that can save him is a drink of The Water of Life. This is found at the end of the earth and is guarded by impossibly tall mountains that continually crash together, leaving minimal chance of survival. Nevertheless the prince decides he will set out to collect the water for the king.

On the way he meets a royal family in a palace. The princess is very beautiful. He spends the night with the family and finds out that the princess is able to cry pearl tears, laugh roses and owns a very special ring that protects her from danger. In the morning, before the prince continues his journey, the princess gives him the ring. The ring guides the prince safely through the crashing mountains; he collects the water of life and returns to his father.

Once his father is feeling better the prince tells him of the royal family and the princess. The old king passes his throne to the prince and insists the royal family come to live with them

Part 1: Share the Story

Watch the video of Anna Conomos telling the story of The Water of Life.

Part 2: Discuss the Story

Use the questions below to begin a discussion about the story.

KS1 questions	KS2 questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the story Anna tells us that the old king is kind and loving. What other clues are there, that show us how good the old king is?• If you had lots of pearls would you give them away as the family had done? Who might you give them to and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•• This story is related to the theme of Kindness. Make a mindmap with associated words for kindness. Who is kind in this story? What happens to the kind characters? What does this tell us about kindness?• This story is unusual as there are no evil characters, as there are in many, even most, fairy stories. Where is the evil, or danger, instead? Would you prefer the story to have evil characters? Or do you prefer it when 'evil' is not a person but a thing?• If you suddenly developed the ability to cry pearls what would you do with them? Would you still live in the same place or would you move to a new village, town, city or even country?

Part 3: Play the Story

KS1 activities	KS2 activities
<p>Story Walk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students stand in their own space around the room. They have each become the Prince in their own story worlds. • Read out Resource A line by line. As you read, the students use the space to mime the story. 	<p>Hotseating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a character from the story. One volunteer comes to sit in the hotseat as the character. The rest of the class ask questions. For example: • To princess: think about the day the three fates turned up and gifted you with pearls for tears, roses for laughter and the precious ring for protection. Why did they do that? Why you? Why those three things? Has the gift changed your life?
<p>Character Dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In pairs the students act out a discussion between the prince and the princess. The princess is trying to give the prince her ring so that he can reach the Water of Life safely. How could she persuade the prince to take the ring? What does the prince say to the princess? • Practise and share role plays. 	<p>Cocktail Party</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each student picks a character from the story (old king, prince, old man, hunter/king, queen, princess) • The students walk round the room, in character, and when they encounter another person, or on a given signal, they stop and talk to the other person as if they are at a party and have never met the other person before. They can make things up about their character if it wasn't covered in the story. • Conversation topics might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>talking about themselves;</i> - <i>talking about their family</i> - <i>talking about where they live</i> - <i>talking about things they like/don't like</i> • At the end the class or family group can come back together and share things they might have learnt about their character or a particularly good conversation they had.
<p>Phone Call</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work in pairs. • One student chooses to be one of the story characters. This could be the Prince, the old King, the new King, or the Princess. • The student calls their friend and tells them everything that has happened in the last few days. • The friend asks more questions to find out more about the story, and the character can make up more details to elaborate. For example: King: <i>A Prince came to visit us the other day.</i> Friend: <i>A Prince? What colour was his horse?</i> 	<p>Story Bones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In pairs, the students assign themselves a number (1 or 2). • Those who are number 1 have 2 minutes in which to retell the story. They can add extra details or dialogue and if they forget something, they can make something up to fit into the story. • After 2 minutes the number 2 students have a turn at retelling the story, but they have 1½ minutes. • Back to number 1 and they now have 50 seconds. • The number 2 students finally have 30 seconds in which to retell the story. • The students don't have to complete the retellings in the allotted time. The challenge is to trim out the parts that are not essential to the story and reach the 'bones' - the important structure. • List 6 - 8 points that tell the story in chronological order. This process can help when they create their own stories.

Part 4: Story Stimulus

KS1 activities	KS2 activities
<p>Speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write the conversation between the prince and princess when she convinces him to take her ring for protection. • What might the conversation be like between the old king and the new royal family when they arrive at the palace at the end of the story? 	<p>Stories of Kindness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As discussed above, this story is unusual because it has no evil characters in it. Every one is kind! The 'evil' comes from the weather and the crashing mountains. • Plan and write a story in which all the characters are kind. They bond together to overcome a non-human threat. Mindmap ideas for this threat; it could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The weather</i> - <i>An animal, bird, insect or plant</i> - <i>The land or sea</i> • Use the following structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Who is affected by the threat?</i> - <i>Who are the two main characters?</i> - <i>What is the threat?</i> - <i>How do the two main characters help each other overcome the threat?</i>
<p>Dear Diary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose one of the characters from the from the story (you could even be the horse, or the two crashing mountains). • Retell the story from the point of view of the character. How does the character feel emotionally? What do they see, hear, taste, touch and smell? 	

Part 5: Taking it further

Similar stories to The Water of Life

The Turtle Who Wanted to Fly (Greek fable)
storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-turtle-who-wanted-to-fly

The Tortoise and the Hare (Greek fable)
storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-tortoise-and-the-hare

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse (Greek fable)
storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-town-mouse-and-the-country-mouse

The Lion and the Mouse (Greek fable)
storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-lion-and-the-mouse

The Fox and the Stork (Fable from Ancient Greece, China and Mongolia)
storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-fox-and-the-stork

The Silver Saucer and the Juicy Apple (Russian folktale)
storymuseum.org.uk/1001-stories/the-silver-saucer-and-the-transparent-apple

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Resource A: Story Walk

Story Walk Prompts

- You are the Prince. Walk around the room like the Prince you are!
- Oh dear! Your father is very unwell. Go to his bedside and comfort him.
- You are going to go and fetch the Water of Life to make him better! Get on your horse – and you're off!
- Across the Palace courtyard – out of the gates – over the drawbridge – over the hill – down a valley – over a mountain – through a forest – through a wood –
- What's this? Another Palace! Over the drawbridge – knock on the door.
- It's opening! Cross the Palace Courtyard – dismount from your horse. Pat your horse to thank her for the journey.
- There's a King! Bow to the King! Oh – and a Princess! She is crying pearls! Ping- ping – ping – they are pinging all over you!
- How about smiling to her? Oh, she's smiling back! And she is smiling roses! Here's a rose – try to catch it – ouch, it has a thorn!
- They are giving you a nice bed for the night. Settle down – so comfortable!
- Ah! Wake up! It's midnight! What are you doing? You are wasting so much time! Your father is very ill! Quick – get dressed – get on your horse!
- The Princess has given you her ring!
- Now – ride! Over the hills! Here are the crashing mountains! If you are quick, you won't get smashed! Poise – aim – and ride!
- You are there! You have the water of life! Collect some in a jug, and now – ride – very carefully – slowly – with your jug of water in one hand, and the reins in the other....
- You have made it back to the Palace. Run up the steps, and give your father a drink.