Visual Disabilities and Folklore:
Analysis of Selected Tales Plus Their Possible Uses
with Children

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Sarah MacMillan

Thesis Advisor
Patricia F. Beilke

Patricia F. Beilke

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2003

Expected Date of Graduation:
May 2004
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Purpose
Introduction
Definitions
Review of Previous Research
  General
  Criteria: General
  Criteria: Blind Characters
  Past Attitudes
  Common Stereotypes
Study and Findings
  Initial Criteria
  Origin of Stories and Type of Blindness
  Final Criteria
  Ratings System
Annotations of Selected Folk and Fairy Tales
Chart—Ratings of Twelve Folk and Fairy Tales with Blind Characters: Selected Characteristics of the Tales and Analysis
Analysis
  Stories Rated as a Three: Not Recommended
  Theme
  Stories Rated as a Two: Mediocre
Characters Are Cured

Characters Are Not Cured

Stories Rated as a One: Recommended Stories

Uses of Fairy Tales

Reading Aloud

Writing

Critical Thinking

Conclusion

References
Acknowledgements

--I owe thanks to my advisor, Professor Patricia F. Beilke, for advising me on my thesis and for suggesting the scope of this project.

--My friend, Ko Jeong-Min, deserves thanks for giving me the opportunity to see what life is like for someone who is blind or visually impaired. Also, I would like to thank him for giving me the idea to focus on the portrayal of blind and visually impaired characters.

--I would like to thank Professor Laurie Lindberg for teaching ENG 390, the honors colloquium about fairy tales, which sparked my interest in this topic in the first place.
Purpose

Materials used in the classroom and school media center should be selected based on a set of criteria to ensure the selection of high quality materials. Traditionally, books and materials containing characters that are blind or visually impaired have not been of high quality, with the portrayal often being negative or damaging to readers. This thesis focuses on folk and fairy tales that feature characters that are blind or visually impaired. Criteria from several different sources with which to judge these stories are identified and 12 stories featuring blind characters are studied and analyzed. Finally, uses for these folk and fairy tales in the classroom and school media center are explored.
Introduction

One of the responsibilities of the school media specialist is to choose materials for the school media center or library. The school media specialist must use specific criteria and personal judgment to select materials that are free from any gender or racial bias and that represent a wide variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Also, the selection process extends to materials that feature characters that have disabilities. Fiction and nonfiction books that portray disabled characters should be accurate and aid students in empathizing with and understanding people who have disabilities (Heim 139). Students who have disabilities should be able to see themselves accurately portrayed in the characters or be able to find role models that they can emulate (Moore 279).

Unfortunately, history has shown that characters that have disabilities have been misrepresented throughout all types of literature. The question that school media specialists should then ask themselves is, “How do we choose appropriate materials and what are the criteria involved?” Fairy and folktales are especially problematic, since a lot of negative beliefs and stereotypes have been transmitted over the centuries through these stories (Wagner-Lampl and Oliver 267). It is especially important that school media specialists and other teachers identify criteria that can be used to adequately judge fairy and folktales and think about how they will be used in the school setting.

Previous studies and research have looked at how literature as a whole has portrayed characters that have disabilities. When they are present, the portrayals are usually extreme, with characters being shown as extremely good or extremely evil (Blaska and Lynch 36). The effects that these stereotypes can have are devastating,
leading to the perpetuation of negative ideas and beliefs not only by the sighted but by the blind as well (Wagner-Lampl and Oliver 267-268). Characterizations of people are made with one’s prior knowledge (Heim 140) and if prior knowledge only includes the negative stereotypes found in some literature, then the characterization will necessarily be negative. As socializing agents, children’s stories and fairy tales transmit to children a society’s values and prejudices (Blaska and Lynch 36). Negative portrayals of people with disabilities will lead to negative attitudes towards people with disabilities (Moore 275) unless contradicted in some way.

One of the ways that negative attitudes towards the blind and visually impaired are combated is through the reading of stories that portray these characters in a positive light. Studies have been done which show that reading and being read to can affect attitudinal changes (Blaska and Lynch 36-37). Reading stories with disabled or blind characters also helps increase prior knowledge or children’s experience with people who have disabilities. Stories that are free of negative stereotypes will transmit positive images to children and help them to empathize with and value people who have visual disabilities.

Fairy tales are especially problematic when it comes to the portrayal of people with visual disabilities. The symbolic nature of fairy tales and folklore lends itself more to extreme characterization and stereotype rather than complete accuracy of information. Common beliefs and attitudes about the blind are transmitted through fairy tales and folklore that affect how sighted people, as well as the blind themselves, feel about people with visual disabilities (Wagner-Lampl and Oliver 267-268). Previous research in this field was examined to identify criteria which school media specialists, teachers, and
parents can use to judge the quality of folk and fairy tales that feature blind or visually impaired characters. The criteria will be used to judge and analyze the quality of 12 fairy tales or folktale adaptations that feature blind or visually impaired characters, with the goal of developing ways in which these stories can be used in the school media center.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used:

Visual impairment—a disability ranging from people who are totally blind to those who are partially sighted. Only 10% of those individuals with visual impairment are totally blind.

Adventitious visual impairment (blindness)—visual impairment “that develops some time after birth.”

Congenital visual impairment (blindness)—visual impairment “present at or almost immediately after birth” (Carroll and Rosenblum 620).

Total blindness—inability to visually distinguish between light from darkness. The eyes may be removed or their “functioning for visual purposes is wholly destroyed” (French 15).

Partially sighted—individuals can use vision to learn, for example, they may be able to read print. There is a large amount of variation in this group, and some individuals can read standard print while others need large print or special aids (Carroll and Rosenblum 620).
Folktale—"a tale of the folk" (Hallett and Karasek 12). These are stories that were originally transmitted orally by generally illiterate people in the past and then later collected and written down by other writers.

Fairy tales—"stories that have been passed down from one generation to the next generation for centuries" (Flack xv). They usually have fantastic or magical elements and often use archetypical characters to represent abstract ideas, such as good and evil.

Review of Previous Research

Studies from the 1970s and 1980s looked at the portrayal of people with disabilities in the mass media and in literature. These studies did not focus on any particular disability but instead looked at how a variety of disabilities were portrayed.

General


Weinberg’s and Santana’s article examined the attitudes that the general public has towards people with disabilities and attributed these attitudes to the negative portrayals of people with disabilities found in the media. The focus was on comic books, comparing the percentage of characters that were evil, good, or neutral. They compared these percentages with such characteristics as race, gender, and disability.

Characters that have disabilities were either shown as good or evil; they were almost never a neutral character. This fits with a common stereotype found throughout literature, showing people with disabilities as especially good or evil, instead of normal human beings with their share of strengths and weaknesses. Other inaccuracies that were
found in Weinberg’s and Santana’s study relating mainly to blind people include the erroneous idea that the blind live in total darkness and that they will develop special, compensatory, super-sensitive senses. They also found that the notion that a blind man could receive love without pity was rejected.

Weinberg and Santana accounted for the extreme dichotomy in the portrayal of disabled people with two theories. One theory, the theory of “dynamic spread,” stated that the erroneous assumption that inferiority in one of the senses would lead to inferiority in all of the senses might account for people with disabilities being portrayed as evil or helpless. The other theory stated that in order to reconcile one’s erroneous ideas of how a disabled person should behave with real people with disabilities that are able to function quite well in ordinary life is to attribute some sort of special ability to that disabled person. The idea being that in order to successfully cope with the disability, the disabled person must be superhuman.

Weinberg’s and Santana’s study is an interesting illustration of the stereotype of blind people as being especially good or evil. Theories and speculation about the origins of people’s prejudice are also interesting, but their study does not provide any useful criteria for judging comic book portrayals of people with disabilities.

Criteria: General


Moore’s article begins with a brief overview of some negative stereotypes that are held about people with disabilities and attributes some of these stereotypes to the
Moore’s article begins with a brief overview of some negative stereotypes that are held about people with disabilities and attributes some of these stereotypes to the portrayals of the disabled in popular books. As with Weinberg and Santana, Moore points out that the characterizations of people with disabilities tends toward the extremes of good and evil. Some good examples that Moore gives are the character Pew from Treasure Island, who is an incredibly evil blind man, and Tiny Tim from A Christmas Carol, who is unrealistically sweet and good.

Moore gives other examples of negative portrayals of disabled people in contemporary books, but she also includes contemporary books that have positive portrayals of the disabled. What makes these portrayals positive is the characterization of fully realized characters that are not just good or evil, but have weaknesses as well as strengths that help them to cope with their situations. In other words, instead of two-dimensional stereotypes, these books show real people coping with real problems and situations. Under representation of the disabled in early readers and basals is also discussed by Moore, who deplores such superficial changes as merely adding more illustrations of the disabled. Unlike Weinberg and Santana, Moore provides a checklist of five criteria that can be used to judge books. These are:

1. Characters are presented as participating in diverse activities, not just those that relate to their disability.

2. The words that are used to describe the character are not discriminatory, negative, or patronizing.

3. Interaction between non-disabled and disabled characters is mutually beneficial instead of the disabled being the recipient of the non-disabled person’s kindness.
4. Characters should be role models who cope with their disabilities realistically.

5. The differences between the disabled and non-disabled should not be overemphasized.

Moore's checklist is a good starting place for identifying criteria to judge folk and fairy tales that feature blind characters. More recent research done in this field has focused primarily on further developing this checklist without the emphasis so much on negative portrayals of people with disabilities as choosing books which feature positive portrayals, although some comparisons are necessarily drawn.


Heim is the mother of a child with a mental disability, and she has developed a checklist, which can be applied to all books that deal with the portrayal of characters that have disabilities. The five criteria that she has developed are as follows:

1. **Accuracy of information.** Heim requires that authors of children's and young adult's books be familiar with appropriate terminology and terms used historically.

2. **Free from damaging stereotypes.** Again, accuracy is stressed, with authors truthfully portraying how characters think and feel. Heim also lists stereotypes which it would be appropriate to stay away from. Some of these are reiterated elsewhere in the research, but some notable additions include: object of violence, enhancement of atmosphere, and nonsexuality.

3. **Literary quality,** which is applicable to all materials that are chosen for the school media center. This involves such issues as plot, syntax, and characterization.
4. Instead of confronting the disability, Heim wants universal problems that affect everyone to be a major factor in the portrayal of the character. This will be emphasized later in Carroll and Rosenblum’s study.

5. Disabled characters are not “used” to contribute to or initiate the growth of a non-disabled character. In other words, the disabled character is not a two-dimensional character that remains stagnate throughout the book, but the disabled character also grows personally during the course of the story.

Heim’s list is an especially good starting point for judging folk and fairy tales that feature blind characters. Even though she developed her list with the mentally disabled in mind, all of her criteria can be applied to portrayals of blind people.

Criteria: Blind Characters


Like Heim, Carroll and Rosenblum develop a checklist of criteria that can be used to judge the quality of books that feature disabled characters, but unlike Heim they focus on portrayals of the blind. Heim’s article and criteria are referenced as a good way to judge such books. Carroll and Rosenblum start their article with the differentiation between those that are totally blind and the partially sighted. They note the lack of characters that are partially sighted in young adult literature, even though the partially sighted comprise 90% of the visually impaired population. In their study, Carroll and Rosenblum looked at 13 books that feature blind or partially sighted characters, with the
main focus on accuracy of portrayal. Like the Moore study, Carroll and Rosenblum are also concerned with the development of fully human and realized characters. They used Heim’s criteria as a starting point and further developed seven more of their own.

1. Does the book have characters that are born blind or did they lose their sight? Are these characters totally blind? In other words, can they see to some extent?

2. Does the book have characters with low vision? Would the book lead people to think that all visually impaired people are totally blind?

3. Do characters have contemporary teenage experiences?

4. Do characters face any special issues of being teenagers with vision impairments in the 21st century?

5. Is there a cure involved suggesting that the only way to be a happy, normal person is to be cured?

6. Do families and peers act realistically towards the character?

7. Do families and teacher expect the character to be successful and independent?

Although Carroll’s and Rosenblum’s criteria are useful in its specific application to the portrayal of the blind, some of these criteria would not apply to the assessment of fairy tales. For example, most fairy tales do not depict teenagers dealing with problems in the 21st century, or even particularly focus on teenagers that go to school with peers. That being said, some of the criteria are particularly useful for looking at interaction between characters in fairy tales.
Past Attitudes


French’s book is a survey of attitudes held about the blind over the past centuries, as well as the social aspects and evolution in the education for the blind. The first chapter of French’s book focuses on the treatment of the blind in ancient and medieval times, which will be particularly illuminating in this study in the portrayal of the blind in folk and fairy tales. Here is a brief overview of French’s history of the treatment of the blind in early history.

As French states, the earliest recorded accounts of the blind come from Ancient Egypt, where blind musicians are depicted and where there are whole manuscripts devoted to eye diseases and cures. In fact, it would seem that throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, cures for blindness took on a “magical” character and sometimes consisted of exorcisms. The general treatment of people with disabilities in ancient times was harsh, especially when extreme value was placed on a person’s perceived usefulness to society. The Spartans were famous for destroying “deformed” children, and Romans sold baskets in their market place in which people could float unwanted children down rivers. Although some societies, such as the Egyptians and the Jews, prohibited infanticide, unwanted children could still be sold into slavery. In Rome, blind girls were prostituted and blind boys were trained as beggars or rowers. In some cultures, old and infirm individuals were “disposed” of by methods such as burial while still alive and cannibalism.
As time went on, some societies developed conscientiousness towards the disabled, and specialized jobs were developed for these people. The blind musicians are an example of this in Egypt, and India and China also developed this practice. Such occupations included soothsayer, seer, prophet, or fortuneteller, with some blind people taking on the role of transmitter of oral traditions. Also, societies began to develop systems of charity for the poor, and blind Roman army veterans were taken care of by the state. In general though, French’s characterization of the treatment of the blind in ancient times shows that the blind were not well cared for. It seems that the blind were seen as useless members of society who were in some cases exploited, whether through slavery or prostitution. In Greece, blindness was even equated with death and punishment, and the only way anyone could cope was through special compensatory gifts, such as prophesy, song, or poetry.

Treatment of the blind became better through the Early Christian and Medieval periods. Hospitals and asylums were established for the needy, and there are countless accounts of saints having pity and caring for the blind. Hospitals developed along the lines of convents even gave inmates useful occupations, and the care for these individuals usually came through the Church. It should be noted that one major drawback related to the blind in this period is that they are associated with abject poverty and are seen mainly as beggars.

While the charity towards the blind shown by the early Church is laudable, there is still the implication that the blind are figures of pity that cannot take care of themselves. The attitude seems to be that they are not really useful and productive members of society: work must be found for them, and they must be segregated from
society for their own good. This may account for some of the origins of the stereotypes that are indeed found in fairy tales and remain with us today.

Common Stereotypes


Monbeck's book is especially useful because the survey of past attitudes held about blind people helps to illuminate their portrayals in fairy tales. While French is more concerned with how the blind were treated in the past, Monbeck looked at how people in the past thought about the blind. Of particular interest is the survey of commonly held stereotypes found in literature, and this forms the basis of the present study of folk and fairy tales. Monbeck's list also applies to some of the ideas brought up by later writers such as Heim, Carroll, and Rosenblum.

1. Pity and sympathy—this idea is that the blind are pathetic and, therefore, deserve only pity and sympathy. The way in which this stereotype is usually manifested is the portrayal of blind as people being the recipients of especially religious or devout people, which echoes Heim's criterion that disabled characters should not be used to further the growth of non-disabled characters. In other words, the blind are being used to demonstrate the goodness of another, non-disabled character. It also implies that pity and sympathy are all that the blind person can expect out of life.

2. Miserable—this stereotype implies that all blind people are utterly hopeless.

Also, it leads to equating blindness with death and can be found in abundance
throughout the ancient world. Most peoples seem to have regarded blindness as one of the worst misfortunes: this also leads to the belief that blind people would be better off dead.

3. Darkness—the stereotype that the blind live in a world of darkness does not have basis in fact. In fact, the blind do not “see” blackness or darkness, but some blind people describe what they “see” as a whitish gray. This erroneous belief also leads to the mistaken idea that the blind are miserable.

4. Helpless—this stereotype implies that the blind can do very little for themselves. This may also explain why blind people are thought to be miserable and why they would be deserving of so much pity.

5. A fool—to go along with the idea that the blind are helpless is the idea that they are easily tricked or not very smart. This leads to portrayals which show the blind as being manipulated or tricked to their own detriment. It also parallels one of the stereotypes that Heim mentioned, which is the idea that the blind are their own worst and only enemies.

6. Useless—this idea relates to the perceived social worth of the blind as well as to their perceived helplessness.

7. Beggars—apparently begging and blindness were closely linked in the minds of ancient peoples. In fact, most beggars to seem to also have been blind.

8. Usefulness—although all of the previous negative stereotypes existed in the past and can be easily found, alongside these stereotypes is the idea that the blind can also be productive or competent.
9. Compensation—this is the idea that the blind are compensated for their perceived loss in the sharpening of their other senses. This compensation can also take the form of special, magical abilities such as prophesy.

10. Sin and punishment—there are many stories where blindness is used as punishment for some sin, such as the case of Oedipus. Some authors have felt the need to pointedly defended blind characters, saying they did nothing to deserve their blindness.

11. Fear, avoidance, rejection—this is related to earlier stereotypes. Since the blind were perceived as being punished or touched by God, they were set apart socially from other peoples. Some occupations for the blind also served to set them apart socially.

12. Maladjusted—because of their blindness, people are not able to cope. They also may be inherently “wrong” or “different.” Some of these ideas manifest themselves in the beliefs that the blind are narcissistic or ungrateful.

13. Immoral and evil—this may reflect back on the idea that blind people are maladjusted or being punished for their sin. Ironically, in order for a blind person to pose enough of a threat to be considered “evil,” the blind person must also be capable in some way too.

14. Idealized—this stereotype leads to the portrayal of blind people as being unbelievable sweet or self-sacrificing and is related to the idea of compensation.

15. Mysterious—this stereotype is related to other stereotypes with the association between blind people and the supernatural or mysterious. Also, it is associated with the idea of blind people and their abilities to be soothsayers.
Study and Findings

Monbeck's list of common stereotypes has formed the basis of the criteria that were identified in the present study to analyze how the blind are portrayed in folk and fairy tales. For this study 12 books or stories were identified that were folktales, fairy tales, or adaptations of the former, and that featured blind or visually impaired characters. A list if criteria with which to study these stories were developed based on the previous research already discussed. The criteria used Monbeck’s list of common stereotypes as a basis. In addition, an examination was made of how the characters became blind and what type of blindness the characters had, whether and how the blindness was cured, as well as selected aspects of the story. Several methods were used to choose stories for this study, including examination of various fairy tale indexes and library catalogues.

Initial Criteria

Initially, an informal set of criteria was developed that the stories should have met before they would be subjected to an in-depth analysis. One of the initial criteria for choosing the stories was that the character that was blind should be the main character or at the least be a character that is very important to the plot of the story. The character also had to be visually handicapped for a significant portion of the story. These criteria immediately eliminated a number of stories from the study. For example, in the fairy tale Rapunzel, the prince is blinded by the witch at the end of the story as punishment for impregnating Rapunzel. The prince does not remain blind for a significant portion of the story, and in the end is cured of his blindness by Rapunzel’s tears. In one of the original versions of Cinderella, Cinderella’s stepsisters are punished with blindness by birds at
Cinderella’s wedding. In all of these tales, the onset of blindness does not happen until the end of the story, and then it is only used as punishment for an evil or immoral character. Based on the specified criteria of importance and duration, these stories would automatically receive very poor ratings. It was therefore decided to only look at those stories where blindness and people with blindness were a significant theme or part of the story are examined in this investigation.

**Origin of Stories and Type of Blindness**

Stories that were studied came mainly from Bracken Library and included tales from many different cultures. Because the initial criteria for the present study limited the number of stories that could be examined, there was no limitation based upon the cultural origin of the stories, although the culture from which the story originates or is adapted from is noted. As a result, five of the stories came from American Indian cultures, four came from Asian cultures, and three were of European origin. Unfortunately, a number of cultures are not represented in this study, including African and Latino cultures. This does not mean that these cultures are completely devoid of folktales featuring blind characters, but it merely means that none were identified from these cultures in the present study. Future studies might want to focus specifically on these cultures and find what stories that they have to offer. The specific nature and type of blindness portrayed in the stories was examined as well. Five of the stories portrayed characters that were adventitiously blind, four stories portrayed congenitally blind characters, and three stories did not indicate how the characters became blind. Almost all of these stories portrayed
characters that were fully blind, with only one story showing a character that is partially sighted.

**Final Criteria**

Twelve stories were selected and they were studied with regard to twenty-six criteria. The stories were judged on the presence of these common stereotypes: deserving pity/sympathy; helpless; miserable; lives in world of darkness; fool—easily manipulated; useless; beggar; compensated for blindness; punishment for past sin; feared, avoided, rejected; mysterious; idealized; maladjusted; and immoral/evil. They were also judged on the types of blindness, congenital or adventitious. In addition, this study notes whether the blindness was cured and how the cure came about; cured because of character’s actions or cured as a gift given because of innate qualities. Literary aspects of the story; whether the blind character was the main character, blindness is a major part of story, and whether the plot/actions are driven by the blindness. Other ideas that were examined include: whether the character participates in activities not related to blindness, whether there were any major themes not related to blindness, and the historical insight into the condition of the blind in the past that is provided by the story.

**Ratings System**

The stories were then rated on a scale from one to three. Stories that were given a rating of number one meant that these stories were free from negative stereotypes that could be damaging to children reading the stories. The stories rated number one also shed light on the historical treatment of the blind or some other aspect of a blind person’s
life, and the portrayal of the blind person is generally positive and of a high literary quality. The stories that received a rating of number one are recommended for children.

Some stories are also relatively free from negative stereotypes but do not significantly enhance a young child's understanding of blind people or had problematic elements to their portrayal of the blind, so they received a two. Other stories that received a two might indulge in one or two of the common stereotypes but not to an excessively damaging extent. These stories could probably be left in the school library and would not significantly harm young children who read these stories. It should be stressed, however, that good books that accurately portray the life of blind people should always be present in the library. The value in these stories lies mainly in the fact that a library collection which features a wide variety of different types of people is always important in a school media center.

Other stories were given a rating of three, because the portrayal of blind characters was generally negative. There were too many negative stereotypes and the overall message or view of the blind was harmful. They are generally not recommended for the improvement of young children's understanding of blind people. In this investigation, only three of the stories were given a rating of one, three of the stories received a rating of three, and half of the stories were given a rating of two.

Annotations of Selected Folk and Fairy Tales

Before the world was created, World Maker, his brother, and Coyote lived under the sea. While swimming to the surface, World Maker’s brother opens his eyes and is blinded. Now, with the help of coyote, World Maker begins to create the world.

Native American


A blind boy lives alone with his cruel and lazy grandmother. One day she asks him to go the lake and trap a bird for their supper. The boy successfully traps a loon, but the loon pleads for mercy. Feeling sorry for the bird, the boy releases her and brings nothing home for supper. The boy gets into trouble with his grandmother, but his mercy on the loon will reward him in the end.

Eskimo


A renowned fortuneteller from Seoul meets an errand boy with a box full of devils. The fortuneteller follows the errand boy and frees a family from the devils, who have been causing the sickness of one of the daughters. But a foolish servant girl lets the devils escape before the fortuneteller can fully vanquish them. Now the devils are determined to seek their revenge on the fortuneteller, and the fortuneteller fears for his life.
Korean


Coyote is invited into a cave by wildcat. There, the other animals ask him to take out his eyes, throw them up in the air, and make them fall back into his head. While coyote is doing this, the other animals steal his eyes. Will coyote ever get his eyes back?

Native American—Oregon


When a young prince named Dorian has a dream that displeases his father, he is sent away. The prince finds a blind dragon that tends a flock of sheep. The dragon has been blinded by dryads as punishment of warning travelers of the dryads. Now Dorian will help the dragon get his sight back and get revenge on the dryads.

Greek


Coyote meets a blind woman and pretends to be a doctor. He tells her he can cure her blindness and all she has to do is follow his cure. While the woman lies on her bed with her eyes covered, Coyote steals everything from her. What will happen when the woman wakes up?

Native American—Southwest

A blind fairy lives alone in a castle far away from her people. There, she is cared for by dwarves who have taken over her kingdom. The dwarves have tricked the fairy into believing that they are her faithful servants. None of the fairy’s subjects will go near the castle for fear of the dwarves, and the kingdom is suffering. How will the blind fairy ever get her kingdom back?

European


Finally, a childless couple has a child, but he is born blind. The child, Allugua, grows up and acts just like any other child. One night he finds a mouse and holds it in his hands in order to keep it warm. Eventually, Allugua’s people must move to their winter fishing lands, but the villagers decide that Allugua must be left behind because he is blind. Luckily for Allugua, he has a friend in the mouse that he saved.

Adapted from an Eskimo tale


A great artist slowly becomes blind. Everyday, she tells her daughter, Kiyo, all about the magical mouse kingdom of Kakure-sato. One day, as Kiyo is walking home from school, she finds some mice. Every day she brings them food, hoping they will show her their magical kingdom, Kakure-sato.

Adapted from a Japanese tale

Anlaf Haraldson and his kin are helped by the “hidden folk” to the greenest valley in the north. Out of jealousy, Gorm and Grim carve a curse into stone that results in their daughter being born blind. However, “the hidden folk” favor Elfwyn, and she is able to live a full life. When Gorm and Grim bring a mysterious stone into the village, the people start to fight with each other. Only Elfwyn is immune.

Will she be able to help her people see the error of their ways?

Viking


The emperor’s daughter, Hwei Ming, is born incurably blind. The Emperor searches all over his kingdom and offers a large reward for anyone who can cure his daughter. Finally, an old man hears of Hwei Ming and decides that he can help. The old man brings with him his amazing seeing stick with the hope of helping Hwei Ming to “see.”

Chinese


Seven blind mice find a mysterious object where they live. Every day each mouse looks at the object and each day that mouse says that the object is something different. But one mouse decides that he will explore the whole object and not just part of it.

Adapted from an Indian tale
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes &amp; portrayal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitiable</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpless</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miserable</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fool</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World of darkness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useless</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beggar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensated</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysterious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealized</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maladjusted</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immoral/Evil</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congenital</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventitious</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cure—direct actions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cure—inate goodness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main character</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blindness—major part</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot/actions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-blind activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical insight</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Amer. Indian</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Amer. Indian S.West</td>
<td>Eskimo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chart represents the criteria that were used to judge the stories along with the ratings and the culture attributed to each story. Above the names of the stories are ratings and an “x” mark indicates which criteria have been identified in each story.

The first item is the rating that was given to each story. Ratings—each story was rated on whether or not they would be recommended to a school library. Those stories that received a one are highly recommended and contain generally positive portrayals of blind people; those stories that were rated a two are recommended with caution and contain mediocre portrayals of blind characters; those stories rated with a three are not recommended and contain generally poor or troubling portrayals of blind characters.

The first 14 items represent the stereotypes that are common to folk and fairy tales. A longer explanation of each stereotype can be found in the discussion of Monbeck’s book. If the story featured a certain stereotype, than an “x” was placed in the corresponding box. Below is a list of each criterion that was used to judge the story along with a brief description and explanation of the criterion and where the criteria were found.

Pitiable—this includes stories that portray blind characters as pathetic or deserving of pity and sympathy. Usually, other sighted characters will show pity to the blind character.

Helpless—this idea goes along with pitiable. The character is depicted as being unable to take care of themselves. This is sometimes manifested into bumping into objects, like the blind fairy or Coyote from “Coyote the Eye-Juggler.”

Miserable—the character is portrayed as extremely and perpetually unhappy because he or she are blind.
Fool—the character is easily manipulated by other characters in the story and is usually shown as being foolish or ridiculous.

World of darkness—it is incorrectly stated that the character only “sees” darkness.

Useless—the blind character is portrayed as having very little value or worth.

Beggar—the blind character is shown as being very poor and begging for money. None of the stories in this study depicted a blind beggar.

Compensated—the blind character is compensated for blindness with some sort of special gift. The old man from “The Blind Man and the Devils” is compensated for his blindness with the ability to “see” devils and destroy them. Elfwyn is specially favored by the hidden people.

Punishment—the character is blind because of punishment for some sin. Elfwyn’s blindness comes about because of a curse placed on her family and the dragon is punished with blindness by the dryads.

Feared—the blind character is avoided or rejected by other characters because the character is feared because of blindness.

Mysterious—the blind character is seen as mysterious because of special supernatural powers.

Idealized—the blind character is incredibly good and perfect.

Maladjusted—the blind character is unable to cope with the life and may be seen as inherently “different” or “wrong.”

Immoral/evil—the blind character is immoral or evil.
The previous criteria come from the Monbeck’s list of common stereotypes found in folk and fairy tales in his book *The Meaning of Blindness: Attitudes Toward Blindness and Blind People*.

Congenital/adventitious blindness—the type of blindness that the character has relates directly to the nature of the disability as well as the nature of the portrayal. Some stories did not indicate how the blind character came to be blind.

Cure—whether or not the character was cured of their blindness as well as how that cure came about affected the character’s portrayal. For instance, a character who is able to cure themselves is a more empowering image than a character who waits around to be cured by another character. Those stories where the character was cured are also more likely to receive a lower rating.

These criteria come from Carroll and Rosenblum’s study on the portrayal of the blind in young adult literature (620-631).

Main character—whether the story was the blind character’s story and they performed an integral part, or whether the blind character was merely a supporting character in the story of another, sighted character.

This criterion comes from Heim’s list in her article (139-142).

Major part of story—whether the blindness seemed incidental to the story or the blindness was a major part of the character and the story.

Plot/actions—whether the plot or actions of the character were determined by the blindness of the character. For instance, the old man’s blindness in “The Blind Man and the Devils” did not significantly contribute to the plot of the story. On the other hand, the blind mice would not need to explore the elephant if they could see.
Non-blind activities—sometimes the stories depicted blind characters participating in activities despite their disability and not specifically related to their blindness. This means that the characters were depicted as contributing valuable work to their societies and participating in the culture of the society in which they were living.

These criteria come from Moore’s article “Portrayals of the Disabled in Books and Basals” (274-279).

Historical insight—since folk and fairy tales often have very old and ancient origins, they can sometimes provide insight into the past treatment or beliefs that ancient peoples held. Some of the stories could be used to show how the blind were treated in the past and therefore provide this historical insight which can be useful in a school setting.

Culture—where the stories came from or what culture the story was adapted from. These attributes did not come from any specific source and were identified by the researcher.

Analysis

Stories Rated as Three: Not Recommended

The three stories that were rated as a three are: And Me, Coyote!, The Blind Fairy, and an unnamed story from the book Doctor Coyote: A Native American Aesop’s Fables. Of the stories rated as three, The Blind Fairy will be the focus of detailed comment so that teachers and librarians will be aware of the types of stories look out for. This book falls into the category of fairy tale adaptation because it does not have an oral background, but still contains fantastical elements common to fairy tales. The illustrations are beautiful and it is a very recent publication, coming out in 1998.
Unfortunately, with the portrayal of the blind fairy, the author manages to use almost all of the negative stereotypes that are common to fairy tales.

A major plot point in *The Blind Fairy* is that the dwarves fool the fairy and have overrun her kingdom. While she thinks that her kingdom is perfectly happy and she is being cared for by her faithful servants, the dwarves have actually taken over her kingdom, and everyone is miserable. Despite the fact that in the past she was a supposedly an effective ruler, her kingdom is now in shambles. The story states clearly that the only way in which this has happened is because the fairy is blind. Therefore, the fairy is shown as being a fool, easily manipulated by the dwarves: she is unable to tell them apart from the servants she has supposedly known for years. Also, she is completely useless as a ruler, unable to take care of herself or walk around without bumping into anything, and at one point in the story, crawls on the ground on both hands and legs. The author does not use the common convention of making the fairy miserable throughout the story, but only because she is so insensible to what is happening around her. The only stereotypes that the author does not employ are those that would conflict with the ones that are being used in the story. For example, the fairy cannot be an idealized, sweet person while at the same time being morally corrupt.

Not only is there a proliferation of negative stereotypes in this story, but the comment made on blindness and blind people by the presence of these stereotypes is also unusually negative. The entire portrayal of the fairy while she is blind leads readers to think that the blind are easily fooled or extremely pitiable. There is no attempt made to show the fairy effectively dealing with her blindness, she is shown as completely impotent. The fairy’s cure reinforces this negative view of blindness. She regains her
sight only when an old lady reminds her that she has magical abilities, the implication being that she was blinded when she forgot about the power that she possesses. When she is blind, she is a useless human being, unable to rule a kingdom or care for herself, easily manipulated and undiscerning. On remembering her innate powers, she is suddenly able to see again. Blindness, therefore, comes to represent the fairy’s powerlessness and impotence. When she can see again, she is suddenly able to rid herself of the dwarves. Although the book does not portray this, the implication is that the newly sighted fairy will again become a great ruler and her people will once again be very happy.

Theme

The main theme in this book seems to be that there is innate power in everyone that can be accessed through knowing yourself. This is a very positive and empowering idea, and the use of blindness as a symbol of impotence is effectively used. The problem is that blindness is used as a symbol of powerlessness and impotence. The empowering message of the story is therefore lost on those readers who may be blind, for the fairy only gained her sense of self with her eyesight. What message would this then send to young children who read this book, who may be partially or fully blind, and who are not able to produce this type of cure? This leads young readers to think of the blind as being inherently powerless and useless.

The other two stories that were given a rating of three, And Me, Coyote! and Doctor Coyote: A Native American Aesop's Fables face some of the same problems that The Blind Fairy does. The presence of too many negative stereotypes means that these
stories will present a negative view of blindness that can be very damaging. For instance, in one story from Doctor Coyote: A Native American Aesop’s Fables, Coyote tricks a blind woman and steals all of her possessions. This plays into the myth that the blind are fools or are easily gullible. And Me, Coyote! is a Native American creation story that features a character called Blind Man. Blind Man is shown as incompetent and incapable of helping himself and must be led around by Coyote. The creatures that he creates are so grotesque that World Maker consigns them to the oceans, and it is implied that he brings sickness into the world. All of these books feature negative stereotypes of the blind and are not appropriate for the library. The comment made on the blind by the presence of these stereotypes is negative.

Stories Rated as Two: Mediocre Portrayals

There were six stories that were judged to be mediocre; “The Blind Boy and the Loon,” “The Blind Man and the Devils,” “Coyote the Eye-juggler,” Dorin and the Dragon, Elfwyn’s Saga, and Journey to the Bright Kingdom. What makes these stories better than And Me, Coyote!, The Blind Fairy, or the unnamed story from the book Doctor Coyote: A Native American Aesop’s Fables is that the blind characters participate in activities not specifically related to their blindness. This makes it less likely that these stories will employ the common stereotypes of uselessness and misery. The problem with these stories is that there is still the presence of other stereotypes. All of these stories fall into one of two categories: the featured blind characters are cured; the featured blind characters are not cured. Stories where the blind character is not cured, “The Blind
Man and the Devils” and Journey to the Bright Kingdom, tend to be better because they are more realistic, and the character eventually has to come to terms with blindness.

Stories Where Characters Are Cured

The most problematic of the mediocre stories are “The Blind Boy and the Loon” and “Coyote the Eye-juggler.” “Coyote the Eye-juggler” is one of the mediocre stories where the coyote does not engage in activities specifically related to his blindness. In fact, while he is totally blind, he is completely helpless and must seek the assistance of birds. In “The Blind Boy and the Loon,” his grandmother who treats him cruelly throughout the story makes the blind boy completely miserable. At one point she even tricks him into believing that he did not kill two bears when in fact he did. On the other hand, the boy makes carvings and is able to gather food and hunt. The fact that he was able to kill two bears, albeit with the help of his grandmother, shows that he is not viewed as completely useless in the story.

The characters in Elfwyn’s Saga and Dorin and the Dragon are also useful and productive members of their society, although Elfwyn’s characterization tends towards idealization. She is able to run and skip and play like all of the other children, even though she is blind. Her blindness even works as an asset, preserving her from the corrupting effects of the evil stone given to her people by Gorm and Grim. Unfortunately, at the end of the story, the characters that are evil are punished with blindness. Therefore, the good character ends the story with repaired sight and the evil characters without sight. The dragon from Dorin and the Dragon is also able to be useful, tending sheep and helping Dorin. Unfortunately, the reader does not come to
know the dragon well enough, and the main character, Dorin, tricks the dragon at one point.

Although these stories have positive aspects in their portrayals of the blind, negative stereotypes still exist. How the characters are cured of their blindness is especially interesting in its implication for the blind. The most proactive character of these four stories is Coyote from “Coyote the Eye-juggler.” Even though his first experiences as a totally blind character leaves him completely helpless, he is only able to see again with the aid of some birds. This is the only one of the stories where the depiction can be said to be that of a partially sighted character instead of a totally blind character, since the eyes that the birds give Coyote are not as good as his own. After this point in the story, Coyote is very proactive in finding his eyes and stealing them back from the people who took them. The fact that Coyote is the one who cures himself can be very empowering. Unfortunately, the initial negative portrayal of total blindness is still damaging in this story.

Elfwyn is the only other character whose actions directly lead to her cure, but unlike Coyote, her actions are not directed at a cure. Instead, she is rewarded by a magical people called “the hidden folk” for her destruction of the evil stone that was corrupting the people in her village. Therefore, her cure is due not to her direct action towards a cure but to some innate goodness that she possesses, which results in her direct action to destroy the stone. The other two blind characters, the blind boy and the Dragon, are cured because they show kindness to those that could cure them. The blind boy’s mercy on the loon led to his cure at the “hands” of the loon; in effect the loon rewards the boy for his innate kindness. The Dragon’s kindness towards Dorin enables Dorin to
defeat the dryads that had initially blinded the Dragon and give the Dragon his eyes back. In fact, the reason the dryads blind the Dragon in the first place is because he protects travelers from the dryads. The dryads punish him for helping people, again a sign of his innate goodness.

Unlike Coyote, these characters are cured as a reward for their goodness, which can send a damaging message to children. It implies that if a person is good enough, then they too may be cured of their blindness. Since this is impossible, it raises suspicions of those people who are blind and are not cured. There is an impossible ideal that these people can never reach, which is why these stories are recommended with caution. There are positive aspects in the portrayal of blind people, but the messages implied in the characters’ cures are troubling.

Characters Are Not Cured

Two of the mediocre stories did not feature miraculous cures for their blind characters. This aspect of the stories means that the stories tend to be more positive and feature characters coping with their blindness. Unfortunately, negative stereotypes are still present and lead to problematic portrayals. The blind character from Journey to the Bright Kingdom, who is the mother of the main character Kiyo, does not begin the story as a blind woman. Instead her blindness comes on her slowly, and throughout the rest of story she must try and cope with her blindness. Unfortunately, she is perpetually depressed for much of the story, and in fact does not cope well with her condition. This plays into the stereotypes that the blind are perpetually miserable. In fact, the near suicide of Kiyo’s mother leads to the climax of the story, which is journeying to the
magical kingdom of the mice. By the end of the story, Kiyo’s mother accepts her fate and is happy again. Therefore, she starts the story well-adjusted and happy, becomes maladjusted because of her blindness, and ends the story well-adjusted. The implication is, of course, that she was only able to accept her fate because she had seen the magical mouse kingdom. This being said, there are other positive aspects of this story such as the relationship between mother and daughter, the competence of Kiyo’s mother throughout, and the fact that at the end Kiyo’s mother is happy and able to perform tasks and go places on her own. Even the depression that Kiyo’s mother experiences may be common among those people who become blind late in life.

Unlike Kiyo’s mother, the blind man in “The Blind Man and the Devils” is never shown as being depressed or maladjusted. In fact, he is especially competent, posing a threat to devils and attracting the attention of the emperor. This character is portrayed as a fortune teller, which was a common occupation for the blind in Korea. In this respect, the story can be said to provide historical insight into the conditions of the blind in other cultures. Unfortunately, this is also a common stereotype in stories that feature the blind. The fortuneteller has special compensatory abilities which enable him to see devils and destroy them, and he is generally mysterious as the source of his powers is unknown.

Stories Rated as One: Recommended Stories

Of the stories that were studied, there are only three that are fully recommended for the classroom or school library. What sets these stories apart from the others previously discussed is that they are almost wholly free of any negative stereotypes. As a result, the characterizations of blind people are stronger, and the characters emerge as
three dimensional and more believable. In some cases, the stories give insight into the historical treatment of the blind, and all are of a high literary quality. The three stories that are fully recommended for use in a classroom or school library are; Seal Oil Lamp, *The Seeing Sick*, and Seven Blind Mice.

*The Seeing Stick* is wholly devoid of any of the negative stereotypes that are found in the other stories, with the exception of the mysterious old man. That said, by the end of the story the mysterious old man is no longer mysterious and his motivations become clear. In this story, the emperor has a blind daughter named Hwei Ming, whom he is determined to cure. An old man comes to the palace with a stick which he claims will enable Hwei Ming to see. He carves pictures in the stick, describing his journey, the palace guards, and the palace. The pictures carved into the stick enable Hwei Ming to “see” and help her discover that by using her fingers and hands she can “see” other objects as well.

What is notable about this story is that it is a blind person, the mysterious old man, who helps a sighted person. The old man is the most proactive character in the story, and his introduction into the story initiates the growth of other characters. He is shown as being a competent and useful member of society, as is Hwei Ming. His actions not only help Hwei Ming to cope better with her blindness, but also help the emperor to come to terms with his daughter’s condition. The actions of the old man also inspire Hwei Ming to encourage other blind people in the kingdom to use their fingers to “see” as well. In this way, the condition of the blind in the story is improved through Hwei Ming and the old man. This was not accomplished through the help of a sighted person,
but through another blind person. Most importantly, this story shows the blind helping themselves and being empowered despite their disabilities.

*Seven Blind Mice* is an excellent example of how a story that might contain some very negative stereotypes can be retold to present a more positive picture. The original tale that this story is based on is from India and is called “The Blind Men and the Elephant.” In this story, blind men are confronted with an elephant. Each man touches different parts of the elephant and each man thinks that the elephant is a different object, such as a spear or a tree trunk. They argue with each other without resolving the issue, and the blind men usually function as representatives of fools.

In the retelling of the story, seven blind mice find an elephant near their pond and again argue over what exactly the elephant is. The twist to this story is that one of the mice decides to explore all parts of the elephant and figures out what the elephant really is. Unlike the original story, where the blind men are offered up as amusement or are meant to represent fools, these mice may initially be confused but eventually figure out what the elephant is. This is empowering for readers because it encourages them to look at all aspects of an issue and to explore and use their knowledge to figure out problems. Even the moral of the story, to see the whole and not in parts, can be very positive and empowering for children. Unlike *The Blind Fairy*, where the moral is presented at the expense of the portrayal of blindness, this story presents an empowering and positive message without making fun of or mocking the blind. The mice in the story do not need their eyesight restored and are not shown as being somehow less useful or valuable because they are blind. The fact that the mice solve the mystery on their own shows blind characters effectively coping with and adapting to their disability.
Not only is the portrayal very good, but the literary quality and illustrations are superb. With visually appealing illustrations and bright colors this book can help young children learn the names of various shapes as well as colors. In other words, this book has other educational purposes besides the obvious story telling, making this a book very useful in designing and implementing activities with students.

The last story to be examined is the Seal Oil Lamp. This story is especially useful in its insight into how the blind were treated in the Eskimo culture. In this story, Allugua is blind from birth, but he is still able to fully participate in the play activities of the other children. In fact, he is especially good at telling stories to other children. Unfortunately, at one point in the story the other people from Allugua’s village pressure his parents into leaving him when they go to their winter fishing village. This action means certain death for Allugua and is a result of Allugua’s perceived uselessness by the other people in the village. The archetype of parents abandoning their children is an old one, with Hansel and Gretel being a famous example, and reflects the harsh reality of the cultures that created these stories. The treatment of Allugua by the villagers reflects how blind people were perceived in the Eskimo culture and probably also reflects actual practices that were done in this culture. This means that this story can be used to open readers’ eyes to past treatment of the blind. It should be noted too that while the villagers may view Allugua as helpless and useless to the community, he is still able to participate in other activities.

The major themes in this story are also especially interesting. One of the ways in which the virtue of Allugua’s parents is indicated is in their deep respect and reverence for nature. In fact, the reason that Allugua is able to survive the winter is because he had previously rescued a small mouse from freezing. In other words, it was Allugua’s deep
respect for nature, which allowed him to be rescued by the mice people. The mice further aid Allugua by telling him more stories and by teaching him a prayer that he can use to hunt animals. Because Allugua showed kindness and respect for the mice, the mice gave him the tools that would make him a useful member of his community. Reverence of nature, is therefore, a major and positive part of this story.

Out of all the stories in this study, only three were fully recommended for use in the classroom and school media center. What sets these stories apart is the positive portrayal of blind people, free of the negative stereotypes that can be so damaging. These stories also had high literary or educational quality and explored universal themes that were not only applicable to the blind, but to others as well. What makes these stories so good is that readers can identify with the characters and at the same time learn something about someone who may be different from themselves.

Uses of These Folk and Fairy Tales

There are many ways in which these tales can be used in the classroom and library. School media specialists can use these tales the same way that they might use other fairy tales that do not feature blind characters. What is important is that the folk and fairy tales used in the classroom are representative of all types of people and cultures, including blind people (Blaska and Lynch 36-37). The uses for these stories vary widely and require a study of their own. There is a wide variety of literature and books that can be utilized by teachers and librarians with detailed activities and programs for use in the classroom. Below are some general summaries of the way in which the stories from this study can be used in the classroom or school media center. Although these activities are
not specific to folk and fairy tales that feature blind characters, these activities are still applicable to the stories. All of the ideas listed below can be found in the following two books From the Land of Enchantment: Creative Teaching with Fairytales by Jerry D. Flack and Fairy Tales, Fables, Legends, and Myths: Using Folk Literature in Your Classroom Bette Bosma.

Reading Aloud

Since folk and fairy tales often have been passed down through the generations, they are especially suited to be read aloud to students. Also, reading aloud develops students' interest in the stories themselves and increases the likelihood that the students will read folk and fairy tales on their own. Vocabulary can be expanded and language developed by reading stories aloud to students. In addition, folk and fairy tales can be used to teach various reading and thinking strategies.

There are several strategies related to reading aloud, that can be used with students. Since fairy tales usually follow predictable patterns, they are useful in helping students learn to make predictions while reading. This skill will be invaluable to them later on in life and in their later school careers, where they will have to make predictions using more difficult texts. Reading aloud can also generate discussions between the students concerning the meaning of language or story. This helps students learn to value their own opinions and share their ideas with peers (Bosma 26-29). Also, reading aloud is very enjoyable for both students and teachers, and having students read stories aloud by themselves helps them to develop language and oral reading skills (Flack 143).
Dramatizations and plays is another facet of reading aloud or presenting stories to an audience. By presenting stories to their classmates, students must necessarily have a thorough understanding of the story and what it means. Dramatization helps students appreciate the story more, and deepens their understanding of major themes or ideas (Bosma 84-86). Also, dramatizations are good ways for students to express their creativity with the folk or fairy tales.

One of the stories that can be read aloud to students is Ed Young’s *Seven Blind Mice*. The colorful illustrations in the book lend themselves to being shared with a large or small group. The repetitive nature of the story means that students can learn to make predictions about what will happen next in the story. For instance, the teacher or librarian might ask students what the next mouse would think the elephant is. Students can also act out the story for their fellow classmates very easily, since the story is fairly simple and very straightforward.

**Writing Skills**

Folk and fairy tales can be used to help improve or develop students’ writing skills. Through the tales, students learn the form, parts, and structure of storytelling, which can then be used in the students’ own writing. Students can write down their reactions or thoughts regarding events in the folk or fairy tale, which not only helps students develop their communication skills in their writing, but helps them to see the value of their own opinions (Bosma 63-73). Also, folk and fairy tales can be a catalyst or invitation for students to write their own stories (Flack 49). Students can use the folk or
fairy tales as a starting point, creating their own stories about another character’s perspective or exploring an issue raised in the stories.

The Seeing Stick can be an ideal story to be used to assist students in developing their writing skills. Since the origins of the old man are unknown, students could be prompted to write a story narrating his adventures. Students could also react to the surprise at the end, and discuss what they would carve into their own “seeing stick.” There are a wealth of issues from this story that students can explore in their writing, which helps them to develop their writing skills. The Seeing Stick is also useful in helping students identify elements or parts of a story, such as, a plot, climax, or setting. This can then be used to help students write their own fairy tales using the elements that they learned from the book.

Critical Thinking

Although critical thinking has already been touched upon with the previous discussions, critical thinking is also a skill that can be taught using the folk and fairy tales and is a skill which can then be transferred to other areas of the students’ lives. For example, students can be taught to classify and identify the characteristics of different folk or fairy tales. They can be taught to look for and recognize common themes, motifs, or archetypes in the tales, and what this means to the overall meaning of the story. They can then compare these archetypes to similar stories, and discuss the similarities and differences among stories of a common type (Bosma 44-49). Teaching units applying Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives to the teaching of these tales can be used as well (Flack 31).
Bloom's taxonomy can be applied to *The Seal Oil Lamp* in order to teach students critical thinking skills. For example, the teacher might explore the moral dilemma faced by Allugua's parents—whether or not they should leave him to die because he is blind—and discuss with students what they think Allugua's parents should do in the situation. Also, students can explore why Allugua's parents would leave him to die in the first place and reflect on what this story says about how the blind were viewed and treated in Allugua's culture. Students can compare and contrast this story with another story that is very similar, *Hansel and Gretel*. Students can study common themes and motifs in the two stories and what these may mean in the story. Not only will some of these ideas develop critical thinking skills, but also students will be exposed to depictions of important issues relating to the blind.

**Conclusion**

It is of supreme importance that the materials chosen for students and young children in the school media center and library meet some form of standards or criteria of quality. Luckily there is a wide variety of criteria and standards which can aid school media specialists and teachers in the selection of appropriate materials; it is only a matter of locating the criteria. Generally, what is appropriate will consist of accurate information and, in the case of fiction, a portrayal that attempts to show individuals as complicated and complete human beings. Unfortunately, people with disabilities, and especially the blind, have traditionally been victims of inaccurate and poor depictions in materials meant for young children. Folk and fairy tales, with their tendencies toward
extreme dichotomies, have traditionally been especially troubling and problematic with regard to the portrayal of the blind.

This study has found that while there are several folk and fairy tales which perpetuate negative images of the blind, there are also some very good stories that feature positive portrayals of the blind and can safely be used in the classroom or school media center. When teachers use fairy tales to teach skills to their students, these stories can be used along with the more commonly known tales. What is important is that teachers use folk and fairy tales that depict a wide variety of different types of people and cultures, with the aim of helping young people to become more accepting and empathetic to persons who are different from themselves.
References


