

Red Riding Hood

In the stories you have just read you will have noticed that the girl is called by different names. But in the descriptions of the different versions that follow she is always referred to as Red Riding Hood and the animal is always referred to as the wolf.

Read through the descriptions and see if you can match them to the versions of *Red Riding Hood* that you have just read.

You should be able to explain your decisions by giving examples from the different versions.

- a. This *Red Riding Hood* was written by Perrault in 1697. It was written for upper class readers in France and it shows how adults of that class thought about children as quite different from themselves. This was unlike the view held by parents of the peasant class at that time, where children were seen as young adults whose work was very important to help the family survive.

The little girl in Perrault's version doesn't seem capable of being much help to anyone — not even herself. She is punished not because of her helplessness however, but because she behaves very badly by talking to a stranger.

The language of the story is more formal and the improper or rude bits have been left out, because polite, young upper class girls should not read or hear about such vulgar things.

- b. This version was written by women in Liverpool in 1972. They wanted to show that Little Red Riding Hood could be brave and capable, but they also show that this is not always easy. The wolf is presented as very frightening and a very real danger to Red Riding Hood and her grandmother.

In the end the two women defeat the wolf together but first, Red Riding Hood has to overcome her own fears and to learn that she can be independent and rely on her own strength and abilities.

- c. This version of *Red Riding Hood* is probably closest to the way the story would have been told before it was written down. It would have been told by storytellers to ordinary people, young and old — villagers, farm workers and peasants — for entertainment. So although a warning is given in it to children to beware of strangers, the main aim is not to teach them right from wrong or how 'nice' children should behave. In fact there are some quite gruesome details in the story and at times the language is not very polite.

Red Riding Hood herself is independent, cheerful and self-reliant, which is probably how the children listening to the story were expected to be. From an early age they would have been working quite hard to help support their families.

- d. This version was written in the nineteenth century by the Brothers Grimm. The story is made sweeter and nicer for children to read. The moral lesson is clear, but so that children reading it won't be upset by a violent ending, the heroine is given another chance to think about how nice young girls should behave.

Although the story still has the purpose of warning children about strangers, it also provides a model of good behaviour and manners for young ladies. Red Riding Hood in this version is pretty, sweet, lovable, obedient, nervous and far from quick-witted.

- e. This version was written in 1939 by James Thurber. In it he sets out to make fun of the earlier very 'proper' stories of *Red Riding Hood*. He does this by making the reader laugh at the most unlikely part of the story: the wolf disguising himself as the grandmother and completely fooling Red Riding Hood. In Thurber's story she is not tricked for a minute, and takes very direct action against the wolf.

Red Riding Hood

FOR WRITING

The five versions of *Red Riding Hood* that you have just read are in order from the earliest to the most modern.

Which version did you like best and why?

Look at the notes you made on each of the stories and write about the way *Red Riding Hood* has changed over the years, and why you think the changes have occurred.

The Collectors

Writers did change stories to suit the ideas around at their time, but this is not the only reason that the early written-down versions of fairy stories and folk tales so often seem to be about girls who are weak and silly, and about boys who are brave and adventurous.

This is what one writer has to say:

In the fairy tales we know best today, the heroes seem to have all the interesting adventures. They get to kill dragons and outwit giants and rescue princesses and find the magic treasure. As for the heroines, things just happen to them: they are persecuted by wicked stepmothers, eaten by wolves, or fall asleep for a hundred years. All most of them ever seem to do is wait patiently for the right prince to come, or for someone else to rescue them from dangers and enchantments. This has made some people say that modern children ought not to read fairy tales, because they will get the idea that girls are supposed to be beautiful and good and helpless and dull.

But there are thousands of folktales in the world that are not at all like this. They have heroines who can fight and hunt as well as any man, heroines who defeat giants, answer riddles, outwit the Devil, and rescue their friends and relatives from all sorts

of dangers and evil spells. They are not only beautiful and good, but also strong, brave, clever, and resourceful.

Why don't we know these stories as well as the others? It is because the first collections of fairy tales for children were put together over a hundred years ago, when women and girls were supposed to be weak and helpless; and the editors who picked the stories out of the many that were available chose ones like *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Little Red Riding-Hood*. These tales were printed over and over again, while the rest were almost forgotten.

Most of the editors who chose these stories were men. The original tellers of folktales, on the other hand, were mainly women. And they were not frail Victorian ladies, but working women: farmers' wives, shopkeepers, craftswomen, household servants, children's nurses, and midwives. They lived active, interesting lives, and the stories they told show it.

Alison Lurie

Red Riding Hood

1

There was a woman who had made some bread. She said to her daughter, "Go carry this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to your granny."

So the little girl departed. At the crossway she met *bzou*, the werewolf, who said to her,

"Where are you going?"

"I'm taking this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my granny."

"What path are you taking?", said the werewolf, "the path of needles or the path of pins?"

"The path of needles," the little girl said.

"All right, then I'll take the path of pins".

The little girl entertained herself by gathering needles. Meanwhile the werewolf arrived at the grandmother's house, killed her, put some of her meat in the cupboard and a bottle of blood on the shelf. The little girl arrived and knocked at the door.

"Push the door," said the werewolf, "it's barred by a piece of wet straw."

"Good day, granny, I've brought you a hot loaf and a bottle of milk."

"Put it in the cupboard, my child. Take some of the meat which is inside and the bottle of wine on the shelf."

"Undress yourself, my child," the werewolf said, "and come lie

down beside me."

"Where should I put my apron?"

"Throw it into the fire, my child, you won't be needing it anymore."

When she laid herself down in the bed, the little girl said,

"Oh, Granny, how hairy you are!"

"The better to keep myself warm, my child!"

"Oh, Granny, what big nails you have!"

"The better to scratch myself with, my child!"

"Oh, Granny, what big shoulders you have!"

"The better to carry the firewood, my child!"

"Oh, Granny, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with, my child!"

"Oh, Granny, what big nostrils you have!"

"The better to snuff my tobacco with, my child!"

"Oh, Granny, what a big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with, my child!"

"Oh, Granny, I've got to go badly. Let me go outside."

"Do it in the bed, my child!"

"Oh, no, I want to go outside."

"All right, but make it quick."

The werewolf attached a woollen rope to her foot and let her go outside.

When the little girl was outside, she tied the end of the rope to a plum tree in the courtyard. The werewolf became impatient and said, "Are you making a load out there? Are you making a load?"

When he realized that nobody was answering him, he jumped out of bed and saw that the little girl had escaped. He followed her but arrived at her house just at the moment she entered.

Red Riding Hood

2

Once upon a time there was a little village girl, the prettiest that had ever been seen. Her mother doted on her, and her grandmother even more. This good woman made her a little red hood which suited her so well that she was called Little Red Riding Hood wherever she went.

One day, after her mother had baked some biscuits, she said to Little Red Riding Hood, "Go see how your grandmother is feeling, for I have heard that she is sick. Take her some biscuits and this small pot of butter." Little Red Riding Hood departed at once to visit her grandmother, who lived in another village. In passing through a wood she met old neighbour wolf, who had a great desire to eat her. But he did not dare because of some woodcutters who were in the forest. He asked her where she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it is dangerous to stop and listen to a wolf, said to him, "I am going to see my grandmother, and I am bringing some biscuits with a small pot of butter which my mother has sent her."

"Does she live far from here?" asked the wolf.

"Oh, yes!" said Little Red Riding Hood. "You must pass the mill which you can see right over there, and hers is the first house in the village."

"Well, then," said the wolf. "I want to go and see her, too. I'll take this path here, and you take that path there, and we'll see who'll get there first."

The wolf began to run as fast as he could on the path which was

shorter, and the little girl took the longer path, and she enjoyed herself by gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and making bouquets of small flowers which she found. It did not take the wolf long to arrive at the grandmother's house. He knocked: Toc, toc.

"Who's there?"

"It's your granddaughter, Little Red Riding Hood," said the wolf, disguising his voice, "I've brought you some biscuits and a little pot of butter which my mother has sent you."

The good grandmother, who was in her bed because she was not feeling well, cried out to him, "Pull the bobbin, and the latch will fall."

The wolf pulled the bobbin, and the door opened. He threw himself upon the good woman and devoured her quicker than a wink, for it had been more than three days since he had last eaten. After that he closed the door and lay down in the grandmother's bed to wait for Little Red Riding Hood, who after a while came knocking at the door. Toc, toc.

"Who's there?"

When she heard the gruff voice of the wolf, Little Red Riding Hood was scared at first, but, believing that her grandmother had a cold, she responded, "It's your granddaughter, Little Red Riding Hood. I've brought you some biscuits and a little pot of butter which my mother has sent you."

The wolf softened his voice and cried out to her, "Pull the bobbin, and the latch will fall."

Little Red Riding Hood pulled the bobbin, and the door opened.

Upon seeing her enter, the wolf hid himself under the bedcovers and said to her, "Put the biscuits and the pot of butter on the bin and come lie down beside me."

Little Red Riding Hood undressed and went to get into bed, where she was quite astonished to see the way her grandmother was dressed in her nightgown. She said to her: "What big arms you have, grandmother!"

"The better to hug you with, my child."

"What big legs you have, grandmother!"

"The better to run with, my child."

"What big ears you have, grandmother!"

"The better to hear you with, my child."

"What big eyes you have, grandmother!"

"The better to see you with, my child."

"What big teeth you have, grandmother!"

"The better to eat you."

And upon saying these words, the wicked wolf threw himself upon Little Red Riding Hood and ate her up.

Red Riding Hood

3

Once upon a time there was a sweet little maiden. Whoever laid eyes upon her could not help but love her. But it was her grandmother who loved her most. She could never give the child enough. One time she made a present, a small, red velvet cap, and, since it was so becoming, she always wanted to wear only this. So she was simply called Little Red Cap.

One day her mother said to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and a bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother. She is sick and weak. This will strengthen her. Be nice and good, and give her my regards. Don't tarry on your way, and don't stray from the path, otherwise you'll fall and break the glass. Then your sick grandmother will get nothing."

Little Red Cap promised her mother to be very obedient. Well, the grandmother lived out in the woods, half an hour from the village. And, as soon as Little Red Cap entered the woods, she encountered the wolf. However, Little Red Cap did not know what a wicked sort of an animal he was and was not afraid of him.

"Good day, Little Red Cap."

"Thank you kindly, wolf."

"Where are you going so early, Little Red Cap?"

"To Grandmother's."

"What are you carrying under your apron?"

"My grandmother is sick and weak, so I'm bringing her cake and

wine. We baked yesterday, and this will strengthen her."

"Where does your grandmother live, Little Red Cap?"

"Another quarter of an hour from here in the woods. Her house is under the three big oak trees. You can tell it by the hazel bushes," said Little Red Cap.

The wolf thought to himself, this is a good juicy morsel for me. How are you going to manage to get her?"

"Listen, Little Red Cap," he said, "have you seen the pretty flowers which are in the woods? Why don't you look around you? I believe that you haven't even noticed how lovely the birds are singing. You march along as if you were going straight to school in the village, and it is so delightful out here in the woods."

Little Red Cap looked around and saw how the sun had broken through the trees and everything around her was filled with beautiful flowers. So she thought to herself: Well, if I were to bring grandmother a bunch of flowers, she would like that. It's still early, and I'll arrive on time. So she plunged into the woods and looked for flowers. And each time she plucked one, she believed she saw another one even prettier and ran after it further and further into the woods. But the wolf went straight to the grandmother's house and knocked at the door.

"Who's there outside?"

"Little Red Cap. I'm bringing your cake and wine. Open up."

"Just lift the latch," the grandmother called. "I'm too weak and can't get up."

The wolf lifted the latch, and the door sprung open. Then he went straight inside to the grandmother's bed and swallowed her. Next he took her clothes, put them on with her nightcap, lay down in her bed, and drew the curtains.

Little Red Cap had been running around after flowers, and, only when she had as many as she could carry, did she continue on her way to her grandmother. Upon arriving there she found the door open. This puzzled her, and, as she entered the room, it seemed so strange inside that she thought, Oh, oh, my God, how frightened I feel today, and usually I like to be at grandmother's. Whereupon she went to the bed and drew back the curtains. Her grandmother lay there with her cap pulled down over her face so that it gave her a strange appearance.

"Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with."

"Oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"The better to see you with."

"Oh, grandmother, what big hands you have!"

"The better to grab you with."

"Oh, grandmother, what a terrible big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with."

With that the wolf jumped out of bed, leapt on Little Red Cap and swallowed her. After the wolf had digested the juicy morsel, he lay down in bed again, fell asleep, and began to snore very loudly. The hunter happened to be passing by and wondered to himself about the old lady's snoring. You had better take a look. Then he went inside, and, when he came to the bed, he found the wolf whom he had been hunting for a long time. He had certainly eaten the grandmother. Perhaps she can still be saved. I won't shoot, thought the hunter. Then he took a shearing knife and slit the wolf's belly open, and, after he had made a couple of cuts, he saw the glowing red cap, and, after he made a few more cuts, the girl jumped out and cried, "Oh, how frightened I was! It was so dark in the wolf's body." And then the grandmother came out alive. So now Little Red Cap fetched large heavy stones with which they filled the wolf's body, and, when he awoke, he wanted to jump up, but the stones were so heavy that he fell down dead.

So all three were pleased. The hunter skinned the fur from the wolf. The grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine that Little Red Cap had brought, and Little Red Cap thought to herself: Never again in your life will you stray by yourself in the woods when your mother has forbidden it.

Red Riding Hood

4

One afternoon a big wolf waited in a dark forest for a little girl to come along carrying a basket of food to her grandmother. Finally a little girl did come along and she was carrying a basket of food. "Are you carrying that basket to your grandmother?" asked the wolf. The little girl says yes, she was. So the wolf asked her where her grandmother lived and the little girl told him and he disappeared into the wood.

When the little girl opened the door of her grandmother's house she saw that there was somebody in bed with a nightcap on. She had approached no nearer than twenty-five feet from the bed when she saw that it was not her grandmother but the wolf, for even in a nightcap a wolf does not look any more like your grandmother than the Metro-Goldwyn lion looks like Calvin Coolidge. So the little girl took an automatic out of her basket and shot the wolf dead.

Moral: It is not so easy to fool little girls nowadays as it used to be.

Red Riding Hood

5

In the far north, beside a river which froze hard as rock in the dark days of winter, there stood a great timber mill and a town built out of wood. The wood came from the trees of the deep forest which surrounded the town and stretched into the far distance.

In this town lived a quiet and shy little girl, called Red Riding Hood. Her real name was Nadia but everyone called her Red Riding Hood because when the cold came she always wore a thick red cloak with a hood. It had been given to her by her great-grandmother who had worn it herself, long ago, when she was a child.

Her great-grandmother still lived in a cottage in the forest and Red Riding Hood loved to visit her more than anything in the world; but she would never go alone because she was frightened to walk through the forest.

Red Riding Hood was frightened of many things. She was frightened of going up to bed by herself, she was frightened of dogs and of thunder and of people she did not know. But she was most frightened of the forest. The forest seemed strange to her for she had been born far away in a city in the south, where her mother and father had gone to be trained for their work in the great timber mill.

"Why do you never play in the forest like we did when we were children?" they asked her.

"It is dark under the trees," said Red Riding Hood, "and in

winter the wolves howl in the distance."

"There have been no wolves in the forest since anyone can remember," said her parents, laughing.

But her great-grandmother took the child to one side and said to her quietly, "Not everyone can hear that howling; they think it is only the wind in the trees. One winter day when I was a girl, out alone chopping wood for the stove, I was attacked by one of the grey wolves which speak."

"Oh, great-grandmother!" whispered Red Riding Hood. "What did you do?"

"I fought the wolf with my hatchet and killed it," replied the old woman, "for I was strong and agile when I was young."

But now the great-grandmother was very old and frail, and almost every day when school and work were over, Red Riding Hood went with her mother and father, or with some of the other children, to cook supper for her and to sit and talk.

Winter was coming. Snow fell. It was dark before the children came out of school and the wind grew icy cold.

In the school the children were hard at work finishing the fur jackets which they had been making to wear during the bitter weather. They were very proud of these jackets, for all of them had cut out their own with great sharp knives and were sewing pieces together with special strong needles and thread. Only Red Riding Hood was not making a jacket. She wanted to wear her red cloak and hood and besides she was frightened that she might cut herself on one of the sharp knives.

Her mother and father worried that she would be cold without a jacket, for the red cloak was growing worn.

"We can see to that," said the great-grandmother, as they all sat around her stove one evening. "Bring the special sewing things with you after school tomorrow and I will help you make a sheepskin lining for your cloak."

"What a good idea," said Red Riding Hood's parents and Red Riding Hood thought happily about tomorrow as she walked home between them through the forest.

"Why don't you take some presents to great-grandmother?" said the father the next morning. "Here are some brown eggs and some chocolate and a pot of the blackberry jam you helped us make." "We shall be busy this evening," said her mother, "but you can easily walk to great-grandmother's on your

own. The path through the forest is cleared of snow every day and there will be a full moon tonight."

Red Riding Hood said nothing. She took a basket and carefully put into it the eggs, the chocolate and the jam. She did not feel happy any more. The other children were going to stay late at school to finish their jackets. She would have to walk through the forest to her great-grandmother's cottage all alone.

Red Riding Hood was frightened. All day at school she could think about nothing but whether she dared to walk through the forest alone. At dinnertime she did not want to eat because she felt sick. She borrowed a special needle and thread and a sharp knife and put them in the basket with the presents, but when school was over she did not set out for her great-grandmother's, although she was longing to see her. She turned her back on the forest and started to walk into the town towards home.

It was dark and quiet outside the school. The other children were still inside sewing their jackets. In the distance Red Riding Hood could hear the noise of sawing from the timber mill. Then she heard another sound, from quite close, somewhere near the edge of the forest. It was the howling of a wolf.

Red Riding Hood stood listening. She knew it was one of the grey wolves. But who would believe her? They would laugh and say she had imagined it. She thought of her great-grandmother, all alone.

What if a wolf had come again for her now that she was no longer young and agile? Red Riding Hood turned around and ran into the forest and along the path to the old woman's cottage.

She ran and ran until her side hurt and her heart thumped so fast she had to stop to get some breath.

The moon shone through the bare branches of the trees onto the snow and the frozen earth. It was very still. Then a gust of wind blew snow into the air and through the wind Red Riding Hood thought she heard a cold voice calling, "Run home, little girl, run home. This is the night of the wolf."

Then she heard a low growl, and staring through the flurry of snow she saw a streak of grey moving toward great-grandmother's cottage.

Her mouth went dry and her legs felt as if she could not move them, but she made them walk on until at last she reached the cottage.

"Great-grandmother, great-grandmother!" she cried, rattling the door latch. "I'm here!"

"Lift up the latch and walk in," called a thin and quavering voice.

"Great-grandmother, are you ill?" cried little Red Riding Hood, and she opened the door and ran into the bedroom.

In the high, wooden bed there was a shape huddled down under the bedclothes. It was hard to see with only the moonlight coming through the window. Red Riding Hood peered at the shape and moved closer to the bed.

"What big eyes you have, great-grandmother," she said.

"All the better to see with, my dear," said the thin, quavering voice.

"And what big ears you have, great-grandmother."

"All the better to hear you with, my dear," said the voice.

"And what a strange nose you have, great-grandmother," said Red Riding Hood, moving a little closer.

"All the better to smell you with, my dear," said the voice, and Red Riding Hood could see a mouth full of yellow pointed teeth.

"And what big teeth you have!" she cried, backing away.

"All the better to eat you with!" snarled the shape, leaping from the bed. It was a grey wolf.

Red Riding Hood screamed and as she screamed she heard her great-grandmother calling. "Quick, child, quick! Let me in!"

Red Riding Hood flung open the door into the kitchen and there was her great-grandmother pulling a blazing branch from the stove. With this branch she advanced on the growling wolf, old and bent though she was.

The wolf was frightened by the flame. It circled fiercely around the old woman, trying to get behind her and spring on her. Red Riding Hood shrank back against the wall. She could see that soon the branch would be burnt out and then the wolf would spring on her great-grandmother. Suddenly she remembered how easily the other children had cut through skins to make their jackets. She reached into her basket and pulled out the great sharp knife. Just as the branch burnt out and the wolf gathered itself for the kill, Red Riding Hood leapt forward and plunged the knife deep into its heart. The wolf gave one terrifying snarl and fell dead on the ground in a pool of blood.

With the help of her great-grandmother Red Riding Hood skinned the wolf and together they made a lining of its fur. "Listen, great-granddaughter," said the old woman, as they worked together stitching the lining into the red cloak, "this cloak now has special powers. Whenever you meet another child who is shy and timid, lend that child the cloak to wear as you play together in the forest, and then, like you, they will grow brave."

So whenever she met such a child, Red Riding Hood did as her great-grandmother had said, but the rest of the time she wore the cloak herself and for many years it kept her warm as she explored deeper and deeper into the great forest.