

The Gate of Dreams

A Note To Parents, Grandparents and Teachers

The response of readers to the first edition of *The Gate of Dreams* has been heartwarming, and I am delighted that a soft cover edition is now available.

I intended these original fairy stories for the broadest range of readers, and have been gratified to learn how popular the book has been as a family read-aloud. The stories have not been simplified for children, since I think it is in discovering words in context that our vocabularies broaden. However, since the silhouette characters perform the stories almost as if on stage, even the youngest family members can follow the action of these stories while listening to them.

Of course, *The Gate of Dreams* is also meant for the private enjoyment of readers of any age. Boys enjoy the stories as much as girls; and I have been pleased to hear from many men who, having once picked up the book, have found themselves moved by the stories to read from cover to cover.

The Gate of Dreams has inspired creative writing projects in schools in which teachers have used the book as a focal point for the study of fairy tales, culminating in the students writing and illustrating their own original stories. Since the term "fairy tale" is so often used as a catch-all for fantasy or for any tale involving magic, the following list of common characteristics of traditional fairy tales might prove useful to teachers interested in pursuing such a creative writing project with their students. It is my hope that the list might be of interest to others who simply find themselves intrigued by the fairy tale genre.

- *Fairy tales happen in a different place and time.* When we hear a beginning like "Far away and long ago there lived..." we are not only transported but given permission to suspend our disbelief. After all, in a different place and time, things might happen which could never happen in "our world".
- *The main characters are clearly "good" or "evil",* allowing the child freedom from ambivalence while reading or listening to the story. Full-strength responses, undiluted by doubt and deliberation are invited and even exacted from the reader when confronted with characters as cruel as the Queen in "Snow White", or as tender in spirit as Snow White herself.
- *The hero or heroine is faced with a difficult problem which may seem impossible to live with and impossible to solve.* The challenge may require outwitting or out-running a formidable foe like the Giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk"; or the challenge may require emotional endurance and faith like that which Cinderella displayed in the face of injustice and

degradation. But regardless of the particular trial facing the protagonist, hardship and suffering are as essential a part of fairy tales as they are unavoidable in our lives.

- *The stories are full of symbolic objects and events which have deep psychological meanings.* The thorns which grow up around the slumbering castle which encloses Briar Rose and all her world reinforce the feeling of adolescent withdrawal and defensiveness – a stage in life which, though it seems to last a hundred years, we must all endure at least once – and perhaps several times through our children. But whether we pick up on universal meanings or supply personal interpretations of our own, fairy stories are rich in symbolic raw material – very much, I think, like the fabric of dream imagery. (It is absolutely essential to keep in mind that there is no “correct” interpretation of a fairy tale, for its meanings are as varied and individual as each reader’s innermost thoughts and emotions.)
- *As a fairy tale nears its conclusion, justice is done – fairy tale justice, that is –* wherein good qualities such as gentleness, bravery, loyalty, and cleverness are rewarded and evildoers are punished in the most appropriate and satisfying ways. What could be more perfect than the witch in “Hansel and Gretel” burning to cinders in the very oven in which she planned to cook the lost children!?
- *A fairy tale ends in fulfillment for the protagonist.* In fact, sometimes the only thing setting a fairy tale apart from a myth, a fable or a cautionary tale is the existence of a happy ending. Even the fairy tale’s ending, however, is symbolic rather than literal. The “happily ever after” signifies hope to the child.

My convictions about the benefits of fairy tales in childhood and throughout our lives prompted the creation of *The Gate of Dreams*. I believe that the magic of fairy tales, ironically enough, lies not so much in their fantasy but in their emotional reality. It is because they provide a looking glass reflection of our inner lives that they are so useful to us in childhood and beyond. By presenting the hero or heroine with a challenge which seems insurmountable, fairy tales acknowledge that life is not easy. These stories convey a difficult truth: that sometimes we will suffer long and hard before we find our way out of the woods. But at the same time, they reassure us that if we learn to trust ourselves, we will discover that somewhere within the rich range of our emotions, each of us “has what it takes” to create his own satisfying conclusions.

The fairy tale promise is simply and only this... that life will at last become richly rewarding to us because of what we ourselves become during the struggle.

Lillian Somersaulter Moats, 1995