

The fairest story of them all

The story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is one of the most well-known and popular of all fairy tales. Few people in the world haven't heard the story of the charming young princess who is nearly killed by her evil stepmother, but is helped by a group of seven loveable dwarfs. And there can't be many of us who haven't glanced in a mirror and felt like saying "Mirror Mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of us all?" hoping that it might answer "You are!"

Although the story of Snow White is one of the most famous fairy tales, no-one knows exactly where it comes from, who first told it, or how old it is.

Where does the story come from?

As far as we know, the first time *Snow White* was written down was in a collection of folk stories and legends put together more than 180 years ago by two German brothers: Jacob Ludwig Grimm (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1786–1859).

The Brothers Grimm were fascinated by both language and myths. They spent many years travelling around Germany, collecting words for what was to become a well-respected dictionary, and finding out about the stories peasant farmers and country villagers had learned from their grandparents and were now passing on to their grandchildren.

They finally published a book called *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*) between 1815 and 1818, which contained many of these folk tales. As there were very few books around at the time, and almost nothing written especially for children, the book became very popular and many of the tales in it became children's favourites.

The first English book of Grimms' fairy tales appeared in 1823 with drawings by George Cruikshank, who later illustrated many of Charles Dickens' novels.



The story has changed!

Did you know that the story of Snow White, which we all know today, is not the same as the original one that the Brothers Grimm first wrote down? Over the years, parts of the story have changed, especially after the Disney cartoon was released. Here are some of the differences:

- ❗ In the original story, the dwarfs don't have their own names and personalities and don't feature very much; all we know is that there are seven friendly little men who look after Snow White. The famous names Doc, Dopey, Sneezy, Grumpy, Sleepy, Happy and Bashful were all created by the makers of the Walt Disney film. Apparently, more than 50 names and personalities were considered by Disney, including Tubby, Burpy, and Biggy-Wiggy, before the final seven dwarf names were chosen!
- ❗ In the very original version of the story collected by the Grimms, Snow White is a princess who is hated by her own mother, the Queen. The mother tries to kill the daughter, and nearly succeeds, until her father – the King – finds out what is happening. He is so angry that he executes the Queen. Gruesome stuff! Although the Grimms collected this story, they never printed it in that form. Instead, they altered parts of the tale, making the evil queen into a stepmother and introducing the Prince who rescues Snow White.
- ❗ There is no kiss to wake up Snow White in the original story. Instead, she is taken away by the prince on a cart, and the poisoned apple stuck in her throat becomes dislodged when his cart hits a pothole.
- ❗ In the original tale, the wicked stepmother tries three times to kill Snow White, not just once.
- ❗ In the original tale, the stepmother does not die while trying to kill the dwarfs. Instead she suffers a far more grisly fate by having to wear a pair of red-hot shoes!

The Disney cartoon

Although many fairy tales have been turned into films or cartoons, none have been as universally popular as Walt Disney's version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It was the first feature-length Hollywood cartoon and at the time was regarded as an extraordinary achievement. Even today, most of us come to know *Snow White* by watching the cartoon as a child.

Before this film was released — in time for Christmas 1937 — Hollywood mostly thought of animation as a way to produce short comedy cartoons which cinema owners liked to screen before the main bill.

But Disney believed the skills of his cartoon artists could be used differently: to create a magical new world filled with fantasy characters and events. Others didn't believe him, however, and many warned that he would lose all his money and become a laughing stock if he tried to make the film. Because all cartoons back then were very short, many people believed that no-one would want to sit through a one-and-a-half-hour-long cartoon.

His choice of *Snow White* was influenced by his own childhood memories of being thrilled by a silent movie based on the story, which he saw during a newsboys' cinema outing in 1916.

Far from being a flop, Disney's *Snow White* went on to become one of the biggest box office successes of its era, and established the Disney studios as one of the leading forces in Hollywood.

It also gave Walt Disney a rare position in the film industry's hall of fame when he collected not just one Academy Award, but eight – a full-sized Oscar for himself, and seven little ones for Doc, Dopey, Sneezy, Grumpy, Sleepy, Happy and Bashful.

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Mirror, Mirror

on the wall, who's the fairest of them all...

Just like Snow White's stepmother, the Queen, most people are only able to see their own reflection by looking into a mirror. Like her, they come to the mirror to see how beautiful they are and to preen themselves in front of it. But, in the story of Snow White, the Queen is in for a shock because, as Snow White grows up into a beautiful young woman and the Queen gets older, the magic mirror must answer truthfully when the Queen asks, "Who is the fairest one of all?" that Snow White has become the fairest in the land.

Of course, not everyone likes to look at themselves in the mirror, because what they see doesn't match how they really feel inside. One lady who is over a hundred years old says that she doesn't like to see all the wrinkles in her face, because she feels like the person she was before the wrinkles appeared!

But the image we see of ourselves in a mirror is really only a reflection, just patterns of light. We cannot touch, taste or smell the reflection and it makes no sound. In fact, it is just the opposite of being blind – a blind person can't see, but can touch, taste, smell and hear. It can be difficult for our senses to tell the difference between illusion and reality. You will know about this kind of distortion if you have ever been in a hall of mirrors: some mirrors make you look very fat or very thin, and others very small or very tall.

Mirrors have always been seen as magical, and used to be called 'magic glasses', although they have not always been made of glass. They are magic because, like other magic objects, they can tell the truth or tell lies to deceive us. Huge mirrors are used to make telescopes to help us find out about the stars and the planets, but mirrors can also be cleverly used here on earth by conjurers and magicians to make us believe things that are not really true.



Mirrors made by man are not the only kind of mirrors. We can also find mirrors in the world of nature. Water is a surface which will show you a reflection, but it is difficult to see your reflection in water because it is nearly always flat on the earth, in ponds and puddles for instance, so you have to lean over and this distorts the picture you see of yourself. It's also a natural mirror in a cat's eye which makes it shine in the dark, and the amazing mirror scales on some kinds of fish make them become almost invisible as they swim along in huge shimmering shoals.

What can you see in a mirror?

Study your own face and see how you look when you are happy and sad, angry and kind.

Don't forget, this is what other people see when you are like this!

Have you ever noticed that the word AMBULANCE is written back to front on an ambulance? This is done so that other drivers will be able to read it the right way round through their car mirrors and can pull over quickly if the ambulance's blue light is flashing.

Write AMBULANCE on a piece of paper and hold it up to the mirror — it will be reversed.

Try a few other words..

Mirror
Snow White
Beech
Box
Kid
Dice
Face

Now try the following words...

Wicked

What happens when you turn these words upside down? The words look the same this time! This happens because of the shape of the letters which make up these words.

See if you can think of any more words which behave like this.

Double Trouble

There are eight differences between these two wicked stepmothers. Can you find them all?



Manic Miners

Can you guide the dwarfs past the mine's dangers to the diamonds by choosing the right path?



Colour Me In



Colour Me In



Dot to Dot

Who is in the enchanted forest?
Join the dots to find out.



Answers

Double Trouble

Manic Miners

