

Smart Kids

Lots of our pantomime stories have children or young people right at the heart of them.

Sometimes these young heroes and heroines start out as brave and adventurous but, just as often, they are thrown into a new and frightening or difficult situation and have to use their own resources to get out again.

Dick Whittington, Jack in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and Aladdin are all what we might call 'likely lads'! The plot of *Dick Whittington* is based on a true story of a young man coming to London to make his fortune, while Aladdin's story is originally from the famous *Arabian Nights* collection of 1001 stories. Jack is probably the least likely of the three to begin with, as he sells his mother's cow for a few beans; however, they are, of course, magic beans!

The story of *Pinocchio* is a little different as the main character is a puppet who wants to be a real live boy, but the adventures Pinocchio has could just as easily have happened to a real boy. The children in *Peter Pan* are different too. There are two groups: the three Darling children who fly away with Peter from their nursery and their

parents and the Lost Boys who live with Peter in Never Never Land and have no parents. Peter of course is the hero of all the adventures in Never Never Land and, at the end of the story when all the other boys accept Mr and Mrs Darling's offer to adopt them, it is hardly surprising that Peter prefers to go back to Never Never Land alone, to continue his swashbuckling and to always stay a little boy. JM Barrie, who wrote *Peter Pan*, based his character on five brothers who he got to know when he met the eldest three out for a walk with their nanny in Kensington Gardens! He was the first writer to create a play about real children, set both in their own ordinary home and in the wonderland of their imaginations.

In Christmas shows which are not traditional pantomimes, but which are becoming very popular, there are plenty of clever children. *The Snow Queen* has Gerda and Kay who are not brother and sister like Hansel and Gretel, but are as close as if they were and have grown up together. When Kay is



enchanted by the Snow Queen, Gerda goes on an incredible journey, encounters very many hardships and is often in danger of her life before she finally manages to rescue Kay from the Snow Queen's icy grip. Although she has help along the way, she often has to take difficult decisions about whether the person or the animal who is offering to help can really be trusted, and these experiences help her become a wiser person. We can see the same kind of process in a story like *The Secret Garden*, where the friendship between three characters: the invalid boy, the orphaned girl and the country boy, eventually produces a happy ending for everyone, including the grown-ups involved in the story.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, there are four children, each with very distinct personalities, who must use all their ingenuity and courage to save both themselves and the strange world of Narnia in which they unexpectedly find themselves.

Our story of Hansel and Gretel has some similarities with the tale of the *Babes in the Wood* – at least they are brother and sister and are abandoned in a big forest! *Babes in the Wood* is based on real life events – in the 15th century a three-year-old boy and his younger sister were abandoned in Wayland Wood by two would-be murderers, who decided at the last minute that they could not kill the children. Sadly, although they survived on berries for a while, the two children died in the forest. The story came down over the centuries until it was put together with the *Robin Hood* stories to provide a happy ending!

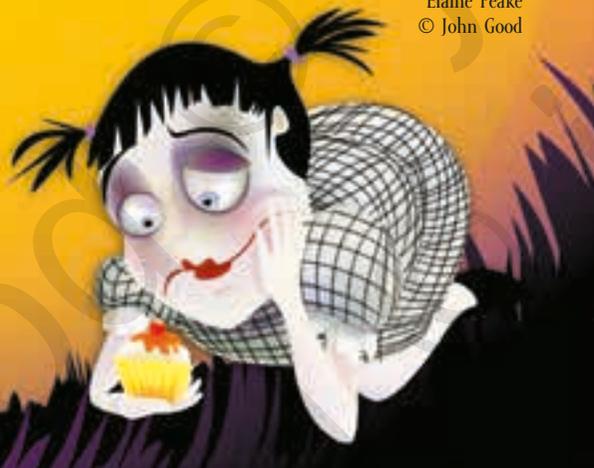
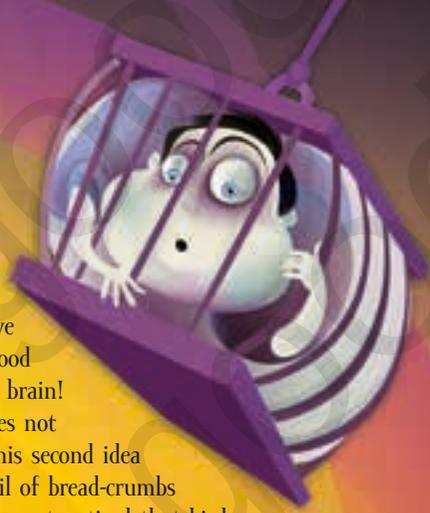
Hansel and Gretel are older and perhaps more resourceful than the Babes, although when they overhear what their stepmother plans to do, Gretel is at first upset and afraid they can do nothing to save themselves. Hansel's idea of using white stones in the moonlight to find the way back home is

a stroke of genius, and combines the ability to observe with a pretty good problem-solving brain! However, he does not think through his second idea of leaving a trail of bread-crumbs – perhaps he has not noticed that birds eat breadcrumbs!

Both children are so hungry in the forest that they do not even stop to consider the rights and wrongs of eating parts of the gingerbread house, and they accept the hospitality of the old woman on face value, never dreaming she wishes to harm them. However, when she reveals her true intent, both children come up with ways of avoiding the fate she plans for them. Hansel pretends he is not getting fat enough to eat and Gretel tricks the witch into climbing into the oven.

All these children in our favourite Christmas shows, as well as others like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, who spends so much time and energy helping other people to get what they need most, are faced with tests and decisions just like real children. Seeing how they make their way through to what is usually a happy ending (or sometimes, as in *Hansel and Gretel*, a happy beginning!) helps us all by showing us how we might look at things which seem difficult in our own real lives, so we can all do our best to happily ever after.

Elaine Peake
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The Good, the Bad

Oscar Wilde, who wrote wonderful children's stories of his own, such as *The Happy Prince* and *The Selfish Giant*, once wrote this reply in a play when a young girl asks her tutor if the novel she has written has a happy ending:

The good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.



And, certainly, we are all used to seeing both heroes and villains in pantomimes and Christmas shows, and we're not surprised either when the characters turn out to have supernatural powers.

Many stories have a good fairy like the fairy godmother in *Cinderella*, but sometimes there are fairies who are not absolutely good all the time — Tinkerbell in *Peter Pan* for example. There is a very bad fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* who, just because she has been accidentally left off the guest list to the Princess' christening, puts a terrible curse on the baby. Luckily, this bad magic can be made a little less bad, although not completely turned around, by another fairy who uses her christening wish to ensure the Princess will not die, but sleep for a hundred years.

We also find wicked stepmothers, some of whom may have magic powers, like the Wicked Queen in *Snow White* with her magic mirror. The wickedest queen I can think of is the *Snow Queen*, who wants the world to remain in everlasting winter and drives ice into young Kay's heart. We may automatically assume that witches are always bad, but if you think of the two witches in *The Wizard of Oz*, one is very good and helps Dorothy and her friends, while the other is exactly the opposite and does all she can to harm them.

and the Ugly



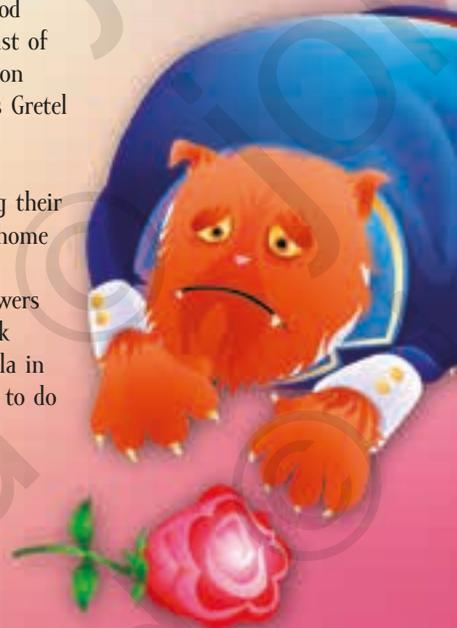
The magic power of the genie in *Aladdin* is interesting, because he must use it to help whoever rubs the lamp, whether that person wants him to do good or bad things.

When we consider the ugly characters in our stories, they may not always be what they seem on the outside. Cinderella's two stepsisters are traditionally known as the 'Ugly Sisters', and this is because they are hateful to Cinderella and their ugly outsides represent the nastiness they have on the inside. The Wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood* is an evil creature who disguises himself as a harmless old lady in order to do bad things, but the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* is quite the opposite - his frightening outside hides a warm and loving person underneath.

Both the Snow Queen and Snow White's stepmother are beautiful in their own way - in Snow White the queen is 'the fairest of them all' until Snow White grows up - but their superficial beauties hide selfish and unpleasant personalities.

In our story of *Hansel and Gretel*, the children's stepmother is a hard woman, who sees the only solution to difficult times in getting rid of the two extra mouths to feed. When the children find the gingerbread house after wandering in the forest for several days, cold and hungry, they do not doubt the good intentions of the old woman who invites them in, lays before them a feast of pancakes and milk and gives them soft beds to sleep on. However, she soon reveals her true colours when, the next day, she locks Hansel up and sets Gretel to work, intending to kill and eat them both.

Although both children do their part in outwitting the witch and making their escape from her, they still need another kind of magic to help them get home again. This time they are helped by a bird which takes them on its back over the broad river. Natural creatures are often blessed with magical powers and in some of these stories they are very important to the plot, like Dick Whittington's cat or even the main character like *Puss in Boots* or Priscilla in *Mother Goose*. But, just as with people, they can use their special powers to do either good or bad.

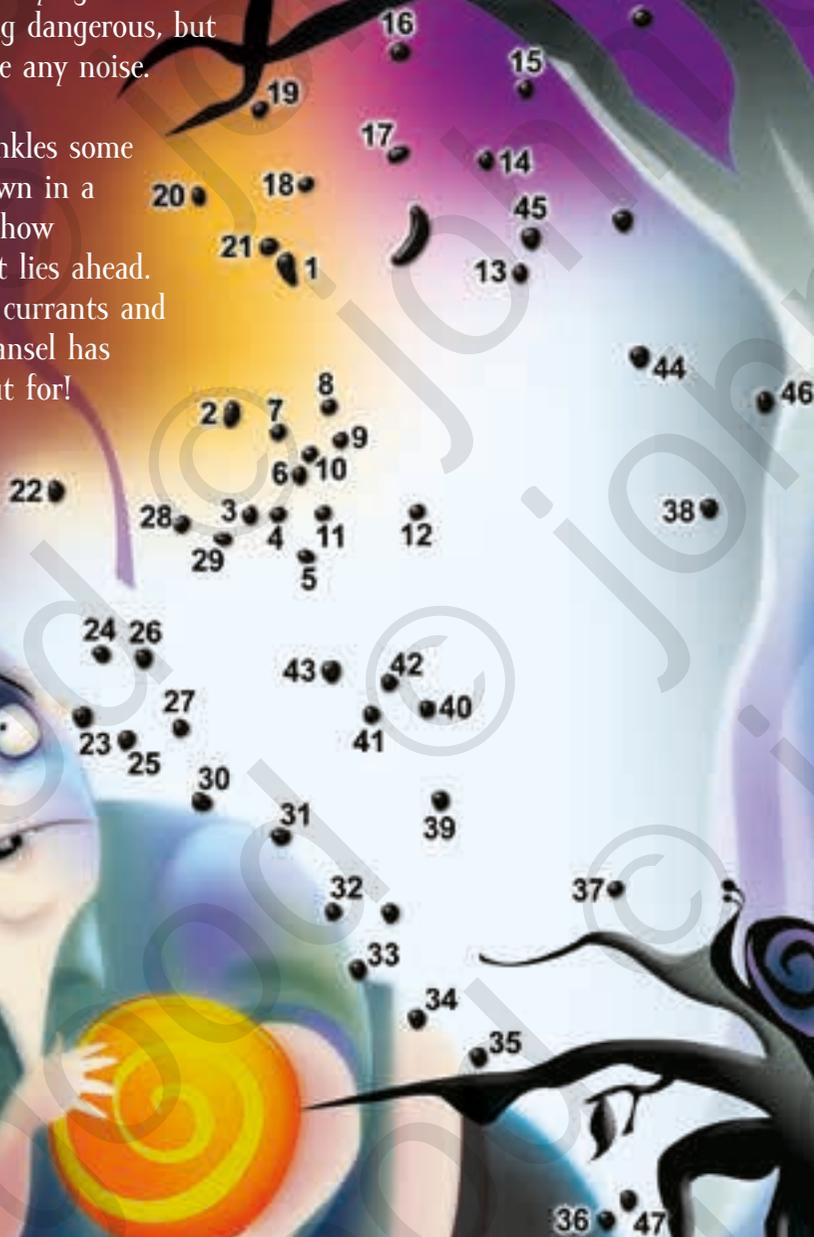
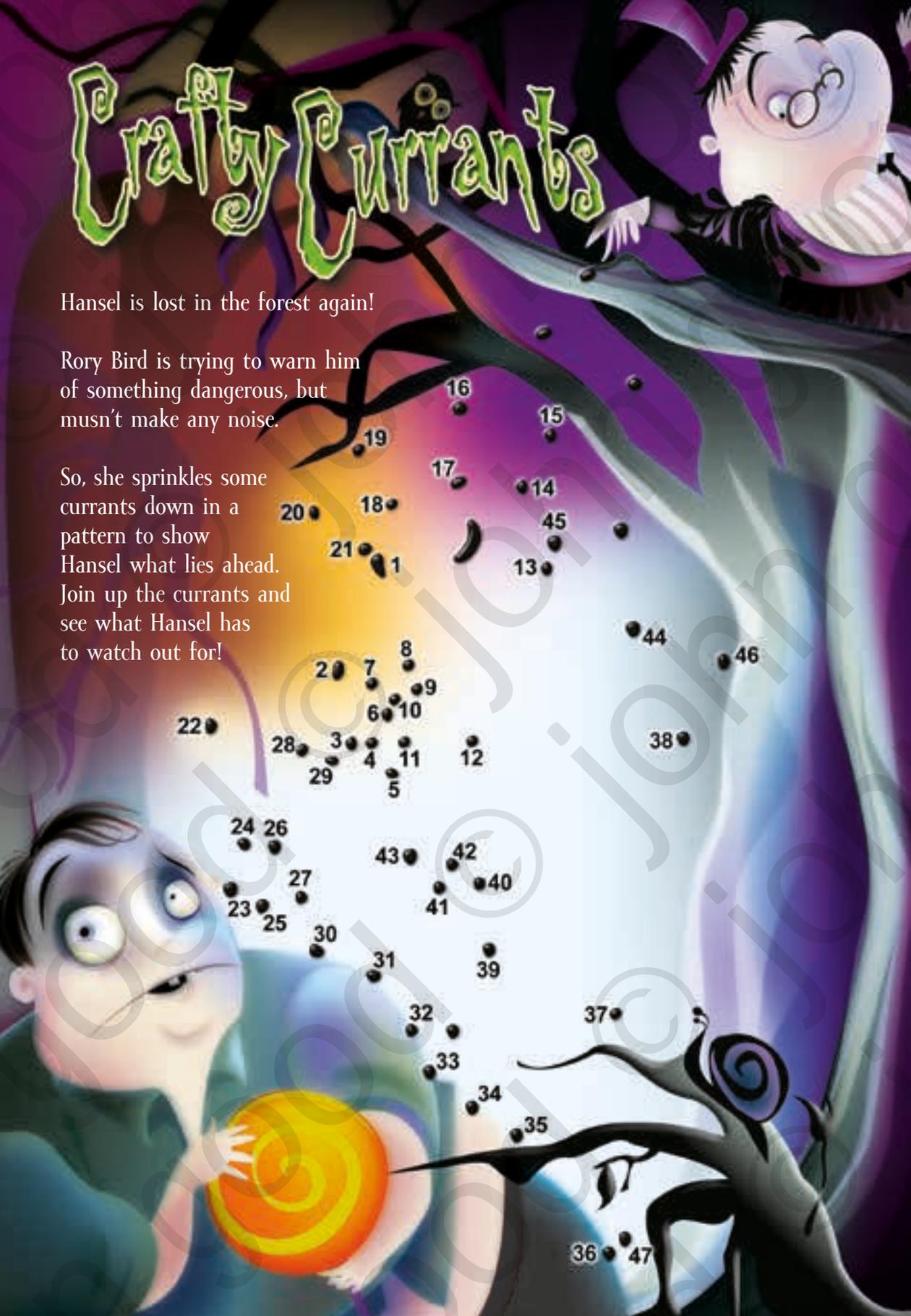


Crafty Currants

Hansel is lost in the forest again!

Rory Bird is trying to warn him of something dangerous, but musn't make any noise.

So, she sprinkles some currants down in a pattern to show Hansel what lies ahead. Join up the currants and see what Hansel has to watch out for!



Confusing Confectionary

The evil witch has told Gretel she must sort out all the mixed-up labels on these sweet things — or else!

Luckily Hansel is slipping her lolly wrappers with clues on. Can you find out what each of the mixed-up labels says?



- 1 Pink and fluffy, and eaten at the fair or seaside - two words!
- 2 Something with lots of currants, raisins and sultanas in, and eaten around New Year - two words!
- 3 You can make little men out of this hard brown spicy-tasting stuff!
- 4 Fruit covered in crumbled breadcrumbs and baked in the oven - two words!
- 5 A fruit covered in sticky stuff, and stuck on a stick - two words!

Loopy Liquorice

Gretel is sucking on some loooong strings of liquorice. She knows Hansel is chewing on the end of one of them — but which one?

Look out for the witch!





Wicked Wordsearch

Can you find all the sweet things on this wordsearch that the old witch is using to fatten Hansel up with? The words go upwards, downwards, backwards, forwards and even diagonally! When you have found all the words, there will be a secret message left over, which Hansel and Gretel ought to listen to!

R	D	A	E	R	B	R	E	G	N	I	G	A
J	E	L	L	Y	B	A	B	I	E	S	N	P
A	S	T	E	P	H	U	M	B	U	G	S	E
P	Y	U	T	T	A	G	U	O	N	C	A	
C	L	L	G	U	A	E	A	B	D	I	O	R
A	L	B	A	A	B	L	S	Y	R	C	F	D
N	O	U	M	K	R	T	O	O	O	E	U	R
D	L	B	E	I	O	L	U	C	P	S	D	O
Y	E	B	T	P	N	Q	U	N	O	H	G	P
F	M	L	P	E	I	T	D	M	A	H	E	S
L	A	E	O	L	C	T	S	O	P	E	C	R
O	R	G	W	I	N	E	G	U	M	S	P	A
S	A	U	B	O	N	B	O	N	S	W	A	Y
S	C	M	C	R	E	A	M	C	A	K	E	S

BONBONS
BUBBLEGUM
CANDYFLOSS
CARAMEL
CHOCOLATE

COCOA
CREAM CAKES
FUDGE
GINGERBREAD
GOBSTOPPERS

HUMBUGS
JELLY BABIES
LIQUORICE
LOLLY
MINTS

NOUGAT
PEANUT BUTTER
PEAR DROPS
SUGAR LUMPS
WINE GUMS

