

How Do Stories Nourish Children's Organs As They Grow?

By Nancy Mellon

How do stories nourish children's organs as they grow? Like color and musical tones, do imaginative pictures resonate with specific organs? We can look with wonder and fascination at the fundamental archetypes of our organs to find characters and plot structures that express them.

In the Book of Tobit from the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, an angel directs Tobias to a mysterious "fearful great fish," saying: "Catch the fish by the gills. Open it and take out gall, liver, and heart for they are excellent remedies." This tale points to the holy and healing powers stored within each of these organs.

Gall relates to clear decisive thoughts and fiery will. It can be daunting to experience healthy gall radiating from a parent, colleague, child, or from ourselves. Nudging ardently at our blind spots, it goads us toward new vision. In *The Twelve Huntresses* of the Grimms' collection, a bold and eager princess and her eleven companions, disguised as huntsmen, attempt to wake up a prince who does not recognize his true bride. They test and challenge him repeatedly. Yet his vision remains closed until he trusts the insight of his loyal lion counselor.

The angel who leads Tobias also devotes himself with uncanny insight to his charge. He leads Tobias exactly where he needs to go. Under his strict guidance Tobias is able to release his love from appalling enchantment and, when he returns home, restore his father's vision. With perseverance and loyal commitment, Tobias' angel asks no reward beyond the success of his mission. He knows which path to take and how to potentize the healing properties of the fish they have caught. His spiritual eyes are open, like Saint George's are as he approaches and struggles with the dragon.

The princess' gall in *The Twelve Huntsmen* leads to loyal marriage. When the juice of the gall of the fish restores Tobias' father's sight, he sees before him true lovers. In *The Juniper Tree*, divine gall gloriously redeems the horrifying darkness that surrounds the stepmother. Such story imaginations stimulate the functioning of our spiritually evolving gall.

How does the liver find nourishment in the stories we tell? A dysfunctional liver generates hostility and manipulation. The witch in *Jorinda and Joringel* exemplifies nasty liver dysfunction. I try to imagine this wretched, bitter witch before she turned young maidens into birds, like Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. To commune with her is to be in touch with a long history of childhood suppression and abuse. The red flower brought by Joringel through his dream vision is like healthy new blood entering the witch's toxic realm. His sublimely devoted service liberates his beloved Jorinda from the witch's spell, and all the other captives of the witch along with her.

The healthy liver feels brilliant excitement and pleasure at being alive. It reaches out for experience and adventure and the joy of the senses, yet is also warmly sensitive to the emotional needs and desires of others. In the Grimms' tale *Little Brother and Little Sister*, the children fondly support one another with both excitement and anxiety. When Little Brother is turned into a fawn, his sister makes a home for them in the woodland. He runs to the hunt, like a child eager for adventure; each evening she welcomes him in their safe nest to be healed. When Little Sister marries a king she insists the fawn accompany her to the palace, but soon she is under attack. When the murderous witch has been judged and burned, the devoted brother and sister are restored to their human lives.

The *Two Brothers*, the longest tale in the Grimms' collection of fairy tales, also portrays deep friendship between siblings. The twin boys in the story early in their lives eat the heart and liver of a mysterious golden bird. From then on, through their many adventures, they are deeply connected. Like Joringel's red flower, the healthy animals that accompany them on their human journeys restore

life. They liberate them from destructive emotions and death, just as liver detoxification can restore a sense of bursting healthy love and joyous adventure.

The liver embodies the spirit of adventure in close connection with others. Stories in which heart forces dominate inspire openness and trust. Rosicrucian fairy tales portray many characters, simple and innocent, who love everyone and everything and at the end of these stories they rule wisely and well. Their elder brothers and sisters ignore and abuse with shriveled heart forces what these characters warmly embrace.

The Grimm's *The Queen Bee* is a tale of initiation in which a loving simpleton disenchant a whole realm. Through his courageous and majestic gentleness, he becomes King and transforms his unruly brothers into loyal subjects. His path to power is his commanding power of compassion. The two elder brothers want to destroy an anthill, and Simpleton says: "Leave the creatures in peace; I will not allow you to disturb them." With whole-hearted good will he also dissuades them from killing ducks for their dinner. The two older brothers want to suffocate bees to take away their honey, and Simpleton again stops them saying: "Leave the creatures in peace; I will not allow you to burn them."

The stone castle to which the three brothers eventually come is a picture of hardhearted will. The only life in this place is a wizened gray man, who is guarding a book that holds the secrets for restoring the kingdom. Where his brothers fail in performing the tasks and turn into stone statues, Simpleton succeeds. The creatures of the earth, water, and air, help him do what needs to be done in return for the loving protection he gave to them.

When the story ends, Simpleton and the youngest Princess rule with sweet love forevermore. For centuries wherever this little story has stirred evolving heart-forces. Its picture language encourages us to attend to the even-tempered and generous pulse at the heart's core.

In *Gutta Percha*, one of the lesser-known tales of George MacDonald, Willie, the hero has all the characteristics of a heart child. Slow to learn at first, his guiding inspiration for each step of his schooling is love. He learns to knit for his mother; he visits the town shoemaker to learn to make shoes for his sister's doll; he teaches himself to read for a friend. As he grows, he builds and delves and studies medicine to harness the healing waters of an old abbey well for his village.

Stories that speak in such pictures can awaken us to the health-producing qualities in the organs, and to their dark side, and can inspire us toward greater consciousness and wisdom.

Editor's Note: Stories have many levels of meaning and many possible interpretations. One can consider other fairy tale and organ connections. For instance, Anthroposophic doctors speak of the following Grimm's tales in relation to the organs:

The Prince Who Feared Nothing - Heart
Brother and Sister - Liver
Jorinda and Joringel - Lungs
Frog King - Kidneys

Contemplation and meditation about the images in these stories and how they may describe organ functions can reveal the connections.

*Nancy Mellon gives courses and workshops on many aspects of storytelling. She is the author of *Storytelling as a Healing Art* and *Storytelling with Children*.*