
Moving into the Fairytale

~ Laurie Clark

There is a big difference in whether or not one has a child grow up with fairy tales. The soul-striving nature of fairy-tale pictures becomes evident only later on. If fairy tales have not been given, this shows itself in later years as weariness of life and boredom. Indeed, it even comes to expression physically: fairy tales can help counter illnesses. What is absorbed little by little by means of fairy tales emerges subsequently as joy in life, in the meaning of life- it comes to light in the ability to cope with life, even into old age. Children must experience the power inherent in fairy tales while young, when they can still do so.

~ Rudolf Steiner, *The World of Fairy Tales*

Fairytales are a most wonderful experience and bring many unique opportunities to the young child. These remarkable stories unfold through images, one picture after the next, revealing a truthful soul adventure that corresponds to our lives in the deepest sense.

The fairytale unfolds to reveal that when challenges are met with courage and selflessness in the journey of life, the will to do the right deed with good will always prevails, even if it is the most difficult choice that can be made. The stories offer deep truths enclosed within images of characters facing challenges and thereby gaining resilience. This is a kind of nourishment for the soul of the child. Children savor the bravery and valor of the heroes and heroines in the story. Often, these characters seem the least likely to succeed in their endeavors. They are frequently portrayed as simpletons or unwanted stepchildren. These characters' heart forces of self-sacrifice, which enable them to do what is needed to accomplish the noble deed, enable the child to cultivate trust and confidence in human nature.

These stories carry archetypes that come from the spiritual world. When the teacher can penetrate and

understand the images in the story before telling it to the children, the story carries a powerful certainty. When the child asks, “Is that story true?” the teacher can answer with conviction that indeed, it is truer than true.

As the teacher tells the story, many children are fully able to listen. But not all children can fully devote their sense of listening to the story. Many children today have a hard time focusing. They lack the attention needed to engage in the spoken story.

The world is very noisy. Radio, television, constant phone conversations, sirens, leaf blowers, and music in stores are some of the many sounds that can overburden the child’s sense of hearing. Digesting what is being heard and becoming aware of where sounds come from takes focus and practice for the young child. The many loud sounds competing for the child’s attention can overwhelm her ability to distinguish and understand what she is hearing.

Challenges with auditory processing and auditory discrimination are quite common in children. Even children with normal hearing can have difficulty making sense of what is being said and perceiving where sounds are coming from. When there is background noise (auditory clutter), the child may have trouble picking out the one voice that is telling the story amid the other sounds in the classroom.

The screens that many children are exposed to play a significant role in their inability to focus in on listening. Their sense of sight is consumed by screens, weakening their ability to listen fully without the moving picture to accompany and depict what is being heard. Habitual use of tablets, computers, televisions, and smartphones can hijack children’s capacity to make their own imaginative pictures through the sense of hearing. The child is accustomed to screens making the pictures.

One thing that we can do for these “hearing-sensitive” children is to give them an accommodating visual to support the development of their listening skills. Adding a few visual props to our storytelling can support and entice the sense of hearing to participate. The visuals invite the child’s attention to the story and help her focus on and participate in the world as a listener. Throughout the year, the visual props can slowly be removed and hopefully, the sense of hearing can be strengthened.

Some children have a difficult time paying attention and focusing on the story because they

digest the world in a kinesthetic way. They experience the world most successfully when they are able to move. And for heaven’s sakes, sitting still even for a short time can be extremely challenging! Tapping, wiggling, bouncing, swinging their limbs, and using their sense of touch is appealing and gratifying for these children. They have excellent “physical memory” and are best able to process and attain a sense of well-being when they can “do” whatever is being presented. For these children, “playing” (dramatizing) the story with the class is helpful. They are then able to participate fully because they can “move into the story.” This way of experiencing the fairytale can be very satisfying for these movers and shakers who are in our care.

Puppetry adds a whole other dimension to stories. A veil is lifted from the table and, underneath it, a magical world is revealed. The movement of the puppets and the added visual of the characters is extremely satisfying for most children. Kinesthetic children imitate the movements inwardly, and the visuals appeal to the “hearing-sensitive” children in the class.

Another way to present fairytales is to do a circle adventure together as a class. The movement sustains the experience of the story as the group moves together through the various adventures that the story holds. The opportunity to include movements that integrate the child’s sensory system can be included to enhance the experience. The group moves “with” and “into” the story in community while doing movements that are therapeutic and fun.

There are many ways that the world of fairytales can be brought to the children. These stories are a source of nourishment and bring deep satisfaction, enriching the child’s development and sense of well-being. ♦

Resources:

- Rudolf Steiner, *The World of Fairy Tales*, translated by Peter Stebbing (SteinerBooks 2013)

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