

First Literary Explorations in...

Fairy Tales

An MYP Language and Literature guide

Knowing what happened is the beginning of reading a story. We then have to account for it: why does this character make that choice? Why does it lead to this ending? And what does the whole thing have to do with us?

Fairy tales give students whole narratives in which to pursue these questions. A problem, a choice, a consequence: we can see how the parts depend on one another, and begin to understand what their arrangement means. The work of this unit is to make those connections and explain them.

At a glance

- **Subject and level:** MYP Language and Literature; Year 2 / Grade 7.
- **Texts:** Selected tales collected by the Brothers Grimm and Andrew Lang. Read at least two closely, including a shared class example. A tale or variant from another tradition can serve as the second text.
- **Time:** 4–6 weeks at four 50-minute lessons per week. The core below takes 16 lessons, or 13 hours 20 minutes. Use the remaining time for more reading, discussion and revision.
- **Assessment:** A comparison of two tales, one Atlas Seminar Map and a short explanation of the choices behind it.

The MYP framework

Key concept: Connections

Related concepts: Character, structure, theme

Global context: Personal and cultural expression

Exploration: Storytelling, imagination and the ways narratives express cultural values.

Statement of inquiry: Connections among character, plot and structure allow storytellers to express and question cultural values and ideas about human experience.

NB: Keep the entire story in view. A quotation can support a reading, but the ending, a repeated action or a character's failure may require us to think again.

Fairy Tales: questions worth pursuing

Factual

- What distinguishes skim, superficial and analytical reading? When do we use each?
- What are plot, character and theme? How does a theme differ from a topic or an explicit moral?
- How do we use textual evidence to support an inference?

Conceptual

- How do characters influence plots, and how do plots change or reveal characters?
- How do the parts of a story work together to develop its theme?
- Why do patterns recur across fairy tales? Can the same pattern express different values?

Debatable

- Do fairy tales reveal enduring truths, preserve cultural assumptions, or do both?
- Must a character change for a story to be meaningful?
- Can two different readings of a tale be equally convincing?

What students should learn to do

Students should be able to choose a reading strategy and explain its use; annotate for understanding; distinguish summary from analysis; and support an inference with evidence. From there, they should explain how character, plot and structure develop theme, compare two tales, and test a reading against details that might complicate it.

Their creative work should make an interpretation visible to someone else. This requires decisions about what to include, what to leave out and how to present it.

Approaches to learning

- **Communication:** Cite the passage, explain the reasoning, listen to another reading and present an interpretation for an audience.
- **Social:** Build an interpretation together, share the creative work and give feedback another student can use.
- **Thinking:** Find patterns, test claims and carry a method of reading into an unfamiliar tale.
- **Self-management:** Choose texts thoughtfully, keep annotations, revise and account for a change of mind.

Learner profile: Thinker, communicator, open-minded, reflective.

Fairy Tales: teaching the unit

Part I: There are three kinds of reading.

Four lessons. Begin with the gallery walk and a shared tale. Model skimming, a first continuous reading, and a return to particular details. Let students see what you underline, what you question and what sends you back to an earlier passage. Check comprehension, then practice a claim–evidence–reasoning response. The reading terms are explained in the method notes below.

Part II: A plot is a problem and a solution.

Two lessons. Trace the movement from the initial problem toward its resolution. Students should explain why one event leads to another. Ask them to consider what would happen if an event were removed or placed elsewhere. Begin the second tale, with help choosing a manageable text.

Part III: Characters influence plot, and plot influences characters.

Two lessons. Diagram a choice and its consequences. Then follow the relationship in the other direction: what do the events change in a character, or reveal about a character who remains the same? A character does not have to become a different person for the reader to understand that person differently.

Part IV: The whole work develops and reveals the theme.

Three lessons. Bring the parts together. Compare the tales' treatment of a shared idea, including what they reward, punish or take for granted. Use a seminar and an Atlas round to test competing readings. Make sure students know the texts and concepts before they appear in the deck.

Useful distinction: “Loyalty” names a topic. “Be loyal” gives advice. “Loyalty can require us to give up something we want” makes a claim about experience. That last claim might be a theme, if the story supports it. Students need to show how the story brings them to it. An ending that complicates the claim deserves their attention.

Bringing the work together

Five lessons. Model a short comparison before students draft their own. Allow time to revise it, prepare and present one Map, and write the commentary. Students can carry the same interpretation and evidence through all three pieces.

With more time, read another variant, investigate an archetype or repeat the seminar after revision. Follow the question far enough for students to discover something they could not have said at the beginning.

Fairy Tales: From Tale to Truth

How do two tales use character, plot and structure to express or question a significant idea about human experience?

The task asks students to make a case for what they have come to understand. Different readings are possible. Each has to answer to the text.

1/ Compare two tales

Write **400–600 words** around one claim about the tales’ treatment of a shared idea. Explain how choices, events and structural patterns develop that idea. Include:

- At least two precise references from each tale, with explanations of how they support your claim.
- A meaningful similarity or difference between the tales.
- A value each tale rewards, questions or takes for granted.
- The effect of at least one narrative choice on a reader.
- An alternative reading, or a detail that makes your own reading less simple.

Identify the versions you used and provide brief references. Keep plot summary to what your reader needs to follow the argument.

2/ Make and present an Atlas Map

Connect one studied tale (**Territory**) with a concept or claim (**Legend**) through the teacher’s assigned method (**Ink**). Make the connection recognizable through a dramatic, visual or oral creation. Plan for one lesson of preparation and a **60–90-second presentation**. The Map and its presentation are one piece of work.

3/ Explain your choices

In **100–150 words**, identify the connection and explain two choices you made for the audience. Link one to a particular detail in the tale. Use audience feedback to suggest a revision. If you worked with a group, explain your own contribution.

Notes for the teacher

Look at annotations, comprehension checks, CER responses, plot–character diagrams, seminar notes and drafts along the way. These show where the reading or reasoning needs attention. Keep drafting and Map preparation within the five assessment lessons. The word ranges help contain the work; they are not grading criteria.

Offer shorter texts, vocabulary help, reading aloud, comparison organizers and rehearsal where needed. Keep asking for evidence and reasoning. Students can choose a tale from a familiar tradition or use one you provide. A claim about one version is not automatically a claim about a whole culture; wider claims need context.

Some notes on the methods

Three kinds of reading

Skim reading: Look over the text. Notice the title, length, opening, ending and repeated words or ideas. Get your bearings and decide what you want to find out.

Superficial reading: Read through to get the whole. Keep going when a word or passage is difficult; mark it for a return. Here “superficial” means an initial reading for the gist. It has a purpose. Students need some sense of the whole before they can make much of its parts.

Analytical reading: Return to those parts and ask how they work together. Annotate, make a claim, find evidence, and test whether the rest of the text supports it. Readers can move among these approaches as their purposes change.

CER and the Single Paragraph Outline

A claim says what you think. Evidence gives your reader something to examine. Reasoning explains how that evidence supports the claim. Students often need the most help with that last step: putting a quotation after a statement does not explain their relationship.

The Single Paragraph Outline makes the arrangement visible before students draft. Establish the topic, audience and purpose; gather details; then organize a claim, supporting points, evidence and reasoning. Write the topic and concluding sentences with that argument in view. A second paragraph can begin with a second outline.

What is an Atlas Map?

In Atlas Seminar, the **Territory** is the text or source, the **Legend** is a concept or claim about it, and the **Ink** is the method or constraint used to connect them. The resulting creation is the **Map**. It might be a scene, drawing or recitation; “Map” names its job, not its shape.

The teacher assigns the same Ink to the teams for a round. Teams choose their Territory–Legend pairing, make the Map and present it. Other teams try to recognize the pairing. After the reveal, discuss what made the connection visible and what readers saw differently. The rulebook explains the full process.

NB: Recognition gives useful feedback, but a vote cannot settle the quality of an interpretation. Look at the text, the choices and the explanation before making an assessment judgment.

Assessment: what counts as evidence?

Use these task notes with your school's Year 2 descriptors, and share the expectations before students begin. The achievement-level descriptors remain the basis for assessment.

A: Analysing — strands i–iv

In **Fairy Tales**, look for an explanation of narrative relationships, theme and reader effects, supported by evidence and appropriate terms. The comparison should show a meaningful connection between features of the two tales.

B: Organizing — strands i–iii

The argument needs an order a reader can follow and clear connections between ideas. References should identify the fairy-tale versions used. The commentary should explain creative decisions without repeating the analysis.

C: Producing text — strands i–iii

Use the **Map**, together with the commentary and evidence of the student's contribution. Look for engagement with an idea, imaginative treatment, deliberate stylistic choices and details chosen for an audience.

D: Using language — strands i–iv

Use the individual analysis and commentary, and the Map where appropriate, to assess vocabulary, sentence control, register, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Collect oral evidence when assessing pronunciation. Add **strand v** when every assessed student has an observed or recorded opportunity to use non-verbal communication.

A group can make the Map. Each student must show the thinking.

Keep each student's analysis and commentary, along with a planning note or identifiable written, visual or oral contribution. Observe the work. If a contribution is unclear, ask for an individual explanation or revision. A group product alone cannot show what each student can do.

Planning across the year

The IB guide provides criteria for Years 1, 3 and 5; use your school's Year 2 progression. All strands of all four criteria must be assessed at least twice across the year. Plan accordingly; each unit need not carry every strand.

Reference: IB Language and literature guide, updated April 2023. Use the school's current Programme Resource Centre copy for the official requirements and descriptors.