

# A Fairy Tale By Any Other Name...

*Leesa Wolfe Wood* for Blue Ridge Public Television (WBRA, WMSY, WSBN)  
Tazewell High School, Tazewell, VA

**Grade Levels:** 9-11

**Time allotment:** One to three 50-minute class periods, depending on teacher preferences

## **Overview:**

In this lesson, students will learn the metamorphosis that occurs in tales that transcend generations and cultures, most notably those communicated primarily through the oral tradition. Who hasn't heard of Cinderella? The very name conjures images of Disney's Technicolor heroine, surrounded by mice and birds; many can recall the strains of Rodgers and Hammerstein's lilting, "In my own little corner, in my own little chair, I can be whatever I want to be," sung by Lesley Anne Warren, Julie Andrews, or Brandy from the shadows and safety of a fireplace. The smallest child knows some version of French writer Charles Perrault's timeless tale about the cruel stepmother, the shrewish stepsisters and the kind fairy godmother who ultimately unites Cinderella with her handsome prince.

In short, we know virtually everything about the Cinderella story, right? Think again! Perrault's version of Cinderella is one of many such tales found throughout the world. Whereas the themes are distinctly similar, each story possesses a unique structure molded by the socioeconomic and cultural environments in which it exists. Furthermore, the story itself evolves to fit shifting social and environmental paradigms. This lesson focuses on "Ash Pet," an Appalachian Cinderella story. Whereas the basis of the tale is European, the framework has acquired a distinctly Appalachian flavor as oral tale-tellers invested the characters and the setting with traits common to the mountaineers' way of life.

**Subject Matter:** Language Arts

## **Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Read and analyze literature of a particular genre from a variety of cultures.
- Note the influences of cultural environment on literature.
- Note the unifying factors in literature within a specific genre.
- Design and present oral reports.
- Develop original literary narratives.
- Hone their skills of utilizing electronic databases and library resources.
- Participate in and benefit from small-group learning activities.

## **State Standards:**

The lesson addresses the following Virginia Standards of Learning found at <http://www.pen.k12.va.us>

- English 9.2 The student will make planned oral presentations.
- English 9.3 The student will read and analyze a variety of literature.
- English 9.6 The student will develop narrative, expository, and informational writings to inform, explain, analyze, or entertain.
- English 9.8 The student will credit the sources of both quoted and paraphrased ideas.
- English 9.9 The student will use print, electronic databases and online resources to access information.
- English 10.1 The student will participate in and report small-group learning activities.
- English 10.3 The student will read, comprehend, and critique literary works.
- English 11.3 The student will read and analyze relationships among American literature, history and culture.

### Media Components:

- Video
  - Telling Tales #13, "Ash Pet,"* available from Blue Ridge Public Television.
- Web Sites
  1. <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/cinderella> This site contains a marvelously annotated rendition of the Charles Perrault classic. I would highly recommend the students read or hear this version of the Cinderella tale read aloud before seeing "Ashpet;" it would provide them with an excellent means of comparison between the most widely known version of the published tales and the alternative folk tales. The site also contains a number of available DVDs and published Cinderella texts, including The Rough-Face Girl (an Algonquin Indian version of the story) and the Creole tale of Cendrillon. For those teachers interested in purchasing alternate Cinderella texts for their classroom, this site lists some of the best materials currently on the market.
  2. <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/cinderella/other> This site lists a large number of alternative Cinderella tales, including "The Baba Yaga," a Russian story. Some tales are unavailable on the Web due to copyright restrictions, but the site notes where these works can be found in print. To read the complete collection and see what is immediately available, the user only needs to scroll down the page below the list of links.
  3. <http://www.acs.uca/gary.ca/~dkbrown/cinderella.html> Here is a marvelous list of published variations on the Cinderella story, complete with titles and bibliographical information.
  4. [http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=419](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=419) For teachers desiring to pursue the topic of alternative forms of literature more extensively, here is a truly useful resource. Entitled "Cinderella Folk Tales: Variations in Plot and Setting," this site contains a well-crafted, fully-prepared lesson on teaching students to recognize the commonalities and differences in the various Cinderella plots. If the user scrolls down to Section 4 of the lesson (entitled "Even More Cinderellas"), the site holds several current links to alternate stories like "Ashputtel" (the delightfully dark Brothers Grimm version) and "Tattercoats."

**Materials:**

Per class:

- TV/VCR

For each student:

- Computer with Internet access
- Pencil and paper.

**Prep for Teachers:**

Prior to teaching this lesson:

1. Bookmark the Web sites listed above on the students' class computers, *or* use WebWhacker or similar software to copy the web sites into a folder, then install that folder into the class computers. As an additional alternative, the teacher could use Filamentality or a similar program to create a Hotlist of web sites, the URL for which should be bookmarked on the class computers.
2. Have students read the Charles Perrault version of the Cinderella tale published on the Surlalune Web pages (site listed above.) If scheduling for the computer lab is tight, read this version aloud to the students a day or two before this exercise, or provide them with computer-generated handouts.

**Introductory Activity:**

1. **INITIATE** a discussion with students to introduce the subject of variations in folk/fairy tales.  
**SAY**, "I'm going to give you a name, and for ten seconds I want you to write down every image that it creates in your mind. Are you ready? 'Cinderella!'"  
**WAIT** for ten seconds, then **SAY**, "Okay, time's up. What do you have?"  
(Answers may include: a fairy godmother, a prince, an enchanted pumpkin, two bad stepsisters, a cruel stepmother, a glass slipper, a royal ball, a midnight curfew, a castle, enchanted mice/rats, and a beautiful young heroine.)  
If any of the elements listed above are not mentioned, **ASK**, "Can anyone think of anything else that fits the Cinderella story?"  
(Answers should basically complete the list above.)  
**ASK**, "Is there anything in the traditional Cinderella story about a big, hairy man?"  
(**PAUSE** for responses.) "A witchy woman with fiery coals and tangled hair?" (**PAUSE** for responses.) "A church meeting?" (**PAUSE** for responses.)  
(Answer: Each time, the students should say, no.)
2. **SAY**, "You may not believe me, but all of those characters and elements—plus much more—are included in an Appalachian version of Cinderella called 'Ash Pet.' This story wasn't written down as was the Perrault version; instead, it was passed down orally from generation to generation. Instead of reading a story, people listened to a storyteller who learned the story from a previous storyteller."  
**ASK**, "Since it was all kept in someone's mind, do you think the stories changed from person to person?"  
(Answer: Yes.)

**ASK**, “Why?”

(Answer: Stories change as more and more people repeat them.)

**SAY**, “This version of ‘Ash Pet’ was first written down in 1948 by a man named Richard Chase, who got the story from an elderly lady in Wise County named Granny Shores. The person telling the story on the video is an Appalachian storyteller named Anndrena Belcher. Remember that this tale is supposed to have happened a long time ago, before the turn of the LAST century.”

### **Learning Activity:**

1. **INSERT** video *Telling Tales #13, “Ash Pet”* into VCR.
2. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION**. **SAY**, “Watch this first clip and see who the mother figure is, what the sisters are like, and where they are going.” **START** from the beginning of Part 13 on the video, clicking the stopwatch on as soon as the live image of Anndrena Belcher appears on the screen. **STOP** after 40:88 seconds, after Belcher says, “...flirt a little bit with the boys.”  
**ASK**, “Who is the mother figure?”  
(Answer: An old woman.)  
**ASK**, “What are the sisters like?”  
(Answers should include lazy, vain, and boy-crazy.)  
**ASK**, “Where are they going?”  
(Answer: A church meeting.)  
**ASK**, “Have we seen Cinderella?”  
(Answer: No.)  
**ASK**, “Now, did you catch the one thing that seems to be a modern addition to this old-timey tale?”  
(Answer: The sisters are wearing hair mousse and it hasn’t been invented yet.) If no one picked up on this detail, **REWIND** to the beginning and **PLAY** this segment again, **STOPPING** at the same point and **ASKING** the question again.
3. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION**. **SAY**, “In this section you’ll see a new character. What does she want and who do you think she really is?” **RESUME** the video. **STOP** after 1 minute and 14:01 seconds, after Belcher asks the first daughter, “You’ve not got any coals of fire. What happened, honey?”  
**ASK**, “To whom did the daughter go to get the coals of fire?”  
(Answer: A witch, a witch woman, a witchy woman, etc.)  
**ASK**, “What did this woman want in return?”  
(Answer: To have someone comb her hair.)  
**ASK**, “Who do you think this woman really is?”  
(Answer: A fairy godmother or a good witch.)  
**ASK**, “Have you seen Cinderella yet?”  
(Answer: No.)  
**SAY**, “In many traditional European tales, the character must perform a task to be successful.”  
**ASK**, “What do you think is the task here?”

(Answer: getting hot coals for the fire, combing the witchy woman's hair, or a combination thereof.)

4. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION. SAY**, "Look for the Cinderella figure in this segment. Watch for how she acts as opposed to the other girls, and see how the witchy woman responds to her." **RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 2 minutes and 13:39 seconds when Belcher says, "...them girls just priss-tailed on to the church meetin' and left Ash Pet there."  
**ASK**, "Who is our Cinderella figure?"  
(Answer: Ash Pet.)  
**ASK**, "Does she get the coals of fire?"  
(Answer: Yes.)  
**ASK**, "How does Ash Pet treat the witchy woman?"  
(Answers should include: respectfully; she combs her hair; she calls her "Aunty," an old mountain term of respect for older women.)  
**ASK**, "What does the witchy woman tell Ash Pet to do?"  
(Answers should include: go home and clean up; fix supper; wait for her, etc.)  
**ASK**, "Now, since this story happens before 1900, did you hear anything that didn't sound right about the girls' dresses?"  
(Answer: The sisters' dresses are made of lycra, a modern fabric.) If no one picked up on this detail, **REWIND** to the beginning and **PLAY** this segment again, **STOPPING** at the same point and **ASKING** the question again.
5. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION. SAY**, "Watch to see how Ash Pet gets her dress." **RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 2 minutes and 5 seconds when Belcher says, "...she looked like a queen."  
**ASK**, "How does Ash Pet get her dress?"  
(Answer: The witchy woman chants a spell.)  
**ASK**, "When the witch asked Ash Pet what kind of decorations she would like on her dress, did you catch the one that didn't fit into the time or place?"  
(Answer: velcro.) If no one picked up on this detail, **REWIND** to the beginning and **PLAY** this segment again, **STOPPING** at the same point and **ASKING** the question again.  
**ASK**, "Who is this witchy woman?"  
(Answers should include: a fairy godmother or a good witch.)  
**ASK**, "What do you think she'll make next?"  
(Answers should include: a coach and horses.)
6. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION. SAY**, "Watch to see what the witchy woman conjures up next and hear what she tells Ash Pet about the church meeting." **RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 37:05 seconds when Belcher says, "...and strolled in."  
**ASK**, "What did the witchy woman conjure up for Ash Pet to ride to the church meeting?"  
(Answer: A horse [specifically a "pieded"/spotted horse].)  
**ASK**, "What was the last thing the witchy woman told Ash Pet to do?"

(Answers should include: take the mare home, take off the dress and slippers, roll the clothes up, hide the bundle under a big rock, and act like she was never gone.)

**ASK**, “What television theme song did the narrator sing as she ‘rode’ up to the church?”

(Answer: the “Bonanza” theme song, which students should recognize since the show is still in syndication. If students in your class aren’t aficionados of classic TV reruns, you may need to explain the significance of the music to them.) If no one picked up on this detail, **REWIND** to the beginning and **PLAY** this segment again, **STOPPING** at the same point and **ASKING** the question again.

**ASK**, “Was there television before 1900?”

(Answer: No.)

7. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION**. **SAY**, “Watch to see who meets Ash Pet at the church and notice what familiar act occurs on the way home.” **RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 1 minute and 7 seconds when Belcher says, “...acting like she hadn’t ever been gone.”  
**ASK**, “Who did Ash Pet meet at church?”  
(Answer: The King’s son.)  
**ASK**, “What Cinderella-like thing did Ash Pet do on her way home?”  
(Answer: She lost her shoe/slipper.)
  
8. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION**. **SAY**, “Now see who helps bring Ash Pet and her prince together. Pay close attention to how this is done.” **RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 2 minutes and 43:45 seconds when Belcher concludes her rendition of the “Wedding March.”  
**ASK**, “Where was Ash Pet hidden by the old woman?”  
(Answer: Under a wash tub.)  
**ASK**, “Who revealed Ash Pet’s presence to the Prince?”  
(Answer: A singing bird.)  
**ASK**, “Now that Ash Pet and the Prince are married, is the story over?”  
(Answer: Most students will say yes.)
  
9. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION**.  
**SAY**, “Wait a minute. Have you seen a big hairy man yet?”  
(Answer: No.)  
**SAY**, “Well, watch and see if you find him. If you do, try to find out what he does to Ash Pet and what his weak point is.”  
**RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 1 minute and 11:17 seconds when Belcher says, “It’d knock me out cold.”  
**ASK**, “What happened to Ash Pet?”  
(Answer: The woman and her sisters pushed Ash Pet into the water and left her to drown.)  
**ASK**, “Why didn’t she drown?”  
(Answer: A big, hairy man caught her and kept her prisoner in his cave.)  
**ASK**, “Does the big, hairy man have a weak point?”  
(Answer: If he is hit by a bullet or musket ball behind the left ear, he would pass out cold.)

10. Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION.**

**ASK**, “What do you think Ash Pet will do now?”

(Answer: Students will probably predict Ash Pet will shoot or hit the hairy man behind the left ear.)

**SAY**, “Watch and see how Ash Pet escapes and what happens to the women who tried to drown her.”

**RESUME** the video. **STOP** the video after approximately 1 minute and 28:12 seconds when Belcher says, “...right down. Thank you, everybody.”

**ASK**, “How did Ash Pet escape?”

(Answer: The Prince rescued her.)

**ASK**, “What happened to the women who tried to drown her?”

(Answer: They were sent down to live with the big, hairy man.)

**ASK**, “Did the story end as you expected it to conclude?”

(Answer: No.)

**ASK**, “Did the story end in a satisfying way for you? Why or why not?”

(Answers will vary. Allow time for general discussion of students’ reactions.)

**Culminating Activity:**

Step 1: **SAY**, “As you can see, this is just one version of the Cinderella story. It has changed through the centuries and across cultures, just as the people who told it have changed. You may have seen an updated version if you watched Drew Barrymore in the movie *Ever After*. Now I want you to devise your own, ultra-modern version of the Cinderella tale; then we’re going to contrast it with other, different Cinderella tales.”

Step 2: **TELL** students they will have 1-3 days to compose the story. (Set the time frame to accommodate overall class abilities.) They must adhere to the following guidelines:

- a) the story must occur no earlier than the year 2000;
- b) the main character/protagonist must be a sympathetic personality of good moral character (a “good guy”);
- c) the story line must at least loosely follow the general Cinderella story;
- d) gratuitous violence must be kept to a minimum; and
- e) stories must be at least three typed pages in length. (Students without access to a computer should be allowed to spend one class period in the school’s word processing lab.)

Students’ stories will be evaluated on the basis of effort and creativity, with attention paid to individual student abilities.

Step 3: **ON THE DAY STUDENTS HAND IN THEIR ORIGINAL STORIES**, students will spend a class period in the school computer lab and/or library, researching the Internet and checking reference materials for alternate Cinderella stories. The web sites listed at the beginning of this lesson should provide more than enough alternative stories for an average-sized class. **IN A LATER CLASS PERIOD**, each student would then present an oral report to the class consisting of two parts:

- a) a dramatic storyteller’s rendition of the story (or at least one not read in monotone); and

- b) a brief critique of this story as it compares to the traditional (French) version.

### **Cross-Curricular Extensions**

#### **LANGUAGE ARTS**

1. Students will compare the traditional Perrault story with “Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper,” published in the Andrew Lang Fairy Tale Treasury (New York, Avenue Books, 1979) or in a collection of Grimm’s Fairy Tales (such as the one published by Pantheon Books in 1944). Note the differences in the illustrations, the vocabulary, and the overall portrayal of the Cinderella figure in each of these stories.
2. Students will research related stories from other countries and cultures, such as the Russian Vasilisa in Russian Fairy Tales by Aleksandr Afanes’ev (New York: Pantheon, 1945) and the German Ashputtel in Danny Kaye’s Around the World Story Book. Another cultural variation would be the Native American Mi’kmaq Cinderella tale.
3. Students will read the following two Cinderella spin-offs:
  - a) Lang, Andrew. “The Old Flea-Bag,” Green Fairy Book, Viking, 1978. (A ring fits the person the prince will marry.)
  - b) Myers, Bernice. Sidney Rella and the Glass Sneaker, Macmillan, 1985. (A sneaker fits the chosen person; also, the leading character is a male rather than a female.)
4. Have students list unfamiliar words or phrases they hear in the story. Make a master list and determine the expressions’ meanings via their usage in the story. Students could then list examples of colorful language or old-fashioned phrases used in their families. The teacher could employ Cratis Williams’ essay on Appalachian dialect and speech to help students understand the unique and special nature of the disappearing Appalachian dialect.
5. Read the Grimm fairy tale “Little One Eye, Little Two Eyes, and Little Three Eyes” found, among others, in Fairy Tales (Follett, 1968). In this story, the two bad sisters hide the third, good sister when the suitor arrives.
6. Students could write or sing the Ash Pet story as a ballad. If possible, they should use a computer to generate instrumentals or sound effects. Actual instruments could also be employed for accompaniment.

#### **SOCIAL STUDIES**

1. The teacher will emphasize that stories move from one country to another or from one teller to another, changing as they are passed on. The teacher would explain the origin of the familiar version and stress that it was preserved in written form. Contrast this with the Appalachian oral tradition of storytelling. Using a map to show the location of Wise County, the teacher should display a photo of storyteller Granny Shores from the cover of Outwitting the Devil: Jack Tales from Wise County, VA, edited by Charles Perdue, Jr. (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1987.) Discuss whether she resembles the students’ grandmothers and/or great-grandmothers. Have students bring in old family photos or artifacts, or let them dress up in old clothes such as may have been worn in 1900, 1920, 1930, and 1940. The class could then discuss differences in styles and clothes between those times and now.
2. Students would compile their own oral histories by interviewing older family members or close family friends. The histories could be transcribed for inclusion in a class volume of histories which could be published on paper or displayed on an Internet site.

3. Doing research using library materials or on the Internet, students could contrast the plight of orphans today with the situation of those living 100 years ago.
4. The class could discuss child labor in the United States as it existed around 1900. What kinds of laws have been passed to protect today's children? How recent are those laws?

### **COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:**

1. Invite a writer of children's books to the class to discuss the elements of good children's literature.
2. Take students on a field trip to a local or regional storytelling festival.
3. Invite a storyteller to visit the school and do a presentation for the class.
4. Ask a college professor or scholar of folk tales and legends to visit the class and discuss how these tales change with time.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

#### **Leesa Wood**

Leesa Wood is currently a teacher of AP Biology and Anatomy/Biology 2 at Tazewell High School in Tazewell, Virginia; she is also a reading specialist. She has been teaching for 18 years and has a Master's degree in Reading Diagnosis and Remediation from the University of Virginia. She also holds Bachelor's degrees in Biology and in English from Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She is a past McGlothlin Award Semi-Finalist. Leesa currently serves as president of Xi Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma (IOTA State) and is also a member of the Tazewell Education Association, the VEA, and the NEA.

In 2003, Leesa headed a course development team for Southwest Virginia Education and Training Network; together they created an Internet-based course on Appalachian culture currently being taught online to students in various counties throughout Southwest Virginia. She is now working toward obtaining certification in online course development and administration and just finished administering an online staff development course dealing with accommodating various learning styles.

As a member of the Appalachian Teachers' Network, Leesa served as editor of the Network's newsletter, "Stitches," and has presented seminars on Appalachian botanicals and Appalachian children's literature for the Appalachian Teachers' Network Conference and for Giles County Schools. A former journalist, she also holds numerous awards from the Virginia Press Association. Leesa resides in the Claypool Hill area of Tazewell County on her family's horse farm.