Fairy Tales with a Black Consciousness: From Cinderella to Ananse

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The Book

Fairy Tales with a Black Consciousness

Essays on Adaptations of Familiar Stories

Edited by Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, Ruth McKoy Lowery and Laretta Henderson
Goals of Stories

- Cross-Cultural Borders
- Critique the recasting of black characters as racially diverse and ambiguous
- Transformation of stories
- Social and political changes through stories
Stories addressed

- The Steel Pan Man of Harlem
- The Girl Who Spun Gold
- Sugarcane Girl: A Caribbean Rapunzel
- Cinderella
- Ananse/Anancy/Anansi
The Pied Piper of the Harlem Renaissance: Colin Bootman’s *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem*

- The Harlem Renaissance has become a major site of black cultural representation in books for young people.
- Since the mid-1990s, publishers have offered dozens of texts for children celebrating that period of artistic and political accomplishment.
- Whatever the reasons, the sheer variety of texts on the Harlem Renaissance demonstrate a range of desires for the cultural work a text can effect.
Some texts seek to concretize history; others play in the imaginative terrain of black possibility during the Renaissance.

The Steel Pan Man of Harlem
The retelling of two popular Grimm’s Brothers’ fairytales captures the essence of Caribbean experiences:

Virginia Hamilton’s *The Girl Who Spun Gold*, a Caribbean version of the Rumpelstiltskin story and

Patricia Storace’s *Sugarcane Girl: A Caribbean Rapunzel*, a West Indian version of Rapunzel.
Black cultural ways of knowing continues to be rooted within African oral traditions.

This cultural knowledge gets passed down through stories as storytellers weave their web of wonderfully interest-piquing tales.

Thus, by retelling traditional tales that incorporate African traditional narrative patterns, the authors of these retellings assert cultural authenticity and affiliations with the continent through their stories, liberally mixing Caribbean and African cultural artifacts to legitimize the stories.
Caribbean Tales

**Sugar Cane: A Caribbean Rapunzel**

*By Patricia Storace, Pictures by Raúl Colón*

**The Girl Who Spun Gold**

*By Virginia Hamilton, Leo & Diane Dillon*
Cinderella variants from the black perspective—African, Caribbean, and African American—are examined through the lens of the anthropologist/folklorist.

This lens necessarily involves tale types and motifs common across all Cinderella variants.

Cultural contexts of the tales, the availability and accessibility of black Cinderella tales.
Cinderella
Ananse/Anancy/Anansi

- Ananse--traveling from one culture to another through environmental changes within the community
- Sociopolitical influences
- Economic developments and time
- New perspectives
Oral Stories

- Anancy stories are oral stories passed down from generations and later included in volumes.
- Much like the Aesop fables, these stories have transformed and morphed into other characters over time.
- Familiar stories include:
  - Brer Rabbit
  - Bugs Bunny
  - Other cartoon characters
Brer Anancy
Cultural stories enable students to see their various cultural mores portrayed in ways they can identify.

Portrayals of protagonists offers clues to the culture being presented.

As stories migrate through space and time they evolve to reflect and meet the needs of their audiences.

Presenting children with literature that allows them to see themselves is a way to engage them in dialogue.
Stories can ease turmoil within groups or communities

Multiple versions of the same archetypical story are necessary to appeal to and be applicable to various cultural contexts

Stories can be mirrors, windows, or doors that move us to explore the vast differences and seek commonalities among us
Literary texts are 50% of the reading materials required for students.

Share a variety of literary texts so students are exposed to different genres and forms.

Help students read critically to determine story’s structure, meaning, view.

Text complexity: What does it look like?
Just read!
Happy reading...