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Book Links: May 2000 (v.9 no.5)

Multicultural Cinderella Stories

by Mary Northrup

The story of Cinderella, perhaps the best-known fairy tale, is told or read to children of very young ages. But Cinderella is not just one story; more than 500 versions have been found—just in Europe! The tale's origins appear to date back to a Chinese story from the ninth century, "Yeh-Shen." Almost every culture seems to have its own version, and every storyteller his or her tale. Charles Perrault is believed to be the author, in the 1690s, of our "modern" 300-year-old Cinderella, the French Cendrillon.

Famous children's writers and illustrators have interpreted Cinderella, including Arthur Rackham, Marcia Brown (her version won the Caldecott Medal in 1955), Nonny Hogrogian, Paul Galdone, and Amy Ehrlich. Most renderings of the story include an evil stepmother and stepsister(s), a dead mother, a dead or ineffective father, some sort of gathering such as a ball or festival, mutual attraction with a person of high status, a lost article, and a search that ends with success.

Male Cinderellas do appear, and not just in parodies, such as Helen Ketteman's *Bubba the Cowboy Prince* and Sandi Takayama's *Sumorella*, listed below. Billy Beg of Ireland is just one of many of these versions of the story.

Cinderella, despite her popularity, has developed a reputation as a simpering, whimpering girl who is helpless until the right magic comes along. But this is the Cinderella of the later twentieth century. The earlier Cinderella, in many of her original forms, was not a wishing-only kind of person. She was self-reliant, devoted to family and ancestors, and willing to make her own future.

The following list concentrates on picture books, but novels based on the Cinderella theme do exist. For a recent example, see *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine (HarperCollins, 1997). The grade levels are suggestions only, as many fairy tale picture books have sophisticated illustrations, allowing them to be used with older students.

Africa

Climo, Shirley. *The Egyptian Cinderella*. Illus. by Ruth Heller. 1989. 32p. HarperCollins, \$15 (0-690-04822-X); paper, \$5.95(0-06-443279-3).

K–Gr. 3. Rhodopis, a Greek slave girl living in Egypt, is teased by the servants about her coloring. Eventually, one of her rosy-gold slippers is carried to the pharaoh's court. He searches for, and finds, the girl. Based partly on fact (a slave named Rhodopis did marry Pharaoh Amasis) and partly on folk legends, this story is remarkable for its details of life in ancient Egypt and for the Egyptian-style illustrations. An endnote distinguishes historical background from the influences of other folktales and legends in shaping this tale.

Onyefulu, Obi. *Chinye: A West African Folk Tale*. Illus. by Evie Safarewicz. 1994. 32p. Viking, \$14.99 (0-

670-85115-9); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (0-14-055760-11). K–Gr. 3. The mistreated stepdaughter Chinye passes through the forest to gather water unharmed by animals and helped by an old woman. Her wise choice, and her stepsister's bad one, bring about a happy ending in this sensitively told tale with a message.

Phumla. *Nomi and the Magic Fish: A Story from Africa*. Illus. by Carole Byard. 1972. 32p. Doubleday, o.p. K–Gr. 3. Nomi is a Zulu girl, treated cruelly by her stepmother and stepsister. A fish feeds the girl and is killed by the stepmother. Its bones cannot be picked up by anyone but Nomi, who then marries the chief. This colorful story shares some elements with the Chinese version of the Cinderella story.

Steptoe, John. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*. 1987. 32p. Lothrop, \$16 (0-688-04045-4); paper, \$5.95 (0-688-12935-8); HarperCollins, Spanish, \$16 (0-688-15548-0); Spanish paper, \$5.95 (0-688-15481-6). K–Gr. 3. Nyasha must put up with a nagging, bad-tempered sister. But when both girls are tested, Nyasha's kindness wins her the prince. Breathtaking illustrations crown this intriguing story with a twist at the end. Translations of character names, a note about the illustrations, and information on the origins of this tale are included in the author's notes.

Americas

Native American

Martin, Rafe. *The Rough-Face Girl*. Illus. by David Shannon. 1992. 32p. Putnam, \$15.95 (0-399-21859-9); paper, \$5.99 (0-698-11626-7). Preschool–Gr. 3. A young Indian girl, whose face and hands have been burnt from tending the fire, wishes to marry the Invisible Being. Tested by his sister, she alone of all the village maidens is found worthy. This beautiful, haunting retelling of a tale from the Algonquin tradition is enhanced by exquisite illustrations and a helpful source note.

Pollock, Penny. *The Turkey Girl: A Zuni Cinderella Story*. Illus. by Ed Young. 1996. 32p. Little, Brown, \$16.95 (0-316-71314-7). Preschool–Gr. 3. An orphan girl who herds turkeys is rewarded for her kindness with beautiful clothes for a sacred dance. Set in a Southwest pueblo, this story has a very different ending from the usual “happily ever after” closing of more-familiar Cinderella variants. An author's note includes information on the collector of many Zuni folktales.

San Souci, Robert D. *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story*. Illus. by Daniel San Souci. 1994. 32p. Dell, paper, \$6.99 (0-440-41363-X). Preschool–Gr. 3. This tale features a girl who is overworked by her sisters and who wishes to meet the invisible warrior. Because of her goodness and inner vision she sees him and becomes his bride. This retelling is not as dark a story as Martin's telling. It also includes notes on the versions of the tale the author consulted.

Other American Cultures

Compton, Joanne. *Ashpet: An Appalachian Tale*. Illus. by Kenn Compton. 1994. 40p. Holiday, \$15.95 (0-8234-1106-0).

Preschool–Gr. 3. In this version, the maiden is a hired girl who works for Widow Hooper and her daughters Myrtle and Ethel. Ashpet, with a new calico dress and shoes courtesy of a magical granny, encounters the doctor's son at a church meeting. Humorous illustrations and local (mountain) color make for a delightful story. An author's note traces the path from the Grimm brothers' character Aschenputtel to a more modern Ashpet.

Domitila: A Cinderella Tale from the Mexican Tradition. Adapted by Jewell Reinhart Coburn. Illus. by Connie McLennan. 2000. 32p. Shen's, \$16.95 (1-885-00813-9).

Preschool–Gr. 3. The emphasis in this story is on Domitila's accomplishments as a cook and leather artist, skills enhanced by the love her mother taught her to include in every task she undertook. It is her dead mother's spirit and the legacy of her training on which Domitila depends, not a fairy godmother. The rich young man who searches for her is at first enamoured of Domitila's cooking, but learns to appreciate and love her deeper qualities.

Hayes, Joe. *Little Gold Star / Estrellita de oro: A Cinderella Cuento Retold in Spanish and English*. Illus. by Gloria Osuna Perez and Lucia Angela Perez. 2000. 32p. Cinco Puntos, \$15.95 (0-938317-49-0). Preschool–

Gr. 5. Storyteller Hayes, in retelling this version of the Cinderella tale, which was brought to the U.S. Southwest by the first Spanish settlers, draws on both the English and Spanish renditions he heard as a child. The heroine, Arcia, is kind to a hawk and receives the reward of a glowing star on her forehead, and, ultimately, the love of the prince, while her stepsisters, who are spiteful and treacherous to the bird, are disfigured.

Hooks, William H. *Moss Gown*. Illus. by Donald Carrick. 1987. 48p. Houghton, paper, \$6.95 (0-395-54793-8). K–Gr. 4. From North Carolina comes the story of Candace, who is banished from her father's house. Aided by a witch-woman who gives her a moss gown, she finds work and eventually love with the master of the house. Motifs from the stories of Cinderella and King Lear are combined in this folktale, along with elements of magic, southern culture, and Elizabethan history, and an extensive author's note traces these origins.

San Souci, Robert D. *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella*. Illus. by Brian Pinkney. 1998. 40p. Simon & Schuster, \$16 (0-689-80668-X). K–Gr. 4. Told by the godmother of Cendrillon, this story is deeply intertwined with Caribbean culture. All of the familiar elements—wicked stepmother, mean stepsister, carriage, gown, and lost slipper—are here, but they are perked with the color and spice of the islands. A glossary of Creole words and a note documenting the origins of the tale and the point of view adopted in this retelling are included.

Schroeder, Alan. *Smoky Mountain Rose: An Appalachian Cinderella*. Illus. by Brad Sneed. 1997. 32p. Dial, \$14.99 (0-8037-1733-4). K–Gr. 4. Told in dialect, this is the story of Rose, who must contend with stepmother Gertie and her daughters, Annie and Liza Jane. With the help of a hog, Rose makes it to the big party and catches the eye of the “rich feller.” The derivation of this take on the Cinderella story, as well as folktale collections where similar versions may be found, is documented in the author's note.

Asia

Climo, Shirley. *The Korean Cinderella*. Illus. by Ruth Heller. 1993. 48p. HarperCollins, \$15 (0-06-020432-X); paper, \$5.95 (0-06-443397-8). K–Gr. 3. Pear Blossom must perform impossible tasks for her stepmother, such as filling a leaky water jar and polishing grains of rice. She succeeds with the help of a frog and birds. A magistrate who notices her on the road traces her to her house using her sandal. Illustrations inspired by temple patterns enliven the book. Notes by both the author and the illustrator illuminate some of the cultural references in the story.

Coburn, Jewell Reinhart. *Angkat: The Cambodian Cinderella*. Illus. by Edmund Flotte. 1998. 32p. Shen's, \$16.95 (1-885008-09-0). Gr. 1–3. Capturing the flavor of the culture, this Southeast Asian tale has a quiet beauty in text and image and includes many recurrent themes. Having helped a fish, the mistreated child of the ashes is helped by the Spirit of Virtue in overcoming a plot against her forged by her wicked stepmother. In this variant, it is a stolen slipper that leads the prince to Angkat.

Coburn, Jewell Reinhart, and Tzexa Cherta Lee. *Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella*. Illus. by Anne Sibley O'Brien. 1996. 32p. Shen's, \$15.95 (1-885008-01-5). Gr. 2–6. A beautiful young girl is helped by a gentle cow that is really the girl's mother. The son of the village elder finds Jouanah and her missing shoe and rescues her from a cruel stepmother and stepsister. While similar to some of the other Asian variants of the tale, this story provides insight into the Hmong culture.

Han, Oki S., and Stephanie Haboush Plunkett. *Kongi and Potgi: A Cinderella Story from Korea*. Illus. by Oki S. Han. 1996. 32p. Dial, \$14.99 (0-8037-1571-4). Preschool–Gr. 3. Kongi works hard for her stepmother and her stepsister, Potgi. Helped by the animals in the field, she is dressed in fine clothes to go to a party at the palace, and a lost shoe brings her together with the prince. The beautiful pictures filled with colorful costumes heighten enjoyment of this story; the book also includes notes on Korean culture.

Louie, Ai-Ling. *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China*. Illus. by Ed Young. 1982. 32p. Putnam, paper, \$5.99(0-698-11388-8).

Preschool–Gr. 2. Here the hardworking and lovely girl befriends a fish, which is killed by her stepmother. Yeh-Shen saves the bones, which are magic, and they help her dress appropriately for a festival. When she loses her slipper after a fast exit, the king finds her and falls in love with her. This sad and beautiful story, with gentle illustrations, is retold from one of the oldest Cinderella stories. A source note includes the story

as it appears in Chinese script from the ninth century.

Lum, Darrell. *The Golden Slipper: A Vietnamese Legend*. Illus. by Makiko Nagano. 1997. 32p. Troll, \$18.60 (0-8167-3405-4); paper, \$4.95 (0-8167-3406-2). Preschool–Gr. 2. This retelling of the Tam and Cam story features the dutiful daughter, Tam, despised by her stepmother and her half-sister, Cam. Tam is helped by her animal friends, allowing her to attend the autumn festival, where she meets and marries the prince. Straightforward, easy-to-understand text for younger listeners or readers and a source note explaining the origins of the tale complete the book.

Mehta, Lila. *The Enchanted Anklet*. Illus. by Neela Chhaniara. 1985. 32p. Lilmur, o.p. K–Gr. 3. In this Cinderella story from India, Cinduri endures life with a stepmother and her daughter. Her deliverance comes through Godfather Snake, who transforms her so she may go to a festival, and there she meets the prince. Like many other versions, this contains familiar Cinderella elements, but it maintains its distinctive Indian style. A glossary and source note are included.

Schroeder, Alan. *Lily and the Wooden Bowl*. Illus. by Yoriko Ito. 1994. 32p. Dell, paper, \$5.99 (0-440-41294-3). Gr. 1–5. Lily, who wears her grandmother's bowl on her head to protect her, works for the cruel Matsu. When Matsu's son wishes Lily for his wife, she tests Lily. At the wedding, Lily's beauty is revealed. This gentle story is enhanced by paintings in traditional Japanese style. An author's note references collections in which the story may be found and itemizes the changes Schroeder made when retelling the tale.

Wilson, Barbara Ker. *Wishbones: A Folk Tale from China*. Illus. by Meilo So. 1993. 28p. Simon & Schuster, \$14.95 (0-02-793125-0). Preschool–Gr. 2. This tale is told in an accessible manner for young listeners. Bright illustrations enrich this story of Yeh Hsien, her fish, and her silken slipper found by the king.

Europe

The British Isles

Greene, Ellin. *Billy Beg and His Bull*. Illus. by Kimberly Bulcken Root. 1994. 32p. Holiday, \$15.95 (0-8234-1100-1). Preschool–Gr. 3. In a switch from the traditional gender of Cinderella, in this story a boy is the object of his stepmother's hate, and a princess finds his shoe and searches for the wearer. With elements of a tall tale—a bull that can fly, a giant with many heads, and a fire-breathing dragon—this Irish tale is exciting and magical. An author's note introduces readers to the Irish storytelling tradition in which this tale is based.

Steel, Flora Annie. *Tattercoats: An Old English Tale*. Illus. by Diane Goode. 1976. 32p. Bradbury, o.p. K–Gr. 3. Listeners will sympathize with Tattercoats. She is dressed in rags and reviled by the servants, with no friends but a goose herd. This is a satisfying old-fashioned fairy tale, with magic and meanness, a castle and king, a ball and beauty.

Central and Eastern Europe

Huck, Charlotte. *Princess Furball*. Illus. by Anita Lobel. 1989. 40p. Greenwillow, \$16 (0-688-07837-0); Morrow, paper, \$5.95 (0-688-13107-7).

Preschool–Gr. 2. When her father demands she marry an ogre, the princess of this captivating tale leaves home. She becomes a kitchen maid, but captures the king's fancy through use of treasures from her dead mother. Fear, despair, magic, and happiness charge through this story (and the pictures of the princess in the thousand-fur coat are wonderful!). An author's note details the background of this story version.

Innocenti, Roberto. *Cinderella*. 1987. 32p. Harcourt, o.p. Preschool–Gr. 3. Set in the 1920s in Europe, this stylish adaptation is closely wedded to that period.

Jaffe, Nina. *The Way Meat Loves Salt: A Cinderella Tale from the Jewish Tradition*. Illus. by Louise August. 1998. 32p. Holt, \$15.95 (0-8050-4384-5). K–Gr. 2. Text and pictures combine to vividly depict the Eastern European Jewish culture. Mireleh, a rabbi's daughter, is driven from her house when she tells her

father she loves him the way meat loves salt. Eventually, a young man traces her missing magic shoe to her and she is reunited with her father at her wedding. A Yiddish pronunciation guide and an extensive author's note citing the origin of the story are provided.

Silverman, Erica. *Raisel's Riddle*. Illus. by Susan Gaber. 1999. 40p. Farrar, \$16 (0-374-36168-1).
Preschool–Gr. 3. This version of the tale draws strongly on Jewish heritage, values, and religious traditions. Raisel is a servant in the home of a distinguished rabbi, whose cruel cook keeps the girl from the Purim holy day festivities. She helps an old woman that grants her three wishes, allowing Raisel to attend the party properly dressed. She dances with the rabbi's son and poses a riddle to him, winning his heart with her wisdom.

Middle East

Climo, Shirley. *The Persian Cinderella*. Illus. by Robert Florczak. 1999. 32p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-06-026763-1).

Preschool–Gr. 4. This author has chosen to retell the Cinderella stories of many locales and cultures, and here, the venue is the ancient Middle East. Beautiful Settareh finds a fairy in a magic jar, and the fairy uses her powers to dress the girl appropriately for the Royal New Year celebration. As custom dictates that the women celebrate separately, the prince can only glimpse Settareh. But, through her lost diamond bracelet, he finds her and overcomes a plot by her wicked sisters to kill her.

Hickox, Rebecca. *The Golden Sandal: A Middle Eastern Cinderella Story*. Illus. by Will Hillenbrand. 1998. 32p. Holiday, \$15.95 (0-8234-1331-4); paper, \$6.95 (0-8234-1518-9).

K–Gr. 3. Maha, who works hard for her stepmother and stepsister, receives a gown of silk and golden sandals from a magic fish to wear to a wedding. This lively story will have listeners enthralled. Illustrations give a real flavor of the Middle East, with a touch of humor. An author's note includes comments on derivations of the Cinderella story and references to Middle Eastern versions of the tale.

Parodies and Humorous Treatments

Cole, Babette. *Prince Cinders*. 1987. 32p. Putnam, paper, \$5.99 (0-698-11554-6). Gr. 1–3. In this gender-bender, the small, skinny hero is forced to clean up after his big, hairy brothers. A princess falls for him, but, instead of a shoe, the test of the proper mate is a pair of trousers that must fit the wearer.

Edwards, Pamela Duncan. *Dinorella: A Prehistoric Fairy Tale*. Illus. by Henry Cole. 1997. 32p. Hyperion, \$15.45 (0-7868-0309-6); paper, \$5.99 (0-7866-1173-0). K–Gr. 4. Hilarious illustrations and generous use of alliteration make this Cinderella story, told with a cast of dinosaurs, one to giggle over.

Jackson, Ellen. *Cinder Edna*. Illus. by Kevin O'Malley. 1994. 32p. Lothrop, \$16 (0-688-12322-8); Morrow, paper, \$4.95 (0-688-16295-9). Gr. 3–5. Bet you didn't know that Cinderella had a neighbor, Cinder Edna. Edna has saved her money and educated herself, and she is ready for anything. This witty treatment of the familiar tale has an obvious message.

Johnston, Tony. *Bigfoot Cinderrrrrella*. Illus. by James Warhola. 1998. 32p. Putnam, \$15.99 (0-399-23021-1). Preschool–Gr. 3. Imagine that Cinderella is big, hairy, and, well . . . smelly. Luckily, her prince matches that description, too. This humorous version of the tale mixes the Bigfoot legend with environmental concerns, and even includes a glossary of the plants and animals mentioned in the story.

Karlin, Barbara. *Cinderella*. Illus. by James Marshall. 1987. 32p. Little, Brown, paper, \$5.95 (0-316-49303-6).
Preschool–Gr. 3. This over-the-top comic interpretation of the traditional story depends on silly visual images that burlesque fairy tale conventions.

Ketteman, Helen. *Bubba the Cowboy Prince: A Fractured Texas Tale*. Illus. by James Warhola. 1997. 32p. Scholastic, \$15.95 (0-590-25506-1). K–Gr. 3. Bubba is the Cinderella in this story full of cowboy humor. With the help of his fairy godcow, he goes to Miz Lurleen's ball. He loses a boot, but Lurleen finds him at last. The language in the story sounds authentic and the illustrations are comical.

Lattimore, Deborah Nourse. *Cinderhazel: The Cinderella of Halloween*. 1997. 32p. Scholastic, \$15.95 (0-590-20232-4). Gr. 1–3. This is one Cinderella who doesn't mind the dirt. Fortunately, the prince loves a mess just as much as she does. Stepsisters, a fancy ball, and the requisite godmother make up the familiar

elements of the story, but all have a distinctly witchy feel.

Meddaugh, Susan. *Cinderella's Rat*. 1997. 32p. Houghton, \$15 (0-395-86833-5). Preschool–Gr. 3. The old tale takes on a new, silly guise when seen through the eyes of one of the rats who was changed into a coach boy by Cinderella's fairy godmother. A bumbling wizard adds more humorous twists to the story.

Minters, Frances. *Cinder-Elly*. Illus. by G. Brian Karas. 1994. 32p. Viking, \$14.99 (0-670-84417-9); paper, \$4.99 (0-614-28895-9). Preschool–Gr. 3. In this city version of Cinderella, Elly hopes to go to the big basketball game. Her godmother even gives her glass sneakers! Told in rapping rhyme, this story of Prince and Elly is ultramodern, enhanced by entertaining illustrations.

Takayama, Sandi. *Sumorella*. Illus. by Esther Szegedy. 1997. 24p. Bess, \$9.95 (1-57306-027-5). Preschool–Gr. 5. In this tale set in Hawaii, a young boy wants to be a sumo wrestler, but he is just a "Mango Boy" who must do his chores. His "fairy godmother," a local peddler, works some magic (after a false start with the boy in a gown). Hawaiian dialect is an integral part of this funny story, and a glossary is included.

Activities

- On a map of the world, find the countries or geographic areas where the Cinderella stories the class has read are based.
- Compare illustrations in different versions of the story. How do they capture the mood? Do they add to the story by showing details or action not mentioned in the text?
- Make a chart of the differences and similarities in versions of the Cinderella stories. Let the class select a favorite version and act out the story.

Mary Northrup is a reference librarian at Maple Woods Community College in Kansas City, Missouri, as well as a freelance writer of professional materials.

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