

Your Life, the Fairy Tale



As we've learned by reading fairy tales in class and discussing the historical contexts in which they emerged, magical acts in tales are often simple guises for real-world issues: the maiden losing her hands may represent a lack of feminine agency in a patriarchal society; combing jewels out of one's hair can allude to the public health issue of head lice; Bluebeard's 'bloody chamber' may speak to the fear and danger of arranged marriages.

For your second major essay assignment, you will write a **creative essay in which you fictionalize an important moment from your own life as a fairy tale**. Like fairy tales, your essay should tell a story: there should be a beginning (which sets up the story), middle (which presents the main conflict), and end (which can be happy or unhappy, but should leave the reader with the lesson learned from the experience). Your fairy tale should be **timeless**; don't use modern details, but instead try to write a piece that can be read and understood in any time period. In addition to the creative essay, you will also submit a **reflection that explains the choices you made**

in the story. Here are steps to follow:

1. **Choose a story from your own life.** You can choose any moment you want, but ultimately, you should write about an experience in which *you overcame an obstacle and learned an important lesson*. Many fairy tales have a moral at the end; what is the moral of your story? As you choose a topic, try to be unique and tell a story that you don't think anyone else could tell.
2. **Consider how you can fictionalize the details of your story using fairy tale tropes.** I assume most of you haven't battled against witches or met any animals that defecate gold, but the details of your own life stories can be translated into fairy tale tropes. Does your story include a troublesome authority figure? Turn him/her into a wicked stepmother. Did a kind stranger help you out? Have them appear as a magical aid (donor), or as a kind servant. You can use any of the tropes we've discussed in class, but your final paper should engage meaningfully with *at least three* specific fairy tale tropes and should generally **follow the order outlined in Propp's 31 functions**.
3. **Write an outline and discuss with me.** Before you begin writing your story, make sure you have it all planned out in an organized outline. Each student will then attend a short meeting with me in extended office hours to discuss the outline. Because meetings are mandatory for every student, you can only sign up for *one* timeslot, so be sure to make the most of your visit!
4. **After you've written the creative component, you should then write a reflection** in which you describe how/why you chose the fairy tale tropes in your story and how the magical acts metaphorically represent your life story. This reflection should make it clear to me that your story was planned and executed with attention to class lectures and course readings.

LOGISTICS

- This essay should be about 1200 words total; 700 words for the creative essay and 500 words for the critical rationale. The word cap for the creative component is flexible; if you need more space to tell your story, I'm ok with exceeding the suggested word count. Please keep the rationale as close to 500 words as possible.
- On or before the day the essay is due, you should post it in the ICON Dropbox as a **single document**. A physical copy is not needed, and will not be accepted in lieu of a Dropbox submission.

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IMPORTANT DATES

- M. 2/19: Essay assigned
- M. 2/26: **Due: Outline;** bring completed one-page outline to class.
- M. 2/26-Th. 3/8: Consultation period: you must meet with me in my extended office hours during this period to go over your outline (and partial draft, if preferred).
- W. 3/7: Story time! Come to class with a full draft of your tale.
- Sat. 3/9: **Due: Final draft;** post to ICON Dropbox by midnight.

GRADING CRITERIA

Your essay will be graded according to how well it meets the following criteria:

- **Content**

Did you *meaningfully* link your life story to at least three fairy tale tropes we discussed in class? Did your story ultimately teach a lesson? Was your choice of topic interesting/engaging to read? Did your rationale engage meaningfully with course concepts?

- **Organization**

Did your story have an introduction, present the conflict, then conclude gracefully? Did your outline show careful consideration for how the story would unfold (i.e. when characters were introduced, at what point the conflict was resolved, etc.)? Did you follow the general order outlined in Propp's 31 functions?

- **Clarity**

Was your essay presented in clear, precise language? Did you vary sentence structure and use standard grammar, punctuation, etc.?