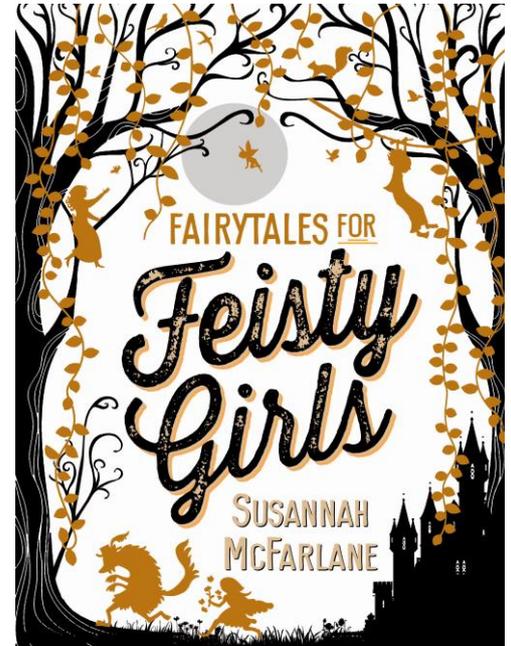


Fairytales for Feisty Girls

By Susannah McFarlane

September 2018 ISBN 9781760523541 hardback
Recommended for 6–9-year-old readers



Summary

Girls can rescue themselves, thank you very much. Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Thumbelina may find themselves in some tricky situations, but life is all about using your talents and brains to escape trouble and create your own happily ever after.

Rapunzel, future engineer and inventor, gives her hair the chop and uses it to create an intricate pulley-system to abseil herself down from that pesky tower and be free from the overbearing enchantress.

Little Red Riding Hood, trainee botanist, uses the same curiosity and powers of observation that got her into trouble to get herself—and her beloved grandma—out of it again by playing the wolf at his own game. Oh, and while she's at it, she helps out that forgetful woodsman who can't find his axe.

Cinderella, happiest in her gumboots and an avid animal-lover, sees her opportunity at midnight and makes tracks, using the revenue from selling her single glass slipper online to start her own animal sanctuary.

The only thing small about **Thumbelina** is her size and that, well, that is very small indeed. Everything else about her is huge: her courage, her determination, her heart, and her sense of humour. Follow her as she explores the world, and eventually finds her place in it.



Fairytales for Feisty Girls is in the spirit of *The Paperbag Princess*, *Rosie Revere, Engineer*, *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and the author's own EJ Girl Hero series. But while the stories have a distinctly modern feminist twist, the colour and black-and-white illustrations by four leading Australian illustrators, Beth Norling, Claire Robertson, Lucinda Gifford and Sher Rill Ng, provide a timeless and classic treasury-style feel.

Themes

- Fairytales
- 'fractured tales'
- kindness & generosity
- empowering girls
- STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) and problem solving

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Author's inspiration

'I was shocked to read a report out of the NYU Child Study Centre indicating that the average girl's self-esteem peaks at age nine then plummets, never to return to that nine-year-old peak again. It seemed unbelievable, yet I recognised my daughter in it: at nine years old she was gaining competence in many things yet slipping in confidence. She seemed to be stepping back just as she should be moving forward. It wasn't capacity, it was belief or lack of belief, and I wanted to do something.

'As a publisher and a writer, I know the power of stories, their power to inspire and to change our thinking, how we see things, how we see ourselves. I wanted to write a story that might help change how our girls saw themselves. [After the EJ12 Girl Hero series] I also wanted to play around with the fairytales I had loved as a girl. I was pretty sure Rapunzel, Cinderella, Lucy aka Little Red Riding Hood, and Thumbelina would be able to rescue themselves, using their talents, their STEM skills and the strength of their good hearts. And so *Fairytales for Feisty Girls* was born...'

— Susannah McFarlane

Discussion questions and activities

- Before beginning the unit of work, ask students to define the term 'fairy tale' and name some of their favourites. Discuss the idea that fairytales might be a means of teaching morals to children. Choose a fairy tale that all students know and talk about the lesson taught in that story. (For instance, young girls should never talk to strangers is the moral behind *Little Red Riding Hood*.)

Now talk about the sort of people who inhabit fairytales—small children, beautiful young girls, handsome princes and wicked old women—and discuss who is normally the hero in these tales? Are girls normally the ones to be saved and boys the ones to do the saving? Ask how might we change fairytales to better reflect that both boys and girls can be heroes?

- Look at the front cover of *Fairytales for Feisty Girls* and:
 - Discuss as a group the mood that is set by the cover image, colours, font, light and shade. Do you expect these stories to be like the fairytales already discussed? (See above.) What makes you think this?
 - Discuss which famous fairy tale characters are depicted here.
 - Turn to the definition of the word 'feisty' and, in their own words, ask students to describe what they understand the word to mean.
 - Referring back to the earlier discussion about the gender roles normally played by characters in fairytales, ask students if they think this word fits what they would expect of a typical female in fairytales.
- Read the poem/prologue out loud to the class and ask students whether it sets an expectation that what is to come in the book will be very different to normal fairytales.
- Read through each of the four stories and then ask students why they think each main character deserves to be described as 'feisty'. What is the special talent that each girl has, and how does she use it to solve the problem she faces?

- Why do you think the author chose to make the male character in this version of Rapunzel an inventor and not a prince? Do you think this Rapunzel is more, or less, likely to live 'happily ever after' with an inventor? Why do you think this?
- Who 'saves' Little Red Riding Hood in the traditional form of the story? Who saves her in this version, and what role does the woodsman play in the story?
- How does the prince in this version of *Cinderella* differ from the more traditional character? In what ways does he change for Cinderella, and how does this version of living 'happily ever after' differ?
- In this version of *Thumbelina*, Thumbelina loves adventure and telling jokes, and this serves her well on her journey. Fairytales often deal with a quest or journey.
 - Can you think of some other examples?
 - Can you think of any other girls in fairytales you've read who love telling jokes?
 - Are you glad Thumbelina doesn't marry a fairy at the ending of this story, like she does in the original story?

Perhaps you could write a fairytale about a girl on a journey—what will she be like, and what will be motivating her on her journey?

- Explore the concept of 'feisty':
 - Younger students might draw their favourite 'feisty girl' escaping using her own special talent: encourage them to explain why they chose this particular character and what she is doing in the picture.
 - Older students might be encouraged to come up with their own alternative rescue plan for their favourite feisty girl.
 - Both younger and older students could be encouraged to break into small groups to come up with feisty versions for well-known fairytales not covered in the book.

The author

Susannah McFarlane understands kids, and loves creating stories they will enjoy reading. She is best known as the author, creator and publisher of some of Australia's most successful children's book series. She created and wrote the awarding-winning **EJ12 Girl Hero** series, which sold over a million copies and sparked the development of the Girl Hero project (www.girlheroproject.com), plus the **EJ Spy School** series. She also created and co-wrote with Louise Park, as Mac Park, the hugely popular **D-Bot Squad** and **Boy vs Beast** series; wrote the **Little Mates** series of alphabet books for under-fives; was series editor for **Stuff Happens!**, about the everyday challenges boys face; and was the original concept-creator of **Go Girl!** and **Zac Power**, two of Australia's leading tween fiction series.

Young readers can find out about Susannah and her writing on her website:

<http://www.susannahmcfarlane.com/kids-stuff/>



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