

FOLKTALES: COMPARING STORIES FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES

What is a folktale?

Folktales are often referred to as fairy tales but should not be limited to this definition. Folktales have been used for centuries as a way of teaching children about the truths of the culture in which they live. Characteristics most commonly found in folktales are:

- The story often takes place in a distant land or remote past: Once upon a time, in a faraway land, a long time ago, etc.
- The story establishes a clear difference between good and evil, right and wrong, good and bad, and will often label characters as such early in the story.
- The story will most likely be repetitive, rhythmic, or will use rhyme to engage the audience.
- The characters in the story will often be aided by trickery, magic, or the help of a powerful friend.
- Folktales often contain a “stock” setting such as a forest, a castle, a bridge, a cave, etc.
- In the end, good is rewarded and evil is punished. The conclusion is satisfying to the listener because everything comes to a nice, neat finish.

The Three Billy Goats Gruff

Once upon a time, three billy goats lived together in a field on a hillside. There was a Big Billy Goat Gruff, a Middle Billy Goat Gruff, and a Little Billy Goat Gruff. Beside the billy goats' field ran a river. One day, they decided to cross it and eat the grass on the other side, but first they had to go over the bridge. Under the bridge lived a big, ugly troll. First, Little Billy Goat Gruff stepped onto the bridge. TRIP TRAP went his hooves. "Who's that tripping over my bridge?" roared the Troll.

"It is only I, Little Billy Goat Gruff, going across the river to make myself fat," said Little Billy Goat Gruff in such a small voice.

"Now I'm coming to gobble you up," said the Troll.

"Oh, please don't eat me, I'm so small," said Little Billy Goat Gruff. "Wait for the next billy goat. He's much bigger."

"Well, be off with you," said the Troll. A little while later, Middle Billy Goat Gruff stepped onto the bridge. TRIP TRAP, TRIP TRAP went his hooves. "Who's that tripping over my bridge?" roared the Troll.

"It is only I, Middle Billy Goat Gruff, going across the river to make myself fat," said Middle Billy Goat Gruff, whose voice was not so small.

"Now I'm coming to gobble you up," said the Troll.

"Oh, no, don't eat me," said Middle Billy Goat Gruff. "Wait for the next billy goat. He's the biggest of all."

"Very well, be off with you," said the Troll. It wasn't long before Big Billy Goat Gruff stepped onto the bridge. TRIP TRAP, TRIP TRAP, TRIP TRAP went his hooves, and the bridge groaned under his weight.

"Who's that tramping over my bridge?" roared the Troll.

"It is I, Big Billy Goat Gruff," said Big Billy Goat Gruff, who had a rough, roaring voice of his own.

"Now I'm coming to gobble you up," said the Troll, and at once, he jumped onto the bridge, very mean and hungry, but Big Billy Goat Gruff was very tough and strong. He put down his head and charged the Troll and butted him so hard he flew high into the air and then fell down and splashed into the middle of the river; and the ugly troll was never seen again. Then Big Billy Goat Gruff joined Middle Billy Goat Gruff and Little Billy Goat Gruff in the field on the far side of the river. There, they got so fat that they could hardly walk home again.