

YOU CAN WRITE A KICKASS FAIRY TALE RETELLING [A WORKSHEET]

Hello, writing friends! I've put together as many fairy tale retelling tactics I could think of to help you craft your next amazing novel. Try these out during your next upcoming writing challenge (e.g. NaNoWriMo), as daily writing prompts, or to create a full novel or series. Think of the possibilities!

Below are different categories to help you better understand your retelling options, along with examples of these tactics at work. By the end of this worksheet, you should have the beginnings of a truly kickass retelling.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR HERO

Everyone wants to be the hero of their own story. Many retellings blossom into reality because we want to tell stories that mean something and haven't been given the proper attention. Let's step away from clichés and the traditional to decide how we can introduce more heroes to our readers.

1// Let's talk appearance. A story can change in an instant just by tweaking someone's appearance; remember Rapunzel's long hair? Here are a few options to get started:

- + Skin color or race. *What if Little Red Riding Hood was Native American?*
- + Stature, weight, health problems, disabilities/abilities. *What if Snow White was allergic to apples?*
- + Gender. *What if the Little Mermaid was in fact a Little Merman?*

Retellings can be goofy or serious, but when I make these suggestions, I don't do it to be facetious or silly. Wouldn't you want to read these retellings if they were seriously well done? Take some time to answer the following questions to create an amazing hero the world needs to meet.

- + Which race(s) would you like to see more representation of?
- + Who could you talk to or interview to accurately represent a culture?
- + How does someone's outward appearance affect the way they value themselves or how other people view them?
- + What can you teach readers about the relationship between someone's appearance and their personality or actions?
- + How does the outward appearance tweak a fairy tale—does the character meet different challenges, or do they have surprising advantages that the "original" character doesn't have?

2// Now let's explore their personality. Before you begin writing, understand that fairy tales traditionally often only featured very pious, noble, and beautiful heroes and heroines. We know better, that people are not always 100% good or evil; motives are very powerful in the story arc, right? So let's go deeper and decide what makes our hero tick:

- + Talent/hobbies. *What if Mulan was already a good fighter before she joined the army?*
- + Family dynamics. *What if the protagonist's parents were divorced?*

- + Sexual orientation. *What if Cinderella wasn't sure if she was in love with the prince or his younger sister?*
- + Weaknesses/bad habits. *What if Pinocchio was a pyromaniac?*

The stuff we carry inside ultimately helps us know if we're good or evil, or a healthy mixture of both. It's also this inner stuff that makes our readers care deeply about the characters.

Retellings are a place to prove that we as authors know a little secret about fairy tale characters that the reader missed. We're here to tell them "This is what really happened. This is why they're amazing."

As you think about your potential protagonist, think about how you would finish this sentence: "The hero is not as _____ as we thought."

CUSTOMIZE YOUR VILLAIN

Villains get a bad rap in fairy tales: they're ugly, mean, and pretty 2-dimensional. They're just mean because they are. Wouldn't it be great to create a villain that makes sense and **gasp** could become relatable to your readers? *Maleficent* and *Wicked* are big examples of how the writer forces the readers to rethink what they "know" about classic villains. How can you do the same?

Hopefully by this point, you might have a fairy tale in mind that you want to explore. Envision what that villain looks like, what they do, and how they relate to the protagonist. With that specific villain in mind, answer the following questions:

- + What villain stereotypes does this character exhibit?
- + What traits do you think should replace these clichés and stereotypes?
- + Why does the villain want to stand in opposition to the main character? What are their motives?
- + Similar to the protagonist's personality, what do you know about the villain that we don't? How does that detail change the story as we know it?

The two points you delved into for the protagonist can work really well for your villains, too. Change up their appearance and personalities to add more flavor and intrigue to the fairy tale. Here are some examples:

- + Instead of stepmothers and stepsisters, what if the protagonist had a stepfather or stepbrothers?
- + What if the "Gaston" figure in *Beauty and the Beast* was a woman?

CUSTOMIZE YOUR GENRE

Retellings doesn't have to stick with European landscapes, castles, or medieval traditions. You can change the backdrop and see how these external circumstances affect your character's decisions. I'm going to show two major ways to tweak the genre to give your new retelling an interesting backdrop

1// When does your fairytale take place? Where does it take place? You can answer these two questions once you pick your genre. Some favorites could be steampunk, dystopian, Western, Sci-fi, Gothic, or a blend if you're feeling adventurous. Here are some retelling examples that could catch your readers' attention:

- + Steampunk Pinocchio
- + Dystopian Aladdin
- + Sci-fi Little Mermaid

This might sound goofy to you at first, but once you think about how you can bring back the symbols and metaphors from a classic European tale into a different era, it can blossom into an interesting story. I challenge you to think about a specific fairy tale and match it up with as many genres as you can think of and decide which match would be most fun for you to explore.

2// Now let's address magic. Magical items and abilities are pretty crucial to any fairy tale retelling. Where would our heroes be without fairy godmothers or a magic lamp? When crafting a retelling, you have to think about the role magic will play. Here are some questions to help you nail down your new rules for magic.

- + Does the hero or villain believe in magic or that it exists?
- + Who uses magic: good people, evil people, or both?
- + How does your protagonist feel about magic? Do they appreciate magic or fear it, for example?
- + Is magic commonly accepted in this society? Does society think it's outdated, evil, or rare?
- + Will you let magic help the protagonist, or will they have to face challenges with their own strengths and abilities?
- + If you don't include magic, how will you replace magical elements in the original tale? Will abilities, friends in high places, or science replace or explain these phenomenon?

CUSTOMIZE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Most fairy tales take on a 3rd person narration. This is all fine and dandy, but can we have more fun with something different? *Hamilton: An American Musical* suggests that a person is remembered by who tells their story. So who will tell this story, and how will we remember them? Here are a few perspective ideas:

- + The protagonist. *The traditional hero of the fairy tale explains their side of the story*
- + The villain. *The villain could be truly evil or misunderstood.*
- + The love interest. *We hear the events from their side and maybe get to know them better than the hero.*
- + The forgotten character. *This could be someone who could've been the hero, but didn't get their chance. It could also be a very minor character in the story that we don't know much about, such as a sidekick or family member.*

Note that this might mean that the traditional protagonist is relegated to a secondary character...or even antagonist. If you still have that specific fairy tale in mind, think about how the story's events would be different based on the perspective. What kind of moral do you want to share with your readers about what it means to be good or evil? You'll be surprised how the story events will change based on the reliability of the narrator.

AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER

How did you do? I'm so excited to hear about your ideas for upcoming fairy tale retellings! I'm also eager to hear what you think about this worksheet—what you like or didn't like. Chat with me with through your favorite outlet and let's make some magic!

- + **TWITTER: @WITTY_WHITTERS**
- + **INSTAGRAM: @WHIT2NEY**
- + **FACEBOOK: WIT & TRAVESTY**
- + **EMAIL: WHIT2NEY@HOTMAIL.COM**