

# Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:  
CALDECOTT IN THE CLASSROOM:  
MULTICULTURAL TALES  
BY CYNDI GIORGIS

This article originally appeared in the January 2013 issue of *Book Links* magazine.



During the past 75 years, there have been several Caldecott Medal-winning books classified as folklore. In 1955, Marcia Brown's *Cinderella; or, The Little Glass Slipper*, translated from the version by Charles Perrault, was the first fairy tale to receive the Caldecott Medal. In every decade since, one or more folklore picture books have been honored, with Jerry Pinkney's version of Aesop's fable *The Lion & the Mouse* (2009) being the most recent. For this focus on "Caldecott in the Classroom" feature, in honor of the award's seventy-fifth anniversary, we explore fairy tales, folktales, legends, and fables that are rooted in oral tradition and often have numerous versions and variants. Folklore from various cultures enables readers to experience stories that have been passed down from generation to generation and offers a glimpse into countries around the world. These tales often contain a moral or lesson as characters search for meaning in their lives. Many of these stories have withstood the test of time and are still popular today.

## 1962 Caldecott Medal

**Once a Mouse . . .**: A Fable Cut in Wood. By Marcia Brown. Illus. by the author. 1961. 32p. Atheneum, \$17.99 (9780684126623); Aladdin, paper, \$6.99 (9780689713439). 398.24. K–Gr. 4.

Brown's folktale, set in India, is replete with three-color woodcut illustrations that add character and detail to the telling of the story. An old hermit (who happens to possess magical powers) rescues a mouse from a crow's greedy beak. When the rodent is confronted by a cat, the hermit quickly changes it into a stout cat. And so it goes, with the hermit changing the once meek mouse into a larger and more powerful creature each time a new animal challenges it. Eventually, the mouse is changed into a handsome royal tiger, but one that is ungrateful for all the hermit has done for it. Sensing this churlish attitude, the hermit returns the tiger to its original form, a frightened, humble little mouse that must scurry away from immediate danger.

## Folklore from India

**Anklet for a Princess:** A Cinderella Story from India. By Lila Mehta. Adapted by Meredith Brucker. Illus. by Youshan Tang. 2002. 32p. Shen's, \$17.95 (9781885008206). Gr. 1–5.

Accompanied by watercolor illustrations, this version of Cinderella features a beautiful and kind protagonist, a magical godfather in the form of a giant white snake, and a sparkling jeweled anklet for which the prince seeks to find the owner.

**The Elephant's Friend and Other Tales from Ancient India.** By Marcia Williams. Illus. by the author. 2012. 40p. Candlewick, \$16.99 (9780763659165). 395.2. Gr. 3–7.

Eight folktales are retold using cartoon panels with thematic borders. The humorous stories feature a loquacious tortoise, an unlikely pairing of an elephant and a dog, and a clever trickster.

**Monkey:** A Trickster Tale from India. By Gerald McDermott. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Harcourt, \$16.99 (9780152165963). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 2.

Monkey wants to munch on the delicious mangoes that grow on the island in the middle of the river. Crocodile wants to devour Monkey. Both find ingenious ways to hoodwink the other, but only Monkey is the true trickster in this tale, featuring bold collage illustrations using handmade papers.

**One Grain of Rice:** A Mathematical Folktale. By Demi. Illus. by the author. 1997. 40p. Scholastic, \$21.99 (9780590939980). 398.2. Gr. 3–6.

Lively illustrations with gold-leaf details enrich this story of a greedy raja who decrees that the farmers must give him almost all of their rice. When famine strikes, the raja is unwilling to share. However, a clever girl asks the raja for one grain of rice, with the amount to be doubled each day for 30 days.

**The Rumor:** A Jataka Tale from India. By Jan Thornhill. Illus. by the author. 2002. 32p. Owlkids, paper, \$6.95 (9781897066270). 813. PreS–Gr. 2.

A young rabbit hears a mango smash to the ground, prompting her to flee in panic. Soon boars, deer, tigers, and even rhinos are running pell-mell, until wise Lion escorts the hare back to the spot and confirms that it was only a mango falling—and not the world breaking apart. Luxurious color spreads show the animals on the run.

## In the Classroom

### Meeting of the Minds

Have students pose questions about a story or a character. Begin by writing down two or more characters' names on a

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chart. Brainstorm questions about the characters' thoughts or actions. Choose one student to be the moderator, who will ask the questions, and other students to assume the roles of the characters, who will respond based on evidence from the story.

## Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RL.3.3.** Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

## 1973 Caldecott Medal

**The Funny Little Woman.** By Arlene Mosel. Illus. by Blair Lent. 1972. 40p. Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (9780140547535). 398.2. Gr. 1–4.

Long ago, in old Japan, lived a funny little woman who loved to laugh: “Tee-he-he-he.” While the woman is making dumplings, one rolls across the table and down a hole. Not willing to lose the tasty treat, she attempts to retrieve it only to tumble down the hole, where a wicked *oni* (demon) dwells. Unfortunately, the little woman’s laugh reveals her presence, and the *oni* captures her so that she will have to make dumplings for him. Longing for her own home, the funny little woman successfully escapes when her captor laughs at her predicament of getting stuck in the mud. Mosel’s award-winning version is based on the tale by Lafcadio Hearn, an international writer known for his Japanese ghost stories and legends.

### Japanese Folktales

**The Beckoning Cat:** Based on a Japanese Folktale. By Koko Nishizuka. Illus. by Rosanne Litzinger. 2009. 32p. Holiday, \$17.95 (9780823420513). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 2.

In this gentle tale—complemented by illustrations in petal-soft shades and textures—Yohei sells fish to help his impoverished family. When a bedraggled white cat appears at the door one rainy evening, Yohei feeds her despite his own grumbling stomach. The cat repays his kindness by beckoning customers to Yohei’s home to purchase fish (porcelain cats holding up one paw are a good-luck symbol in Japan today).

**I Am Tama, Lucky Cat:** A Japanese Legend. By Wendy Henrichs. Illus. by Yoshiko Jaeggi. 2011. 32p. Peachtree, \$16.95 (9781561455898). 398.2. K–Gr. 3.

Featuring watercolor illustrations depicting the mountainous setting, this retelling of the beckoning-cat legend involves an impoverished monk who shares his humble home with a hungry, shivering cat he names Tama. Little does the monk know that the furry feline will bring him both friendship and fortune.

**Maneki Neko:** The Tale of the Beckoning Cat. By Susan Lendroth. Illus. by Kathryn Otoshi. 2010. 32p. Shen’s, \$17.95 (9781885008398). 398.20952. Gr. 1–4.

A monk and his cat live a simple life at the monastery in this retelling of a legend. During a great storm, a noble samurai sees a cat that appears to be beckoning him forward. As he moves, a bolt of lightning splits a tree, and narrowly misses the samurai. In return for the cat saving his life, the samurai bestows riches on the monk, who shares them with the village.

**Three Samurai Cats:** A Story from Japan. By Eric A. Kimmel. Illus. by Mordicai Gerstein. 2003. 32p. Holiday, \$17.95 (9780823417421); paper, \$6.95 (9780823418770). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 2.

When a *daimyo* (powerful lord) is unable to rid his castle of a disgusting rat, he asks for the assistance of the *docho* (senior monk). After two samurai cats are unsuccessful in defeating the rat, a third one arrives and proves to be the rat’s worst nemesis. Like the well-paced text, the colorful, detailed drawings are irresistibly humorous.

**Wabi Sabi.** By Mark Reibstein. Illus. by Ed Young. 2008. 40p. Little, Brown, \$16.99 (9780316118255). K–Gr. 3.

Brown cat Wabi Sabi sets out to discover the true meaning of her name, encountering a variety of animals that provide her with various interpretations. Young’s lifelike collages are embellished with Japanese haiku in this fictional story, which follows folktale conventions.

## In the Classroom

### Same and Different

Using the three folktales about the beckoning cat, have students generate a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles. The middle section of the diagram, in which all three circles overlap, should show which elements the three stories share. The other overlapping areas should show what is shared by the two corresponding stories, and the larger space within each circle should show what is different about each story.

## Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RI.2.9.** Compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two or more texts on the same topic.

## 1976 Caldecott Medal

**Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears:** A West African Tale. By Verna Aardema. Illus. by Leo and Diane Dillon. 1975. 32p. Dial, \$16.99 (9780803760899); Puffin, paper, \$7.99 (9780140549058). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 1.

This African *pourquoi* tale begins when Mosquito tells his

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friend Iguana an outlandish story. Deciding that he doesn't want to hear such foolishness, Iguana put two sticks into his ears. When Python encounters Iguana, who totally ignores him, a chain of events erupts that results in Monkey inadvertently killing an owl. All the animals determine that it is Mosquito that is ultimately to blame, which explains why he continually whines in people's ears, "Zeee! Is everyone still angry at me?" Full-color illustrations complement the story while capturing the nuance of each African animal.

## *Pourquoi Tales*

**Mouse & Lion.** By Rand Burkert. Illus. by Nancy Ekholm Burkert. 2011. 32p. Scholastic/Michael di Capua, \$17.95 (9780545101479). PreS–Gr. 2.

This familiar Aesop's fable is set in the Kalahari Desert and features softly textured, naturalistic watercolor illustrations. Mouse pleads for his life after waking King Lion. Amused by the rodent's proposition that Lion might need the diminutive creature's help someday, he lets Mouse go only to discover that his prophecy comes true.

**Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters:** An African Tale. By John Steptoe. Illus. by the author. 1987. 32p. Amistad, \$17.99 (9780688040451). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 2.

Mufaro has two beautiful daughters—Manyara, who has a bad temper, and Nyasha, who is kind and considerate. When all the worthy women are invited to appear before the great king so he may choose a wife, the two sisters reveal their qualities, characteristics, and predictability. Steptoe's paintings show rich landscapes as well as dramatic close-up portraits.

**A Story, a Story.** By Gail E. Haley. Illus. by the author. 1970. 36p. Atheneum, \$18.99 (9780689205118); Aladdin, paper, \$7.99 (9780689712012). 398.2. K–Gr. 4.

Once upon a time, all the stories in the world belonged to Nyame, the sky god, who kept them in a box beside his throne. But Ananse, the spider man, wanted the stories and devised a plan using three sly creatures to procure them in this 1971 Caldecott Medal winner, featuring woodcut illustrations.

**Why the Sky Is Far Away:** A Nigerian Folktale. By Mary-Joan Gerson. Illus. by Carla Golembe. 1974; reissued 1992. 32p. Little, Brown, paper, \$6.99 (9780316308748). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 2.

This *pourquoi* story, first told more than 500 years ago by the Bini tribe of Nigeria, tells of a time when people took a piece of the sky to eat. However, when they became wasteful and disrespectful, the sky grew angry and moved far away, prompting the people to learn how to grow their own food.

The simple illustrations combine monotype prints and collages in brilliant colors.

**Zomo the Rabbit:** A Trickster Tale from West Africa. By Gerald McDermott. Illus. by the author. 1992. 32p. Harcourt, \$17 (9780152999674); paper, \$7 (9780152010102); e-book, \$7 (9780547773223). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 3.

Zomo beseeches Sky God for wisdom, and he sends the rabbit to accomplish three impossible tasks. The rabbit does so by duping Big Fish, Wild Cow, and Leopard, which is why he must run fast whenever he sees them. McDermott blends the brilliant geometric patterns of West African kente cloth with other global influences in vibrant images.

## In the Classroom

### *Why Pourquoi?*

*Pourquoi* is the French word for "why." Therefore, these stories explain why certain things in nature exist in the way that they do. Have students discuss: What is the moral of the story? Why is this story important to the culture where the story originated? What did you learn about the culture from the story? Can you compare this story to other folktales that you have read?

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RL.3.2.** Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

## 1997 Caldecott Medal

**Golem.** By David Wisniewski. Illus. by the author. 1996. 32p. Clarion, \$17 (9780395726181); paper, \$7.99 (9780618894246); e-book, \$7.99 (9780547769318). 398.21. Gr. 3–6.

According to Jewish legend, the renowned scholar and teacher Rabbi Loew created a golem from clay to protect his people from persecution in the sixteenth-century Prague ghettos. *Golem*, the Hebrew word for "shapeless man," is brought to life as well through Wisniewski's elaborate cut-paper illustrations, which are crisply layered to create a 3-D effect. When a mob arrives and storms the gates of the ghetto, Golem rises in stature to protect the Jews. With the promise from the emperor that the Jews are now safe, Golem is returned to his original clay form only to return someday "when the desperate need for justice is united with holy purpose."

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## Jewish Folklore

**The Brothers' Promise.** By Frances Harber. Illus. by Thor Wickstrom. 1998; reissued 2009. 32p. Albert Whitman, paper, \$6.99 (9780807509029). PreS–Gr. 1.

This retelling of a favorite Jewish tale focuses on two brothers who divide their father's farm. Even though the siblings appear very different in personality, they prove to be the same, as they bestow kindness, unwittingly, on each other. Wickstrom's pictures are vigorous both in color and style.

**Gershon's Monster: A Story for the Jewish New Year.** By Eric A. Kimmel. Illus. by Jon J. Muth. 2000. 32p. Scholastic, \$17.99 (9780439108393). 398.2. Gr. 2–4.

Gershon never apologizes for any of his mistakes. Rather, he sweeps them up, tosses them into the cellar, and then throws them into the sea on Rosh Hashanah. However, his reprehensible behavior threatens the lives of his children—unless he can repent. Muth's watercolors bring the story's elements to a child's level, showing Gershon's bad deeds as nasty imps.

**It Could Always Be Worse: A Yiddish Folk Tale.** By Margot Zemach. Illus. by the author. 1976. 32p. Square Fish, paper, \$7.99 (9780374436360). K–Gr. 3.

A man lives with his mother, wife, and six children in an overcrowded one-room hut. The advice he receives from the rabbi results in even more noise and chaos. Finally, the unfortunate man realizes that it could always be worse than his perceived situation.

**Joseph Had a Little Overcoat.** By Simms Taback. Illus. by the author. 1999. 32p. Viking, \$16.99 (9780670878550). 398.2. PreS–Gr. 2.

Joseph had a little overcoat and it was chock-full of holes, just like this 2000 Caldecott Medal recipient. Based on a Yiddish folk song, the book's pages contain die cuts that are used in creative ways to show what Joseph will make next as he reworks each successive piece of clothing.

**The Little Red Hen and the Passover Matzah.** By Leslie Kimmelman. Illus. by Paul Meisel. 2010. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823419524). 398.2089. PreS–Gr. 1.

"Oy gevalt!" It's almost Passover, and the Little Red Hen needs matzah for her seder dinner. Will the horse, sheep, or dog help her grow, harvest, and bake the matzah? Yiddish vocabulary, wry humor, and ink-and-watercolor art make this an enjoyable retelling.

## In the Classroom

### Character Business Cards

To help students contemplate the actions and essence of a

character, have them create character business cards. Each student should select a character and determine his or her card's tagline as well as the products or services the character will provide. Students should also consider the card's font, color, and symbols, along with the layout and design.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RL.2.7.** Use information gained from illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

## 1998 Caldecott Medal

**Rapunzel.** By Paul O. Zelinsky. Illus. by the author. 1997. 48p. Dutton, \$17.99 (9780525456070); Puffin, paper, \$7.99 (9780142301937). 398.2. Gr. 3–5.

Zelinsky's retelling of this classic tale contains exquisite Italian Renaissance-style paintings in warm golden tones. A husband desperately attempts to satisfy the cravings of his pregnant wife by stealing rapunzel greens from a sorceress' garden. When he is caught, the man must bargain with the evil woman, who demands that he forfeit his daughter, Rapunzel, once she is born. On the girl's twelfth birthday, the sorceress imprisons her in a tower accessible only by climbing up the dazzling beauty's silky braids. Charmed by Rapunzel's singing, a prince discovers the secret of entering the tower and falls instantly in love. When the sorceress realizes that the girl has been intimate with the prince and is with child, she banishes the girl to the wilderness. The unknowing prince returns to the tower and encounters the sorceress, who causes him to fall. However, the two lovers are soon reunited and live a "long life, happy and content."

### Versions and Variants of Rapunzel

**Rapunzel.** By Barbara Rogasky. Illus. by Trina Schart Hyman. 1982. 32p. Holiday, o.p. 398.2. Gr. 2–5.

In this Brothers Grimm version, a husband is caught stealing rampion greens from the witch's garden for his pregnant wife. The witch will spare his life if he agrees to give her his soon-to-be-born daughter.

**Rapunzel: A Groovy Fairy Tale.** By Lynn Roberts. Illus. by David Roberts. 2003. 32p. Abrams, \$17.95 (9780810942424). 398.2. Gr. 2–5.

In this hip, happening tale set in the 1970s, Rapunzel is locked up in an apartment by Aunt Esme (who happens to be the formidable lunch lady). Long-haired rock star Roger attempts to rescue Rapunzel but suffers from an amnesia-inducing fall when he is discovered by the tyrannical aunt. References to the '70s abound, including bell bottoms, lava lamps, and vinyl records.

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**Rapunzel's Revenge.** By Shannon Hale and Dean Hale. Illus. by Nathan Hale. 2008. 144p. Bloomsbury, \$18.99 (9781599900704); paper, \$15.99 (9781599902883). 741.5. Gr. 5–8.

The Hales' graphic-novel retelling, set in the Wild West, has the heroine teaming up with a young man with an outlaw past, rather than with the pompous prince. Rapunzel is on a quest to find her birth mother and to right the wrongs of sinister Mother Goethel. Hale's art provides a wonderful sense of place to the fantasy landscape.

**Petrosinella: A Neopolitan Rapunzel.** By Diane Stanley. Illus. by the author. 1981; reissued 1995. 32p. Puffin, o.p. 398.2. Gr. 2–5.

Stanley's retelling is based on the Italian version of the fairy tale, published 200 years before the Brothers Grimm tale. After a young woman steals parsley from an ogress, her child, Petrosinella, is taken and confined within a tower in the dense forest. Three magic acorns help Petrosinella to escape with her handsome prince.

**Sugar Cane: A Caribbean Rapunzel.** By Patricia Storace. Illus. by Raúl Colón. 2007. 48p. Jump at the Sun, o.p. 398.209729. K–Gr. 3.

Brilliant hues and swirling lines re-create the island setting of this Caribbean retelling, which features a young fisherman whose pregnant wife craves the sugarcane that can only be found in Madame Fate's garden. When baby Sugar Cane turns one year old, the sorceress spirits her away and imprisons her in a tower. Once she escapes, she reunites with the King of Song, and, as it is with all good fairy tales, they live happily ever after.

## In the Classroom

### *Jigsaw Discussion*

In this strategy, divide the class into small groups and assign a different story to each. The group then discusses who the main character is and what he or she does; when and where the story occurs; how the setting affects the character's actions; how he or she relates to the other characters; and how the character resolves problems. Other groups will read a different story and perform the same task. Each group will then record their findings on a chart, generating discussion across participants.

### **Common Core Connections**

- **CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RI.4.2.** Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

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