

## Kindergarten Stories

What are the overriding developmental issues that need to be met through stories in the kindergarten? What brings absorption, nourishment, and delight? Looking at the kindergartner, several core elements come to the fore. First of all, virtually all parents have experienced their four and five year olds taking the couches apart or using the chairs to build houses and forts. This expresses one core issue: the need to know that home is dependable.

Whether the child has been in day care all her life, or has never left Mom, this separation or individuation is now driven from within, and is met with new awareness. No matter what we do, this drive will set up a pounding internal question she must answer: can I leave home, face challenge, and return home safely AND UN-CHANGED? This is the first, central issue for the kindergartner, and for a story to deeply nourish the child it must take her on this journey.

Second, most parents have had their young children ask to hear the same story or play the same game, *ad nauseam*. The young child needs to know that life is dependable and has an order that she can take hold of and work with for her safety. This sense of order has been developing for years, but right now, as the child faces the internal experience of growing up and individuating, she needs to take hold of it in an active and clear way. In the stories this happens through repetition. This repetition happens first in the unfolding of the story. Each story has within it a basic triple cycling of the situation so the child knows what to expect and can anticipate the outcome. As well, each story has a repeating verse that captures some central aspect of the story. Together these allow the child to feel she is master of the story world.

While children have always needed repetition, in today's busy and chaotic world, the element of simple repetition has proven even more important. The standard Folk Tale is the prototype for this.

Third, the kindergartner, like the younger child, still finds her health in the wholeness of the world, and not in her individuality. As has been described, individuality requires a standing back and separating, a self-consciousness. While the kindergartner has begun to exercise this muscle, at this juncture she needs reassurance that she can just melt into the world and find its natural harmony and nourishment. Therefore, all the stories create a world that the child is free to enter and take from, but none of them have an interactive or reflective aspect. Whether reading or telling the stories, we create a world that the child enters in her own way. As the children sit and listen to the same story, each child is free to take it in as fits her needs.

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Oddly, stories which address all three of these issues are not easy to find. We have researched stories and long pondered the reason for this. It will take the perspective of time and an in-depth anthropological study to really understand this, but it is our hypothesis that four and five year olds today face very different challenges than they did generations ago. They are being pushed much too fast and are not fully developing the ground they need to grow up with confidence. Today's kindergartner in the modern world, lives, either personally or by way of peers, in a society of broken homes and fractured communities. He is bombarded with dry information and mature imagery on a daily basis - no matter how hard we may try to shield him. All of these elements undermine the young child's sense of stability and security.

We recommend three types of stories that each meet this need from a slightly different perspective: the nature story, the folk tale, and the quasi-Fairy Tale. In our Resource Libraries we have divided them because we feel that each has its unique and important gift for the kindergartner. Therefore, we recommend including some of each type of story in the course of the year or two.

All along the teacher, whether at home or in the classroom, has to use her observation and her intuition to judge what type of story, as well as which specific story, will best feed her child. However, it is easy to get stuck on the type of story that is easiest or most comfortable for the teacher or easiest for a particular child. **“Easy,” “comfortable,” and “best” are not synonymous. Challenge and struggle are critical parts of any growth and learning.** If you are using mainly one type of story, venture out. Experiment. Work with change.

This principle of stretching into new and unfamiliar lands also applies to the stories from other cultures. Teachers will often be most at home with stories from their native culture - at home with home. It is important not to let this block your judgment. Telling the children a story from another culture has a far deeper and more lasting impact than to tell her *about* that culture. In the Enki approach, we strongly encourage teachers - at home or in the classroom - to balance the stories they use according to type and culture. We can venture out and notice our own reactions and the children's as part of the learning process. To this end, the cultural origin of each story is listed in the table of contents.