

LESSON PLAN

Stereotyping and Genre

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grades 4-8

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Overview

In this lesson, students use fairy tales as a way of learning about the idea of genre. They explore how the typical tropes of a genre can create or perpetuate stereotypes and create a “flipped” fairy tale that sends a message that is unusual for the genre.

Learning Outcomes

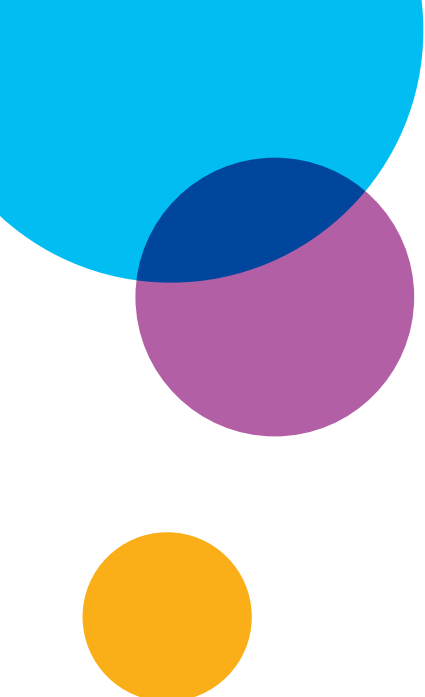
Essential knowledge: Students will learn the following essential domain knowledge:

- Reading media: Concept of genre; typical elements of *fairy tales* and *fables*
- Media representation: Impacts of genre elements on stereotyping, ways of responding to stereotyping in media

Key concepts/big ideas: Students will learn the following key concepts/big ideas:

- Media are constructions: Media makers’ choices are influenced by the conventions of the medium and genre they are working in
- Media have social and political implications: Different genres such as fairy tales and fables have explicit morals and meanings, and genre conventions can also lead to implicit meanings such as stereotypes
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form: Genres give media makers a “toolbox” of characters, settings, etc. to use

Performance tasks: Students will understand how genres influence how works are made and experienced, use writing tools to create a new work, and engage with issues of stereotyping and representation in media



Student-facing outcomes: We will learn about different types of stories and how they are put together. We will think about how people choose what goes into stories and how stories can teach us lessons or sometimes show people unfairly. We will make our own new stories, and work on problems about how people are shown in stories.

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to show the videos [Reading Media: Genre](#) and [The Paper Bag Princess](#)

Optional: Prepare to show the video [Media Minute: Media Have Social and Political Implications](#)

Prepare to distribute the following student worksheets:

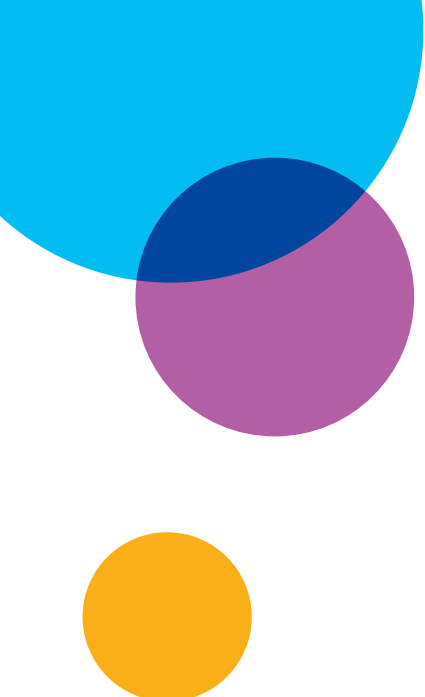
- *Fairy Tales versus Fables*
- *Genres*
- *Guessing Tropes*
- *Playing with Genre*
- *Flipped Fairy Tale*

Read the teacher backgrounders *Fairy Tales versus Fables: Teacher's Version* and *Playing with Genre: Teacher's Version*.

Procedure

LEARNING ABOUT GENRE: FAIRY TALES

Start by asking students how many of them know what a fairy tale is. Can they name some examples of fairy tales? (Examples: *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, et cetera. You may substitute any examples that are more relevant for your class, but make sure that *The Three Little Pigs* is mentioned. If students mention a *fable* such as *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Emperor's New Clothes* or *The Lion and the Mouse*, include it in the list but make a mental note to return to it later in the lesson.)



Now ask: What *makes* these stories fairy tales? What do they all have in common?

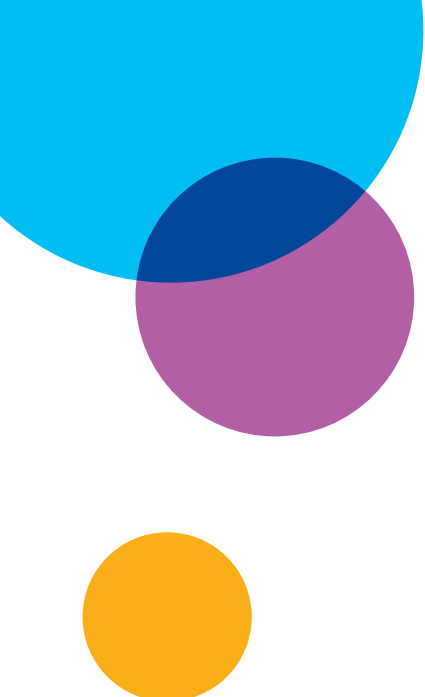
- Have students make a list of the things that make something a “fairy tale.”
- These are likely to be the characteristics listed:
- They are usually set “once upon a time”
- They typically have animals, children or princes/princesses as main characters
- They are quite short
- Characters often punished for making bad choices
- They usually have no known author

There are many different versions across time and around the world (for instance, in some versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* the main character and her grandmother are rescued by a woodsman, and in others they are not; in some versions of *Goldilocks* the main character gets away from the bears, and in others she is eaten by them.)

Now go back through the list of fairy tales and ask if each one fits this list of examples. If students earlier mentioned any *fables*, highlight them now; if not, introduce the idea that there is a similar kind of stories called fables with examples like *The Ugly Duckling* (by Hans Christian Andersen), *The Lion and the Mouse* (by Aesop) and *The Crow and the Grapes* (by Lafontaine.) (You may substitute any examples that may be more relevant to your class. Consult the different definitions of *fairy tales* and *fables* below to confirm that your examples fit the activity.)

Project or distribute the handout *Fairy Tales versus Fables*. Take the characteristics of the fairy tale the class listed earlier and either write them in the overlap between the two circles (if they apply to both fables and fairy tales) or in the top circle (if they apply only to fairy tales.)

During the discussion, highlight the question of *morals*. Explain to a students that a moral in a story is more than just showing a character being punished for making the wrong choice: it is a clear lesson that can be taken from it, which is usually stated outright by the writer at the end. With that understanding, do all fairy tales have morals? What is the moral of *Goldilocks* (“if you break into someone’s house, don’t fall asleep in their bed”)?



Now have students list in the bottom circle the ways that fables are *different* from fairy tales. This will likely be more difficult for them so you will need to guide the discussion more. Make sure to include the following points:

- Fables *a/ways* have a moral
- Fables usually have a single author
- Though fables may be retold, there is usually just one version of the story
- Fables do not change over time and don't appear around the world in the same way as fairy tales do.

Now explain to students that fairy tales and fables are both examples of *genres*. Have any students ever heard this word before? Based on the examples so far, what do they think it means?

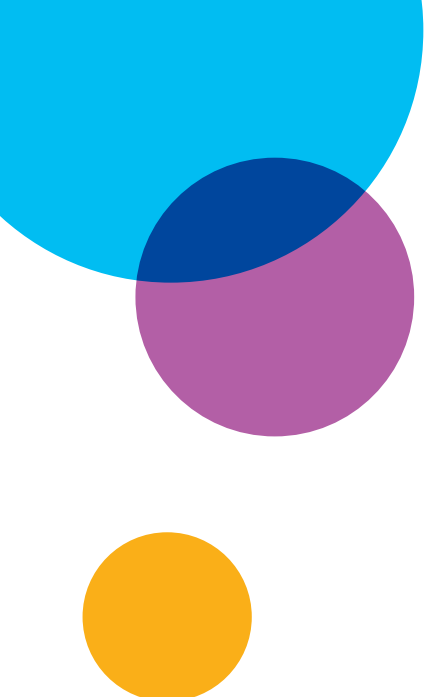
Distribute or project the handout *Genres*. Add the following to the “Examples” box:

- Science fiction
- Superheroes
- Comedy
- Reaction videos
- Puzzle games
- Strategy games

Then write the following in the “Non-Examples” box:

- The Three Little Pigs
- Movies
- Video games
- Spider-Man

Point out that the items in “non-examples” are either *media types* (movies, video games) or specific *media works* (*The Three Little Pigs*, *Spider-Man*). Ask students if they can suggest any other examples or non-examples. If they correctly name examples that fit the definition of *genre* (see below) put them in the *Examples* box; otherwise put them in *Non-Examples*.



Now show students the video [Reading Media: Genre](#) and then help students to help fill in the *Facts* box. The answers should look something like this:

Facts about genres:

- There are many different genres
- Some genres are similar to others (fantasy, science fiction) and others are very different
- Some start out as subgenres (superheroes as a subgenre of science fiction)
- Some are found across media types, some are found more often in a few (superheroes in comics and movies)
- Genres often have a typical tone (funny, exciting, romantic, inspiring)
- Genres tell audiences what to expect
- Genres give media makers a “toolbox” of characters, settings, etc. to use

Finally, have students reflect on the three boxes that have been filled (examples, non-examples, and facts) and ask them to compose a definition of the term. It should be something like the following:

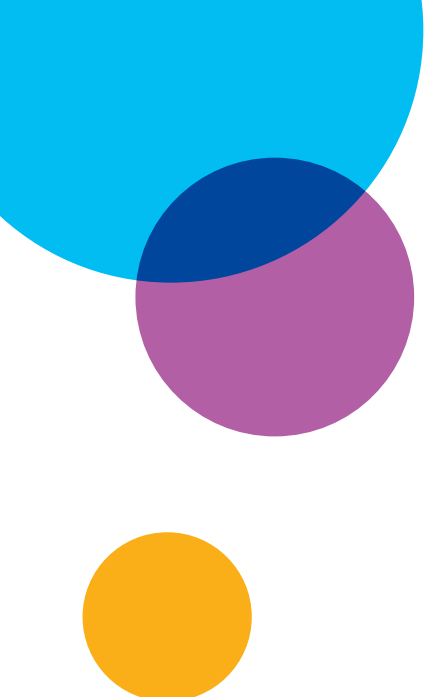
A *genre* is a kind or *category* of media work that makers use and audiences recognize.

With this definition in mind, have the class brainstorm other examples of genres. Remind them that some genres are only found in a particular medium (different kinds of video games, for example) while others are found in many media (mysteries, romance, etc.) Write the examples on the board.

GENRE TROPES

Tell students that each genre has a number of *tropes*, the “toolbox” of characters, settings, events and other things that come with a genre. Remind students of the tropes of fairy tales that you identified earlier and expand them with the following questions:

Who are the typical main characters? (Animals, children, princes and princesses. Often an orphan, stepchild or youngest child)



What are some words you might use to describe a typical main character? (Brave, clever, handsome/beautiful, young.)

Who are typical enemies or opponents of the main characters? (Predatory animals, evil step-parents, robbers, monsters, magicians and witches.)

What are some words you might use to describe a typical enemy? (Big, bad, wicked, old, cunning.)

What problems do the main characters typically have? (Kidnapped, chased by travelers, lost/abandoned in the woods, have to seek their fortunes.)

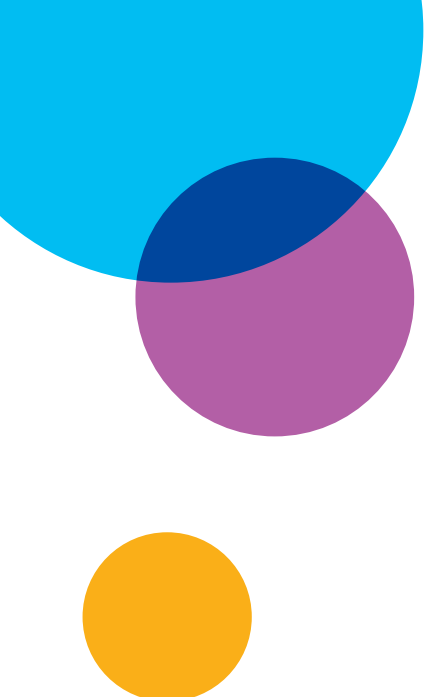
How do the main characters usually solve their problems? (Being brave, being kind, being clever, being lucky, sometimes just by waiting to be rescued.)

What kinds of actions are usually rewarded? What kinds of actions are punished? (Kindness and following the rules are rewarded. Rudeness and breaking the rules are punished.)

Tell students if we know a genre's tropes well, we also can guess what will happen at different times. For example, we know that if a child's mother dies and their father remarries, their stepmother will be "wicked" and will want to harm them or get rid of them.

Give students some more examples, and let students predict what will happen next and give examples of fairy tales where this happens. (You can project or distribute the handout *Guessing Tropes* to provide scaffolding for younger students.)

- If a childless couple wishes for a child... They will have an unusual child (tiny, magical, an animal, etc.)
- If a person is kind to a stranger early in the story... The stranger will give them important help later on.
- If a person is told to absolutely not break a rule... They will break the rule and be punished for it.
- If a princess gets kidnapped by a dragon, a giant or an ogre... A prince will rescue them.



Ask students: Can they think of other examples where you can guess what will happen next?

STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

When students have finished the handout, explain to them that even when media works don't have a clear message or moral, they teach us lessons through things like who is expected to be the main character, who is their enemy, and what actions are punished and rewarded.

(If students need help understanding this idea, show them the video [*Media Minute: Media Have Social and Political Implications.*](#))

Now write the word *stereotype* on the board and ask students if they know what it means. Make sure they understand that a *stereotype* is an image or picture of a kind of person that makes it seem like they are all the same: all stepmothers are wicked, all princesses are kind and beautiful, and so on.

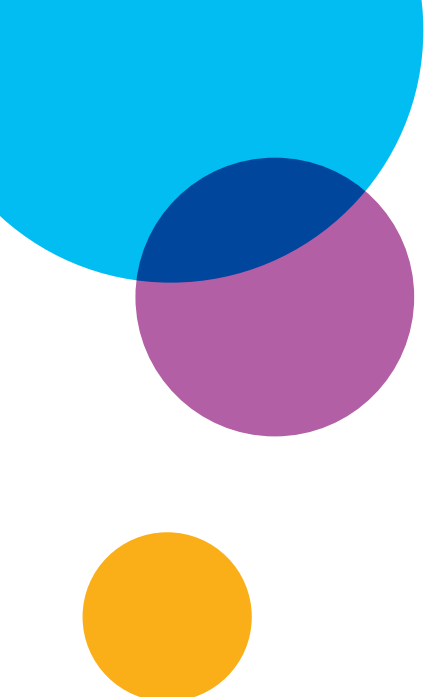
Now ask students to think about how a genre's *conventions* might lead to *stereotyping*. For example, wolves and stepmothers are stereotyped as being bad in fairy tales, and girls are often stereotyped as being passive princesses who wait for a prince to rescue them. Have each group brainstorm how the conventions of the genre they analyzed might contribute to stereotyping.

When students have completed their analysis, have them share it with the class and get feedback.

It's important to make sure students understand that *critiquing* something — such as by pointing out how it uses stereotypes — is not the same thing as *criticizing* it, and that there's nothing wrong with liking a media work that has some elements we *don't* like. Older students can explore this question in more detail in the lesson [*Calling Out Versus Calling In.*](#)

PLAYING WITH TROPES

Now tell students that because we often know the tropes of a genre like fairy tales, media makers can play with those tropes to surprise us. Sometimes this can be done just for fun, but it can also be done to avoid or even counter the stereotypes that come from those tropes.



Read students the book *The Paper Bag Princess* or [show a video of it being read by author Robert Munsch](#), then distribute the worksheet *Playing with Genre* and either have students complete it individually or fill it in with the class. One tropes has already been fully completed, one has the first two columns completed, a third has been identified; students should be able to identify and analyze two more tropes from the story. (You can use the *Teacher's Version* to guide the discussion, but keep in mind there are many possible answers for the last two tropes—the ones given are just examples.)

ASSESSMENT: FLIPPED FAIRY TALE

Distribute the assignment sheet *Flipped Fairy Tale* and tell students that they will be writing a fairy tale that, like *The Paper Bag Princess*, both **embraces** and **reverses** fairy tale tropes.

It does not have to be a retelling of a **specific** fairy tale (though it can be) so long as it shows their knowledge and understanding of the **tropes** of fairy tales they have learned about.

Like *The Paper Bag Princess*, the changes made to the tropes in their fairy tale should change the meaning of the story (compared to typical examples). The meaning does not have to be specifically related to gender as it is in that work, it just has to change some of the broader meaning we take from it.

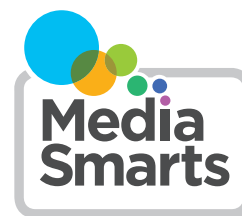
If time allows, have students share their drafts with a partner and give each other feedback. They can use the instructions for self-editing in the assignment sheet.

You may also choose to have students read their stories aloud to the rest of the class, or to compile a collection of flipped fairy tales.

REFLECTION

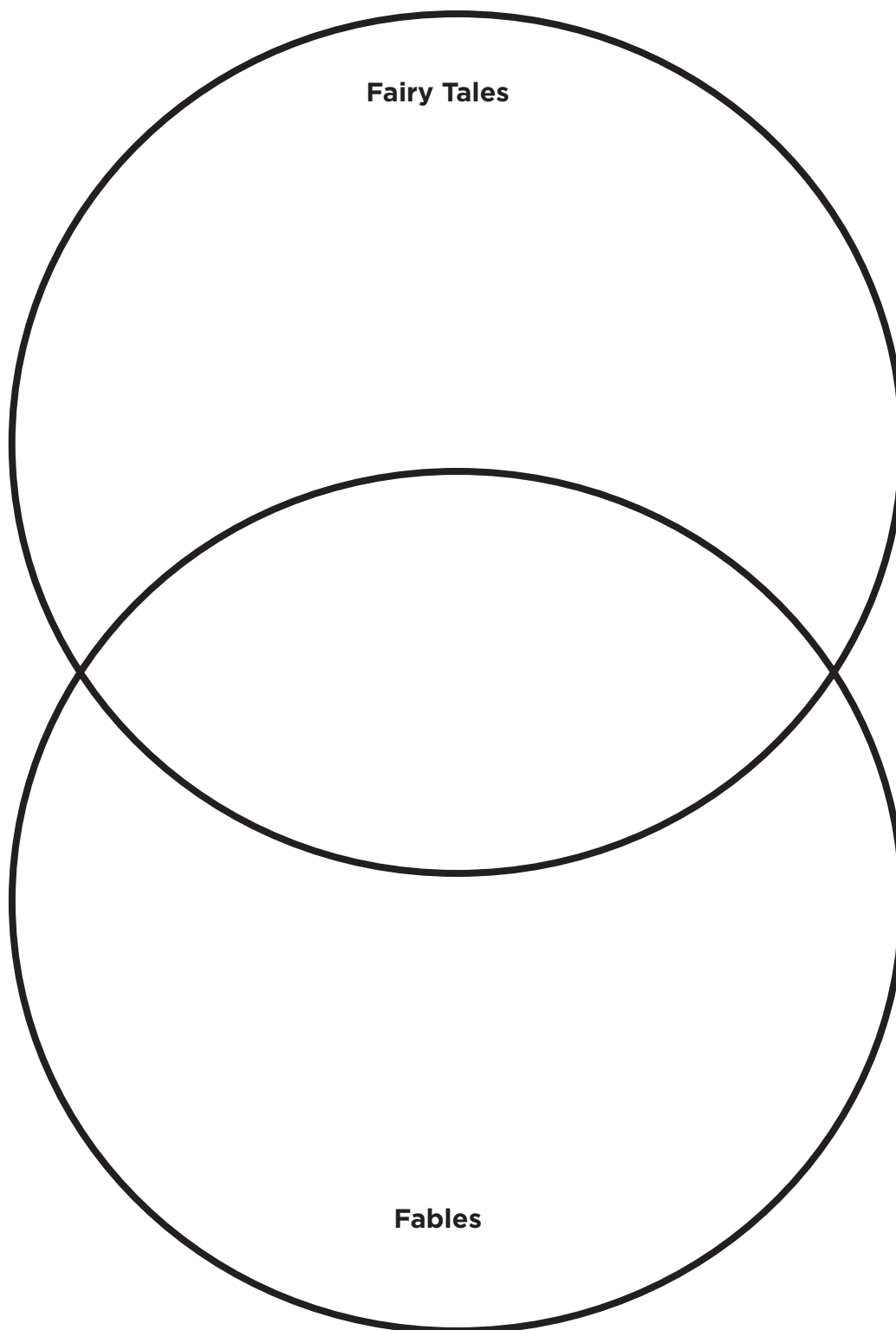
For an optional reflection activity, have students reflect orally or in writing on this question: How might what we've learned change how I look at **other** genres?

STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

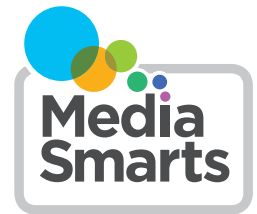


Fairy Tales versus Fables

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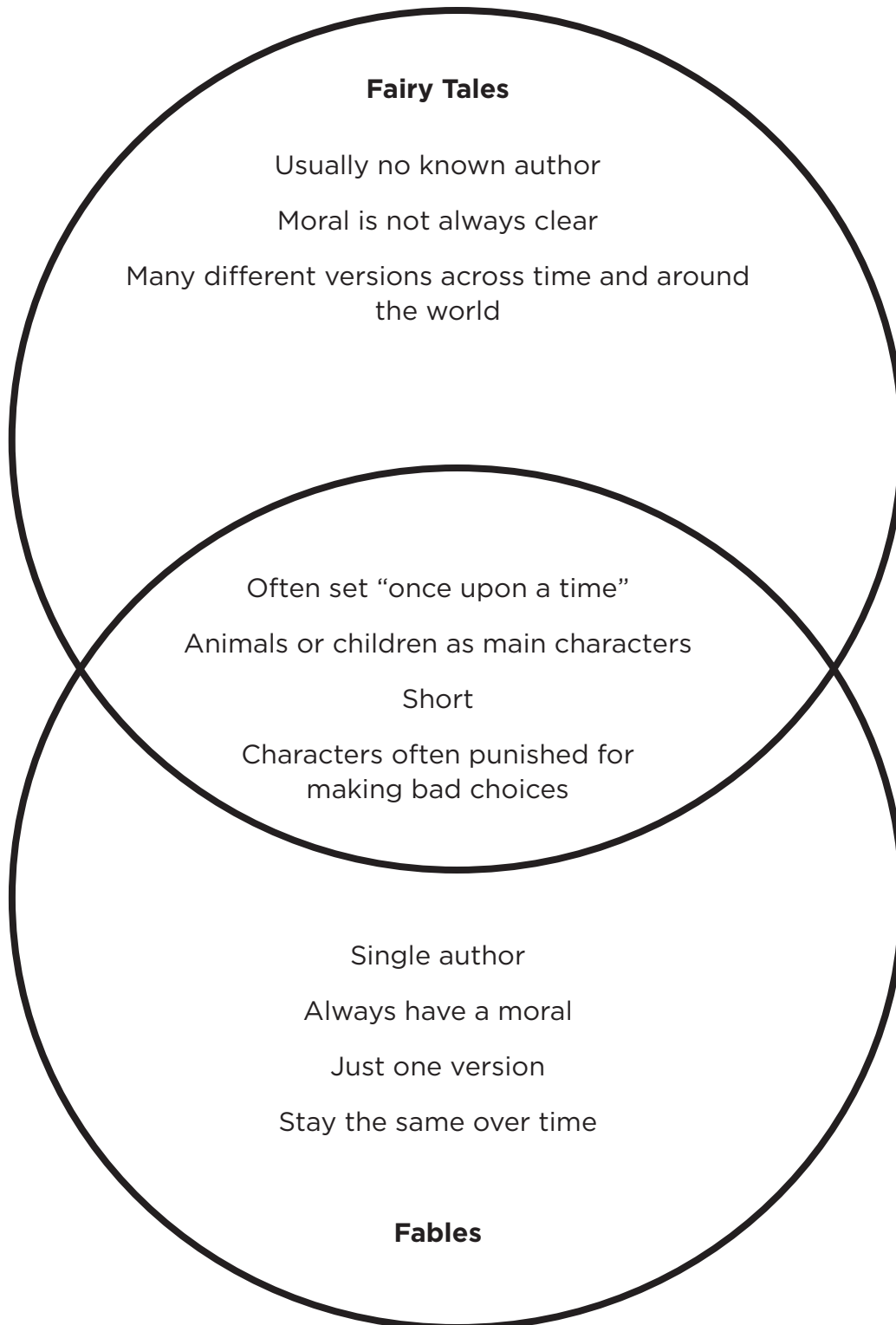


STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

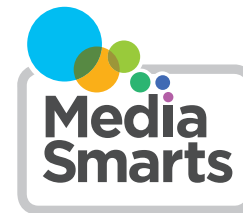


Fairy Tales versus Fables: Teacher's Version

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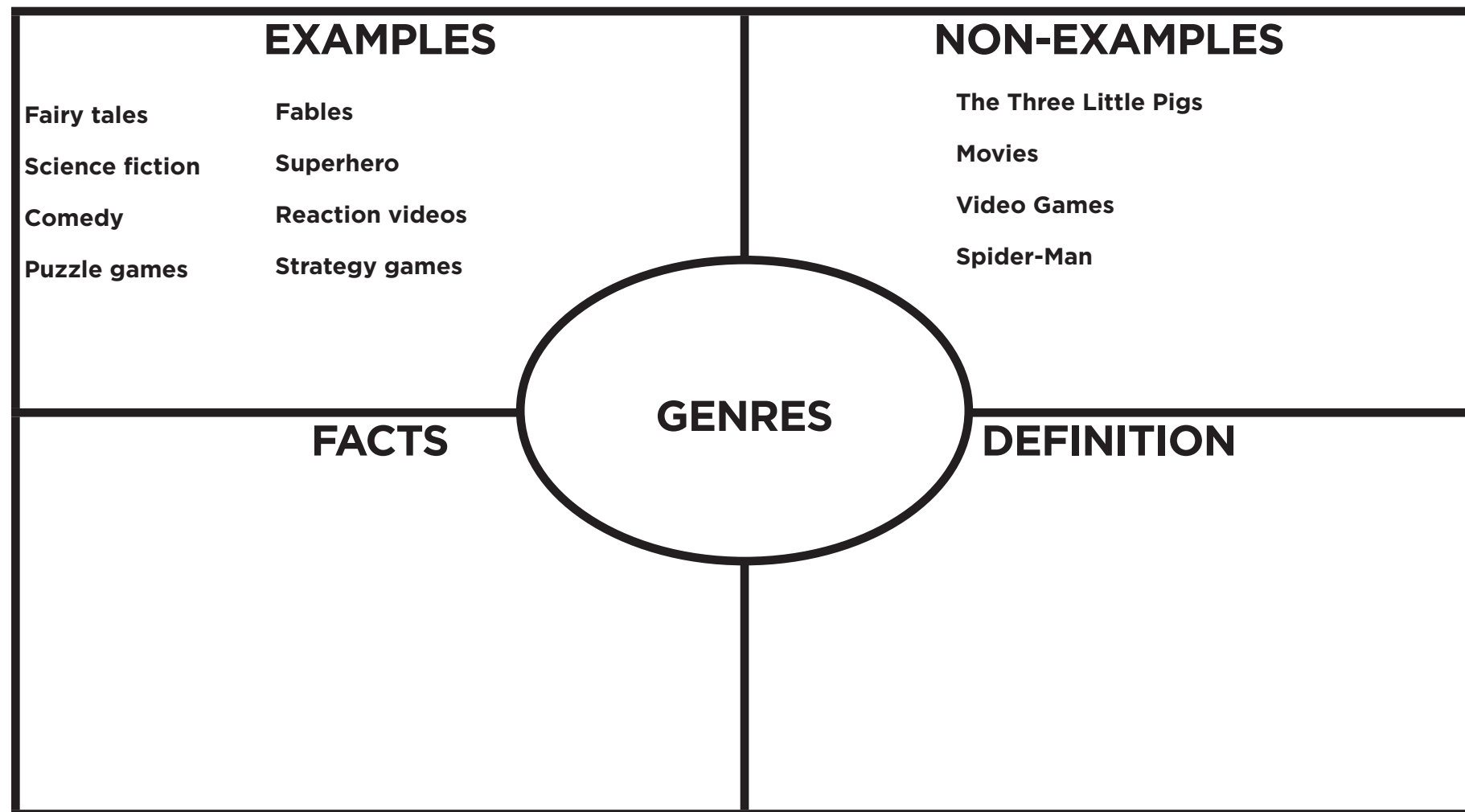


STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

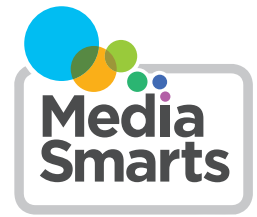


Genres

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STEREOTYPING AND GENRE



Guessing Tropes

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How well do you know fairy tale tropes? See if you can guess what will happen next.

If this happens...	... this will happen	Examples
If a child's mother dies and their father remarries...	... their stepmother will be "wicked" and will want to harm them or get rid of them.	Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, Cinderella
If a childless couple wishes for a child...		
If a person is kind to a stranger early in the story...		
If a person is told to absolutely not break a rule...		
If a princess gets kidnapped by a dragon, a giant or an ogre...		

STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

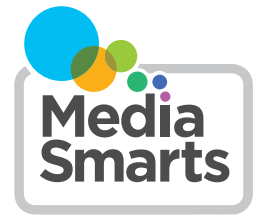
Playing with Genre

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How does *The Paper Bag Princess* play with genre? Use this table to find out.

When this happens...	We expect...	But instead...	So we think...
There is a princess	She will be beautiful and have nice clothes	She has to wear a paper bag when her clothes are burned	Nice clothes aren't important
There is a dragon	The dragon will kidnap the princess		
The prince and princess are going to be married			

STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

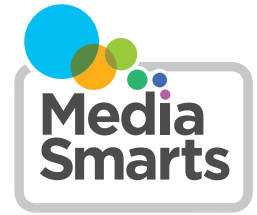


Playing with Genre

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How does *The Paper Bag Princess* play with genre? Use this table to find out.

When this happens...	We expect...	But instead...	So we think...
There is a princess	She will be beautiful and have nice clothes	She has to wear a paper bag when her clothes are burned	Nice clothes aren't important
There is a dragon	The dragon will kidnap the princess	The prince is kidnapped instead of the princess	Women aren't always rescued by men
The prince and princess are going to be married	The prince and princess will get married and live happily ever after	They do not get married because the prince is a bum	You don't have to get married to live happily ever after
There is a prince	He will be brave and clever	The main character is the princess instead of the prince	Courage and cleverness matter more than being a boy or a girl
The dragon kidnaps someone	The prince will beat the dragon and kill it	The princess beats the dragon is beaten, but by cleverness instead of force. The dragon is not killed.	There are lots of different ways to solve problems.



STEREOTYPING AND GENRE

Flipped Fairy Tale

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Get ready to twist, turn, and totally flip fairy tales! Just like the book we read, you're going to write your own fairy tale that both uses some classic fairy tale ideas AND changes them in a big way.

Your goal is to make these changes change the whole point or message of your story! The new message can be about anything important to you.

Here's your step-by-step guide to creating your amazing flipped fairy tale!

1. Tropes

Think about some of the **genre tropes** of fairy tales we talked about in class, and any other ones you can think of. Which ones seem **silly**? Which ones **really bug you**? Which ones lead to **stereotypes** about different kinds of people, how the world works, or how we should solve problems?

(Remember, tropes can include **characters**, **settings** or **things that happen** in a story.)

Describe **at least three** tropes here.

1)

2)

3)

2. Story

Think about the tropes you chose. What kind of story would they fit in?

Where would a story with those tropes happen?

Who would be in a story with those tropes?

What would **normally** happen when those tropes were used?

3. Get ready to flip!

Pick **at least two** of your tropes to **flip**. Describe they will make **your story** different and how they will change the meaning of the story.

Trope:

Changes to story:

Changes to meaning:

Trope:

Changes to story:

Changes to meaning:

4. Write your flipped fairy tale!

Now, it's time to write the first draft of your story! Start writing, turning your planner notes into full sentences and paragraphs. Make sure the tropes you chose are clearly reversed and that your new meaning is clear.

Aim for a story that is 1-2 pages long (double-spaced) and has a clear beginning, middle, and end.

When you're done, Read your entire story out loud to yourself. How does it sound? Are the **story** and the **meaning** clear? What can you do to make it more clear and more fun?