My research and carved box explore the history, symbolism, and themes of fairy tales as they evolved, as well as their cultural and societal significance. Fairy tales have changed drastically over the years and the ones we are familiar with today are very different from their original versions, with many of their impressive and unique qualities being overlooked.

I was interested to learn that many fairy tales predate the first written language and were therefore shared orally centuries before they were first physically recorded. This is what inspired me to use illustrations to depict the story, "The Seven Ravens," by the Brothers Grimm. I chose this story because of how relatively unknown it is compared to more popular tales, as well as the darker imagery and tone. I wanted to reintroduce the idea of darker fairy tales as well as create a unique experience of discovering the story, with my hand carved illustrations divided into different sides of the box. I used woodcarvings as an alternate way to record and share this story without the use of written language as a nod to storytelling's long history.

Rey S.
Massachusetts

A New Look Into Our Oldest Stories

Audrey S.

This paper addresses the history of fairy tales and the influence they have on society and cultures around the world. A fairy tale can be defined as; "a story (as for children) involving fantastic forces and beings (such as fairies, wizards, and goblins)." They may seem simple, but there is a rich history behind these stories, as well as many reasons not to take them at face value. I will be exploring those characteristics as well as exploring other questions, such as: How have fairy tales evolved over time? How can even the most fantastical tales relate to real issues people face in the modern age? It will also explore many recurring themes and motifs throughout different tales.

As a child I was introduced to fairy tales through the Grimm brothers fairy tale collection. I was drawn to the fun and interesting characters and how they were able to outsmart their foes or persevere through the darkest times. I also loved the colorful lands and beings that surrounded these characters. One of my favorite stories as a kid was "Puss in Boots" where the third son of an old miller is left with only the housecat after his death and follows the cat as he does the best to bring fortune to his master. I loved the idea of the main character being a charming taking cat and was impressed by his ability to defeat his opponents by using his wits and intelligence instead of force. As I grew older, I was exposed to the Disney version of many of my beloved characters, as well as different versions from other sources, and was struck by some of the extreme differences between the versions. This sparked a curiosity about how there could be so many versions of one story. I am interested in why such changes had been made over the years. I am also interested in the historical and cultural significance held within fairy tales and folklore. Over the years, fairy tales have changed, not only to fit their audience, but to fit the values of society.

Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen are well known for their versions of fairytales, and are often credited for popularizing the genre 150 years ago. Since then, there have been many different retellings and different versions in media, tv, books, plays, and even comics. What many don't realize is that these tales were around long before these authors. Most of the tales we know and love today go back thousands of years, some even predating the first written languages. "The very earliest writing dates back about 5,000 years. But when were the earliest stories told? The most conservative estimate would suggest that storytelling began 20,000 years ago. It is likely that tales were told much earlier than that. Written literature of any kind is the merest tip of the storytelling, and poetic, iceberg"(Warner 2). Despite the fact that written language is only about 5,000 years old stories have been told and passed down for thousands of years before being able to be recorded. This is what makes the exact origin of many fairy tales so difficult to track, since before we could record stories physically they were shared orally. However, many researchers believe that the common ancestor of all fairy tales is "the blacksmith and the devil," a tale about a clever blacksmith who, sells his soul to the devil for unmatched smithing skills, only to use these skills to outwit the devil by the end of the story.

One fact that often surprises today's fairy tale readers is that fairy tales were originally intended for an adult audience. Many of the original versions of beloved fairy tales are much darker and violent than what we have grown accustomed to; they often do not have a happy ending. When authors such as the Grimm Brothers were putting together their collection, they altered many of these stories to appeal to a younger audience. Though still dark compared to today's standards, the tales have a relatively nicer tone and happy endings. These were then continuously changed and edited into many of the tame versions we are familiar with to this day. For example, in the version of Cinderella many of us are familiar with, the tale ends with Cinderella fitting into the glass slippers after her two stepsisters, as well as the entire kingdom, fail. However, in the Brothers Grimm version of Cinderella, her step sisters are so desperate to prove that they can fit into the glass slipper that they resort to mutilating themselves in order to fit into the slipper and are still not able to trick the Prince. They then have their eyes pecked out by birds, and are ultimately eaten by wild beasts while wandering the forest. Both plots seem to be similar though there are significant differences. In addition to the difference in the levels of violence, there is also a difference in the length of both stories, with the Grimm version containing three days of the ball, three different dresses, and three different impossible tasks for Cinderella to finish in order to attend these dances. Though even the Grimm version is surprisingly tame compared to some of the older versions which follow much darker plots with more violence and even murder along with

unlikable versions of Cinderella which depict her as self-centered and lazy instead of the kind natured version most of us are familiar with.

It is also interesting to explore some of the recurring symbols and motifs. Why do so many fairy tales have evil stepmothers and witches? And why do so many take place within forests? It is easy to brush off these questions, but if you take a moment to look deeper, it is interesting to see some of the hidden meaning. Forests and nature are often portrayed as dark and mysterious; however, a lot of the time it also reflects the characters' feelings, such as how Hansel and Gretel felt as they were stranded in the forest by their parents. However, forests don't always have to be a bad thing, as they sometimes benefit the hero, while at the same time causing the villain's defeat as seen in Cinderella where after her stepsisters, blinded by birds, end up wandering the forest until they are killed by wild creatures. Another recurring motif in fairy tales is food appearing in some form in almost every fairy tale. From the gingerbread house Hansel and Gretel nibble on, to the wine and cake little red delivers to her grandmother food plays at least some role in most stories. In many smaller folk tales and fairy tales, the character comes across or is rewarded with an object that can create unlimited food. Since food is one of our basic necessities as humans, it is seen as good, and having an unlimited amount of it is a very appealing idea. This is especially relative when considering that at the time when many of these stories were told, there were peasants struggling to get by where such a price would be more valuable than fame or glory. It is also worth noting how food symbolizes social networking, similar to how people can be brought together at a dinner table or gathering. For example in "The Magic Table, the Golden Donkey, and the Club in the Sack" one of the protagonist returns home with a table that magically summons enough food to feed anyone and uses it to invite his father's friends over in order to impress them and his father. Another recurring motif is the number three, often appearing as a number of tasks the main protagonist has to finish in order to complete their goal, the number of characters, powerful items, imagery and more. It can be seen in tales such as "The Three Bears" or "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" and can be seen in the three nights Cinderella spends at the ball, and even in the three drops of blood at the start of "Snow White." The number three may be one of the most prominent motifs in fairy tale. There are a few different reasonings behind this, some referencing religion as the number three is considered a holy number in many religions and others simply as a literary element used to enhance or add to the story.

The impact fairy tales have had on our society is undeniable; whether it be in pop culture, cultural traditions, or even the lessons we are taught as children, we are surrounded by these stories. However, recently a lot of these stories have fallen under scrutiny, often for their passive princesses and outdated themes and roles. Michelle Smith, a journalist for "The Conversation addresses this in her article. "It's not the only time fairytales have come under scrutiny recently. They are increasingly being targeted for "banning" within schools or avoidance by parents because of their perceived sexism, passive princesses, and reinforcement of marriage as girls' ultimate goal"(Smith 4). As time passes often our cultures and society change alongside and with these changes often come shifts in our society's values and standards. What were once ideal role models and beloved protagonists are now being criticized for being passive and not standing up for themselves, often relying on their male counterparts to get them out of their problems. With our current societal ideals and the rising feminine movement, many people are rejecting many traditional depictions of female characters in fairy tales. Though these concerns do not come without reason it is also a conclusion found by only looking at these tales from the surface. Simply deciding to ban something because its portrayals are outdated when compared to our current societal standards would be unfair and an overreaction. Most of these stories were told in a time were society's standards were much different and by those standards

many of these stories were actually empowering for females during past time periods. This type of history is not only interesting but would also be lost if we decide to ban older versions of fairy tales. If these unpreferable versions of these stories would be banned, they along with this history would be erased.

It is also important to remember that often stories are more than what one sees on the surface. For example, Cinderella is seen as a helpless protagonist who lets her step-family take advantage of her until a prince sweeps her away to a castle, thus solving problems for her. However, the original tale can also be viewed as a life lesson in self-worth. Though Cinderella is pushed around by her family in both versions, she handles all of this with kindness and patience and, when she is given the opportunity to meet the prince, he recognizes her beauty. When he looks for her, all he has is her glass slipper, her sister cut off mutilate their own feet in a desperate attempt to fit into the slipper. In the end, their scheme doesn't work and Cinderella is able to prove her identity. Her sisters try to change their appearances to win over the prince, but despite them being able to fit into the shoe, it does not fool the prince; this shows that outside looks are not always the most important and that inner beauty is what matters. To some, Cinderella may seem like a terrible role model for children; however, if you look at the story in a new way, you can learn a valuable life lesson.

Fairy tales are older than most written languages, though this did not stop them from spreading or evolving over centuries, from simple stories told between chores to the cultural phenomenon they have become today. Despite the contrast in these stories, their popularity cannot be denied. Though many people view the small changes to these tales over the years or the modern retellings as steps in the right direction, it is also important to take a step back and look at what fairy tales once were. There is so much to learn and experience from these stories. They are extremely unique and timeless and it would be a shame to let these versions fade into the past. Next time you have the chance, consider exploring these tales.

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