

# Fairy Tales, Brainstorming Cards and Tarot:

## How to plot quickly and have fun too!

### I. Fairy Tales and Folktales

I use the two terms interchangeably for now. For our purposes I'm referring to the oral tales that have, more often than not, passed into written form (because that is how we generally encounter them) and generally have the following characteristics in common:

— the setting is an undefined place and time, which is closely related to the society from which the tale comes i.e., In *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, edited by Alan Dundes, (see my Selected Bibliography) is a book of many version of little Red Riding Hood, from the Grimm's tale, to the gory 16<sup>th</sup> century version, the setting is different depending on where the tale is collected from. The oral form of the fairy tale existed long before the written version. Many tales, for example, *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, were written down in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and therefore reserve that cultural flavor and setting.

— “flat” characters that never develop: adventurous and fearless, Jack the Giant Killer; clever Red Riding Hood, proud Beauty in *Beauty and the Beast*, a curious Sleeping Beauty.

— an implicit or explicit prohibition that affects the plot, i.e., must not eat the giant's food, or stray from the path, or go into that room, or touch that scarf.

— some kind of magic: magic beans, a spindle needle that sends one into a sleep of one hundred years, a talking mirror.

— a transformation, either physical or character, i.e., the wayward child becomes a hero, the maiden becomes a woman, the poor girl becomes a rich one, the innocent child becomes worldly-wise.

The components of tales are called motifs, by folklorists, and turn out to be helpful in terms of story construction.

### An exercise to illustrate

Here are some examples of motifs:

- cruel stepmother
- magic object received from fairy
- carriage from pumpkin
- prince sees heroine at the ball and is enamored
- slipper test: identification by fitting of shoes
- lowly heroine marries prince
- fairy godmother
- clothes produced by magic
- transformation: mouse to horse
- taboo: staying too long at the ball
- glass slipper

What tale is this? **Cinderella**. But many stories have fairy godmothers and cruel stepmothers; others transformation of creatures and taboos involving time.

# Fairy Tales, Brainstorming Cards and Tarot:

## How to plot quickly and have fun too!

Some motifs are specific and some are general. And include **actions**, **objects**, and **characters**.

Motifs that are often grouped together account for what folklorists call “tale types”. As an example I collected 10 African variants of *The Goat and Her Kids*, which is an animal variant of *Red Riding Hood*. In the tale as we know it, the wolf is the villain; in the African tales it is often an ogre or a hyena.

### How does awareness of fairy tales help us plot and structure stories as fiction writers?

Among other things, motifs provide an “an alphabet” of themes and types of folk narrative. And, I think, can be applied to the stories we write.

“Knowledge of the kinds of motifs is the basic tool of trade for the storyteller.” – Professor Waller Hastings at Northern State University at ABERDEEN, SD (see my Selected Bibliography.)

We may want our stories to be unique and stand apart, but in order to be at least somewhat recognizable to our readers; we borrow from the genre we’re writing in. To be a better writer, it’s important to be aware of the motifs in your genre and in your story so you can manipulate these motifs and better manipulate our genre, or even bring in motifs from other genres.

## Fairy Tales

### An exercise – the Motifs of romance

Use the short form below to make a list or a brainstorm web of the motifs in your current story. Can you add more variety? Can you pull motifs from fairy/folk tales, other genres, other sub-genres of romance?

<b>Motifs</b>	<b>Your story:</b>
Objects:	
Actions:	
Characters:	

# Fairy Tales, Brainstorming Cards and Tarot:

## How to plot quickly and have fun too!

### II. Brainstorming Cards – Five-Step Plot

Reference: *The Writer's Brainstorming Kit*, Pam McCutcheon and Michael Waite, Gryphon Books for Writers, c. 2001. [www.gryphonbooksforwriters.com](http://www.gryphonbooksforwriters.com) They use Syd Field's example of story structure. Their cards are replicated in the table below. The words are intended to trigger associations "to add depth and interest" to your character and plot.

**Instructions:** On your own, pick your cards, then riff! It helps to know your genre first. But notice if you don't stick to it when you're coming up with a story off the cuff. Or you may. If you don't that may be a sign that you are more naturally inclined to a certain type of story structure, and that kind of story that uses that kind of structure.

As a group today, five people gather, each one has a card with a number on it. That number corresponds to the list of 50 words on your handout. I'll assign each of you as A-E. Each person will have a turn, please just a minute or two, to introduce yourself briefly and correlate their word to the assigned stage of the story. I'll give you about 10-15 minutes to do this exercise.

Example of story structure:

**A. The Ordinary World:** the normal milieu for your character

**B. The Trigger Event:** the incident that happens to throw your character out of her secure world and send her in a new direction

**C. The Change of Plans:** stakes rise and goals may change, possibly more than once

**D. The Black Moment:** when it seems that everything will go wrong

**E. The Resolution:** the character makes a decision or has an epiphany, and as a result is rewarded

1. Animals	18. Heartbreak	35. Quench
2. Apprenticeship	19. Honor	36. Rescue
3. Balance	20. Improvement	37. Revenge
4. Build	21. Inheritance	38. Riches
5. Burden	22. Innocence	39. Sacrifice
6. Change	23. Insanity	40. Secrets
7. Communication	24. Joy	41. Self
8. Death	25. Judgment	42. Sin
9. Deception	26. Knowledge	43. Sloth
10. Dependence	27. Loneliness	44. Strength
11. Desire	28. Love	45. Time
12. Dreams	29. Loyalty	46. Travel
13. Ego	30. Luck	47. Unknown
14. Faith	31. Magic	48. War
15. Family	32. Misfit	49. Wisdom
16. Fear	33. Power	50. Zenith
17. Giving	34. Pride	

# Fairy Tales, Brainstorming Cards and Tarot:

## How to plot quickly and have fun too!

### III. Tarot Cards –The Story Theme

Tarot is visual, the images are archetypal and often powerful. Tarot can spark us in unexpected ways!

For the purposes and brevity and power, I'm using just the Major Arcana: 22 cards of the tarot deck that are of major themes – Death, Love, the Hermit, etc. (see below). Each of the 22 cards can be a main story theme. Each card can indicate a wide range of things. You just pick the meanings that resonate with you.

For example, the deck I'm passing around a few examples from is the Crowley-Thoth deck, my favorite.

**0 The Fool:** has the theme of innocence, play, trusting fate, no fear, creativity, possibility of the quantum leap, freedom, independence, listening to the heart's voice. The Fool can spark a story where a florist young woman who needs to grow up and take responsibility, according to her parents. But she prefers to trust the winds of destiny to bring her to her goals. This suggests various conflicts she must face to overcome and gain responsibility without losing her innocence. Or if it has a sad ending, she doesn't grow up.

**III The Empress:** has the theme of bounty, caretaking, mothering, wisdom, femininity, inner and outer wealth, beauty, Venus, connection between spirit and matter.

A story starter: A nurturing and controlling woman who needs to learn to let go of the past to create relationships in her present

**IV The Emperor:** Aries, pioneer, leader, initiator, creative wisdom, leadership qualities, urge for action and adventure, new beginnings, fatherhood, authority.

A story starter: A story about a man who has to be in charge

Also you can use the 12-step hero's journey and pick a card for each step. (See Vogler, Selected Bibliography.)

So here I've given you examples of characters inspired by the cards, and knowing your characters better, you can decide what conflicts to throw at them.

Tarot also helps me clarify the story's main theme. I weave its imagery into the story. For example:

**XIV Art:** Sagittarius, unification of opposites, balance, inner change, transformation, alchemy, quantum leap, creative power, the crucible

# **Fairy Tales, Brainstorming Cards and Tarot:**

## **How to plot quickly and have fun too!**

### **Tarot Exercise**

Think of question or concern you have about your story. Where you may be stuck and wonder what's next. Breathe! Put your feet on the floor and feel centered as you can in this moment.

Then pick one card. For the purposes of today's exercise, I've only provided the Major Arcana from various decks in my collection.

What does this card evoke for you? Write the first thing that comes to mind? Then the second thing, then the third thing. Keep listing what this cards brings up for you, even if it is illogical and seemingly not connected to your answer.

### **Conclusion**

Great! I hope you became acquainted today in the short time we had together with fairy tale motifs, the brainstorming cards technique, and some uses of tarot with your writing.

Above all, have fun with your writing and your creativity. Happy Writing!