

Fairy Tale: not believed to be literally true. When you hear a version of Cinderella, you're not really prompted to wonder "Did this happen?" or "Is this true?" You can also spot fairy tales because they're usually set in a magical or otherworldly time and space (i.e. once upon a time.)

Folk tales are passed down through oral tradition, whereas fairy tales are written works of fiction. Folk tales reflect real-world settings and events, whereas fairy tales feature magic and fantasy. Both folk tales and fairy tales aim to teach a lesson, but folk tales take a more realistic approach.

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What is the difference between a legend and a tall tale?

A **legend** is a story that gets its inspiration in a real historical fact and embellishes what is real, contrary to the **tall tale** which is not associated to something concrete and in which everything is imagined. There is always a more or less precise space-time setting, once again something in opposition to the tale.

Legend: ambiguous or liminal truth status. The listener has to evaluate whether or not they think the story is really true. Think: stories about Slenderman or King Arthur. Wondering "Is this real?" or "Did this really happen?" is built into the story. Legends are also rooted in identifiable places and times, which helps us identify them!

Legend, traditional story or group of stories told about a particular person or place. Formerly the term **legend** meant a tale about a **saint**. **Legends** resemble folktales in content; they may include supernatural beings, elements of mythology, or explanations of natural phenomena, but they are associated with a particular locality or person and are told as a matter of history.

Scott Reynolds Nelson

According to the ballad that made him famous, John Henry did battle with a steam-powered drill, beat the machine, and died. Folklorists have long thought John Henry to be mythical, but historian Scott Nelson has discovered that he was a real person—a nineteen-year-old from New Jersey who was convicted of theft in a Virginia court in 1866, sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary, and put to work building the C&O Railroad. There, at the Lewis Tunnel, Henry and other prisoners worked alongside steam-powered drills. In his book, Nelson pieces together the biography of the real John Henry. It is also the story of work songs, songs that not only turned Henry into a folk hero but also, in reminding workers to slow down or die, were a tool of resistance and protest.

Fables: a short story, typically with animals as characters, [conveying](#) a moral.

The Brahmin and the mongoose - hasty killing - think before you act

The Loyal Mongoose^[a]

There was once a Brahman named Godly [orig. *Devasharma*] in a certain town. His wife mothered a single son and a mongoose. And as she loved little ones, she cared for the mongoose also like a son, giving him milk from her breast, and salves, and baths, and so on. But she did not trust him, for she thought: "A mongoose is a nasty kind of creature. He might hurt my boy." [...]

One day she tucked her son in bed, took a waterjar, and said to her husband: "Now, Professor, I am going for water. You must protect the boy from the mongoose." But when she was gone, the Brahman went off somewhere himself to beg food, leaving the house empty.

While he was gone, a black snake issued from his hole and, as fate would have it, crawled toward the baby's cradle. But the mongoose, feeling him to be a natural enemy, and fearing for the life of his baby brother, fell upon the vicious serpent halfway, joined battle with him, tore him to bits, and tossed the pieces far and wide. Then, delighted with his own heroism, he ran, blood trickling from his mouth, to meet the mother; for he wished to show what he had done.

But when the mother saw him coming, saw his bloody mouth and his excitement, she feared that the villain must have eaten her baby boy, and without thinking twice, she angrily dropped the water-jar upon him, which killed him the moment that it struck. There she left him without a second thought, and hurried home, where she found the baby safe and sound, and near the cradle a great black snake, torn to bits. Then,

overwhelmed with sorrow because she had thoughtlessly killed her benefactor, her son, she beat her head and breast.

At this moment the Brahman came home with a dish of rice gruel which he had got from someone in his begging tour, and saw his wife bitterly lamenting her son, the mongoose. "Greedy! Greedy!" she cried. "Because you did not do as I told you, you must now taste the bitterness of a son's death, the fruit of the tree of your own wickedness. Yes, this is what happens to those blinded by greed...."

Myth

Myth: true in a profound way for the culture that tells them. Myths are sacred stories, often about the origins of the world/ universe or the way the world came to be the way it is. Myths are often set during the creation of the world, at a distance from the every day.

Persephone

The Pleiades

After Atlas was forced to carry the heavens on his shoulders, **Orion** began to pursue all of the Pleiades, and Zeus transformed them first into doves, and then into stars to comfort their father. The **constellation of Orion** is said to still pursue them across the night sky.

One of the most memorable myths involving the Pleiades is the story of how these sisters literally became stars, their *catasterism*. According to some versions of the tale, all seven sisters died by suicide because they were so saddened by either the fate of their father, Atlas, or the loss of their siblings, the Hyades. In turn, Zeus, the ruler of the Greek gods, immortalized the sisters by placing them in the sky. There these seven stars formed the star cluster known thereafter as the Pleiades.

Iroquois[\[edit\]](#)

A tale attributed to the **Iroquois** people tells that the Pleiades were six boys who danced atop a hill to the tune a seventh was singing. On a certain occasion, they danced so fast and so light they began to ascend to the skies, and thus became the constellation. ^{[51][52]}

Kiowa[\[edit\]](#)

The [Kiowa](#) of [North America](#) legend of the Seven Star Girls links the origin of the Pleiades to [Devils Tower](#). The seven little girls were chased by bears, and climbed a low rock. They begged the rock to save them, and it grew higher and higher until they were pushed up into the sky. The seven girls became the Pleiades and the grooves on Devils Tower are the marks of the bear's claws. ^{[53][54]}

The **Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index (ATU Index)** is a [catalogue](#) of [folktale](#) types used in [folklore studies](#). The ATU Index is the product of a series of revisions and expansions by an international group of scholars: originally composed in German by Finnish folklorist [Antti Aarne](#) (1910), the index was translated into English, revised, and expanded by American folklorist [Stith Thompson](#) (1928, 1961), and later further revised and expanded by German folklorist [Hans-Jörg Uther](#) (2004). The ATU Index, along with Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1932)—with which it is used in tandem—is an essential tool for folklorists. ^[1]

Joseph Campbell Hero's Journey

Vladimir Propp

By sorting out those events and characters which are crucial to the tale and those which are superfluous, Propp exposed the syntagm or that which is universal to the tale. He argued that there are 31 basic functions and 7 character types and that all folktales are created using an amalgam of these standard ingredients.

Functions^[edit]

After the initial situation is depicted, any wonder tale will be composed of a selection of the following 31 functions, in a fixed, consecutive order: ^[2]

1. **ABSENTATION**: A member of the hero's community or family leaves the security of the home environment. This may be the [hero](#) themselves, or some other relation that the hero must later rescue. This division of the cohesive family injects initial tension into the storyline. This may serve as the hero's introduction, typically portraying them as an ordinary person.
2. **INTERDICTION**: A forbidding edict or command is passed upon the hero ('don't go there', 'don't do this'). The hero is warned against some action.
3. **VIOLATION of INTERDICTION**. The prior rule is violated. Therefore, the hero did not listen to the command or forbidding edict. Whether committed by the Hero by accident or temper, a third party or a foe, this generally leads to negative consequences.

The **villain** enters the story via this event, although not necessarily confronting the hero. They may be a lurking and manipulative presence, or might act against the hero's family in his absence.

4. **RECONNAISSANCE:** The villain makes an effort to attain knowledge needed to fulfill their plot. Disguises are often invoked as the villain actively probes for information, perhaps for a valuable item or to abduct someone. They may speak with a family member who innocently divulges a crucial insight. The villain may also seek out the hero in their reconnaissance, perhaps to gauge their strengths in response to learning of their special nature.

5. **DELIVERY:** The villain succeeds at recon and gains a lead on their intended victim. A map is often involved in some level of the event.

6. **TRICKERY:** The villain attempts to deceive the victim to acquire something valuable. They press further, aiming to con the protagonists and earn their trust. Sometimes the villain makes little or no deception and instead ransoms one valuable thing for another.

7. **COMPLICITY:** The victim is fooled or forced to concede and unwittingly or unwillingly helps the villain, who is now free to access somewhere previously off-limits, like the privacy of the hero's home or a treasure vault, acting without restraint in their ploy.

8. **VILLAINY** or **LACKING:** The villain harms a family member, including but not limited to abduction, theft, spoiling crops, plundering, banishment or expulsion of one or more protagonists, murder, threatening a forced marriage, inflicting nightly torments and so on. Simultaneously or alternatively, a protagonist finds they desire or require something lacking from the home environment (potion, artifact, etc.). The villain may still be indirectly involved, perhaps fooling the family member into believing they need such an item.

9. **MEDIATION:** One or more of the negative factors covered above comes to the attention of the Hero, who uncovers the deceit/perceives the lacking/learns of the villainous acts that have transpired.

10. **BEGINNING COUNTERACTION:** The hero considers ways to resolve the issues, by seeking a needed magical item, rescuing those who are captured or otherwise thwarting the villain. This is a defining moment for the hero, one that shapes their further actions and marks the point when they begin to fit their noble mantle.

11. **DEPARTURE:** The hero leaves the home environment, this time with a sense of purpose. Here begins their adventure.

12. **FIRST FUNCTION OF THE DONOR:** The hero encounters a magical agent or helper ([donor](#)) on their path, and is tested in some manner through interrogation, combat, puzzles or more.
13. **HERO'S REACTION:** The hero responds to the actions of their future donor; perhaps withstanding the rigours of a test and/or failing in some manner, freeing a captive, reconciles disputing parties or otherwise performing good services. This may also be the first time the hero comes to understand the villain's skills and powers, and uses them for good.
14. **RECEIPT OF A MAGICAL AGENT:** The hero acquires use of a magical agent as a consequence of their good actions. This may be a directly acquired item, something located after navigating a tough environment, a good purchased or bartered with a hard-earned resource or fashioned from parts and ingredients prepared by the hero, spontaneously summoned from another world, a magical food that is consumed, or even the earned loyalty and aid of another.
15. **GUIDANCE:** The hero is transferred, delivered or somehow led to a vital location, perhaps related to one of the above functions such as the home of the donor or the location of the magical agent or its parts, or to the villain.
16. **STRUGGLE:** The hero and villain meet and engage in conflict directly, either in battle or some nature of contest.
17. **BRANDING:** The hero is marked in some manner, perhaps receiving a distinctive scar or granted a cosmetic item like a ring or scarf.
18. **VICTORY:** The villain is defeated by the hero – killed in combat, outperformed in a contest, struck when vulnerable, banished, and so on.
19. **LIQUIDATION:** The earlier misfortunes or issues of the story are resolved; objects of search are distributed, spells broken, captives freed.
20. **RETURN:** The hero travels back to their home.
21. **PURSUIT:** The hero is pursued by some threatening adversary, who perhaps seek to capture or eat them.
22. **RESCUE:** The hero is saved from a chase. Something may act as an obstacle to delay the pursuer, or the hero may find or be shown a way to hide, up to and including transformation unrecognisably. The hero's life may be saved by another.
23. **UNRECOGNIZED ARRIVAL:** The hero arrives, whether in a location along their journey or in their destination, and is unrecognised or unacknowledged.
24. **UNFOUNDED CLAIMS:** A [false hero](#) presents unfounded claims or performs some other form of deceit. This may be the villain, one of the villain's underlings or an

unrelated party. It may even be some form of future donor for the hero, once they've faced their actions.

25. **DIFFICULT TASK:** A trial is proposed to the hero – riddles, test of strength or endurance, acrobatics and other ordeals.

26. **SOLUTION:** The hero accomplishes a difficult task.

27. **RECOGNITION:** The hero is given due recognition – usually by means of their prior branding.

28. **EXPOSURE:** The false hero and/or villain is exposed to all and sundry.

29. **TRANSFIGURATION:** The hero gains a new appearance. This may reflect aging and/or the benefits of labour and health, or it may constitute a magical remembering after a limb or digit was lost (as a part of the branding or from failing a trial). Regardless, it serves to improve their looks.

30. **PUNISHMENT:** The villain suffers the consequences of their actions, perhaps at the hands of the hero, the avenged victims, or as a direct result of their own ploy.

31. **WEDDING:** The hero marries and is rewarded or promoted by the family or community, typically ascending to a throne.

Some of these functions may be *inverted*, such as the hero receives an artifact of power whilst still at home, thus fulfilling the donor function early. Typically such functions are negated twice, so that it must be repeated **three** times in Western cultures.^[3]

Characters[[edit](#)]

Main article: [Actant](#)

He also concluded that all the characters in tales could be resolved into seven abstract **character** functions:

1. The **villain** – an evil character that creates struggles for the hero.
2. The dispatcher – any character who illustrates the need for the hero's quest and sends the hero off. This often overlaps with the princess's father.
3. The helper – a typically magical entity that comes to help the hero in their quest.
4. The princess or prize, and often her father – the hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her as a consequence of some evil or injustice, perhaps the work of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, which constitutes the villain's defeat.
5. The **donor** – a character that prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object, sometimes after testing them.

6. The **hero** — the character who reacts to the dispatcher and donor characters, thwarts the villain, resolves any lacking or wrongdoings and weds the princess.
7. The **false hero** — a **Miles Gloriosus** figure who takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess.^[4]

These roles could sometimes be distributed among various characters, as the hero kills the villain dragon, and the dragon's sisters take on the villainous role of chasing him. Conversely, one character could engage in acts as more than one role, as a father could send his son on the quest and give him a sword, acting as both dispatcher and donor.^[5]