

TEACHERS' NOTES

FAIRY TALES

GONE BAD

ZOMBIERELLA

JOSEPH COELHO, illustrated by FREYA HARTAS



WALKER BOOKS

9781406389661 • Paperback • £7.99 • 7 years+

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

Before You Start:

- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. The group could also be asked to reflect on the writer's use of language and how he creates a particular effect or image.
- As you read, you may also want to encourage the group to begin to pick out key vocabulary, such as **ossified, unthumbed, decrepit, bramble, wizened, phlegm, bloated, auburn, entrée, carriage** or **cemetery**, that the children may need clarifying, and add these to a glossary, following up on new and unfamiliar vocabulary by using photographs and video sources to bring these words to life and support the pupils in using them in context.
- Joseph Coelho is a performing poet and 'Fairy Tales Gone Bad' originated as a performed piece (<https://vimeo.com/164704392>, <https://vimeo.com/153248658>), so reading aloud and bringing the words to life off the page will be key to a successful and enjoyable encounter with the story.

Session 1: Cover, Prologue and Chapter 1:

- Begin by sharing Freya Hartas's cover illustration, asking children to consider it carefully, reading what messages it might contain about the book they are about to read and unpicking any connections they may make with other stories they already know. Ask the children to make predictions of what the story could be about and to justify their responses, drawing out any connections they may have made to other stories. Record the children's responses and return to these as you read the book, comparing the children's initial thoughts to how the story actually unfolds.
- Support the children to make connections between this text and other stories they might know, by encouraging them to look in detail at the cover illustration.
 - Who do you think this character could be? What do you notice about her clothing and appearance? What do you think is the relationship between her and the cat and dog, and what can you say about the way they look? What clues does her body language give?
 - Where do you think she is standing, and what do you notice about the setting? What features of the background catch your eye? Why? Children might notice cobwebs, spiders, moths and flies; bats and crows; mushrooms and autumn leaves: what associations do these elements have for you? How does the palette of the cover make you feel?
 - What does the title "Zombierella" suggest to you? Encourage children to unpick the name into 'zombie' and '-rella', exploring what each part might contribute to the story they are about to read. What do you know about zombies, and about the etymology (West African) of this word and the origins of this belief? What happens in the traditional (Cinderella) story that you know? How do you think these two stories or traditions might come together in this telling?
 - What can you say about the layout and appearance of the cover, the typeface used for the title "Zombierella"? What do you take from the series title, "Fairy Tales Gone Bad" with the skull in the O of "GONE" echoing that at the top of the page and around the character's neck? What do you expect of a fairy tale: where and when might it be set? What about one that has "gone bad", what might this involve?
 - Do you recognise the names of the author and illustrator, carved on gravestones? Children may know Joseph Coelho from his picturebooks, poetry, videos or even a school visit. What does this make you think this book will be



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like? Children may recognise the name or style of Freya Hartas from her picturebooks or illustrations for books by Stephanie Burgis: what do you think her illustrations will add to the story? Does the cover make you want to read this book? Why? Why not?

- Open the book and share the illustrations and dedications up to the **Table of Contents**, and discuss:
 - How do the illustrations — of Zombierella in the frame, of the dismembered cat, of Zombierella with four other characters — support your prediction about the story? How does the framed portrait compare with the one on the cover, and what might this tell you? Children might comment on her poor clothing, less confident body language and facial expression, the frame of skull, spider, beetles and centipede.
 - What does Joseph Coelho's reference to "gruesome tales" and Freya Hartas' to a "zombie boyfriend" and "vampire cat", and the illustration of the dismembered cat — lead you to expect of the story they have written and illustrated?
 - Who do you think the four figures in the group portrait might be? How do you think they might be connected to each other and to the character we have seen on the cover? What do you think is the quality of relationship between them: do they get on? How do you know?
- Read aloud the **Prologue**, sharing the illustrations including those of the Library and Librarian on pages 8 and 9. Give the children time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:
 - What do you think is happening in the pages you have just heard read? Who is the Librarian and what do you learn about him and the stories he has discovered in his collection?
 - What words and phrases stand out for you as you hear the story read? How has Joseph Coelho brought certain parts of the story into sharp focus?
 - How do Freya Hartas's illustrations support your engagement with and understanding of the story? How does this fourth double-page illustration of Zombierella relate to the three you have seen already (on the cover, the facing page, and with the four other figures)? What do you think you might already know about her character and personality? What do you predict might happen in this particular "fairy tale gone bad"?
- Read on aloud through Chapter 1, **The Digging of a Grave**. Ask the children to discuss their initial responses to the text. Were any of their predictions about the story confirmed? What does it make them think about? How does it make them feel? What parts of the chapter stood out for them? Were there any memorable words or phrases? What made these particularly memorable? What do they think might happen in the rest of the story?
- Re-read the text together, or give the children a copy of the chapter to re-read on their own, encouraging them to focus in on the characters and action in more depth. They could text mark and annotate a copy of the chapter to share their thoughts and ideas around the following questions:
 - What do you think has happened to Cinderella to bring her to the situation we see her in in this chapter? How might this relate to the traditional story you know?
 - How does Joseph Coelho fill in details of Cinderella and the changes in fortune of the horse Lumpkin?
 - What impression does the setting of Grimmsville make on you? What words and phrases especially capture what it is like? Children might notice "a town with glamour long behind it... festering... forgotten". What do you make of the mysterious procession of horses — "blacker than the backs of eyelids during nightmares" — racing to the abandoned mansion "both terrible and beautiful"? The children might also see the pun in the reference to "grim", if they know about the Brothers Grimm and their fairy tales.
 - Why do you think Cinderella wants to race the horses? How do you think she feels as she loses her final connection to a happier past and buries Lumpkin? How do you know?



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- How do Freya Hartas’s illustrations support your response to the text? Which elements especially stand out for you? Why?
- What do you think is the significance of the coffins? What do you think will happen next?

Session 2: Chapters 2 and 3:

- Continue to read aloud Chapter 2, *The Prince Prepares for the Ball*. Give the children time and space to reflect on what they have heard, and discuss:
 - What do you think you know about the prince and his pattern of behaviour, the odd social schedule he has developed? Why do you think he is “new in town [...] new in every town he visited”? What clues do you have to the kind of character he might be? How do you know?
 - If they do not comment on them, ask children about the references to blacking out windows, removing garlic and covering mirrors, clarifying that these relate to beliefs around vampires. Why do you think the prince’s servants have to make these preparations when he visits each haunted mansion? How does this new information connect to what you already know about the prince’s arrival at the mansion?
 - How do Freya Hartas’s illustrations, especially the double-page spread of the mansion on pages 48 and 49, and the preparations inside on page 51, work with Joseph Coelho’s words? What details do they pick up on, and what is added?
- Now read aloud Chapter 3, *The Three Fake Sisters*, including sharing the illustrations, and allow time and space to reflect, discuss and consider:
 - How does the tally of Cinderella’s experiences of death affect you? What do you find out about Fluffy and Simpson, whom you have already seen, that fills in what you might have predicted? Why do you think the narrator is surprised that the goldfish drowned? How does Lumpkin’s recent death fit into this pattern? Why do you think Joseph Coelho is emphasising the significant presence of death in Cinderella’s life, and the origin of her nickname in her mother’s ashes worn around her neck? What do you predict might go on to happen in her life?
 - What impression do Cinderella’s three sisters and stepmother make on you? How do you respond to what you find out about the suspicious death of Cinderella’s father and the way they have treated her since? How does their behaviour overlap with the Wicked Stepmother and Ugly Sisters of the traditional tale? How does Joseph Coelho extend and update this for this story? What details especially stand out for you?
- Add quick **pen portraits** of the stepmother, and of large-eared Hebina, aromatic Storm and long-tongued Alhora to the Reading Journal to summarise and reinforce what you have read. A pen portrait is an informal description of a person or a group of people, a character sketch in words. A pen portrait may discuss ‘hard’ facts, such as age or gender, but it should also focus on ‘softer’ aspects, such as attitudes and appearance. From the chapters you have read so far information you could include in the pen portrait might be name, appearance, background, likes and dislikes, as well as any other ideas they have expressed and the writer’s own inferences about them from what they have read. You could also add a pen portrait for the prince.
- Now you have a full picture of Cinderella and the setting and characters of this story, encourage the children to predict how the story might unfold, revisiting the illustrations to support discussion:
 - How do Freya Hartas’s illustrations support your reading of the story, for example of the poison that might have killed Cinderella’s father on pages 54 and 55; the vignettes of Fluffy, Simpson, Karate and Lumpkin on pages 56 and 57; of the three fake sisters on pages 64 and 65, or Cinderella falling downstairs past the gallery of family portraits on pages 72 and 73. What details stand out for you in the illustrations?



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- How do you think the different threads of the story might now be woven to move the story forward? What do you think will happen after Cinderella has slipped on the filthy stairs?

Session 3: Chapter 4:

- Before reading on, reflect on the events of the story so far and the character of Cinderella, asking the children to complete a **Role on the Wall** for her. To do this, have a prepared outline drawing of Cinderella onto which the children can record their ideas. Ask the children to write words or phrases sharing what they know about her outward appearance or other information about her from the story events on the outside of the outline. Then, use these to begin to infer and deduce her internal feelings and characteristics and note these on the inside of the outline.
- To promote a higher level of thinking, ask the children to consider what we know from her speech and the narration and what we have to infer from body language, gestures and actions. Support the children in making explicit links between the external and internal. For example, what does something Cinderella does tell us about her personality? Or, how does her personality make a specific action seem most likely?
- Encourage the children to continue to return to the Role on the Wall as you continue to read the story, using a different colour each time to highlight the knowledge they gain each time they read more.
- Revisit the children's predictions about what might happen in this chapter — after Cinderella has fallen down the stairs — and how the story might develop. Then read aloud Chapter 4, ***Cinderella and Death***. Give the children time and space to reflect on what they have read, and discuss:
 - Did you predict that Cinderella would die? How did Joseph Coelho prepare you for this twist in the plot?
 - What else do you think has happened in this chapter? Can you summarise the key events? How does it make you feel?: are you pleased at the way the plot has developed, for Cinderella/Zombierella and the things she might now be able to do with the help of the Fairy of Death? How do you think the unfolding story will stick to the traditional visit of Cinderella to meet her Prince Charming at the ball, and how might it deviate?
 - What did the visit of the Fairy of Death, transforming Cinderella into Zombierella, make you think about or feel? Was this in line with your predictions? How does the Fairy of Death relate to the Fairy Godmother of the traditional tale? How do the coach and horses and footmen correspond to those of the version of the story that you know?
- Consider Joseph Coelho's use of poetic devices, following Cinderella's transformation.
 - What do you notice about the way the Fairy of Death and Zombierella speak? If children do not notice the rhyme and rhythm and the division into stanzas of their words you could reread these, and point out the use of a different font in the text. Why do you think Joseph Coelho has the characters speak this way? What impact does this part of the text have on you? Why do you think this is? Do you think they would sound the same and have the same impact if they were speaking in prose?
 - You could experiment with turning some of their words into prose to compare the impact, and extend the activity by asking them to turn their own prose into rhymed and rhythmic speech.
- Finish the session by considering the impact of the illustrations and predicting how Zombierella's attendance at the ball might be received.
 - How do Freya Hartas's illustrations work with Joseph Coelho's words to enhance your experience of the story? What do they add to the story as he tells it? Which illustrations do you find most effective? Why?



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- What do you think will happen when Zombierella attends the prince's ball? How will she be received by her stepmother and fake sisters; do you think they will recognise her? What impression do you think she will make on the prince, given he is not the Prince Charming of the traditional tale? How do you think events will relate to the traditional version of the story?
- What do you predict will happen next in Joseph Coelho's version of the story? What possibilities has he allowed for in the story world he has set up?

Session 4: Chapters 5–7:

- Begin the session by reading the opening of Chapter 5, **The Ball**, from page 96 "The ball was in full swing!" to page 101, "... electricity over her skin." in which we see Zombierella's arrival at the prince's first ball and her effect on him. Ask the children to **visualise** the scene in their mind's eye as you are reading aloud, closing their eyes and picturing the scene unfolding as if it were a scene in a film. Read the section aloud two or three times and then ask them to describe to a partner what they pictured. You could give the children simple art materials to depict their visualisation.
- Following this, ask the children to share what they imagined and to identify key vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation. For example, "... music was pulsing, low and melodic, bitter and smooth..." or "... lychees stuffed with blackberries [...] doughnuts shaped like cockroaches [...] huge, hard-boiled eggs carved to look like faces..." or "... her dress of autumn leaves and her eyes dark and deep..." or "... wrapped in black [...] handsome as the night [...] wolfish smile..." Ask the children why these words or phrases in particular stood out to them.
 - What made them so vivid or memorable?
 - What impression is created by the author through the descriptions?
 - How do these descriptions make you feel?
 - What would you be thinking if you were an onlooker?
- You could go on to look closely at Freya Hartas's illustrations for this passage, and compare the children's own sketches if they have done them: did you and the illustrator focus on the same details, did you focus on the whole scene, the buffet, the prince and Zombierella together, the reactions of bystanders?
- Now go on to read aloud the rest of Chapter 5, then give time and space to reflect on what they have heard, and discuss:
 - What did the confrontation between Zombierella and Hebina make you think about or feel? How does her revenge make you feel? How does the way Joseph Coelho has twisted the traditional tale allow Zombierella to give Hebina her come-uppance in this scene?
 - How does Zombierella's flight from the ball as midnight chimes compare with the traditional tale? How does this first episode make you think the story might proceed over the next two nights of balls? What do you think will be true to the tradition, and what might Joseph Coelho reinvent?
- Continue to read aloud Chapter 6, **Guts!** and discuss:
 - What do you think has happened in this chapter? How do you think the story has advanced?
 - Does the revenge Zombierella took on Hebina prepare you for the trick she plays on Storm? How does this scene affect you? Does it make you think she might have similar revenge in mind for Alhora? How do you think this revenge strand of the story will develop?
 - What is the impact on you of the blossoming relationship between Zombierella and the prince? Did you predict the revelation that he is a vampire? In the story world Joseph Coelho has created how do you think their love might develop?



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- What do you think might happen next in the story, how will it continue to follow the traditional tale and how will it deviate?
- End the session by reading aloud Chapter 7, **Feet**, then give time and space to reflect on what they have heard, before discussing:
 - Is this how you thought the third ball night might play out? Did you predict that Zombierella and her prince would find each other and realise they were both undead? How does this resolution make you feel?
 - Did you predict that Joseph Coelho would include some reference to the glass slipper of the traditional Cinderella tale? How does the gruesome way the fake sisters mutilate themselves to try and win the prince affect you? You could share that in the Brothers Grimm’s version of Cinderella (Aschenputtel), the sisters — who end the story blinded — slice pieces off their feet to try and squeeze them into the glass slipper. Is the gore and cruelty of Joseph Coelho’s version in keeping with the original, do you think? Why might other less gruesome retellings have become popular?
 - What is the impact of the prince’s exhumation of Zombierella to make her his bride, and the couple’s subsequent resurrection through love? Do you like the way the story seems to end? How do you think it came about that the step-mother “was no longer fake”, the step-sisters “were no longer foul” and that “they learned to live together as equals”? Is a “happily-ever-after” ending what you expected or hoped for? Do you think this is the right ending for a fairy tale, even one that has “gone bad”?
 - Share the fact that there is a further chapter and ask the children to predict how they think the story might go on to actually end.
 - How do Freya Hartas’s illustrations for this and the other two chapters support your reading of the story? Do they add emphasis or details to Joseph Coelho’s text? Do you think they pick up the humour, gruesomeness and personalities of the characters? How?

Session 5: Chapter 8 and Epilogue:

- Read aloud Chapter 8, **A Shifting of Bones** and the **Epilogue**. Give the children time and space to reflect on what they have heard, then discuss:
 - How does this final scene make you feel? What do you think is the mood of the final chapter? How does Joseph Coelho draw everything together in one place? How do you respond to the way he goes on to end the story? Is this what you predicted?
 - How do you think each of the characters feels? How do you know?
 - What do the final spreads — of Lumpkin emerging from his grave; of Cinderella (note the change back to her old name) galloping past the prince, her step-mother and -sisters; of Death cackling atop the mountain — make you think about and feel? How do they add to your enjoyment of the end of the story, and the satisfaction it might bring?
 - Do you feel that this resolves the story? What do you think the ending means?
 - Do you think you will take up the Librarian’s invitation to “come back again soon and hear some more”? Why? Why not?
- Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to it through booktalk with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls “the four basic questions”. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:
 - Tell me...was there anything you liked about this story?
 - Was there anything that you particularly disliked...?
 - Was there anything that puzzled you?



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- Were there any patterns...any connections that you noticed...? Did it remind you of anything else you've read or seen? What links do you see to other stories you already know?
- The openness of these questions, unlike the more interrogative "Why?" question encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the "wrong" answer.
- Asking these questions will lead children inevitably into a fuller discussion than using more general questions. You may, for example, ask the children if they had favourite parts of the story, and why this was.

After reading, you could also:

- Consider the different characters and the plot.
 - How does the author use the traditional tale and the world of the undead he has created? How important do you think each part is to the story?
 - Which character was your favourite? Why?
 - Which character, aspect of the story, incident or episode interested the group the most?
 - Did any of the characters remind you of characters in other books?
- Review the story in chronological order and consider the different emotions that Cinderella/Zombierella has felt throughout the story, the high and low points, using the Role on the Wall to support discussion of her emotional journey. You could use **hot-seating** to explore the feelings of Cinderella/Zombierella or any of the characters further; in hot-seating, one member of the group role-plays a central character from a poem or story and is interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses. The children could work collaboratively to choose words that describe a character's emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes and then organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity that they have felt in the story and create a **graph of emotion**.
- Through modelling, ask the children to describe their favourite part of the story. Provide the children with an oral scaffold, for example: *the most memorable part of the story was... because...; my top moment in the story was... because...* and in pairs ask them to identify their favourite part of the narrative. Encourage children to give reasons for their choices and invite some children to share these.
- If possible, leave copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group.
- Repeat the visualisation activity used in Session 4 (Chapter 5) to explore other settings, e.g. the opening on page 22, which are often very atmospherically described.
- Continue to consider the origins of the story in performance, by re-reading aloud favourite passages, and comparing the blank verse and rhymed parts of the story. Children could be supported to create a performance reading of parts or all of the story, considering how they will use their voices to lift the story off the page and bring it to life. Joseph Coelho gives advice on performing poetry (and on other aspects of poetry) in some excellent short films at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/english-ks1-ks2-understanding-poetry-with-joseph-coelho/zdhhbqp3>.
- They could predict how the other "Fairy Tales Gone Bad" that the Librarian mentions — "Grannylocks", "The Monstrous Duckling", "Jack and the Flesh-Eating Beanstalk", "The Boy Who Puked Up a Wolf", "Creeping Beauty" — might have been twisted. Do Freya Hartas's illustrations on pages 13 to 15 give any clues? Or can they twist their own traditional tales that honour but also play with, deviate from and reinvent the form?



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Other suggested titles by or to further support the exploration of themes arising from the book:

Other books by Joseph Coelho:

- *Werewolf Club Rules*, illustrated by John O’Leary
- *Overheard in a Tower Block*, illustrated by Kate Milner
- *A Year of Nature Poems*, illustrated by Kelly Louise Judd
- *Poems Aloud*, illustrated by Daniel Gray-Barnett
- *If all the world were...* illustrated by Allison Colpoys
- *Luna Loves Library Day*, *Luna Loves Art* and *The Hairdo That Got Away*, illustrated by Fiona Lumbers
- *No Longer Alone*, illustrated by Robyn Wilson-Owen

The children might want to find out more about the author, Joseph Coelho. You can visit his website at:

<https://www.thepoetryofjosephcoelho.com/>

You could also visit CLPE’s poetryline website at <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/coelho-joseph> to hear Joseph perform some of his poems and talk about poetry.

They may also like to find out more about Freya Hartas at her website <http://freyahartas.co.uk/>.

Other twisted traditional tales:

- *Into the Forest*, Anthony Browne (Walker)
- *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs*, Mo Willems (Walker)
- *A Wolf’s Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood*, Toby Forward, illustrated by Izhar Cohen (Walker)
- *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (Puffin)
- *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (Puffin)
- *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, Eugene Trivizas, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury (Egmont)
- *Jack and the Baked Beanstalk*, Colin Stimpson (Templar)
- *Goldilocks on CCTV*, John Agard, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura (Frances Lincoln)
- *Revolting Rhymes*, Roald Dahl (Puffin)
- *Charming!* Michaela Morgan (Barrington Stoke)



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