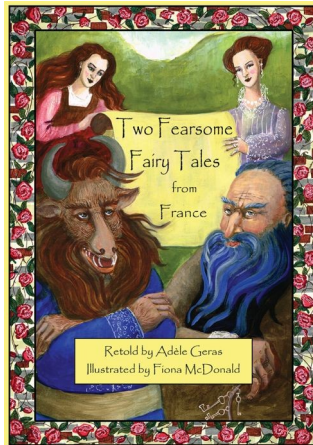




Teachers' Notes for

Two Fearsome Fairy Tales from France, by Adèle Geras and Fiona McDonald

Copyright Notice: These Teachers' Notes are available free of charge for use and study within schools but may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale. Copyright in these Notes remains with Christmas Press.



Publication details:

Two Fearsome Fairy Tales from France

retold by Adèle Geras

illustrated by Fiona McDonald

Hardcover, A4 size format, 32 page picture book

Published by Christmas Press May 1, 2015

ISBN: 9780992283841

RRP: \$19.99

Two magical, scary classic fairy tales from France, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Bluebeard*, elegantly retold by Adèle Geras and lavishly illustrated by Fiona McDonald. For older readers.



About the author:

Adèle Geras is a British writer for young children, teens and adults. She has written more than 95 books for children, young adults, and adults. Her best-known books are *Troy* (shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize and Highly commended for the Carnegie Medal) *Ithaka*, *Happy Ever After* (previously published as the Egerton Hall Trilogy), *Silent Snow*, *Secret Snow*, and *A Candle in the Dark*.

About the illustrator:

Fiona McDonald is an Australian illustrator, author and dollmaker. She has had more than 10 books published internationally, including a graphic novel for children, *Ghost Doll and Jasper*. Her



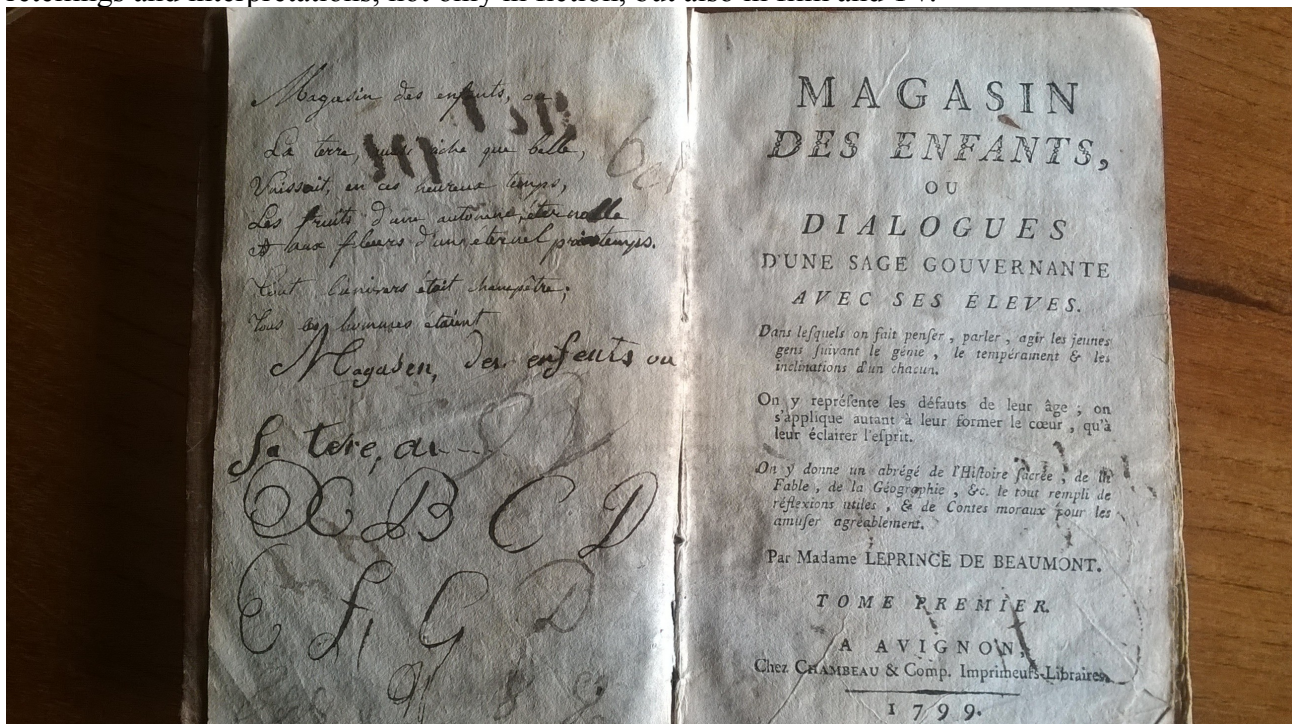
previous title with Christmas Press, *Two Selkie Stories from Scotland*, retold by Kate Forsyth, came out in 2014 and was listed as one of Good Reading Magazine's top books for 2014.

About the stories:

Beauty and the Beast is an unusual fairy tale in that it isn't derived from folk culture but like the tales of Hans Christian Andersen, is the original creation of a professional writer. Its author was Madame Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711--1780), an 18th century French novelist who also wrote many short stories and fairy tales. Obligated to supplement her small writing income with other work, she also had a job as a children's governess, and so unlike the work of many other writers of the period who dabbled in the fashionable pursuit of the writing of fairy tales, Madame Leprince de Beaumont's tales have a real eye for simplicity and clarity as well as magic and beauty—perfect for entrhralling her young readers!

La Belle et la Bête, as its title is in French, was first published in 1757 in her series, *Le magasin des enfants* (the children's magazine), and was an immediate success, reprinting many times (photo below is of a 1799 edition) She was listed as an important author in the famous 18th century encyclopedia of fairy tales and their tellers, *Le Cabinet des Fées*, and her *Beauty and the Beast* story was taken up by many other writers and cultures from all over the world.

Since then, her tale of love triumphing over appearance has inspired countless re-imaginings, retellings and interpretations, not only in fiction, but also in film and TV.



Unlike *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bluebeard* derives directly from oral folk tradition and was first written down by the famous French compiler of fairy tales, Charles Perrault in his 1697 book, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (Stories or tales of the past). The fearsome, scary figure of La Barbe Bleue, as Bluebeard is in French, is believed to have been at least partly inspired by the real-life 15th century aristocrat and serial killer Gilles de Rais, but this kind of story also occurs in other cultures, such as in England with the very similar tale titled 'Mr Fox'. With its combination of magic, luxury, and terrible danger from a monstrous bridegroom, it is a disturbing story that has also been interpreted in both fiction and film, with one of the most influential versions in modern times being one that both the author and illustrator of *Two Fearsome Fairy Tales* mention—Angela Carter's collection, *The Bloody Chamber* (which also by the way includes a version of *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*).

These two classic French fairy tales, are, in a way, mirror images of each other. Both with the theme

of not judging by appearances, they each represent a young woman's dilemma faced with a monstrous male figure. Only, as Fiona McDonald points out in her piece, the Beast is good and kind under a monstrous exterior, while Bluebeard's normal human shape hides the evil monster within.



Picture above of Bluebeard and his bride by Gustave Doré from a 19th century French edition of Perrault's tales.

From the author, Adèle Geras:

When I first learned to read, I had a series of books from America. I can't recall the name...*Golden* was in there somewhere but that's all I remember. I don't recollect any specific titles but I think *Cinderella* might have been one of them and also *Rapunzel*. Those two stir certain memories.

Later on, I was very much in love with my copy of *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales*, illustrated by Rex Whistler, and I can still bring those pictures to mind in great detail.

I also read Andrew Lang's *Coloured Fairy Books* and I thought those were terrific. I admired the fact that they were in a SERIES and that I could collect them. I thought the idea of calling them by the names of colours was brilliant and I am still a little sad that I lost my editions long, long ago.

But the real eye-opener came for me when I saw the movie *La Belle et la Bête* by Jean Cocteau. That was so surreal and beautiful that I was truly enchanted. The images (for instance, beautiful women's arms sticking out of the walls carrying lit sconces) have stayed with me since the first time I saw it back in the very early 60s.

The story is wonderful. It encompasses a kind of King Lear story about three sisters, who are, apart

from Belle herself, greedy and grasping. It's about parental love, about duty, about seeing through to the real nature of a person and ignoring their surface appearance and it speaks very strongly about overcoming fear of the unknown, the different, the strange, the unexpected and even the very ugly.

When I was a girl, I took the whole thing at its very beautiful face value. It has so many elements that make it attractive: snow, roses, a castle, supernatural elements, a beautiful innocent heroine, sickness, and possible death. It's about the way love can triumph over everything and carry us all to a happy ending.

Bluebeard is a different kind of tale altogether. I knew this story vaguely in the way we think we know narratives that we haven't actually read. But I came to it properly in Angela Carter's version in *The Bloody Chamber*, which is an amazing and life-changing book.

This tale has elements of darkness that are very attractive. A mass -murdering husband, a disobedient wife, a last-minute rescue and that dark, bloody room behind the door which should have stayed locked.... but which, if it hadn't been opened, would have led to even more bones and blood heaped up there. When I learned that the story may have been based on the real life crimes of Gilles de Rais, I was fascinated. I love thrillers and the 'woman in jeopardy' is a favourite theme of some of my most admired writers. Finally, maybe the best thing about it is the title. *Bluebeard* is such an evocative word. Could it be that my general dislike of beards originates in this tale? It's possible.

I hope readers enjoy my versions of these two fairy tales.

From the illustrator, Fiona McDonald:

Two Fearsome Fairy Tales From France was great fun to illustrate. Beauty and the Beast has always been a favourite story of mine and I had quite clear ideas how I wanted to illustrate it. For a start, I have always felt it should have lots of detail. Because Adèle's version was quite long for the number of pages in the book, I was limited as to the number of big colourful illustrations I could do. One solution was to do some illustrations that showed a number of scenes from the story at once, like the Merchant riding his horse, the Beast's house with a hidden Beast (can you find him?) and the three daughters watching for their father's return.

Illustrations that could fit along the top or bottom of a page were also ideal for this story. Beauty had to be beautiful. When I was a little girl, all fairy tale girls had to be very pretty. Although I have seen wonderful modern illustrations of this story I do not feel happy unless Beauty is lovely to look at. Some of the pictures I did of her I left as pencil sketches. I liked the character and freedom I had captured with the pencil. To compensate for the lack of colour I designed elaborate rose borders for these pictures.

The Beast had to be animal-like but not hideous, well, at least, to satisfy me. I wanted him to look a bit strong and heroic; someone Beauty could easily fall in love with. He wouldn't have worked if he looked like a fat slug. I have never really liked the end where the Beast turns into a handsome young man. I always thought Beauty would want to marry the Beast she'd fallen in love with, a bit like Shrek and Princess Fiona. So I didn't bother trying to do a picture of the Beast as a real man. I have never seen a version where he doesn't look a bit weak in human form.

Blue Beard is one of those fairy tales I have found very disturbing. It is so blood thirsty and the wife seems so useless and helpless! However, as an adult I read a great retelling for adults by Angela Carter, called *The Bloody Chamber*. I really enjoyed this and it made me feel I would like to illustrate it one day.

Blue Beard had to look a bit menacing. His young wife only married him for his money- she

thought he was rather scary to be with. Because my Blue Beard was going to be in the same book as the Beast I wanted him to be like a reflection of the Beast. On the one hand you have a hideous looking creature with a good and gentle heart and on the other you have a man (maybe a bit ugly but still human looking) who was really a terrible beast on the inside.

Blue Beard's wife had to be young and pretty, also quite into fashion. Beauty was naturally lovely and wore plain clothes but Blue Beard's wife liked fancy clothes, jewels, make-up and having her hair styled. And again, I wanted her to look as though she belonged in the same world as Beauty but a twisted reflection of Beauty too. Beauty gets her man through her own courage and loving and faithful heart but Blue Beard's wife is rescued by her brothers, in other words, she doesn't really do much to save herself.

Some ideas for discussion:

Beauty can't help knowing straight away that she is facing a Beast; while the Bride doesn't know at the beginning what is hiding under Bluebeard's aristocratic veneer. How do the two stories explore the theme of 'the monster'?

Think about the two young women at the centres of these stories: Beauty and the Bride. In what ways are they similar, in what way different? How have the author and the illustrator built their portrayals? Explore this in reference to both text and pictures.

Sisters are featured in both stories, but with very different perspectives. Discuss.

The rose and the magic mirror in *Beauty and the Beast* and the locked door and the key in *Bluebeard* are important symbols. Discuss how they are used in the stories.

Some ideas for creative activities:

Write a letter from one of Beauty's sisters to a friend, telling them about Beauty going off to the Beast's castle, and what the family thinks of that.

Write a diary entry from the Bride's point of view about her first few days in Bluebeard's palace.

Draw a portrait of the Bride's sister, Anne.

Illustrate a scene from Beauty and the Beast that isn't depicted in the book.

Imagine that you are a reporter who's just heard of the events both at Beauty's castle and at Bluebeard's palace. Write a news report about them.

Further reading:

Some fiction and film based on Beauty and the Beast:

Beast, by Donna Jo Napoli(novel)

The Courtship of Mr Lyon, by Angela Carter(short story)

Beauty, by Robin McKinley (novel)

Rose Daughter, by Robin McKinley(novel)

Scarlet in the Snow, by Sophie Masson(novel)

Heart's Blood, by Juliet Marillier(novel)

Film: *La Belle et la Bête*(French film, directed by Jean Cocteau, 1946)
The Scarlet Flower(Russian animated film, directed by Lev Atamanov, 1952)
Beauty and the Beast(Walt Disney animated film, 1991)

Some fiction and film based on Bluebeard(note: most of these, except the first one, are for older, more mature students only):

Mr Fox, (traditional English tale). You can read a version here:
<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/bluebeard/stories/mrfox.html>

The Bloody Chamber, by Angela Carter (short story—this is also the title story of the collection of the same name)

Strands of Bronze and Gold, by Jane Nickerson(novel)

Film: *Barbe Bleue* (early French silent film, directed by Georges Méliès, 1902)
Secret Beyond the Door(American thriller, directed by Fritz Lang, 1948)
Barbe Bleue(2009 French time-slip fantasy film, directed by Catherine Breillat).





Photo by Bruno Jan(see end-papers of *Two Fearsome Fairy Tales from France.*)