

The Mighty Baba Yaga

A delightfully creepy play based on a Russian folktale

About the Story

Lexile: 940L (captions)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: After learning about elements of Cinderella stories, students will write their own.

Key Skills: key ideas and details, figurative language, tone, text structure, inference, character, narrative writing

Essential Questions:

- What makes a story timeless?
- What makes a story universal?
- How can we overcome the challenges we face?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, R.9, R.10, W.3, W.9, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Slideshow:

- Cinderella Stories From Around the World

Special Collection:

- Stories for Halloween from the Scope Archives

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: A Cinderella Story
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- **Core Skills Workout:** Inference, Mood
- **Literary Elements:** Theme Anticipation Guide
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

15 minutes

Do-Now: Anticipation Guide (5 minutes)

- Project the **Theme Anticipation Guide** on your whiteboard or share the Google Form version with each student (both are available in your Resources tab). Have students decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement, then discuss. After reading the play, ask students how they think the characters would respond to the statements in the Theme Anticipation Guide.

View a Slideshow (5 minutes)

- Project our **Cinderella Stories From Around the World** slideshow, which builds knowledge about the many versions of the Cinderella story and the archetypes that recur throughout them.

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *aspiring*, *chamber pots*, *gaunt*, *gnarled*, *grotesque*, *hearth*, *pluck*, *resonates*, *reverberates*

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 12 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Assign parts and read the play as a class.
- Break students into groups to discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions.

Close-Reading Questions (15 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **How do Vasilisa's stepmother and stepsisters treat her? What is their motivation for treating her this way?** (key ideas and details) *Maria, Nina, and Anna are hateful to Vasilisa—they say horrible things to her, lock her up and withhold meals from her, and sell her late mother's prized possessions. They use this money to buy themselves fancy clothes while Vasilisa waits on them hand and foot in dirty, shabby clothes. They do this because Vasilisa's father married Maria after Vasilisa's mother died, and Maria, Nina, and Anna now stand in line to inherit his farm and fortune—after Vasilisa, that is. The three of them exert power over Vasilisa in an attempt to get rid of her—and go so far as to send her to her death at Baba Yaga's house—so that they can become more rich and powerful.*
2. **When Vasilisa asks her stepmother and stepsisters why they hate her so much, her stepmother responds, "How could we hate you, my dear? Does a bear hate the beetle it crushes beneath its paws?" What does she mean?** (figurative language, tone) *Even though it might sound at first like Maria is being gentle and kind, she is making a scornfully abusive remark to Vasilisa: Just as an enormous and powerful bear doesn't even notice if it steps on a tiny, helpless beetle, we don't care about you in the least.*
3. **In Scene 3, after Maria tells Vasilisa that she must go to Baba Yaga's house, Vasilisa says, "If you make me do this, I fear you will be cursed. You will wither from your own wickedness." What is the significance of these lines? How else does the playwright indicate that Maria and her daughters' wickedness will be punished?** (text structure) *These lines foreshadow what happens in Scene 8: After touching Baba Yaga's glowing skull, Maria, Nina, and Anna vanish into thin air. The playwright hints at their punishment in Scene 1, when after the three of them treat Vasilisa most terribly, the sky darkens, thunder claps, and Baba Yaga's flaming skull appears in their cottage window. This suggests that Baba Yaga is already watching and plotting, which is confirmed when Baba Yaga tells Vasilisa that she has been expecting her. In addition, in Scene 3, after Maria, Nina, and Anna send Vasilisa off to Baba Yaga's house believing they are seeing the last of her, Maria says, "Well, girls, I daresay there is now nothing that will stop us from getting what we deserve." Echoing this comment at the end of Scene 7, as Vasilisa leaves Baba Yaga's hut with a glowing skull, Baba Yaga says, "The light will deliver that which is deserved"—which is to say, a harsh punishment for Maria, Nina, and Anna.*
4. **How does Vasilisa complete Baba Yaga's first task?** (inference, character) *Vasilisa is unable to complete Baba Yaga's first task of separating a sack of peas into piles because the walking house makes it impossible. The task is ultimately completed for Vasilisa in reciprocity for her kindness: After sharing her bacon and scrap of bread with Baba Yaga's cat and dog, the animals repay her by separating the peas into neat piles while she sleeps.*

5. **Consider the following photo caption: “Vasilisa, like the heroine in many Cinderella stories, has a special connection with animals and nature.” How is this idea developed in the play?** (character) *In Scene 2, readers get the sense that Vasilisa finds joy in the land she cultivates and in nature as she “pauses to look out at the farm, at the neat rows of cabbage and bushes bursting with wild berries.” Her connection with animals is apparent in Scene 5 when she is not afraid of Baba Yaga’s snarling dog and hissing cat, but rather, senses their hunger and shares what little food she has with them. In response, the cat begins to purr and the dog curls up beside her. In Scene 6, when she is struggling to complete Baba Yaga’s second task of filling a bucket full of holes with water, she is able to observe a magpie and mimic its behavior to overcome the challenge.*
6. **What do Vasilisa’s feelings toward her stepmother and stepsisters throughout the play reveal about her?** (character) *Vasilisa is hopeful, kind, and forgiving. When Peter offers to take her in, she refuses with gratitude and expresses optimism that Maria, Nina, and Anna will soften their hearts to her. Even after all of the awful things they’ve done to her, she still forgives them in the end and tells them that when she inherits her father’s fortune, she will not turn them away.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **What big idea does the play suggest about good and evil? Would you classify Baba Yaga as “good” or “evil”?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that the play suggests good will win the day and evil will be punished. They may point out that Baba Yaga is clearly capable of evil—she is constantly threatening to eat Vasilisa and seems a bit disappointed when Vasilisa solves the riddle and Baba Yaga must therefore let her go. On the other hand, she helps Vasilisa and punishes Maria, Nina, and Anna.*
2. **How is this Cinderella story similar to versions you’ve heard before? What makes it unique?** *Answers will vary.*
3. **What do you like/dislike about Cinderella stories? Why do you think these stories remain popular today?** *Answers will vary.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: A Cinderella Story**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 17 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Other delightfully creepy stories from the *Scope* archives that are perfect for Halloween:

- [Frankenstein](#) (a read-aloud play based on Mary Shelley's classic novel; October 2018)
- [The Monkey's Paw](#) (a read-aloud play based on a classic horror story by W.W. Jacobs; October 2017)
- ["The Nothing"](#) (Fiction In a Flash by Kristin Lewis; October 2020)
- [The Tell-Tale Heart](#) (a read-aloud play based on Edgar Allan Poe's classic tale; September 2016)

Go to Scope Online to explore the rest of our [Special Collection: Stories for Halloween](#). You'll find more read-aloud plays, stories, grammar activities, and a podcast!