

Lisa Bullard ... Writing Road Trip

Once Upon a Time

Story-Crafting Practice Using Proven Storylines

These four story prompts will be recognizable to many students. They may recognize them as older stories or fairy tales, or they may know them through retellings by other writers (or movie-makers) over the years. If you believe that many of your students will recognize the stories from the descriptions below, it can be fun to have students guess the story inspirations before you give each of the story titles away. If you believe that many of the students in your classroom will not know these basic stories, you might want to find a version to share with them before they begin writing (you may find these stories in several different forms, some more suitable than others for young listeners).

The goal is for students to practice story-writing by crafting their own creative retellings of these time-proven tales. The basic details of character, plot, and conflict are provided in the prompt; this gives students a successful model to draw on as they reinvent the stories. Encourage students to give the stories a completely fresh feeling by giving them a contemporary setting, perhaps even their own school.

Prompt #1 ("Hansel and Gretel")

A brother and sister are abandoned by their poverty-stricken family. The lost children are enticed into the home of a predatory woman. Eventually the children find a clever way to outwit their captor and escape with her wealth. They are reunited with their father.

Prompt #2 ("Snow White")

A stepmother is jealous of her stepdaughter's youth and beauty. Trouble escalates and the girl has to run away rather than risk harm from the stepmother. A group of misfits take her in and befriend her, but the stepmother continues to try to find the girl and harm her. Eventually a rich young man falls in love with the girl, and through his help she is able to escape the stepmother for good.

Prompt #3 ("Beauty and the Beast")

Because of family circumstances, a beautiful young woman agrees to befriend a disfigured young man who is hidden away from regular life. The two develop a strong bond, yet the young woman is torn between the world she came from and the world of the young man. When it appears the young woman has abandoned him, the young man falls into a deep depression, and is only transformed by her eventual return.

Prompt #4 ("The Ugly Duckling")

A complete misfit is born into a family of super-achievers. The child is ignored by family and ridiculed by peers. Ultimately the child grows up enough to discover a hidden talent that shocks everyone.