

The History of Cinderella

Cinderella is one of the most well-known stories around the world. This story appears in the folklore of many cultures. There are between 350 and 1500 different versions of this story in the world today.

The story is based around a kind young lady (the heroine), who suffers at the hands of her step-family after the death of her mother. In some stories her father is absent, while in other versions he neglects Cinderella.

The heroine has a magical guardian who helps her triumph over her nasty family and receive her greatest wish by the end of the tale. The guardian is sometimes a representative of the heroine's dead mother. In most tales she is referred to as the Fairy Godmother. Most of the tales include a magical event sparked by an article of clothing (usually a shoe or glass slipper) that causes the heroine to be recognized for her true worth.



The earliest recorded version of the Cinderella tale comes from China. It was written down by Tuan Ch'eng-shih in the middle of the ninth century A.D (850-60 Common Era). From the way it was written, it is thought that readers were already familiar with the story and that this version was the first to be written down. In the Chinese story the heroine is called Yeh-shen and there is no fairy godmother. Instead, there is a magical fish who helps Yeh-shen. A golden shoe leads the prince to her and they marry.

The next written down version came from a Frenchman, Charles Perrault. He wrote the version in 1697 and introduced the fairy godmother. This story also included the pumpkin carriage, the animal servants, and the glass slippers. Perrault was told this story by storytellers and added these extra things for effect. Some people think that he confused "vair" (*French for fur*) with "verre" (*French for glass*) which would explain



how the slipper came to be made of glass! Also in his version, Cinderella finds husbands for her sisters at the end.

The Grimm Brothers' version, known as *Aschenputtel* or *Ash Girl* does not have a fairy godmother. In their story, the heroine plants a tree on her mother's grave and a white dove helps with the magic. Because of their cruelty to Cinderella, the stepsisters have their eyes pecked out by birds.

In modern times, the tale of Cinderella has been retold in books, musicals, novels, and dreams of little girls.