

Invites Year 5 and 6 gifted children with a love of

literature and writing and an interest in gender stereotyping



'Feminist Fairy Tales'

G.A.T.E.WAYS is an independent organization offering challenging and enriching activities and experiences to develop and extend highly able children. Established in 1994, G.A.T.E.WAYS runs a range of stimulating school programs as well as the Saturday *Brainwaves Club*.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess, stuck in a tower...and frankly she'd had enough. In this program we will delve into the dark history of fairy tale representations of girls and women across time and place, critically examine a new wave of retellings in books and films and create our own feminist fairy tales. Using examples, we'll consider reading and writing fairy tales through a feminist lens. We'll journey into the woods of symbols, motifs and tropes and find hidden treasures when connecting psychoanalysis and fairy tales. Wielding your pens as swords, you'll carve new stories from the old, as you each create a compendium of original fairy tales for a new generation of feminists – boys and girls, young and old.

Session One: Tales as old as time

Throughout time, fairy tales have been told to teach, to warn and to impart knowledge of the world and how it works. In this session we venture back in time to discover ancient tales that had their fair share of feisty heroines. We'll discover the social and historical events that led to shifts in how fairy tales have been told and shared, and try and pinpoint when those feisty heroines started yearning for charming princes and why. We'll explore the tales in our set text *Vasilisa the Wise* and use their morals and lessons as inspirations for our own creative writing. You'll leave Session One with a quest of your own: to visit a local bookshop or library to understand what diet of fairy tales children are currently consuming, and how female characters are represented in various interpretations.

Session Two: Twisting tradition and deconstructing Disney

Fairy tales have been interpreted, twisted, mashed up and retold for centuries. But the last thirty years have seen an explosion in fairy tale retellings, particularly as films. We'll discuss various film representations of fairy tales, see how particular characters are portrayed in each, for instance Rapunzel in *Into the Woods* and *Tangled*, and talk about what the critics thought. We'll consider a range of literary retellings, and consider how these reflect the time they are published. We'll ask the question, can a fairy tale princess be a feminist and find examples to debate why, or why not. We'll also examine our fairy tale book data and analyse current trends, before we come up with a concept for our own fairy tale that breaks ALL the conventions.

Session Three: Keeping company with kings, witches and evil step-mothers

How can we subvert traditional characters who inhabit the fairy tale realms? We'll look at examples of characters outside the dominant paradigm and understand ideas of inter-sectionality and feminism. What archetypes are presented in fairy tales – the charming prince, the evil stepmother, the beautiful princess – and how do they reinforce gender stereotypes? We'll critically examine some reinvented characters and create a character dossier for our own protagonist and antagonist. We'll also explore how metaphor used in fairy tales? What does the apple represent, the glass slipper, the beast, the dead mother? We'll explore famous interpretations of symbols and motifs by fairy tale scholars and experts, and create our own metaphoric systems of meaning for our stories.

Session Four: The future of fairy tale feminism

Will there be a happy ending? In our final session, we will finish creating our own ground-breaking feminist fairy tales, workshop and beautify them and decide how we will share them with new readers. We'll return to our timeline and see if we can predict future trends in fairy tale retellings based on what we have learnt and our understanding of current feminist movements. Fairytale scholar, Jack Zipes, argues that fairy tales are 'more relevant for adapting to a rapidly changing world than we realise', so finally we will consider what types of lessons and morals may we need to tell future generations as they navigate brave new worlds, and are they any different to the ones we've been telling for eons?

What to Bring

- ❖ Set text: *Vasilisa the Wise* (see below)
- ❖ Any favourite fairy tales from your childhood
- ❖ A notebook
- ❖ Pencil case including highlighters or textas
- ❖ Folder or A4 display book to store handouts
- ❖ A stamped, self-addressed DL envelope for return of your report
- ❖ A small, labelled photograph of yourself; a stamped, self-addressed DL envelope for your report
- ❖ A snack (no nut products please); a hat (for participants in Term 1 and 4)

Preparation

Prior to attending the program, please read/watch the set texts below:

Book:

Vasilisa the Wise: And other tales of Brave Young Women, Kate Forsyth & Lorena Carrington, Serenity Press (2017)

Films

Into the Woods (2014)

Tangled (2010)

On enrolment you will also receive a list of other optional texts.

About the Presenter –

Kate Mildenhall is a writer and teacher. Her debut novel, *Skylarking* (Black Inc., 2016) is based on the true story of Kate and Harriet, best friends growing up on a remote Australian cape in the 1880s, and the tragic event that befalls them. Kate has taught in schools, at RMIT University and State Library Victoria, and has volunteered with Teachers Across Borders delivering professional development to Khmer teachers in Cambodia. Recently, Kate worked on the Young Researcher Fellowship program, developing an online research course and connecting young Gifted and Talented learners in regional Victoria with experts at the State Library of Victoria. She lives with her husband and two young daughters in Hurstbridge, Victoria, where she is currently working on her second novel.

This program was first run in Term 4, 2018. Below is some student feedback:

- *I really liked being exposed to and sharing writing with other people who think the same as me. Also, Kate is an amazing teacher and her feedback and engagement in my writing was really good. (Siobhan)*
- *This program has put so many new questions into my head. It is definitely my favourite program. (Madison)*
- *I loved this program; best one ever and I think it unlocked a new part of my life. I loved all of it. Kate is an amazing presenter and I haven't learned as much, thought (as much) or enjoyed something school-related in a long time. Best four days ever. (Samantha)*
- *I loved writing all of the stories and the fairy tales and how they changed throughout time. I wasn't really sure what to expect, but I loved the program. (Paige)*