

GERMAN CULTURE COURSE

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

The Grimms, their sources, their editing and the afterlife of the tales

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THE BROTHERS GRIMM & GERMAN FAIRY TALES

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The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Who Were the Brothers Grimm? Scope & Sources

Most people meet the Grimms through a story: Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Snow White. Far fewer know who the two brothers were, how they got the stories, or what else they did. This first chapter sets out the people, the book and the questions the course will ask, and it names the myths that a careful reader should be ready to test. Names, dates and details are from general knowledge and are flagged "check" where they should be verified.

The People

Jacob Grimm

The elder brother, born in 1785 and died in 1863 (check). A scholar of language, law and old German literature, and the one who formulated what became known as Grimm's law, a pattern of sound change in the Germanic languages (Chapter 8).

Wilhelm Grimm

The younger brother, born in 1786 and died in 1859 (check). Often in poorer health, he did most of the editing and rewriting of the tales for later editions (Chapter 5, check the division of work).

Born in Hanau

Both were born in Hanau, in Hesse, and grew up partly in nearby Steinau (check). Their father died when they were young, which left the family short of money and shaped their careers (Chapter 3).

The Book

The brothers' best-known work is a collection of tales first published in two volumes in 1812 and 1815, titled in German *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, usually translated as "Children's and Household Tales" (check). They revised and enlarged it through seven large editions, the last in 1857 (check). The familiar English name "Grimm's Fairy Tales" is a later and looser label.

Term	Meaning (check)	Why it matters
Märchen	A short fictional tale, often magical, usually without a fixed place or time	The German word is wider than "fairy tale"; many tales contain no fairies
Sage	A legend tied to a named place or person, presented as something that happened	The brothers collected these too, in a separate work (Chapter 8)
Kinder- und Hausmärchen	The title of the collection, often shortened to KHM	Scholars cite tales by KHM number

What This Course Covers

- **The background (Chapters 2 and 3).** Tales and collectors before the Grimms, then the brothers' lives and world.
- **The collection (Chapters 4 to 6).** How the book was made, how it was edited, and a close reading of six tales.
- **Interpretation and scholarship (Chapters 7 and 8).** Why the tales are dark, how people have read them, and the brothers' work on language, law and a great dictionary.
- **The afterlife (Chapters 9 and 10).** Films, tourism and politics, then a method for reading any fairy tale.

The course is about the Grimms and their book, not about every fairy tale in the world. The relationship between German fairy tales and Romanticism is met briefly in *German Literature* 6, and this course goes further into the brothers themselves.

Myths to Test

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
The Grimms wrote the tales.	Who told them, who wrote them down, and who reshaped them?
They collected the tales from German peasants.	Who were the storytellers in practice? Were they all peasants, and all German?
The tales are unchanged old folk stories.	How much did the brothers edit between 1812 and 1857?

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
The tales were written for children.	Who was the first audience, and what changed in later editions?
The Grimms were only storytellers.	What else did they do, and what is the dictionary?
The tales are "purely German".	Which tales have close versions elsewhere, and what does "German" mean here?

The question behind the course

Instead of asking "what do the Grimm tales mean?", the course asks a set of smaller questions: who produced this text, from what sources, in which edition, and what was changed along the way. Interpretation comes later and rests on that groundwork.

Sources to Use

- **The tales themselves,** in a translation whose edition and translator you can name. Translations differ, and some follow the early editions while others follow the last.
- **Annotated scholarly editions,** which list sources and changes tale by tale (check which are available in English).
- **Histories and biographies** of the brothers, written by folklorists and literary historians who disagree on some points.
- **Museums and archives,** such as the Brothers Grimm museum in Kassel (check the details and what is currently open).

In this course, tale content is paraphrased and any quotation is short, with the translation named. Where historians disagree, the chapter says so rather than choosing a side silently.

A British comparison

Think of the English and Scottish collectors of the same era, such as Walter Scott and later Joseph Jacobs (check the examples), who also gathered older stories and shaped them for readers. The questions of "whose voice is this, and what was changed" apply to them as well, and the comparison helps with the Grimms.

Check the details

Every name, date and attribution in this course comes from general knowledge and is marked "check" where it is uncertain. Scholars revise the story of the Grimms, especially on their sources and their editing, so verify against current scholarly editions and museum sources before quoting anything.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Without looking anything up, write down what you already believe about the Grimms and their tales, in five short statements. Mark each as "documented", "claimed" or "unknown" in your own view.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose one tale you know well. List what you can say about its source, its first appearance in the collection and its edition history, and mark what you could only find out from a scholarly edition.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in two or three sentences the difference between a *Märchen* and a *Sage*, using one example of each from any culture.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The brothers:** Jacob (1785 to 1863) and Wilhelm (1786 to 1859), born in Hanau (check)

- **The book:** *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 1812 and 1815, seven large editions to 1857 (check)
- **The key words:** *Märchen* (tale), *Sage* (legend), KHM (the collection)
- **The method:** who produced this text, from what sources, in which edition, with what changes
- **The caution:** "Grimm's Fairy Tales" is a label that hides editing, translation and later adaptation

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Before the Grimms: Tales, Tellers and Collectors

The Grimms did not invent the fairy tale, and they were not the first to print one. By 1812 there was already a long tradition of spoken stories, a fashionable French literary genre, an Italian collection from the 1600s, and a German intellectual movement eager to find "the voice of the people". This chapter sets out that background so that the Grimm collection can be judged in context. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Oral Storytelling

Stories were told aloud for centuries before anyone collected them. Because spoken tales left no record, what we know about them comes from later writing, and that writing was done by people who had their own reasons for choosing and shaping what they wrote.

- **Who told them.** Women and men of many occupations, at work, at home or while travelling (check how far the common picture of a spinning-room storyteller is supported).
- **To whom.** Mostly to mixed audiences, adults as well as children; the idea of fairy tales as children's reading is largely later (Chapter 5).
- **How they spread.** By telling, by travel, by trade and by print, so that similar tales appear across Europe and beyond (check examples).
- **The problem of evidence.** A tale told in 1810 and written down in 1812 may already have been altered by the teller, the listener and the writer.

Earlier Literary Tales

Basile in Italy

Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (also called the *Pentamerone*), published after his death in the 1630s, is an early large collection of literary fairy tales in Neapolitan, with versions of stories later known elsewhere (check the dates and titles).

Perrault in France

Charles Perrault's collection of 1697 (check) gave French readers versions of "Cinderella", "Sleeping Beauty", "Little Red Riding Hood" and others, written for a court and salon audience and ending with a stated moral.

The salon writers

In the 1690s a group of mostly women writers, among them Madame d'Aulnoy, produced elaborate literary tales in Paris salons (check names), and the term "fairy tale" comes from their *contes de fées*.

These earlier tales matter for two reasons. First, they show that several "Grimm" stories had printed versions well before the brothers. Second, they show the tale as a sophisticated literary form, not only a rural folk one. Later Germans sometimes treated the French tradition as foreign, which affects how the Grimms' sources were described (Chapters 4 and 9).

Germany Before 1812

Development (check each)	What it contributed
Translations of French and Oriental tales	The *Arabian Nights* reached Europe in French in the early 1700s, and German readers knew French fairy tales in translation.
Musäus's *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782 to 1786)	A German collection of ironic literary retellings that used the word *Volksmärchen* for tales that were not strictly folk tales.
Herder and the idea of the *Volk*	Johann Gottfried Herder argued that a people's songs and tales expressed its spirit and deserved collection.
Romantic writers	Writers such as Novalis, Tieck and later Brentano wrote their own *Kunstmärchen* (art tales) and admired older popular material.
Des Knaben Wunderhorn (1805 to 1808)	Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano's collection of folk songs, edited freely, which the Grimms knew and which gave the Grimms an example.

Folk tale or art tale?

German has two useful terms. A *Volksmärchen* is a tale from popular tradition, and a *Kunstmärchen* is a literary tale by a named author. The Grimms' collection presented itself as the first kind, but the line between the two was already blurred, which is why Chapters 4 and 5 look closely at how the tales were gathered and rewritten.

The Romantic Interest in Folk Culture

- **The context.** German-speaking lands were divided into many states and then, in the Napoleonic years, were invaded and reorganised (check the political background; Chapter 3).
- **The idea.** Many intellectuals looked to older popular culture as a source of shared identity, and some saw tales and songs as the surviving voice of the nation (check how different writers framed this).
- **The method.** Collect, preserve and sometimes improve. Brentano and Arnim felt free to rewrite; the Grimms said they wanted to be more faithful, though Chapter 5 asks how faithful they were.
- **The link to nationalism.** The collecting movement was later drawn into national politics, and Chapter 9 returns to this.

For the wider literary movement, see *German Literature* 6, which covers Romanticism and the fairy tale; this chapter concentrates on the collectors.

A British comparison

Think of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802 to 1803) (check the dates). Both gathered older material for a reading public and both were criticised for how freely they edited, which is a close parallel to the Brentano and Arnim and Grimm cases.

Check the details

Dates of first publication, titles, and the exact influence of one collector on another are all from general knowledge and are debated by scholars. Verify against a current history of the fairy tale before quoting.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Make a short timeline of five milestones from the 1600s to 1812 that lead up to the Grimm collection, and say in one line what each contributed.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain the difference between a *Volksmärchen* and a *Kunstmärchen*, and say why the difference is hard to apply to the Grimm collection.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose one tale that appears both in Perrault (or Basile) and in the Grimms. List two things the versions probably share and two you would want to check by reading both.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Italy:** Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, 1630s (check)
- **France:** d'Aulnoy and the salons; Perrault, 1697 (check)
- **Germany:** Musäus, Herder, Novalis, Tieck, Arnim and Brentano (check)
- **Key terms:** *Volksmärchen* (folk tale), *Kunstmärchen* (art tale), *conte de fées*
- **The caution:** every written tale before 1812 was already shaped by a collector or an author

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · The Brothers and Their World

The tales were collected by two particular men at a particular moment: a time of war, occupation, political upheaval and anxious money. Knowing how the brothers grew up, where they worked and what they lived through helps explain what they collected, why they collected it and why the collection changed as it did. This chapter gives a short life of the brothers, set against the politics of their day. Dates, places and details are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Childhood and Education

Hanau and Steinau

Jacob (1785) and Wilhelm (1786) were born in Hanau in Hesse, where their father was a lawyer and official. The family later moved to nearby Steinau (check the dates and the father's post).

Loss and money

Their father died in 1796, and their mother, with several children, had less money from then on (check). The family depended on relatives, and Jacob took on much of the responsibility for his siblings.

School in Kassel

The brothers went to school in Kassel, supported by an aunt, and were good students although sometimes treated as outsiders because of their lower standing (check the details).

- **Marburg.** Both studied law at the university in Marburg in the early 1800s, where Jacob and Wilhelm met Professor Friedrich Carl von Savigny, a leading figure in the historical study of law (check).
- **The turn to old texts.** Savigny encouraged Jacob's interest in medieval manuscripts, and the brothers gradually moved from law towards language and literature (check how directly).

- **The friendship with the Romantics.** Through Savigny they met Brentano and Arnim (Chapter 2) and came into contact with the Romantic circle (check).

Jobs and Years

Years (check each)	Place	What happened
1806 to 1813	Kassel	The Kingdom of Westphalia, set up under French influence, ruled the area. Jacob worked as a court librarian for a time, and the brothers began collecting tales.
1812 and 1815	Kassel	The two volumes of the first edition of the tales appear (Chapter 4).
1816 to 1829	Kassel	After the end of Napoleonic rule the brothers worked as librarians under the restored elector, with modest pay and time for study (check).
1830 to 1837	Göttingen	Both took posts at the university, Jacob as professor and librarian and Wilhelm first as librarian and then as professor (check).
1837 to 1840	Kassel	After the Göttingen Seven protest (Chapter 8) they lost their posts and returned to Kassel, living for some years on their writing and on help from friends.
1841 onward	Berlin	They were invited to Berlin by the Prussian king, where they worked on the dictionary and other projects until their deaths (check).

The World They Lived In

- **Napoleonic wars.** French armies crossed the German lands from the 1790s, and the brothers lived under French-influenced rule in Kassel (check). That experience helps explain an interest in German language and culture as something worth preserving.
- **Political fragmentation.** The old Holy Roman Empire ended in 1806, leaving many separate states and, after 1815, a loose German Confederation (check). Questions of German unity were central to the educated public.
- **The 1830s and 1840s.** Debates over constitutions, censorship and liberty shaped university life and led to the Göttingen protest (Chapter 8).

- **1848.** The brothers lived through the revolutions of 1848, and Jacob took part in the Frankfurt Parliament as a member (check the role and extent of their involvement).

Working together

The brothers lived and worked together for most of their lives, and their writings often cannot be neatly divided. Even so, scholars generally credit Jacob with more of the linguistic and legal scholarship and Wilhelm with more of the editing and style of the tales (check how firmly this can be stated). A third brother, Ludwig Emil Grimm, was an artist who made portraits and illustrations (check).

A British comparison

The brothers' world has a rough British parallel in the generation of Walter Scott and Robert Burns, who also collected older songs and tales in the shadow of upheaval and wars, and who were also tied to ideas of national tradition (check the comparison). One difference is that the Grimms' interest in the language shaped a long scholarly career as well as a famous book.

Check the details

Specific dates, posts and salaries in a biography like this one are easily mis-remembered. Check them against a modern biography of the brothers or the museum in Kassel, and treat statements about their motives as interpretation, not fact.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Make a one-line summary of each decade of the brothers' lives from 1800 to 1860, naming the place and the main work.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain in a short paragraph how the Napoleonic wars might have shaped the Grimms' interest in German tales, and say what evidence would be needed to support the claim.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

List three facts about the brothers' lives that you would check against a modern biography, and say why each is likely to be misremembered.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Origins:** Hanau, Steinau, school in Kassel, law at Marburg (check)
- **Careers:** Kassel librarians, Göttingen professors, then Berlin (check)
- **Key events:** Napoleonic rule in Kassel, the Göttingen Seven in 1837, the revolutions of 1848 (check)
- **People:** Savigny, Brentano, Arnim, and the brother Ludwig Emil Grimm (check)
- **The caution:** motives such as "they collected tales to save German culture" are interpretations

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · The Collection: Children's and Household Tales

The usual picture is of two scholars travelling the countryside and writing down tales from old peasant women. Research since the twentieth century has complicated that picture a good deal. This chapter looks at how the collection was actually made, who the tellers were, what the first edition looked like and how the book grew through seven large editions. It is a chapter about evidence, so it flags more than usual as "check". Names, dates and numbers are from general knowledge.

How the Collection Was Made

- **Starting out.** The brothers began collecting around 1806 to 1810 (check), partly at the encouragement of Brentano, who wanted material for his own projects.
- **Asking friends.** Much of the material came from people the brothers knew, who told the tales in Kassel or sent them in writing (check the proportion).
- **Printed sources.** Some tales came from books, including earlier collections and literary works, and were adapted (check examples).
- **Writing down.** The brothers recorded tales from memory or from notes, not with any means of exact recording, so the wording was never a word-for-word transcript.
- **The first volume.** It appeared in 1812 with around 86 tales, and a second volume followed in 1815 (check the counts).

The Tellers

The Wild family

The family of Dortchen Wild, whom Wilhelm later married, lived in Kassel and passed on many tales, including some of the best known (check which). Dortchen herself and her sisters were important informants.

The Hassenpflug family

Another Kassel family of educated background with French-speaking roots, associated with several tales (check). This is part of why the idea of a purely German peasant source is questioned.

Dorothea Viehmann

A woman from a village near Kassel, described in the preface to the second volume as a source for many tales, often pictured as the typical peasant storyteller (check). Later research suggests her background was more varied and her sources partly literate (check).

The old picture and the new

The old picture is of ordinary country people handing down ancient German stories. The picture that scholars have built since the twentieth century is of a collection that drew heavily on educated, urban, middle-class informants, some with French-speaking family backgrounds, and on printed books as well as speech (check the details and how far historians agree). The brothers' own prefaces helped to create the earlier picture, which fits the ideas of the time.

The Editions

Edition (check each)	What it was like
1812 and 1815 (first edition)	Two volumes with scholarly notes, intended for a readership of adults and scholars, and not illustrated.
1819 (second edition)	A revised and enlarged edition, with more tales and changes to the text.
1825 (the "Small Edition")	A shorter selection with illustrations by Ludwig Emil Grimm, aimed at a general and younger readership and a commercial success.
Later editions to 1857	Seven large editions in all, with the number of tales rising to about 200 plus others in an appendix, and with Wilhelm's continual revision.

- **Notes.** The scholarly annotations on sources were published separately in later years, and give valuable evidence about origins (check).
- **The title.** *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* points to children and the household as the setting for the tales, which was partly an editorial choice (Chapter 5).

- **The reception.** Early reviews included criticism that the first edition was unsuitable for children, which led to changes (check).

A British comparison

The first edition resembles a scholarly record, as the Scott and Percy collections did, while the "Small Edition" resembles a children's selection from a larger work (check the comparison). The same material was presented to two different readerships, with different results.

Check the details

Counts of tales per edition, the exact years, and the identification of individual informants are all debated and are easy to misstate. Consult an annotated edition or a modern scholarly history before quoting any of them.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the traditional picture of how the tales were collected and list three points where modern research challenges it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare the 1812 to 1815 edition with the 1825 Small Edition: readers, content, appearance and purpose.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain why an informant's educational and family background matters when judging whether a tale is "folk" material, with one example.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Editions:** 1812 and 1815; 1819; the 1825 Small Edition; seven large editions to 1857 (check)
- **Tellers:** the Wild and Hassenpflug families; Dorothea Viehmann (check)
- **The revision:** the old peasant picture gave way to educated, partly French-speaking informants and printed sources
- **The method:** ask of each tale who told it, in what year and in which edition
- **The caution:** the brothers' prefaces are evidence, but they also presented a particular image

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Editing the Tales

Between the first edition of 1812 and the last of 1857 the tales changed a good deal. Wilhelm, who handled most of the revision, added detail, smoothed the style, adjusted some moral and religious points, and in places made matters harsher as well as gentler. This chapter looks at what changed, what did not, and what it means to ask whether the Grimm tales are "authentic". Examples are from general knowledge and flagged "check", since individual tales and editions differ.

What Changed

Style

The language became more even and more colourful, with added dialogue, proverbs and descriptive touches, and a storytelling voice that sounds more like a single narrator (check examples). Wilhelm's own taste shaped it.

Detail

Tales gained length and incident in many cases. Combined versions drew on several tellers or sources, so that the printed tale is sometimes a composite (check which tales).

Content

Some matters considered unsuitable for families were removed or softened, while some violence, especially punishment of wrongdoers, was kept or sharpened (check specific cases).

Examples to Look For

Type of change (check each tale)	What scholars report
Mothers and stepmothers	In some tales, such as "Hansel and Gretel", a mother in early versions becomes a stepmother in later ones, which is often linked to a wish to protect the idea of the mother.
Pregnancy and sexual matters	A reference in an early "Rapunzel" to a pregnancy is said to have been altered in later editions.
Religious touches	Later editions added Christian wording and references to God in places.
Punishments	Cruel punishments at the end of tales, such as the villain's fate in "Snow White" or "Cinderella", were kept or intensified in the later texts.
Gender roles	Heroines are often described as obedient, industrious and patient in later versions (check how consistent this is).
Dialect	A few tales were printed in Low German dialect, such as "The Fisherman and His Wife", for local colour (check).

Not simply "cleaned up"

The popular claim is that the Grimm tales were once much darker and were made nice for children. The evidence is more mixed. Some content became milder, some became harsher, and many changes were stylistic. The result was a more consistent book, not simply a gentler one (check how scholars now describe the direction of change).

Why Did Wilhelm Revise?

- **Readers.** The success of a children's selection and the criticism of the first edition encouraged changes for a wider audience (Chapter 4).
- **Taste.** Wilhelm preferred a certain narrative style, with the sort of manner he thought suited a tale told aloud (check how he described it).
- **Values.** The middle-class values of the time, around family, religion and gender, appear in the later texts.
- **Scholarship.** Jacob and others preferred a more faithful record, and the brothers did not always agree about how far to alter (check).

"Authentic" Folk Tales?

The question matters because the Grimms presented the book as a record of the German people's storytelling. Taken literally, that claim does not hold: the tales were selected, composed from several sources, and rewritten. But a different claim can hold, that the collection preserves tale types and motifs from wider traditions in a particular edited form. A fair reading says the Grimm collection is a literary work built on folk material, not a transcript of folk speech.

- **Why it still matters.** The collection became a reference point for later folklorists, who used it to study tale types, and its editing affects their conclusions.
- **How to read it.** Compare editions and cite which one you are reading. Where translations differ, find out which edition each follows.

A British comparison

Compare the later "bowdlerised" editions of Shakespeare prepared for family reading by Thomas Bowdler in the early 1800s (check the date), which removed material thought indecent. The comparison helps to see that editing for a family audience was common in the period, though the Grimm case is more complicated, since the brothers also added and sharpened.

Check the details

Claims about specific changes, such as mother to stepmother, are widely repeated but vary by tale and edition. Check against a scholarly edition that prints the early and late versions, and do not accept a single dramatic example as proof of a general rule.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List four kinds of change Wilhelm made across editions and give one possible example of each, marking those you would need to check.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Evaluate the claim that "the Grimm tales were once much darker and were cleaned up for children", using the evidence in this chapter.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short plan for comparing the first and last editions of one tale, naming what you would compare and what sources you would use.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Reviser:** mainly Wilhelm, across seven large editions to 1857 (check)
- **Kinds of change:** style, detail, content, religion, gender roles, dialect
- **Common claims:** mother to stepmother; softened sexual references; sharpened punishments (check each)
- **The method:** compare editions and name the edition and translation you read
- **The caution:** "once darker, then cleaned up" is too simple

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Reading Six Tales

After five chapters about the collection, it is time to read some of it. This chapter looks at six well-known tales, summarised in outline and in the course's own words, and asks the same questions of each: where does the tale come from, what pattern does it follow, what do the numbers and objects do, and what changed between editions. The tales are public domain, but the chapter paraphrases and does not quote at length. Read a full translation alongside it and note which translator and edition you use. Details are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Six Tales

Tale (KHM number; check)	Outline	Points to notice
"Hansel and Gretel" (KHM 15)	Two children are abandoned in a forest by their parents in a famine. They find a house of sweets owned by a witch, and the girl defeats her.	Hunger as the engine of the plot; the trail of pebbles then crumbs; the shift from mother to stepmother in later editions (Chapter 5).
"Cinderella" / "Aschenputtel" (KHM 21)	A mistreated girl is helped by a tree on her mother's grave and by birds, goes to a festival three times and is identified by a shoe.	No fairy godmother; three festival visits; the cruel punishment of the stepsisters; parallels in many cultures.
"Snow White" (KHM 53)	A jealous queen tries repeatedly to kill her stepdaughter, who is sheltered by seven dwarfs and falls under a poisoned spell.	Three murder attempts; the magic mirror; the number seven; changes between editions in who the persecutor is (check).
"Little Red Riding Hood" / "Little Red Cap" (KHM 26)	A girl meets a wolf on the way to her grandmother, who is eaten, and a hunter rescues them.	A warning against leaving the path; the rescue ending that differs from Perrault's tragic version (Chapter 2); the added second episode (check).

Tale (KHM number; check)	Outline	Points to notice
"Rumpelstiltskin" (KHM 55)	A girl must spin straw into gold, and a strange helper demands her child unless she can guess his name.	Names and power; the bargain; three days of guessing; the abrupt ending of the helper (check).
"The Frog King" (KHM 1)	A princess promises a frog friendship in return for retrieving her golden ball, and he becomes a prince.	A broken-promise theme; the first tale in the collection; the change from a thrown frog to a kissed frog in popular versions (check).

Patterns Across the Tales

Threes and sevens

Many tales repeat an action three times (three attempts, three nights, three tasks) and use numbers like seven for groups. Repetition makes the tales easy to tell and remember (check the examples in each).

Forest and threshold

Forests, paths, doors and thresholds mark moves between safety and danger. Several of the six tales turn on leaving a path or entering a house.

Helpers and tests

Characters pass tests, receive help from animals, trees or strange figures, and face a villain who is punished. The shape resembles the morphology described by scholars of tale structure (check, for example Vladimir Propp).

- **Family trouble.** Four of the six begin with trouble inside a family: a failing household, a stepmother, a jealous queen or an unwise bargain.
- **Reward and punishment.** Hard work, patience and kindness are rewarded, and cruelty and greed are punished, often severely.
- **Plain style.** Characters are often described by one trait, with little psychology, and the settings are generic.

Tale-Type Numbers

Folklorists classify tales by *type*, using the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) index, which gives a number to each plot pattern (check the name and how it developed). Cinderella is usually placed in type ATU 510A, for instance (check), and "Little Red Riding Hood" belongs to a different type altogether. The system lets scholars compare tales across languages, but its numbers should be treated as a tool, since it simplifies and some tales mix several types.

Reading with the editions in mind

For each of the six tales, ask: which edition am I reading, which translator, and what do the notes say about the source? A version known from film or a picture book is often a retelling, so it may differ from every Grimm edition (check).

A British comparison

Compare "The Frog King" with the Scottish tale "The Well of the World's End" (check the title and its place in collections such as Joseph Jacobs's), which has a similar frog bargain. Parallels like this show a tale type spread across Europe, not a purely German property.

Check the details

KHM numbers, ATU numbers and plot details differ between editions and translations. Check each against an annotated edition, and read at least one tale in full before relying on a summary, including this one.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose two of the six tales and compare them: the opening trouble, the helper, the test and the ending.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Pick a recurring number or object across at least three of the tales and explain what job it does in the story, without claiming a hidden symbolic meaning.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Take one tale you know from film or a picture book and list five things you would check by reading it in a named Grimm translation.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The six:** Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, Rumpelstiltskin, The Frog King (check the KHM numbers)
- **Patterns:** threes and sevens, thresholds, helpers and tests, reward and punishment
- **Classification:** the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index of tale types (check)
- **The method:** name the edition and translator before saying what a tale "says"
- **The caution:** popular versions differ from the Grimm texts

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Darkness, Violence and Interpretation

Readers new to the original tales are often surprised by their violence: abandoned children, murder attempts, mutilation, burning and death as punishment. Readers have also long disagreed about what such things mean. This chapter sets out where the darkness appears, what the main schools of interpretation say, and how to weigh competing readings without treating any one of them as settled. It is a chapter about method, so it describes views rather than choosing a winner. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Where the Darkness Is

Family danger

Parents abandon children, stepmothers plot against stepdaughters, and siblings are at risk. Danger often comes from inside the home, not from outside it (Chapter 6).

Punishment

Villains often meet severe ends, in some tales in ways that read as grim ritual: forced dancing in hot shoes, being rolled in a barrel, or being pecked by birds (check the tales and the editions).

Hunger and want

Poverty and hunger drive many plots, which reflects the conditions in which tales were told, not simply a taste for horror (check how far the historical setting is reflected).

Two cautions apply. First, as Chapter 5 showed, not every tale became gentler over time, so "the dark original" is not a single thing. Second, the tales are short and plain in style: violence is told briefly and with little comment, which can make it seem colder or more matter-of-fact than a modern reader expects.

Schools of Interpretation

Approach (check names)	What it asks	A limit to bear in mind
Historical and social	What do the tales show about the lives of the people who told them: hunger, inheritance, marriage, work? Robert Darnton's essays on French tales are a well-known example of the method (check).	The tales were reshaped by collectors, so the social evidence is indirect.
Psychological	What do the tales do for the inner life of the child or the listener? Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) is the best-known Freudian example (check).	Critics say such readings are hard to test and that Bettelheim's use of sources has been challenged (check).
Jungian	Are the figures and patterns expressions of shared symbols, or archetypes?	The claim of universal archetypes is hard to test against the variety of actual tales.
Feminist	Who has power and voice, and which models of womanhood do the tales promote? Scholars such as Maria Tatar and Jack Zipes have written on the Grimms from different angles (check).	Results depend on the edition and the tale, since heroines and villains vary.
Folkloric and comparative	How do versions of a tale type vary across places and periods, and what stays constant?	It maps patterns but says less about meaning for a given audience.
Literary and reception	How have readers, translators and illustrators changed the tales?	It concentrates on later uses more than the original setting.

Weighing interpretations

A reading is stronger when it can be tied to a specific text and edition, when it accounts for the details a rival reading ignores, and when it says what evidence would count against it. A reading is weaker when it works for any tale at all, when it depends on a translation, or when it treats a late literary version as ancient folk belief.

Questions for Any Reading

- **Which text?** Which edition and translation does the interpreter use?
- **Whose meaning?** The teller's, the collector's, the editor's, the child's or a modern critic's?
- **What is left out?** Which details does the reading explain, and which does it skip?
- **Can it be tested?** Is there any evidence, historical or textual, that could show it wrong?
- **Is it the only one?** Do rival readings fit the same facts, and can they both be partly right?

A British comparison

Nursery rhymes in Britain have been given dark historical explanations, such as the claim that "Ring a Ring o' Roses" is about plague (check), which most folklorists regard as unproven. The same caution applies to confident readings of Grimm tales: an attractive explanation is not evidence.

Check the details

Authors, titles, dates and the standing of particular interpreters are debated, and some well-known works have been strongly criticised. Check recent scholarship before quoting any interpretation as established, and treat any claim that "the tale really means X" with caution.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose one tale and write two short readings of it from different schools, then say what each explains and what each leaves out.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Use the five questions in this chapter to assess a confident claim you have read or heard about what a Grimm tale "really means".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in a short paragraph why violence told briefly and plainly can read differently from violence in a modern film, and what that implies for interpretation.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Where the darkness is:** family danger, severe punishment, hunger
- **Schools:** historical, psychological, Jungian, feminist, folkloric, reception (check names)
- **Test a reading:** text, whose meaning, what is left out, testable, rivals
- **The method:** describe the views, then weigh them on evidence
- **The caution:** "what it really means" claims are usually interpretation

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · The Grimms as Scholars: Dictionary, Grammar and Law

To most readers the Grimms are the authors of a book of tales. To their contemporaries and to later scholars, they were above all philologists: students of old texts and of the history of language, law and myth. The tales were one project among many, and not always the one the brothers themselves ranked highest. This chapter surveys their scholarly work, the protest that cost them their posts, and the great dictionary they began and did not live to finish. Titles, dates and attributions are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

A Wider Field of Work

Legends and myth

Alongside the tales, the brothers published *Deutsche Sagen* (German Legends), in two volumes in the 1816 to 1818 period, and Jacob wrote *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), an attempt to reconstruct pre-Christian beliefs from later sources (check the dates and the methods).

Old texts

They edited and discussed medieval German, Norse and other texts, including songs and poems, and helped to make the study of older Germanic literature an academic field (check titles).

Law

Jacob's *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer* (German Legal Antiquities, 1828) collected evidence about early legal customs from texts and traditions, a link back to their law studies (Chapter 3; check the details).

Grammar and Grimm's Law

- **Deutsche Grammatik.** Jacob's multi-volume German Grammar began to appear in 1819 (check). Despite its name, it is a historical study of the Germanic languages, comparing older and newer forms.

- **Grimm's law.** A regular pattern of sound change that separates the Germanic languages from other Indo-European ones: for example, an older "p" sound corresponds to "f" in Germanic, so Latin *pater* matches English *father* (check the details and the role of earlier scholars such as Rasmus Rask).
- **Why it mattered.** It was among the first clear demonstrations that sound change follows regular patterns, which became a foundation of historical linguistics (check how scholars rank its importance).
- **Not the same law as the tales.** The term "Grimm's law" has nothing to do with the fairy tales, which is a common confusion.

Latin or older form (check)	English	Pattern
pater	father	p becomes f
pes, pedis	foot	p becomes f
tres	three	t becomes th
cornu	horn	c (k) becomes h

The Göttingen Seven

In 1837 the new king of Hanover set aside the state's constitution (check the details). Seven professors at Göttingen, including Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, signed a protest. They were dismissed, and Jacob was ordered to leave the kingdom within days (check). The episode made the brothers known as defenders of principle, though historians differ over how political they were and how organised the protest was (check). The brothers' later position in Berlin came partly because of this reputation (Chapter 3).

The German Dictionary

A project too big for one lifetime

In the late 1830s the brothers agreed with a publisher to compile a large historical dictionary of German, the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, with quotations showing how words had been used over time (check). The first volume appeared in 1854. Wilhelm died in 1859 having reached the letter D, and Jacob died in 1863 having reached part of F (check). Later

scholars carried the work on and it was finally completed in 1961 (check). It was later revised by German academies (check).

- **The aim.** To record the history and range of German words from the earliest times, using quotations, in the way later historical dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* would do.
- **The style.** Entries could be long and personal, and the brothers' enthusiasm for some words is visible (check).
- **The legacy.** It remains a reference for German word history, and it is available in digital form (check the details).

A British comparison

The dictionary invites comparison with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which also began as a collaborative historical project taking decades beyond its first plans (check the dates), and with Samuel Johnson's earlier dictionary. The Grimm work, like the OED, aimed to show history, not only current usage.

Check the details

Titles, publication years and the extent of each brother's share in the dictionary are from general knowledge. Verify against a scholarly biography or the dictionary's own history before quoting, and check the examples of sound change with a linguistics reference.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List five scholarly works or projects of the Grimms apart from the tales, with a one-line description of each, marking dates to check.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain Grimm's law in your own words, using two example word pairs, and say why it is called a "law".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short paragraph on whether the dictionary or the tales is the more important part of the Grimms' legacy, giving reasons on both sides.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Other works:** *Deutsche Sagen*, *Deutsche Mythologie*, *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer*, *Deutsche Grammatik* (check the dates)
- **Grimm's law:** regular Germanic sound shifts, such as p to f (Latin *pater*, English father)
- **1837:** the Göttingen Seven protest and dismissal (check)
- **The dictionary:** begun late 1830s, first volume 1854, completed 1961 (check)
- **The caution:** Grimm's law has nothing to do with the fairy tales

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Afterlives: Disney, Film, Tourism and Politics

The Grimm tales have been translated, illustrated, filmed, staged, taught, sold and used for political purposes. Most people now meet them in a form the brothers would hardly recognise. This chapter follows that afterlife: the early English translations, the film and Disney versions, the tourist industry in Germany, the use of the tales by the Nazi regime and the debates since. The political material is handled descriptively and carefully. Names, titles and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Translation and Reception

- **Early English.** An English selection by Edgar Taylor appeared in 1823 to 1826 with illustrations by George Cruikshank (check), and was an early success that shaped English readers' sense of the tales.
- **Selection and softening.** Translators have often chosen tales, shortened them and adjusted wording for their audience, so there is no single "English Grimm" (check the main translations).
- **Spread.** The collection has been translated into a very large number of languages, and is often counted among the most translated German books (check the claim and the figures).
- **Illustration.** Illustrators from Cruikshank to Arthur Rackham and many later artists have fixed the look of characters in readers' minds (check names).
- **UNESCO.** The brothers' handwritten annotated copies of the tales were added to UNESCO's Memory of the World register in 2005 (check).

Film, Stage and Disney

Disney

Walt Disney's studio made "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937), the first full-length cel-animated feature (check), and later adapted Cinderella and other tales, partly from Perrault, in a style that became the

German film and television

German studios, in both East and West, made tale films and television series for decades; the Czechoslovak-East German film of "Three Wishes for Cinderella" (1973) is a long-standing Christmas favourite in parts of Europe (check the title and the details).

most familiar version for many viewers (check).

Stage and revision

Operas such as Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893; check), musicals such as *Into the Woods* (1987; check) and modern retellings revisit the tales with new emphasis.

Whose tale is on the screen?

A film "of" a Grimm tale may draw on the Grimm text, on Perrault, on an English translation, on an earlier film or on all of these. When judging how faithful a version is, ask faithful to which text, and treat the answer as part of the history of the tale, not as an error to correct (check each case).

Tourism and the Fairy Tale Route

- **The Deutsche Märchenstraße.** The German Fairy Tale Route, a tourist route set up in the 1970s (check), links towns associated with the brothers and their tales, running roughly from Hanau to Bremen.
- **Places.** It includes Hanau, Steinau, Marburg, Kassel and Hamelin, famous for the legend of the Pied Piper, which the brothers collected as a *Sage* (check the stops).
- **Museums.** Museums in Kassel and Steinau display material about the brothers (check which are open).
- **Heritage and invention.** Some associations are firm and some are marketing, and a visitor can usefully ask which is which.

Politics and the Nazi Period

The collection began as part of a scholarly and cultural project in the Romantic and early nationalist climate (Chapters 2 and 3), and it was later available for political use. The following points are widely discussed by historians, and details should be checked.

- **A national book.** By the later nineteenth century the tales were widely treated as a core of German national culture, and were taught in schools (check).
- **The Nazi period.** The regime promoted the collection as a national book, and used selected tales and readings to support its ideas, while some tales were criticised or removed from use as unsuitable (check the specific cases and the scale). Historians stress that this was a use of the book, imposed on it from outside, and not something that the brothers, who died decades earlier, could have intended.
- **After 1945.** Allied occupation authorities are reported to have briefly restricted the book, and it was soon back in use (check this claim carefully, since accounts differ).
- **Later debates.** Scholars have discussed antisemitic and gender stereotypes in a small number of tales, and the question of how to present them to modern readers (check which tales and the arguments).

A British comparison

Compare the use of Arthurian legend or of Shakespeare as "national" culture in Britain, which has also been claimed by different political and educational projects over time (check examples). In both cases a body of stories becomes a symbol, and the symbol's history is partly separate from the original texts.

Check the details

This chapter covers sensitive history and the facts are from general knowledge. Check dates, titles and especially the claims about the Nazi period and the post-war period against scholarly histories before relying on them or repeating them.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose one tale and trace its journey from the Grimm text to a film or picture-book version, listing three changes and the likely reason for each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why the German Fairy Tale Route mixes firm history and marketing, and give two questions a visitor could ask to tell them apart.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short, careful paragraph on how a national book can be used by a political regime, using the Grimm tales as the case, and say what the brothers' own responsibility is and is not.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Translation:** Taylor and Cruikshank, 1820s; many later versions (check)
- **Film:** Disney's *Snow White*, 1937; German and Czechoslovak films; stage works (check)
- **Tourism:** the German Fairy Tale Route from Hanau to Bremen (check)
- **Politics:** a national book, used by the Nazi regime, debated since (check carefully)
- **The method:** ask which text a later version actually draws on

The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Reading a Fairy Tale

The first chapter promised smaller and better questions than "what do the Grimm tales mean?": who produced this text, from what sources, in which edition, and what was changed along the way. Nine chapters later there is enough to answer them and to turn the answers into a method you can use on any fairy tale. This final chapter gathers the myths and what the evidence says, sets out a timeline, then gives a practical method with a worked example. Names, dates and details are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Myths Versus Evidence

Myth	What the course found (check each)	Chapter
The Grimms wrote the tales.	They collected, selected and edited; Wilhelm did most of the revision.	4, 5
They collected them from German peasants.	Many informants were educated, middle-class and some had French-speaking backgrounds; some tales came from books.	4
The tales are unchanged old folk stories.	They were revised across seven large editions.	5
They were written for children.	The first edition was aimed at adults and scholars; the Small Edition of 1825 reached a wider readership.	4, 5
They were once much darker and were cleaned up.	Change ran in several directions; some matters were softened, some sharpened.	5, 7
The Grimms were only storytellers.	They were philologists: grammar, law, myth, legends and a dictionary.	8
A tale "really means" one thing.	Readings differ by school and edition, and few can be tested.	7
The tales are purely German.	Many have parallels across Europe and earlier printed versions.	2, 6
The popular film version is the Grimm version.	Films draw on several sources, including Perrault.	9

A Timeline

Year (check each)	Event
1630s	Basile's collection of Neapolitan tales is published.
1697	Perrault's tales appear in France.
1785 and 1786	Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are born in Hanau.
1805 to 1808	Arnim and Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.
1812 and 1815	First edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.
1825	The illustrated Small Edition.
1837	The Göttingen Seven protest and the brothers' dismissal.
1857	The seventh large edition.
1859 and 1863	Deaths of Wilhelm and Jacob.
1937	Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.
1961	The German Dictionary is completed.
2005	The brothers' annotated copies enter UNESCO's Memory of the World register.

A Method for Reading a Fairy Tale

Choose any tale that someone calls "Grimm", "traditional" or "the original". Ask these questions in order, and mark each answer as *documented*, *claimed* or *unknown*.

1. Which text?

Which edition and which translator are you reading? Is it a Grimm text, a Perrault text or a modern retelling?

2. Whose source?

Who is named as informant or source in the scholarly notes, and does that fit the picture of a "peasant" tale (Chapter 4)?

3. What changed?

4. What pattern?

How does the first-edition text differ from the last? Is the change in style, detail or content (Chapter 5)?

What tale type is it, and what are its threes, thresholds, helpers and tests? Where else does the type appear (Chapter 6)?

5. Which reading?

If someone offers an interpretation, what text and school does it rest on, and could anything count against it (Chapter 7)?

6. What afterlife?

Which later versions in film, books or politics are you actually remembering, and how do they differ (Chapter 9)?

A Worked Example

Question	"Hansel and Gretel" (check each)
Which text?	The 1857 edition in a named translation; the opera and picture books are retellings.
Whose source?	Attributed in the notes to a Kassel informant family (documented in the scholarly notes; check the family and the extent of any literary source).
What changed?	Widely reported: mother to stepmother between early and late editions; added detail and religious wording (claimed; check the editions).
What pattern?	Abandonment, a trail, a dangerous refuge and a defeated villain; tale type ATU 327 (check); parallels elsewhere in Europe.
Which reading?	Historical (famine) and psychological (fear of rejection) readings both exist; neither is settled.
What afterlife?	Humperdinck's opera of 1893, picture books, films and the sweet house as a tourist image (check).

The pattern

Most answers come out part documented, part claimed and part unknown. That is not a reason to distrust everything said about the Grimms. It is a reason to ask which part of a statement is documented, which is a popular story told with confidence, and which is an interpretation that could be tested.

A British comparison

Try the method on a British tale, such as "Jack and the Beanstalk" or "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" (check the collections that first printed them). The same questions about source, edition and later retelling apply, and the answers often show the same mixture of collector's shaping and later legend.

Check the details

Every name, date and attribution in this course comes from general knowledge and is marked "check" where it is uncertain. Scholars keep revising the story of the Grimms, so verify against current annotated editions and scholarly histories before quoting anything.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose a tale and write answers to the six questions, marking each as documented, claimed or unknown.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Pick three of the myths in the table and write one sentence each, in your own words, saying what the evidence supports.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short timeline of five events that, in your view, best show how the Grimm collection and its image changed, and say why you picked each.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The collection:** 1812 to 1857, seven large editions, revised mainly by Wilhelm (check)
- **The sources:** educated informants, printed books and earlier tales, not only peasants
- **The method:** text, source, change, pattern, reading, afterlife
- **The habit:** label each claim documented, claimed or unknown
- **The caution:** "the original Grimm version" is often a retelling

Course complete

You have finished *The Brothers Grimm & German Fairy Tales*: the earlier tellers and collectors, the brothers and their world, how the collection was made and edited, six tales read closely, the debates over darkness and meaning, the brothers' work as scholars, the tales' afterlife, and a method for testing claims about any fairy tale. Related courses include the other Germany-specific Culture courses on the site, such as *German Literature*, *Bauhaus & German Design* and *The Bundesliga: A History*.