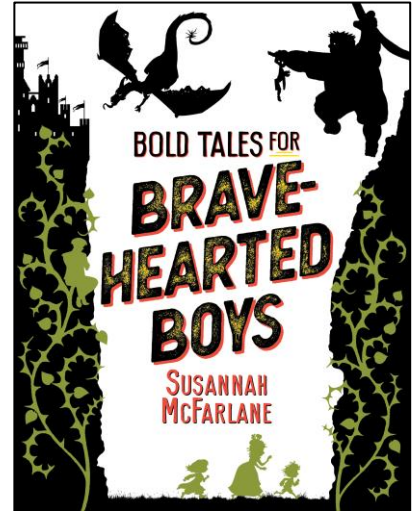


# Bold Tales for Brave-hearted Boys

By Susannah McFarlane



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Recommended for 6-9-year-olds

## Summary

Boys can be pretty handy at dragon-felling and tower-climbing, but there is so much more to them than brawn and bravado: they have a lot to say and feel as well, as these tilted tales will tell...

In '**Jack and the Beanstalk**', we meet the other Jack, the giant and gentle one, who spends his time protecting the castle from intruders. Jack is pretty sick of people just thinking they can climb up and take stuff, so when he has the chance to punish that pesky little Jack, he has a choice: to give little Jack what he deserves, or to turn the other – giant – cheek...

'**Hansel and Gretel**' couldn't be more different. Gretel is the feisty and physically strong one who is always ready to leap into any adventure, while Hansel is more thoughtful and hangs back a bit before he acts. He would like to be like his sister (although sometimes she doesn't always think things through) but is also happy helping, cheering from the sidelines – or, in this case, a cage.

Christian can't work out why no one is telling the truth about '**The Emperor's New Clothes**' and is confused that he is encouraged to do the same. Putting his life at court at risk (and possibly his freedom, too), Christian stands up and calls out the craziness when no one else will.

Prince Leopold Charming is very handsome, has excellent manners and is quite handy as a sword-swinger. But he's also a mad-keen tennis player with a highly mathematical brain, which will come in handy when he is called on to rescue a nearby sleeping princess in '**Prince Leo and the Sleeping Princess**'.

**Bold Tales for Brave-hearted Boys** – for boys who know heroes have big hearts.



*Bold Tales for Brave-Hearted Boys* takes a distinctly modern look at the boys and men who feature in some of our best-known fairytales. These characters may be good on a horse and nimble with a sword but, more importantly, they have the capacity to out-think their foes, be sensitive to the needs of others, and play a musical instrument, all the while remaining calm, loyal and kind of heart. But while the stories have a distinctly modern twist, the colour and black-and-white illustrations by four leading Australian illustrators, Simon Howe, Matt Huynh, Louie Joyce and Brenton McKenna., provide a timeless and classic treasury-style feel.

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## Use in the curriculum

This book is a stand-out in the 'fractured fairy tales' or 'twisted tales' genre of books for children in that it specifically rehabilitates the male roles in such tales.

It sits well with the more common twisted tales of feisty girls who don't want to be princesses. Genre-bending being their main aim, these tales are an excellent introduction to genre study because they show up the hitherto 'invisible' biases and stylistic traits of traditional tales.

## Themes

- fairytales
- empowering boys
- kindness
- equality
- masculinity

## Discussion questions

1) Before beginning the unit of work, ask students what the word 'tale' means to them. Steer the conversation to the idea that 'tales' is a shortened form of the word 'fairytales' and encourage them to name their favourites from this genre. Talk about how tales were used a long time ago as a means of teaching children about the world around them and the right and wrong way to behave. Choose a fairytale that all students know and talk about the lesson taught in that particular story. (For instance, young girls should never talk to strangers is the moral behind 'Little Red Riding Hood'.) Now talk about the sort of males and females who often inhabit fairytales and discuss how these stories tend to feature physically strong men who fight battles to save beautiful but defenceless females, who they later marry. Ask them if we are ever encouraged to think about the hero's feelings and emotions? Encourage students to think about how our attitudes about gender and behaviour might differ from the old-fashioned view and then come up with ideas about heroes that better reflect our time and help us to know how to behave.

2) Look at the front cover of *Bold Tales for Brave-Hearted Boys* and:

- a) Discuss as a group the mood that is set by the cover image, colours, font, light and shade. Do you expect these stories to be like the fairytales already discussed? (See above.)
- b) Can students name which famous fairytale characters are depicted here?
- c) Turn to the definition of the word 'bold' inside and, in their own words, ask students to describe what they understand the word to mean.

3) Read the poem/prologue out loud to the class and ask students how it sets an expectation that the heroes to come in the book differ from the heroes in classical fairytales?

4) Read through each of the four stories and ask students:

- What, in your opinion, makes each main character deserve to be described as 'bold' and 'brave-hearted'?
- What is the special trait that enables each hero to solve the particular problem he faces?

5) How does the giant in this version of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' differ from in the traditional story?

- Is the (little) Jack character in this story heroic? If not, why not?
- Compare how both Jacks (giant and little) treat their mothers and give examples from the book to illustrate the comparison.



## In the classroom...

5) How does the giant in this version of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' differ from in the traditional story?

- Is the (little) Jack character in this story heroic? If not, why not?
- Compare how both Jacks (giant and little) treat their mothers and give examples from the book to illustrate the comparison.

6) Hansel and Gretel have very different reactions to the news that their uncle and aunt are planning to leave them in the woods.

- What can we tell about each character from their reaction, and how do they differ from what you might expect of a stereotypical boy and girl in a fairytale?
- What other examples from this story reverse fairytale stereotypes about gender?

7) The Emperor may not be in danger from a fire-breathing dragon or an evil fairy in 'The Emperor's New Clothes' but he is 'saved' by Christian.

- What is he 'saved' from and what special characteristics does Christian possess that enables him to come to the Emperor's rescue?

8a) Why do you think the author chose to make the princess in 'Prince Leo and the Sleeping Princess' a competitive tennis player?

- How would you describe the relationship between Leo and the princess at the end of the story?
- How does this version of living 'happily ever after' differ from the original version?

9a) Younger students can be encouraged to draw their favourite 'bold and brave-hearted boy' character and explain what it is about him they like so much.

9b) Older students can be encouraged to come up with their own alternative versions for well-known fairytales not covered in the book.

### In the Author's Own Words:

'I wrote this after writing Fairytales for Feisty Girls, inspired to take the same reconstructing eye to the boys of classic fairytales.

'I was first taken with "The Emperor's New Clothes" and how little attention was given the brave boy who called out the truth about the Emperor – what was his story? So, in my telling, the focus is on that boy, Christian, and his struggles to find the strength to stand up for the truth.

'Then I wondered about "Jack and the Beanstalk" and what bad press the giant received – after all, it was Jack who, after disobeying his mum at the market, climbed up the beanstalk and stole stuff from the giant.

'These stories are about qualities that are perhaps not as immediately striking as dragon-felling and witch-quelling – honesty, forgiveness, obedience, duty–valuable qualities today as well as a long, long time ago.'

— Susannah McFarlane

### The author

Susannah McFarlane is the author, creator and publisher of some of Australia's most successful children's book series. She is best known as the author of the bestselling EJ12 Girl Hero and EJ Spy School series, which have sold over 1 million copies. Susannah also created and co-wrote (with Louise Park, as Mac Park) the hugely popular D-Bot Squad and Boy vs Beast series; wrote the Little Mates series of alphabet books for under-fives; was series editor for Stuff Happens!, about the everyday challenges boys face; and wrote *Fairytales for Feisty Girls*.