

# Amag

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## Educational Content, Article No 6 ONCE UPON A TIME... The houses from imagination.

by Alicia Guerrero Yeste & Fredy Massad.

Once upon a time' is an expression that conjures up our imagination and transports us to a different realm of time and space: there where folk and fairy tales happen.

We are very familiar with the essential characters of folk and fairy tales: the maiden, the courageous young man, the king and the queen, the witch and the fair, the humble people who find their luck (as a treasure or as a magical child) because of their gentle souls, the magical animals that help or misguide the tale's hero or heroine, the wicked step-mother, the dragon, the helpful or evil snake, the enchanted frog, the wolf...

And we are also very familiar with the essential places where these stories are located. Perhaps the first idea of fairy-tale territory that springs to our mind is a natural place: the forest. There is always some magical task to accomplish or dangerous risk in the forest. And, afterwards, we might immediately say 'the castle'... The Castle: arguably the quintessential architectural element of tales. The hero has to reach the castle where the princess lives; the princess has to flee from the castle where maybe her wicked step-mother or mother-in-law also keeps an underground dungeon... We all know how a fairy tale castle is or –to put it more 'seriously'- how to visualize it in our minds and how to represent it in a piece of paper. We can imagine how the castle of the Sleeping Beauty or Snow White would look like. And we can also easily imagine other typical types of buildings that appear in fairy and folk tales: the cottage in the middle of the forest, a poor cottage or the welcoming cottage where some protective person dwells.

We all are familiar with a repertoire of tales where these types of buildings appear. We do even know tales where these buildings have a specific importance. Think of the Three Little Pigs, for example! This is a very simple and good example of the symbolic meaning of every kind of building that appears in the tale. And here is where the idea for our proposal is based.

We would like to propose kids and adults to enjoy the act of telling a story while, at the same time, recognizing the importance of the meaning of the symbolism of architecture in a folk tale and the substance of archetypes that lies within our imagination.

We have chosen a folk tale with a strong cautionary message where a building undergoes a magical metamorphosis: "The fisherman and the gold fish". The proposal is to recreate the narration of this story focusing particularly in the transformations that the little cottage of the poor fisherman goes through. The fisherman's wife is a selfish vain woman who misuses the wise magical powers that the little golden fish offers generously to the good-hearted fisherman: she wants her little cottage to turn into a nicer larger house, then she wants a wealthier palace and become a very powerful person... The little cottage turns into a sumptuous palace.

Let's imagine these transformations! Let's explore how we represent these archetypal architectural concepts and which are our personal inputs into this representation. Let's conceive an exterior and, if we like, let's also figure out the inside of the house. Let's think about form and also, if we feel like imagining it, also space.

Hopefully this should encourage all of us to carry on exploring to discover the host of wonderful architectures that have been imagined in fairy and folk tales all over the centuries, for the sake of enjoying the beauty of fantasy and also to understand something else about the meaning and sense of architecture from 'the real world'.



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This is an exercise that can be done in many different ways.

For example, a simple and enjoyable way can be doing it as a bedtime activity: take a piece of paper or notebook, a single pencil or a box of crayons. As the story is narrated, a brief pause to draw the cottage, the larger house, the even larger house and the palace can be made. The drawings can be completed – if you like- with the characters of the story, the landscape where the dwelling of the fisherman and his wife was...

It can also inspire the kids and adults to work together in order to build models of each of the buildings that appear throughout the story.

Yet, we would like to present this as a bi-dimensional concept and propose an exercise that, while thinking about architecture, also evokes the effect of the moving image. The final result would be a moving illustration or an interesting exploration of pre-cinematic techniques.

Indeed each approach to the exercise can be (and has to be!) completely individual and free. We suggest here a basic scheme around which every personal idea can be devised. We offer a gallery of images from which we have drawn inspiration but many many many other sources can prove inspirational... the work of the masters of the golden era of illustration, pop-up books and movable pictures books, animation films based on fairy and folk tales (made with different techniques: puppets, cartoon, experimental...). These sources will enrich the visual imagination and stimulate us to develop our own visions.

Our proposal has been based around the silhouette drawings of artists such as Arthur Rackham and Jan Pienkowski, and the silhouette animation films of Lotte Reiniger. These are complex and highly beautiful images yet apparently simple. We would like to 'use' this apparent simplicity as means to emphasize the exploration of the basic aspects of the architectural types that appear in the story.

### 1. Take a large piece of card.

Distribute the scene of the story: on one side, we have the pond / seaside where the fisherman finds the little fish. We imagine a landscape around it and around the path that leads to the fisherman's house. On the other side of the card, where the cottage should stand, we DO NOT draw anything. We gently cut a long and thin straight horizontal line (try to keep it as unnoticeable as possible).

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2. Take another card and draw the characters: a cute little golden fish, a humble and good-hearted fisherman and the hard-hearted fisherman's wife. Try to express the nature of each character in this drawing.

These figures can be also silhouettes if you like.

Cut out the figures and add some thin stick to the back of each figure. They will be moving across the scene as the story unfolds.

3. Take a black card. Use a piece of chalk or a white crayon to draw the shape of the buildings: a very poor shack, a cottage, a tall mansion and the palace for a mighty queen.

Think carefully to draw a structure that can be clearly recognized as such. How would look like the shack where you would live in if you were a poor fisherman? How would look like a magical nice house given to you by a magical fish? How would look like the palace of a very powerful and evil queen?

Bear in mind key details, such as the scale of every building (a shack is tiny and weak, a palace is huge and very sound...), do any of these buildings have any relevant ornaments that signify something about the people that inhabits them?

Then, cut out every building and put some thin stick in their back as well.

Another possibility is devising the metamorphosis of the building out of the original shack: namely, draw and cut out individual architectural elements that would be gradually superimposed on it to transform the shack in a mansion and, then, a palace. This would involve also drawing each structure separately (for example, additional floors and wings, big nice roof, towers...) and, afterwards, investigate how to 'expand' the primary structure. This option would highlight the 'magical' side of the transformation.

4. You have all elements. Now, let's get ready: it's as though we start watching a film or play. The adult reads the story aloud and the kids will take care of moving the characters following the narration.

Two or three kids can participate: one or two can take care of the motion of the characters and another one, of the buildings.

When the story starts, we will put the poor shack through the thin cut we made in one the sides of the card – when every transformation happens, we will smoothly retire the figure and will proceed with the next one. If we chose the option of 'metamorphosing' one basic structure, we will put through the thin cut each of the architectural elements.

The idea is keeping all this hand-made elements as a possibility of toy, or book-toy. Ideally it should encourage kids to invent their own stories, their own version to this specific fairy tale and try to create another set of 'props' for other fairy-tales (such as The Three Little Pigs).

Designing these buildings could also stimulate their attention to the presence of architecture in all the stories or images related to fantasy they interact with (book illustrations, video games, films...) and explore images of actual buildings looking for connections with these imaginary structures. ...Hopefully leading them to start designing their own architectural visions!

[A LINK TO THE ALEXANDER PUSHKIN'S VERSION OF 'THE FISHERMAN AND THE GOLDEN FISH.'](http://russian-crafts.com/tales/golden-fish.html)  
<http://russian-crafts.com/tales/golden-fish.html>

[A COUPLE OF LOTTE REINIGER FILMS FOR INSPIRATION](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxkIGXVwZTM)  
'Hansel and Gretel' (1955)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxkIGXVwZTM>

'Cinderella' (1922)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kku75vGDD\\_0&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kku75vGDD_0&feature=related)



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