

## Fairy tales could be 6,000 years old

24th January, 2016



The famous 19th-century fairy tale collector Wilhelm Grimm suggested fairy tales dated back thousands of years. Scientists now support his theory and claim that many of the fairy tales we know and love could be over 4,000 years old. Anthropologist

Jamshid Tehrani and folklorist Sara da Silva say the oldest known fairy tale dates back over 6,000 years to the Bronze Age. This is a time between the Stone Age and Iron Age when humans first started making tools from metal. Dr Tehrani studied the evolution of our early languages. He found strong links between a tale called "The Smith and the Devil" and the Proto-Indo-European language - an ancient common language that dates to around 6,000 years ago.

The two scientists analysed 275 tales for elements of culture that existed before modern languages like English, French and Italian. They say well-known tales like "Beauty and the Beast" and "Rumpelstiltskin" are at least 4,000 years old. Dr Tehrani said: "It's remarkable that these stories have survived so long without being written down. They are older than the English language and would have been first told in a language that is now extinct." Many of the fairy tales we know today were first written down in the 17th century. Dr Tehrani says the new findings suggest that: "A substantial number of magical tales have existed in Indo-European oral traditions long before they were written down."

Sources: [independent.co.uk](http://independent.co.uk) / [sciencenews.org](http://sciencenews.org) / [bbc.com](http://bbc.com)

## Writing

Some people think fairy tales are important, while others don't. Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

## Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

*famous / collector / theory / fairy tale / Stone Age / tools / metal / evolution / links / elements / culture / remarkable / survived / language / extinct / substantial / oral*

## True / False

- A man called Wilhelm Grimm said fairy tales were 20,000 years old. T / F
- Scientists say the oldest fairy tale is around 6,000 years old. T / F
- The Bronze Age is before the Iron Age and after the Stone Age. T / F
- The world's oldest known fairy tale is about the devil. T / F
- Scientists looked at 2,750 fairy tales in their research. T / F
- The fairy tale 'Beauty and the Beast' is less than 4,000 years old. T / F
- The earliest fairy tales were told in English. T / F
- Most fairy tales were written down before they were spoken. T / F

## Synonym Match

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. suggested   | a. traces        |
| 2. support     | b. development   |
| 3. theory      | c. considerable  |
| 4. evolution   | d. back          |
| 5. common      | e. extraordinary |
| 6. elements    | f. widespread    |
| 7. remarkable  | g. proposed      |
| 8. extinct     | h. spoken        |
| 9. substantial | i. vanished      |
| 10. oral       | j. hypothesis    |

## Discussion – Student A

- What do fairy tales teach us?
- Why are the same fairy tales told in many different cultures?
- What do you know about the fairy tale 'Beauty and the Beast'?
- Why are fairy tales good for people?
- What do you know about the early history of your language?
- At what age should people stop reading fairy tales?
- Who is your favourite fairy tale character and why?
- What questions would you like to ask the scientists?

## Phrase Match

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. fairy tales dated back                  | a. survived so long        |
| 2. the fairy tales we know                 | b. language                |
| 3. when humans first started making        | c. is now extinct          |
| 4. Dr Tehrani studied the evolution        | d. magical tales           |
| 5. an ancient common                       | e. tools from metal        |
| 6. culture that existed                    | f. known tales             |
| 7. well-                                   | g. thousands of years      |
| 8. It's remarkable that these stories have | h. before modern languages |
| 9. first told in a language that           | i. of our early languages  |
| 10. A substantial number of                | j. and love                |

## Discussion – Student B

- How important are fairy tales?
- What fairy tales are important in your culture?
- What fairy tales did you like as a kid?
- What do you think about what you read?
- What do you think that fairy tales are over 4,000 years old?
- Do you think it's OK that Disney makes movies of fairy tales?
- Are fairy tales still being written? Do you know any modern ones?
- What are the similarities between many fairy tales?

## Spelling

- The famous 19th-century fairy tale letoorcld
- Grimm tsdeggeus fairy tales
- Scientists now support his oyhetr
- gptsohaintroo Jamshid Tehrani
- the loouitevn of our early languages
- an ncitnea common language
- The two scientists seldaayn 275 tales
- neeltesm of culture that existed before
- It's aarbrlmkee that these stories have survived
- first told in a language that is now ctxinet
- A tiaubltrasns number of magical tales
- existed in Indo-European oral insartiodt

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. j	4. b	5. f
6. a	7. e	8. i	9. c	10. h

## Role Play

### Role A – Fairy godmother

You think a fairy godmother is most important for a fairy tale. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as good. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): a happy ending, a moral message or a topical world issue.

### Role B – A happy ending

You think a happy ending is most important for a fairy tale. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as good. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): fairy godmother, a moral message or a topical world issue.

### Role C – A moral message

You think a moral message is most important for a fairy tale. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as good. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): a happy ending, fairy godmother or a topical world issue.

### Role D – A topical world issue

You think a topical world issue is most important for a fairy tale. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as good. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): a happy ending, a moral message or fairy godmother.

## Speaking – Essentials

Rank these with your partner. Put the most essential things for a fairy tale at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                     |                                 |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| • a fairy godmother | • a topical world issue         |
| • love              | • a moral message               |
| • an evil person    | • possibility for a Disney film |
| • a happy ending    | • a talking animal              |

### Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	T	d	T	e	F	f	F	g	F	h	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.