

Introduction



Some years ago, I got the idea of putting together a book of short stories by different children's book authors. Wouldn't it be interesting, I thought, to see what would happen if everyone was asked to write about the same premise? I was certain that no two stories would be the same. The book, *Birthday Surprises*, proved me right. Despite the same features in the plots, each author brought an original voice and slant to his or her tale.

It worked once. Would it work again? I thought long and hard in search of another

premise, one that would surprise my readers and intrigue the authors who participated in the collection. In discussion with editor Sarah Ketchersid, we came up with the phrase “I fooled you.” Each author was asked to include this sentence in his or her story. The results showed that my first anthology was not a fluke. Here again are ten stories that are totally different despite the common element in each one.

A few weeks after sending out requests for stories but before any actually arrived, I woke one morning with a revelation. By selecting the phrase “I fooled you,” I was not really being original at all; I was reinventing the wheel. Just about every folk and fairy tale—*Aesop’s Fables*, *The Arabian Nights*, the Uncle Remus stories, and many other classic children’s books—contain the act of fooling someone. The sentence

“I fooled you” may not necessarily be included in the story, but it is implied.

Think about it: “Hansel and Gretel” begins with the stepmother plotting to fool the children she plans to lose in the forest. But Hansel fools the stepmother after he overhears her scheming and slips outdoors and fills his pockets with pebbles. He drops these along the route the next day so that he and Gretel can find their way home. That night, the stepmother fools Hansel by locking the door so he can’t get a new supply of pebbles. He then uses breadcrumbs instead, but they are eaten by birds. Lost in the woods, Hansel and Gretel find the witch’s house, built of cakes, cookies, and candies to fool lost children, whom she then captures to eat. But in the end, the biggest “I fooled you” is played out by Hansel when he is encaged and lets the witch feel

a twig, which she thinks is his finger. It's so skinny that she continues to feed him in hopes of fattening him up. In the end, of course, Hansel is triumphant when he pushes the witch into the oven in which she had planned to roast him.

Similarly, tricks are played on the bad guy—be it witch, wolf, ogre, elf, or troll—in “The Three Little Pigs,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” “The Three Billy Goats Gruff,” and many others. Even the most famous book for children from the nineteenth century, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, is an “I fooled you” story, because author Lewis Carroll reveals to us that it was all a dream. He fooled us! And more recently, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* also turns out to be an act of Max's imagination and not some exotic

kingdom ruled by fantastic creatures. He fooled us, too.

Think about it. I bet you'll come up with other examples where "I fooled you" is a part of the story. And of course, sit down and read the stories included here. I hope you enjoy them all. No fooling!

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