

TEXT	'THE SIX SWANS' from <i>THE YELLOW FAIRY BOOK</i> (1889–1913)
AUTHOR	Andrew Lang
THEMES	Family (units 4, 20), places (unit 8), clothes, materials (unit 9), nature (unit 15), animals (unit 16)
VOCABULARY	Emotions, nature, animals, strange places, good and evil
WRITING	Students write the end of the story.
SPEAKING	Conversations between characters

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Andrew Lang's anthologies of folk tales and fairy tales appeared in 25 collections published between 1889 and 1913. Lang was a writer and critic and much of the editorial work on the series was done by his wife, Leonora Blanche Alleyne. There was great interest in recovering these kinds of tales in the 19th century, as witnessed by the influence of the brothers Grimm. Today such tales can sometimes be seen as reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes. In the 19th century they were often criticised for their brutality and amorality. Lang's books played a very important role in making this kind of literature accepted and appreciated, establishing traditional tales as an important literary genre. Their continued popularity is evidenced in the *Shrek* movies and film versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*, whilst fairy tales have influenced serious contemporary writers such as Angela Carter.

WARMER

Using an online source like 'Creative Commons' (images), find different fairy tale illustrations/film stills/book covers, etc. Ask students in pairs or small groups to discuss what they think is happening in the pictures and which they think looks most interesting. Each group presents their ideas to the class (see below).

MIXED ABILITY

If this is a group activity, appoint two of the stronger students as note-takers during the discussion. Weaker students can express their preferences but the stronger ones will have the job of presenting the group's ideas to the rest of the class.

ABOUT YOU

Use the discussion questions to introduce the literary theme of turning people into animals, and forests as sinister, threatening settings. Elicit examples if possible. e.g. **animals:** Greek myths, *The Witches* by Roald Dahl, *The Chronicles of Narnia* stories by C.S. Lewis, etc; **forests:** *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Little Red Riding Hood* (traditional), etc.

After reading the introduction, ask for suggestions about how the idea of changing people into animals, and forests as a setting might be part of this story.

1 After reading the text, students work in pairs and discuss their answers to the question (he goes to visit his children and she goes to see why he is going to the forest). This could then be turned into a mini-conversation between the king and queen.

2

Possible answers

- 1 She paid the king's servants for information.
- 2 She made white shirts because swans are white.
- 3 The girl did not run to meet the queen because she was worried she was not a good person.
- 4 The king was worried, upset and sad.
- 5 Ask for suggestions.

VOCABULARY

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Answers

- 1 stepmother 2 spell 3 thread 4 lonely
- 5 servants

4

Answers

- 1 E I was curious about how to bake bread.
- 2 D They don't pay their servants much money.
- 3 A An evil old man lived alone in the wood.
- 4 B The old castle was a very lonely place.
- 5 C My stepmother makes us wonderful cookies.

WRITING

5 This can be done as homework or as a class collaborative writing activity. The latter first involves agreeing on which option to develop and then deciding what happens and how to express the ending. Encourage students to add some direct speech to their endings.

SPEAKING

6

MIXED ABILITY

You can allocate the conversations. In a class of 30, three pairs work on each conversation but initially as a group. This helps weaker students reinforce the language they use before performing the conversation. Then form three groups of ten so that they are made up of one pair from each conversation. They perform their conversation for the rest of the group.