

**WHO
WROTE
THAT?**

Gail Carson Levine

- Ella
Enchanted
- Fairest
- Dave
at Night



FOREWORD Kyle Zimmer
President, First Book

Dennis Abrams

Gail Carson Levine



WHO WROTE THAT?

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

JANE AUSTEN

AVI

JUDY BLUME

BETSY BYARS

BEVERLY CLEARY

ROBERT CORMIER

BRUCE COVILLE

ROALD DAHL

CHARLES DICKENS

THEODOR GEISEL

WILL HOBBS

ANTHONY HOROWITZ

GAIL CARSON LEVINE

C.S. LEWIS

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BARBARA PARK

GARY PAULSEN

TAMORA PIERCE

EDGAR ALLAN POE

BEATRIX POTTER

PHILIP PULLMAN

MYTHMAKER:

THE STORY

OF J.K. ROWLING

MAURICE SENDAK

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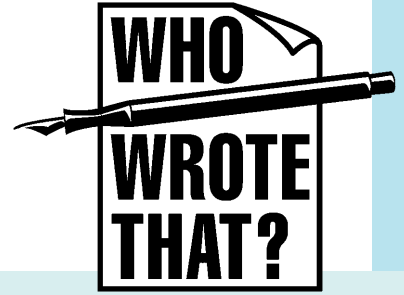
STRATEMEYER

E.B. WHITE

LAURA INGALLS

WILDER

JANE YOLEN



Gail Carson Levine

Dennis Abrams

**Foreword by
*Kyle Zimmer***

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FOREWORD BY
KYLE ZIMMER
PRESIDENT, FIRST BOOK

HUMANITY IS POWERED by stories. From our earliest days as thinking beings, we employed every available tool to tell each other stories. We danced, drew pictures on the walls of our caves, spoke, and sang. All of this extraordinary effort was designed to entertain, recount the news of the day, explain natural occurrences—and then gradually to build religious and cultural traditions and establish the common bonds and continuity that eventually formed civilizations. Stories are the most powerful force in the universe; they are the primary element that has distinguished our evolutionary path.

Our love of the story has not diminished with time. Enormous segments of societies are devoted to the art of storytelling. Book sales in the United States alone topped \$26 billion last year; movie studios spend fortunes to create and promote stories; and the news industry is more pervasive in its presence than ever before.

There is no mystery to our fascination. Great stories are magic. They can introduce us to new cultures or remind us of the nobility and failures of our own; inspire us to greatness or scare us to death; but above all, stories provide human insight on a level that is unavailable through any other source. In fact, stories connect each of us to the rest of humanity not just in our own time, but also throughout history.

This special magic of books is the greatest treasure that we can hand down from generation to generation. In fact, that spark in a child that comes from books became the motivation for the creation of my organization, First Book, a national literacy program with a simple mission: to provide new books to the most disadvantaged children. First Book has been at work in hundreds of communities for over a decade. Every year, children in need receive millions of books through our organization, and millions more are provided through dedicated literacy institutions across the United States and around the world. In addition, groups of people dedicate themselves tirelessly to working with children to share reading and stories in every imaginable setting from schools to the streets. Of course, this Herculean effort serves many important goals. Literacy translates to productivity and employability in life and many other valid and even essential elements. But at the heart of this movement are people who love stories, love to read, and want desperately to ensure that no one misses the wonderful possibilities that reading provides.

When thinking about the importance of books, there is an overwhelming urge to cite the literary devotion of great minds. Some have written of the magnitude of the importance of literature. Amy Lowell, an American poet, captured the concept when she said, “Books are more than books. They are the life, the very heart and core of ages past, the reason why men lived and worked and died, the essence and quintessence of their lives.” Others have spoken of their personal obsession with books, as in Thomas Jefferson’s simple statement: “I live for books.” But more compelling, perhaps, is

the almost instinctive excitement in children for books and stories.

Throughout my years at First Book, I have heard truly extraordinary stories about the power of books in the lives of children. In one case, a homeless child, who had been bounced from one location to another, later resurfaced—and the only possession that he had fought to keep was the book he was given as part of a First Book distribution months earlier. More recently, I met a child who, upon receiving the book he wanted, flashed a big smile and said, “This is my big chance!” These snapshots reveal the true power of books and stories to give hope and change lives.

As these children grow up and continue to develop their love of reading, they will owe a profound debt to those volunteers who reached out to them—a debt that they may repay by reaching out to spark the next generation of readers. But there is a greater debt owed by all of us—a debt to the storytellers, the authors, who have bound us together, inspired our leaders, fueled our civilizations, and helped us put our children to sleep with their heads full of images and ideas.

WHO WROTE THAT? is a series of books dedicated to introducing us to a few of these incredible individuals. While we have almost always honored stories, we have not uniformly honored storytellers. In fact, some of the most important authors have toiled in complete obscurity throughout their lives or have been openly persecuted for the uncomfortable truths that they have laid before us. When confronted with the magnitude of their written work, we can forget that writers are people. They struggle through the same daily indignities and dental appointments, and they experience the intense joy and bottomless despair that

many of us do. Yet, somehow they rise above it all to weave a powerful thread that connects us all. It is a rare honor to have the opportunity that these books provide to share the lives of these extraordinary people. Enjoy.



British artist Richard Redgrave created the above illustration, called “Cinderella About to Try on the Glass Slipper,” sometime in the 1800s. The fairy tale of Cinderella has endured over time and across cultures; author Gail Carson Levine’s take on it, Ella Enchanted, became a popular book for young girls.

Fairy Tales Old and New

FAIRY TALES ARE much more than stories of princes and princesses, ogres and dragons, or loves lost and won. Fairy tales help shape how we see ourselves and the world around us. Children learn how to conquer their own fears and apprehensions by reading about the adversities that the stories' heroes and heroines must overcome. The reader, just like the characters in the tales, learns how to emerge from childhood to adulthood.

In his classic work *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim argued that fairy tales are an essential part of growing up. He explained:

Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his identity and calling, and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further. Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one's reach despite adversity—but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous [lacking in courage] and narrow-minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence—if an even worse fate does not befall them.¹

In other words, children use the conflicts, troubles, and quests described in the stories as examples of how to live their lives. Of course, this does not apply only to the older, classic fairy tales. Harry Potter is a contemporary example of a character who shows courage and bravery when he faces evil. This illustrates that the themes in such stories are timeless.

Historically, fairy tales developed in large part to serve as moral lessons for their readers. Today's fairy tales originally existed in a much simpler form, as folktales. These versions were not written down because, in the early societies in which many tales originated, very few people knew how to read. Instead, these tales were passed down orally from generation to generation, and they generally became more complex as time passed. Folktales were a popular form of entertainment. Professional storytellers told stories for money, teachers told them to their students, and mothers told them to their children. Folktales were told as stories, recited as poetry, or sometimes even

performed as songs. In whatever form they were told, they were intended to be both entertaining and informative. Life was difficult then and conditions were rough, so stories of children who starved and parents who had to abandon their children in the woods (as in *Hansel and Gretel*) “showed the importance of self-reliance and living by one’s own wits.”² Interestingly, these early tales did not feature passive and fragile women, as many of their later versions did. In these stories, everyone had to be strong in order to survive.

In seventeenth-century France, the wealthy aristocracy began to collect and write down these folktales, making them more literary in the process. At the same time, the stories began to reflect the morals and illustrate the qualities that upper-class children were expected to have in that society. French writer Charles Perrault (1623–1703) was the first to write down stories such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Cinderella*.

As author Jack Zipes explained, these stories were written to teach “proper young girls” how to behave. Similarly, stories like *Puss in Boots* and *Hop O’ My Thumb* were written to provide examples for young boys. The lesson of *Sleeping Beauty*, for example, is that the heroine has to be patient and wait 100 years for a prince to bring her back to life. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, the reader learns that good girls are pretty, polite, and never talk to strangers; otherwise, a wolf will attack them. (The wolf is a metaphor, a symbolic representation, for male sexual aggression.) In *Cinderella*, perhaps the most famous fairy tale of all, hard work, sweetness, and kindness are rewarded. It is clear from the story, however, that these attributes are not quite enough: Before she is rewarded, the girl must also be clean and well dressed.

The story of Cinderella has been popular throughout time in a wide variety of cultures. In fact, one of the earliest known versions of the tale, written by Tuan Ch'eng-shih in China around A.D. 850–860, is more than 1,000 years old. In his version, the heroine has a magical fish as a helper, and it is a golden shoe, not a glass slipper, that identified her to the prince who wants to marry her. Charles Perrault wrote the version of Cinderella's story that is most familiar to modern readers. It is believed that when Perrault referred to Cinderella's shoes, which were used to identify her as the prince's true love, he confused the French word *vair* ("fur") used in the earlier oral versions of the story with the word *verre* ("glass"). That may be how the tradition of the glass slipper was born.

Other versions of the story are slightly different, as well. The Brothers Grimm, German authors who compiled many of the traditional German folktales in their book, *Children's and Household Tales* (otherwise known as Grimm's Fairy Tales), wrote a version that also preaches the values of work, cleanliness, and diligence. Their story was called "Aschenputtel" or "Ash Girl," but unlike Perrault's version, there is no fairy godmother. Instead, there is a magic tree planted on the grave of the main character's mother. Of course, in Walt Disney's animated version of the story, Cinderella not only has a fairy godmother, but two mice to help her as well!

There is a long and honorable line of authors who told and retold the story of Cinderella. Gail Carson Levine joined this tradition with the publication of her first book, *Ella Enchanted*. In her other books, such as *The Fairy's Mistake*, *Princess Sonora and the Long Sleep*, *The Two Princesses of Bamarre*, and *Fairy Dust and the Quest for the Egg*, Levine has taken the plots and themes of other



Although getting her first book published took several years and many tries, Gail Carson Levine (above) has become one of the most popular authors for children and young adults. Many of her books are modern twists on classic fairy tales, ensuring their lasting appeal.

classic fairy tales and made them relevant to today's readers. In doing so, she has made them her own.

Levine was drawn to the classic fairy tales as a child, so it was natural that she would turn to them for inspiration

when she began her career as a writer. When asked in an interview why she wrote about fairy tales, Levine said,

Fairy tales are timeless. Their themes touch our cores, which doesn't seem to change. *Hansel and Gretel*, for example, is about abandonment. *Cinderella* is about being unloved and unappreciated. *Snow White* is about jealousy. Writers write about this primal stuff in every form of fiction—realistic contemporary, historical, mystery, and space-age science fiction. In a way, some fairy tales come close to modern gadgetry. We have jet planes, but fairy tales have seven-league boots that go twenty-one miles in a step. We have micro-wave meals, but fairy tales have tablecloths that set themselves and provide food endlessly. We have genetic engineering that can put a mouse gene into an elephant, but fairies can turn a mouse into an elephant. I love to play with the magical elements, to imagine how it feels to take a step in seven-league boots, or how it feels to turn into a toad or to have snakes slithering out of your throat.³

It is her ability to step into the thoughts and feelings of her characters, even in a fairy tale setting, that sets Levine apart from traditional fairy tale authors. These authors

Did you know...

Did you know that, in the original Brother's Grimm version of *Cinderella*, the evil stepsisters are horribly punished for their cruelty? Unlike in some tamer versions, at Cinderella's wedding, doves dive down and peck the stepsisters' eyes out, leaving them blind for the rest of their lives.

tended to describe their heroes and heroines from the outside, with very little thought to examining their feelings and motivations.

Given Levine's great success, it is rather difficult to believe that she did not plan to be a writer. Although she was interested in art and drawing from an early age, she earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy in college. After college, Levine worked for the government of the State of New York for almost 30 years. She worked for the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Social Services. During this time, Levine continued to take classes in drawing and painting until she finally realized that writing, for children in particular, was her true calling.

Even once she had made the decision to become a writer, success did not come easily. It took Levine years to find a publisher. As she recalled in an interview:

It took me nine years to get anything published. At the beginning I mostly wrote picture books, which were rejected by every children's book publisher in America. The first book of mine to be published was *Ella Enchanted* and not one, but two publishers wanted it. That day, April 17, 1996, was one of the happiest in my life.⁴

How did Levine do it? It is extremely difficult for an aspiring writer to be rejected by publishers, to feel unappreciated, or to feel simply not good enough. How did Levine keep going? How did Gail Carson Levine go from being a social services worker to one of the most popular and beloved children's writers of today? Are there such things as real-life fairy tales?



When she was a child, Gail became attached to the story of Peter Pan—she even thought of Peter as her first boyfriend. Above, the villainous Captain Hook is surrounded by Peter, Wendy, and the Lost Boys.

Growing Up Creative in New York City

GAIL CARSON WAS born on September 17, 1947, in New York City. Her father, David Carasso, had changed his name to David Carson, to make it sound like he was a “real American.” David’s mother died as a result of complications from childbirth when he was only a few months old. His father, Abraham, died of gangrene from a cut he had gotten while working as a carpenter. So, David was sent at a young age (Levine was never sure exactly how old he was), along with his older brother, Sam, and his younger half-brother, Leo, to live in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in the Harlem section of New York City. Her