

The Little Match Girl

Hans Christian Andersen (Danish poet and author), 1845.

The story: <https://www.gordongetty.com/images/documents/174/Little%20Match%20Girl-Text.pdf>

Yet another Victorian tale of poverty for Christmas?... Why?

Context:

- Industrial revolution leading to mass rural to urban migration. Over-population of city areas meant many were in poverty, with unsafe child labour a common practice.
- The wealth gap between rich and poor was huge, with business owners swimming in money and unskilled, manual labourers struggling to get by.
- The 'real' meaning of Christmas - being generous to show you are a 'true' Christian.
- The juxtaposition between Christmas feasting and luxury with poverty is the perfect setting to highlight the message of urban deprivation.

Genre? Fairy tale

What makes a Fairy tale?

- intended for children
- fantastic or magical elements
- sometimes has a moral
- characters - good or bad
- happy ending
- short story and to the point, but idealistic, romanticised and emotional.

Applied to the LMG?

- **Intended for children:** yes
- **fantastic or magical elements:** her dreams/hallucinations/visions
- **sometimes has a moral:** the poor die if we don't look after them. Life is unfair.
- **characters - good or bad:** Father, bad. Grandmother, good. LMG, good.
- **Happy ending:** sort of... LMG goes to heaven and is far happier than anyone on earth. But she is dead.
- **Short story and to the point, but idealistic, romanticised and emotional:** Although romanticised poverty, still is realistic enough for people to relate to the story. During the industrial revolution many, many children were living in cities in abject poverty and regularly died of hunger and hypothermia.

As did his contemporary and (at times...) friend, Charles Dickens, Andersen was wanting to raise awareness of poverty in his writings.

By using the fairy tale format, the contrast highlights the piteous message of the tale, and the lack of hope for those in poverty.

The 'fantastic' dreams are also everyday dreams - for food, warmth and love - highlighting how unattainable these things are for children in poverty, as much as a dragon is for the rich.

Putting pathos into a story

Pathos: the quality that puts emotion into a story, tugs on the heartstrings, and persuades us through our feelings.

How has Andersen put pathos into the story?

Spelling it out - '...the picture of misery', 'poor little girl', 'poor little creature' etc.

Repetition - "poor little" "the match went out" variations of "bright"

Basic description - '...with bare head and naked feet'

Using evidence to explain as much as spelling it out - feet that were 'red and blue with cold', slippers that are ill-fitting hand-me-downs, it must be cold beyond description if a single match feels like 'a large iron stove'

Implication (for an older audience) - hypothermia leads you to hallucinate, as each hallucination gets further from reality, you know she is getting nearer to death.

Adjectives - 'steaming roast goose', 'warm, bright light'

Adverbs - 'sank down', 'snowflakes fell'

Verbs - 'shivering' 'boy seized...' 'huddled' 'drawn' 'beat'

Kicking a dog when it's down - boy running off with her slipper, hallucination dies just before the good bit - eating the goose.

Removing hope - house no warmer than outside, beatings when no matches are sold, lighting a match to keep warm, the matches keep burning out

Juxtaposition - her beauty 'long, fair hair...' with the drab picture we have been given, the light in the windows with the dark outside, colourful hallucinations full of feeling and senses with dull reality that's numb with cold, 'Another match on the wall... The table was covered with a snowy white table-cloth...'

Descriptions for the senses - sight (lights), sound ("scratch"), smell ('savoury smell of roast goose'), touch ('just to warm her fingers', 'stretched out feet as if to warm them'), taste (goose offering its breast up to the little girl)

The date - New Year's Eve

Imagery - reaching for the hallucinations, dead child still holding the matches

Angelic Imagery - "long, fair hair, which hung in curls", religious society, shows her purity, creates a sense of guilt in the reader?

Pathetic Fallacy - "wind howled" etc. (giving inanimate objects and elements, e.g. weather, human emotion to reflect feelings)

Minimal use of dialogue - only hear the girl speak at the very end. - she is a passive part in the story. What happens, happens to her. She is a victim of circumstance with no control over the course of events.

Change of tone of paragraphs - especially at the end, jumps from the girl flying up to heaven, to a newspaper style report of next day. Places it in reality, not just a story.

Find the sentence you think is most pathos laden:

e.g. 'the only one who had ever loved her, and who was now dead'
'pale cheeks and smiling mouth, leaning against the wall; she had been frozen to death'

Film/animated depictions of The Little Match Girl

1)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EeEcp3vvj8k&list=RDQMZqgfnRnW3tk&index=5 - THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL (1937) Color Rhapsody Cartoon (8mins)
Set in 1930s New York City

- Thoughts?
- How does it differ from the written story?
- How has pathos been put into it?
- Does it work for you?
- Why/why not?
- Does the setting make it more or less pathos heavy? (1930s Great Depression - many died due to poverty - audience at the time would have easily been able to relate to it. Modern audiences see it as nostalgic).

2)

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x22k1co> - The Little Matchgirl, Disney (2006) Cartoon (6mins)
Set in Russia

- Thoughts?
- How does it differ from the written story?
- How does it compare to the other cartoon?
- How has pathos been put into it?
- Does it work for you?
- Why/why not?
- Does the setting make any difference to how you relate to it?

3)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JHwQJRnvXY&list=RDQMZqgfnRnW3tk&index=6 : (1.21 - 2.10 mins)

- Thoughts?
- How does it differ from the written story?
- How does it compare to the cartoons?
- How has pathos been put into it?
- Does it work for you?
- Why/why not?

4)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEDXQFXd4xY&t=383s (6.41 - 8 mins)

(Been given a backstory - in this scene a girl is returning a shawl that a rich girl has dropped when they were both in the bakery; rich girl shopping, LMG stealing. Her father is also depicted as an alcoholic and at the end she returns to her mother, rather than grandmother.)

- Thoughts?
- How does it differ from the written story?
- How does it compare to the other cartoons and the other 'live action' clip?
- How has pathos been put into it?
- Does it work for you?
- Why/why not?

Things to consider:

Interpretation of text

- Removing turkey walking with cutlery
- Making the dreams come alive
- Giving a back story - taking audience on a journey
- Character - pretty, vulnerable, likeable, engaging
- How the characters interact with each other
- Juxtaposing things to highlight a message or concept (poverty/opulence, warm light/cold light, warm colours/cold colours etc.)

Atmosphere

- Nostalgic, warm and inviting, cold and hostile, busy, still, fun and joyous etc.

Achieved through...

- Costume
- Props
- Colours (palette)
- Music
- Sounds
- Lighting
- Set
- Long lingering looks, facial expressions
- Camera shots/positioning of characters in the frame

Possible Activities:

- **Pick a sentence from the script and see if you can make it even more pathos heavy than the author.**

- **Re-write the story making it as pathos heavy as possible.**

- **Re-write the story taking out all pathos altogether.**

If you have done a pathos and non-pathos story, compare your two pieces. What difference does it make? Sometimes a story is even more powerful for no added pathos.

- **Write a screen play for the Little Match Girl. Again make it seamlessly pathos heavy. Make your audience cry.**

- **Illustrate the story putting as much emotion into the pictures as possible.**