Cinderella:

when one thing becomes another?

The story of Cinderella has captured our imaginations for centuries. The tale of a young woman living in misfortune, whose circumstances are changed with the help of a lost slipper, is evident in many different cultures. The story has been translated into lots of languages but, with each new translation, the story is adapted for new readers. These new readers will have different backgrounds and cultural traditions. As a result, when translators are thinking about telling the story of Cinderella in a different culture, they must consider whether to change features of the story to suit a new audience.



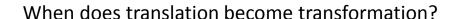
Image by Gustave Doré, Histoires ou contes du temps passé (1864)

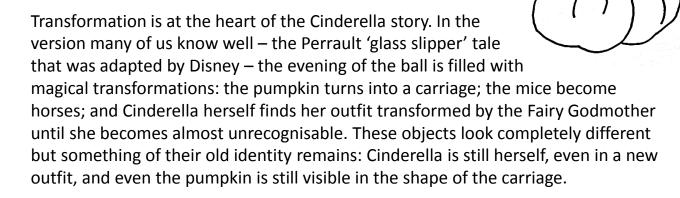












So let's imagine the Fairy Godmother as a kind of translator. She takes some objects or animals and performs an act of magic to turn those objects into something new. In a sense, this is what the translator is doing – waving a magic wand of language to create something new, which still contains a residue of the old. This raises the question: is translation a form of transformation? Does translation just create a copy of the original or something completely new?

Think about or discuss with a friend the following questions:

- Do you think translation is a form of transformation? Does it create a copy or something new?
- Can a film version of Cinderella be considered a 'translation' of the original story?
- If we agree that translation *is* a process of transformation, does it have a responsibility to stick to the original story, or does it have the freedom to make changes? At what point does the original story become unrecognisable?
- Who is the true 'author' of the Cinderella story?



French Cinderella

German Cinderella

Ancient Greek Cinderella

Here are some variants of the Cinderella story. These are just a handful – there are hundreds more all over the world!

The version of Cinderella we are probably most familiar with in the West is Charles Perrault's 1697 version, *Cendrillon*. This was the first version to introduce what are now recognisable elements of the story – the pumpkin, the fairy godmother, and the iconic glass slipper.

The Grimm brothers' 19th-century version of the tale, *Aschenputtel*, is more gruesome. The stepsisters even cut off part of their feet to make them fit the slipper! There is no Fairy Godmother, but Cinderella is helped by a tree that grants her wishes. At the end of the story, birds pluck out the stepsisters' eyes to punish them for their evil deeds.

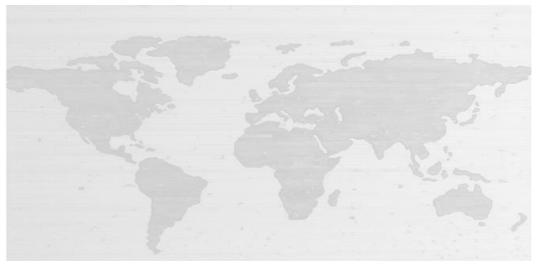
One possible origin story of Cinderella comes from the Ancient Greek geographer Strabo, in 7BC. In this version, an eagle steals the shoe of the Greek courtesan Rhodopis and takes it to the King of Egypt, who launches a search for the shoe's owner. He finds Rhodopis and marries her.

Korean Cinderella

The Korean Cinderella is named Pear Blossom, after a pear tree her father plants when she is born. Her stepmother tries to get rid of her by setting her impossible tasks, such as filling a jar with water even though the jar has a hole in it. Pear Blossom is helped by some animals: a frog, some sparrows, and an ox. Pear Blossom accidentally drops her sandal into a stream, and it is found by a magistrate who decides to marry Pear Blossom.

Caribbean Cinderella

Robert D. San Souci's *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella* is a Creole version of the story. In this, the carriage is made from a breadfruit, rather than a pumpkin, and Cendrillon's slippers are bright pink and embroidered with roses.



Nigerian Cinderella

Obi Onyefulu's *Chinye: A West African Folktale* shares some similarities with Cinderella, but the main character in this story, Chinye, is not motivated by a wish to marry a prince. Sent by her stepmother to fetch water, Chinye is protected from the forest by animals. An old woman asks her to enter a hut where there are gourds on the ground, and pick up the smallest gourd. Chinye does this and finds the gourd is full of jewels. Her jealous stepsister tries to do the same but chooses the biggest gourd, which causes a terrible storm to break. Chinye's stepsister and stepmother lose their possessions in the storm and flee. Chinye uses her new wealth to help her village.

Cambodian Cinderella

The Cambodian Cinderella is called Angkat. The magical creature in this version is a fish Angkat is kind to, which her stepsister kills. The spirit of Virtue tells Angkat to put the fishbones under her mat at night. When she wakes up, golden slippers have appeared in their place. A bird steals one of the slippers and takes it to a prince, who decides the slipper's owner will be his bride. He marries Angkat, but her jealous family scheme to make her come home, and they kill her. Later, a red-leafed banana plant grows up in the very spot where Angkat was killed. Angkat's father chops down the plant and spreads pieces of it around the forest. In every place a piece lands, a bamboo shoot grows. One day, the prince is on a hunting trip in the forest and decides to sleep in the bamboo grove. There, he hears Angkat's voice whispering that she is still with him. Angkat returns to him and her family are banished.

Different Cinderellas

Consider the different ways the Cinderella story has been told in lots of countries around the world. Why do you think this story appeals to so many diverse cultures?

Each version of Cinderella adds new details.

- Why do you think the Caribbean Cinderella's carriage is made from a breadfruit? Why are her slippers pink and not made of glass?
- Why do animals appear in lots of versions?
- What do you think is the significance of the fish in the Korean Cinderella? Or the eagle in the Ancient Greek Cinderella?
- Do you think it is important that the West African Cinderella is not looking for a prince? Is she more of a feminist than the other Cinderellas?

If you had to write a twenty-first-century Cinderella, what changes would you make to modernise the story? Do you think the Cinderella story will still exist in one hundred years? Or one thousand? How might it have changed?

Which ordinary everyday objects could the Fairy Godmother use to make...

- the carriage
- the horses
- the coachmen

Would the Fairy Godmother herself even be a fairy, or could it be some other kind of magical creature?



Cinderella and mistranslation

There is an urban legend that the famous glass slipper in Perrault's French version of the story was a result of a mistranslation.

In French, the word for glass is 'verre', while the old French word for 'fur' was 'vair'. Since the two words sound similar, some people assumed that Perrault meant to refer to a fur slipper, but that this was misheard or wrongly translated. In fact, this assumption is wrong, and the original version by Perrault does mean to refer to a slipper of glass or 'verre' – which adds an extra touch of magic!







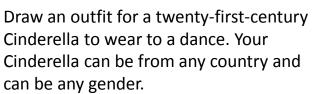












Explain why you have chosen that outfit.

•	•	• •	•	•	•	•	• •	•	•	•	•	•	• •	•	•	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	•	•	••	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	• •	•	•	•
•	• •	• •	•	•	•	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	•	•	• •	•	•	•	• •	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	• •	•	•	• •	•	• •	•	• •	١





