

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Princess and the Pea

By Hans Christian Andersen
1835

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was a Danish writer, best remembered for his popular fairy tales. This fairy tale deals with the tradition of European royalty only letting their children marry people of similar high social class. As you read, note what the prince and his family think makes a good bride.

- [1] Once upon a time there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess; but she would have to be a real princess. He travelled all over the world to find one, but nowhere could he get what he wanted. There were princesses enough, but it was difficult to find out whether they were real ones. There was always something about them that was not as it should be. So he came home again and was sad, for he would have liked very much to have a real princess.



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One evening a terrible storm came on; there was thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down in torrents.¹ Suddenly a knocking was heard at the city gate, and the old king went to open it.

It was a princess standing out there in front of the gate. But, good gracious!² what a sight the rain and the wind had made her look. The water ran down from her hair and clothes; it ran down into the toes of her shoes and out again at the heels. And yet she said that she was a real princess.

"Well, we'll soon find that out," thought the old queen. But she said nothing, went into the bed-room, took all the bedding off the bedstead,³ and laid a pea on the bottom; then she took twenty mattresses and laid them on the pea, and then twenty eider-down⁴ beds on top of the mattresses.

- [5] On this the princess had to lie all night. In the morning she was asked how she had slept.

"Oh, very badly!" said she. "I have scarcely⁵ closed my eyes all night. Heaven only knows what was in the bed, but I was lying on something hard, so that I am black and blue all over my body. It's horrible!"

Now they knew that she was a real princess because she had felt the pea right through the twenty mattresses and the twenty eider-down beds.

Nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that.

1. **Torrent (noun):** a strong, fast-moving stream of water
2. an expression of surprise
3. the frame of a bed upon which the mattress is placed
4. small, soft feathers from the breast of the female eider duck
5. **Scarcely (adverb):** barely, hardly

So the prince took her for his wife, for now he knew that he had a real princess; and the pea was put in the museum, where it may still be seen, if no one has stolen it.

[10] There, that is a true story.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO of the following best explain the themes of this story?
 - A. Royals are so important they should be remembered and honored in museums.
 - B. Royal people are more likely to be extremely sensitive and delicate.
 - C. Older members of royal families are particularly suspicious and sneaky.
 - D. Most people who claim to be royal are actually lying in the hopes of making themselves rich and important.
 - E. People in high social classes often only want their family to marry people in the same respected social class.
 - F. Looks are often deceiving, and often people who are actually royal will look just like anyone else.

2. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the story best support the answer to Part A?
 - A. "but she would have to be a real princess." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "There was always something about them that was not as it should be." (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "The water ran down from her hair and clothes; it ran down into the toes of her shoes and out again at the heels." (Paragraph 3)
 - D. "'Well, we'll soon find that out,' thought the old queen." (Paragraph 4)
 - E. "Nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that." (Paragraph 8)
 - F. "and the pea was put in the museum, where it may still be seen, if no one has stolen it." (Paragraph 9)

3. Which statement best describes the royal family's first reaction to the princess arriving at their home?
 - A. They are surprised by her messy appearance, but do not doubt her royal status.
 - B. They are unsure whether she is actually a princess because of how she looks.
 - C. They are happy that their son has finally found a real princess he can marry.
 - D. They absolutely do not believe that she is a princess and cannot be persuaded she is.

4. How does paragraph 4 contribute to the story's development?
 - A. It shows how the queen is being sneaky and unkind because she does not want her son to get married.
 - B. It shows that the queen does not believe the girl is a real princess, and nothing will convince her that she is.
 - C. It shows that the queen is creative enough to find a way to determine whether or not the girl is a true princess.
 - D. It shows that the queen does not want her son to know how much she cares about his future wife's royal status.

5. How does the princess' reaction to the pea develop the story's plot? Cite evidence from the text in your answer.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. If this story were to be re-written for a modern setting, how do you think it would be different? Are any of the details or themes of the story outdated?
2. Is it okay to judge people based on their appearances, like the prince's family first does when meeting the princess? How can these first impressions cause trouble?
3. Do you think it is fair that the prince's family only wants the prince to marry a princess? Why or why not?
4. In this story, what makes the princess who she is? How does she see her identity versus others?
5. In this story, women are celebrated for being sensitive and delicate. In the context of this story, how do we define the roles of men and women? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.