

Fractured Fairy Tales: Concepts and Applications

Subjects: [Literature](#)

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Fractured fairy tales are adaptive retellings of traditional stories that employ humor, irony, and narrative innovation to transform established meanings. As a distinctive literary genre, these works combine entertainment with subversion, reshaping familiar plots, characters, and morals to engage readers in both imaginative and critical reflection. The genre gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century, when classic tales began to be rewritten to reflect modern cultural values and shifting audience expectations. Through techniques such as parody, reversal, and alternative endings, fractured fairy tales challenge inherited norms while offering renewed interpretive possibilities. Beyond their literary appeal, they have been recognized for their pedagogical importance: their familiarity lowers barriers to reading, while their inventive variations foster creativity, analytical reasoning, and language development. Collectively, these attributes affirm fractured fairy tales as a genre of lasting significance, uniting artistic reinterpretation with educational relevance in ways that continue to enrich both literary and literacy learning.

fractured fairy tale

literary adaptation and reinterpretation

literary education

reading engagement

pedagogical practice

Fractured fairy tales, defined by Cummins as adaptations that employ humor and unexpected twists, have become a prominent literary genre recognized for their engaging and subversive storytelling ^[1]. Cummins' definition underscores these tales as creative reinterpretations of canonical narratives that particularly attract older readers through their playful transformations of characters and plots ^[1]. Building on this, Ermida demonstrated that the combination of humor and narrative sophistication enables fractured fairy tales to captivate learners and serve as effective teaching tools ^[2]. Similarly, Bacchilega incorporated them into classroom contexts, showcasing their flexibility across subjects and their potential to cultivate interpretive and imaginative thinking ^[3].

As reimagined versions of traditional tales, fractured fairy tales hold deep cultural and pedagogical significance by balancing continuity and innovation. Through the interplay of familiarity and novelty, they invite readers to reconsider whether classical stories continue to express universal values and how modern adaptations reframe those meanings for contemporary audiences. This engagement promotes intrinsic motivation and reflective reading, allowing learners to approach moral and cultural questions with renewed curiosity. From an educational standpoint, the recognizable narrative structures of fractured fairy tales can reduce affective barriers and enhance reading enjoyment among language learners ^[4], while multimodal retellings have been shown to strengthen oral and literacy skills ^[5]. Research on fractured fairy tales has developed along two interconnected trajectories: literary analysis and pedagogical practice. Within literary studies, scholars such as Zipes and Joosen have examined

adaptation strategies, including revision, parody, and transformation, as mechanisms for reinterpreting inherited moral and cultural assumptions [6][7]. These approaches demonstrate the genre's versatility and its role in reflecting evolving social and esthetic sensibilities. In education, fractured fairy tales have proven powerful tools for fostering creativity, critical thinking, and sustained reading engagement.

Consequently, this entry synthesizes existing research on fractured fairy tales as a genre that connects literary reinterpretation with educational practice. It examines their defining features, adaptive processes, and pedagogical significance, and explores their narrative, cultural, and linguistic dimensions. The discussion highlights how fractured fairy tales reshape familiar stories to encourage imagination, language awareness, and learner engagement. Drawing on perspectives from literary studies, linguistics, and education, the paper clarifies the continuing relevance of this genre and provides a conceptual foundation for future research on its role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and sustained reading motivation among young readers.

References

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