Introduction:

Thinking back on my own education, I remember one of my greatest difficulties in school to be situating history lessons within my own understanding of the world. The times and places I learned about seemed so distant, so meaningless to my young mind that I could not retain the information, nor could I fully grasp the issues. Questions like, “Who is the ‘good guy’ in this situation?” “Was that decision a good idea?” “What was that leader like as a person?” were the types of inquiries I grappled with as I contemplated entire civilizations that had come and gone before me, as well as the events that unfolded on the world stage before my eyes. As an attempt to help students make creative connections to the world around them, I would like to suggest curriculum that stretches how students perceive historical events by relating them to fairytales. Because students are more familiar with fairytales than they often are with history, overlaying the two will provide an additional structure to which students can relate.

This method has a critical component because it also pushes students to recognize that all history is in fact told, and that linking events to fictional stories is a way to draw out the idea that perspective determines (hi)stories. Using fairytales as metaphors for history encourages students to question how history is retold and to examine what a particular telling reveals and obscures. Questions such as, “who is the hero of this story?” “Who is the villain?” “Would other people see this story the same way?” get at the root of the issue: that any perspective on history is one of many.

I provide one historical/fairytale example here, but this model could be expanded upon in a number of ways. I would encourage teachers to enlarge and change this model as is appropriate for their classrooms. I would like very much to see these transformations-- feel free to email me with lesson plans, stories, pictures, etc. at ljunkin@gmail.com
Cinderella and the Marshall Plan: Two Stories of Transformation

Traditional lessons about the Marshall Plan in the USA champion the American perspective of post-war history. Students are taught that, while Germany and other western European countries were devastated by the war and greatly suffered the effects of it, the United States created a plan that successfully helped those countries recover and become prosperous again. While Stalin and countries in Eastern Europe opposed the Marshall Plan and refused aid, those countries that accepted the aid improved dramatically in the years after the war.

While I am not criticizing this view of the Marshall Plan, it should not be ignored that United States also had its own motives for implementing the Marshall Plan, including that the free market policies greatly benefited the US economy. It should also be said that students should use the metaphor as a tool, but recognize its limits. Not all aspects of the fairytale will easily transfer to history.

Cinderella Metaphor Suggestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character: Fairytale</th>
<th>Character: History</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cinderella</td>
<td>Germany or W. Europe</td>
<td>Needed some assistance to be successful after a period of difficult times. Accepted aid from the USA that transformed the country into an economically competitive nation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stepmother/sisters</td>
<td>Stalin or Soviet Union, Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Did not support US aid to Europe. Had an alternative plan to achieve prosperity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairy Godmother</td>
<td>USA or Truman</td>
<td>“Saved” Europe by providing aid, trade. Facilitated Western Europe’s transformation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prince</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>All of Europe desired prosperity after the war. A growing economy would be enough to sustain these countries through difficult times.</td>
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Lesson Plan Ideas

Marshall Plan/Cinderella:

-Teach about the Marshall Plan using the metaphor of Cinderella. Discuss character motivations in both the fairytale and the historical events. Explain in detail the “transformation” of Western Europe. Have students fill out their own character charts, exploring how characters and historical figures/countries relate.

-Hold a discussion about the fairytale framework and how that particular perspective reveals some aspects of the story and obscures others. Reveal that the characterizations of countries and individuals are typically taught in the same vein as Cinderella. What are the strengths of this approach? What are the weaknesses?

-Look at political cartoons of the Marshall Plan. These cartoons reveal several perspectives of the Plan. Have students take on a perspective and create their own political cartoons about the Marshall Plan. Encourage them to use Cinderella or create their own metaphors in the cartoons.

-Have students break into groups and rewrite the Cinderella story to incorporate other perspectives that match the Marshall Plan (what if Cinderella were culpable? What if the fairy godmother had her own motives for transforming Cinderella?) Pair with a complete history of the Marshall Plan, researched and written by the students.

Looking at the Big Picture:

-Show students various maps of the world that divide the world differently. Ex: political, geographical, demographic, USA-centered, Africa-centered, pre- and post- USSR, etc. Discuss how even what we take for granted can be viewed in many ways.

-Creative mapping project: have students create imaginative maps that embody the Marshall Plan. Ideas include drawing countries in a manner that might illustrate their Cinderellaesque character traits (kindhearted fairy godmother, poor Cinderella, etc), or reconfiguring the layout of countries to help tell the story.
Resources

http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk/lessons/coldwar/coldwar_truman.html

An online diagram for students to fill out after learning about the Marshall Plan. Includes hints, facts for students.

http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/marshall/marsintr.html

An extensive site about the Marshall Plan. See individual pages of the site for maps and political cartoons/propaganda for and against the Marshall Plan. (shown below)