

Motoko's Storywriting Residency

The Adventure of the Wonder Child

Students will write a story based on the plot of "Little Princess Melon", a Japanese folktale in which a child is born in an unusual way and raised by a parent. Later the child disobeys the parent, gets into a trouble, but is rescued at the end.

The Base Story: "Little Princess Melon"

A childless couple finds a big melon, out of which a baby girl is born. She grows up to be a skilled weaver. She also has three bird friends. One day her parents leaves and tells her not to open the door to strangers. Then a monster who copies everything he hears knocks on her door and, out of curiosity, she opens the door. She gets kidnapped by the monster, but is rescued by the three birds and her parents.

Other Helpful Stories

Thumbelina, by Hans Christian Andersen

Pinocchio

Kaguya Hime, the Moon Princess, a Japanese folktale

The Procedure

The sequence of events is divided into twelve parts, which students are guided through. For each part, students should do both writing and illustration. **One important rule: All their ideas must be non-violent. They cannot kill or hurt their characters or try to solve the problem with weapons.** Encourage original, creative ideas.

1. Introduce the character(s) who are going to have the wonder child. Tell where they lived and what they were like. Example: *Once upon a time, there was an old fisherman who always wanted a child. His wife had died a long time ago, and they never had a child. He lived alone in a little hut by the sea.*
2. The character(s) was doing something or on their way to some place on the day they found the child. Explain what they were doing. Example: *One day, he was walking home after he had finished fishing.*
3. Have the character(s) find an object. It can be a fruit, a flower, a ball, or an egg. It could also be a modern machine such as a TV. Inside the object, the character finds a baby. Describe the baby. Example: *On the beach, the old man saw something shining brightly in the sand. He dug it out of the sand. It was a little pink seashell. When he held it in his hand, the seashell became warm, and started to open up. Inside he found a tiny baby girl. She had dark green hair like seaweed, and was very beautiful.*

Suggestion: As an alternative, the parent can create a baby out of wood, clay, snow, etc. and s/he can come to life. A child could also be brought to the parent by a stork, etc.

4. Tell how the character(s) felt, and tell their decision to keep the baby. Also, name the baby. Example: *The old man was very surprised. He thought, "This baby must be a gift from the Dragon King of the Sea." He decided to take good care of the baby. He was very happy finally to have his own child. He named her Princess Pearl.*
5. State that some time has passed, and the baby is a young child now. Tell what the child was like, and what s/he liked to do. Example: *Princess Pearl grew up to be a fine young girl. She loved collecting seashells and building sandcastles, and she went to play on the beach almost every day.*
6. Explain that the parent(s) had to go somewhere one day and leave the child alone at home. Tell that, before they left, they told the child not to do something. (Interdiction) Example: *One day, the old man had to go into town to buy a new fishing net. Before he left he said to Princess Pearl, "Don't go out to the beach today, dear, because a terrible storm might be coming." Princess Pearl promised.*
7. The child is going to disobey the parent(s). Describe the process in which the child comes to the decision to do what s/he is not supposed to do. Example: *After the old man left, Princess Pearl was bored. She said to herself, "There is nothing in the house for me to do. I know that I'm not supposed to go to the beach, but it might be okay if I went and just picked one seashell and build one sandcastle." She went to the beach.*
8. Now the child is going to be in trouble. Describe the situation, and what happens to the child. **Caution: Do not have the parent come home yet.** Example: *When she came to the beach, the sky was dark and ominous. The wind was blowing hard. Princess Pearl decided to pick just one seashell and go home. She saw a little seashell at the edge of the beach. When she tried to pick it up, though, a big wave came and snatched her away into the sea.*

Suggestion: Discuss with students what kind of trouble a child can get into in a story. Some options are

- To be kidnapped by a monster (or a bad person)
- To get lost (in a forest, etc.)
- To lose or break something of value. (a magic ring, etc.)
- To be put under a spell and get transformed into something (a frog, etc.)

Since our stories are to be non-violent, do not allow students to hurt or injure the characters.

9. Describe the trouble further. Have the child character assess the situation. Describe how s/he felt. Example: *Princess Pearl found herself in front of a magnificent sandcastle at the bottom of the sea. She was surprised that she could breathe under the water. Suddenly a huge, blue dragon came out of the castle and shouted, "I am the Dragon King of the Sea! I have captured you, Princess Pearl, because you disobeyed your father and put yourself in danger. I will put you in jail and you will never see your father again!" Then two fish soldiers came out and put her in the sea*

dungeon. Princess Pearl felt terrible. She missed her father so much she started to cry.

10. Now the child must somehow get out of the trouble. Obviously, there are many ways to accomplish this. Some options are:

- The child uses a special skill, ability, or tool to get out of trouble.
- The child is rescued by the parent.
- The child is rescued by some other helpful character(s).
- A magic object is used to save the child.
- Or any combination of the above.

First, either the child plans his/her own escape, or the rescuer becomes aware of the situation and plans out the rescue. Example: *When the old man came home and did not see his daughter, he was very worried. He looked all over for her, but did not find her anywhere. Then he remembered the pink seashell his daughter came out of when she was a baby. He took the seashell out and looked into it. There he saw an image of Princess Pearl crying in the sea dungeon. He decided to go and ask the Dragon King to give back his daughter.*

11. Next the plan has to be executed. If this involves a confrontation with an antagonist (monster, etc.,) make sure that the problem is not solved through violence. The character may:

- Beg or plead with the antagonist
- Negotiate or make trade with the antagonist
- Trick or outsmart the antagonist, or
- Overpower the antagonist in a non-violent way. (sing a song to put him to sleep, etc.)

Example: *The old man went straight to the beach and shouted, "Oh, Great Dragon King! Please give back my daughter!" Suddenly the water parted and the great blue dragon appeared. The old man was scared, but he said, "I love my daughter. Please give her back." The dragon said, "I will let her go if she promises that she will always listen to you from now on." Princess Pearl heard this in the dungeon, and she said, "I promise." Then all of a sudden she was back at the beach with her father.*

12. Now the child has safely returned to the family. Tell how the child and the parent(s) felt. End the story with the lesson the child learned from this experience. Example: *Both Princess Pearl and her father were very happy. Princess Pearl said, "I am sorry I made you worried. I will never break my promise." And they all lived happily ever after.*

After students finish writing, have them go over the stories to make sure that the plot is consistent. They may want to add more details, and/or use figurative language (foreshadowing, simile, etc.) to embellish the stories. Each student can present the final story to his/her class orally or by making a picture book.