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Magically modified Grimm's: Storytelling in the agricultural classroom

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Magically modified Grimm's: Storytelling in the agricultural classroom

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Sustainable Agriculture

Program of Study Committee:
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER 1	ARTIST’S STATEMENT.....1
CHAPTER 2	STORYTELLING AND SCIENCE COMMUNICATION.....3
	“Truth” in the Post-Truth Era..... 5
	The “Industrial” vs. “Sustainable” Rhetoric of Agricultural Communication.....7
CHAPTER 3	STORYTELLING AND AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION.....12
	Agricultural Education in Iowa’s K-12 Schools.....12
	Experiential Learning for the Agricultural Classroom.....15
	From Fairy Tales to <i>The Hunger Games</i> : Teaching Agriculture Through Art.....18
CHAPTER 4	MAGICALLY MODIFIED GRIMM’S (SCRIPT).....23
CHAPTER 5	“FOOD & FAIRY TALES” CURRICULUM OVERVIEW.....60
	Unit Overview.....60
	Week One.....60
	Week Two.....61
	Week Three.....62
	Week Four.....63
	Week Five.....65
REFERENCES.....	66

CHAPTER 1. ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Tammy Stotts breathes deeply and takes in a whiff of the Iowa State Fair: corn dogs, cow droppings, chocolate-drizzled funnel cakes. She reaches across a small plastic table, hands a laminated drawing of an apple to the young boy standing in front of her booth, and asks him where it grows. The child considers his three options: tree, vine, or underground. For Tammy, the answer seems obvious. Yet the boy only scratches his head and picks at his cotton candy. He looks to his mother for help and receives a bewildered frown. She tells the boy to take his time, but he grows impatient and sticks the apple on a vine. Tammy shakes her head and encourages him to try again. This time, the boy buries the apple underground and runs towards the Tilt-a-Whirl before Tammy can reveal the correct answer. And so the pattern goes—the last child affixed a carrot to a tree, the one before pinned a potato to a vine. Having just taken a new position as director of the Iowa Farm to School Program, Tammy takes another deep breath and begins to worry: how do we prevent one of the most thriving and important agricultural states in the country from raising a generation of agriculturally illiterate youth?

Tammy's story has haunted me ever since she first shared it with my Sustainable Agriculture Graduate Colloquium in 2015, as I too believe that children have a basic right to know where and how their food is grown. This is especially important when related to healthy eating—the percentage of children with obesity in the United States has more than tripled since the 1970s (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2017); only two percent of American children consume the recommended daily value of fruits and vegetables (Fruits & Veggies—More Matters, 2017); and one in three children born after the year 2000 will develop diabetes (Associated Press, 2003). To help provide agricultural literacy to young students, I have written “Magically Modified Grimm's,” a comedic fairy tale mash-up set in the world of 21st-century

agriculture. Aimed at K-8 audiences, the play follows Jack, Goldilocks, Hansel, and Gretel as they grow “magically gigantified orbs” sold to them by the mysterious Mr. Wolfe. By combining storytelling, music, dance, and puppetry, the play is an entertaining and educational narrative that aims to spark critical thinking and meaningful dialogue about agriculture among adults and children alike.

The play centers on a number of important agricultural topics such as biotechnology, public health, industrial processing, corporate consolidation, food sovereignty, economic inequality, and social justice. In exploring these components of the food system, my hope is that “Magically Modified Grimm’s” can help provide today’s youth with the knowledge, excitement, and vocabulary needed to discuss some of our nation’s most pressing agricultural concerns. To accomplish this, free performances will be held at the Ames Public Library and Colo-NESCO Community Schools, the latter of which will take place as a part of a sixth grade writing residency that aims to build skills in the areas of writing, literacy, creativity, and critical thinking.

While the main objective of “Magically Modified Grimm’s” is to promote agricultural literacy, many other topics serve as inspiration for the play. In constructing this thesis, I have prefaced the script with two introductory chapters. The first examines how narrative can be used to communicate science and sustainability, while the second provides an overview of Iowa’s educational system, Experiential Learning Theory, and the power of fairy tales to teach children. I then include the “Magically Modified Grimm’s” script, followed by a curriculum overview outlining how the play can be used to meet state learning standards. It has been a pleasure developing this creative project and I look forward to seeing how audiences will react to its message of health, happiness, and hope.

CHAPTER 2. STORYTELLING AND SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

Although 97% of climate scientists find evidence that global warming is caused by human activity (NASA, 2016), at least 20% of U.S. citizens still deny the issue's very existence (Funk & Kennedy, 2016). Additionally, many governments—including the current U.S. administration—choose to ignore scientific findings in support of short-term economic solutions to long-term environmental problems. Often these opinions are born from emotional responses and political allegiances more so than research and facts themselves. Climate change is only one of many controversial topics in which scientific information fails to influence an issue. In the past decade, for example, the benefits of stem cell research, the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and the possible link between vaccinations and autism have all been widely debated. Depending on who you ask, these issues might be real or fake, corporate propaganda or political conspiracies, debunked urban myths or inarguable scientific truths.

Some researchers assert that citizens and their governments ignore scientific advice because researchers do not engage with the political process and fail to “recognize that poor scientific decisions in politics do not necessarily result from a lack of understanding. They are, rather, a failure of scientists to communicate their message effectively in what is ultimately a political, not a scientific, arena” (Kassen, 2011, p. 153). To correct this, scientists can use an engagement model comprised of two-way interactions, careful listening, and immersive participation to better advocate on behalf of their research (Corneliussen, 2012). Instead of communicating with the “usual language of evidence and arguments that are used—with varying degrees of certainty—to support models and theories,” (Katz, 2013, p. 1045), scientists can share their findings via personal testimonials, fictional entertainments, or any other narrative form that

involves “a temporal sequence of events influenced by the actions of specific characters” (Dahlstrom & Ho, 2012, p. 593).

Using narrative to communicate science—regardless of its intended connection to public engagement, political advocacy, or both—is highly controversial. At the heart of this debate is the belief that storytelling obstructs communication of important information by distorting data and other experimental complexities in a manner that favors a story more than the truth. As Yarden Katz (2013) writes:

Great storytellers embellish and conceal information to evoke a response in their audience. Inconvenient truths are swept away, and marginalities are spun to make a point more spectacular. A storyteller would plot the data in the way most persuasive rather than most informative or representative. Storytelling encourages the unrealistic view that scientific projects fit a singular narrative. Biological systems are difficult to measure and control, so nearly all experiments afford multiple interpretations—but storytelling actively denies this fact of science. (p. 1045)

Many researchers also worry that using narrative to communicate science can cause irrevocable damage to their work. Since the very basis of science is rooted in evidence-based communication, making use of the narrative pathway might strip one of credibility, or worse, injure the field of science as a whole (Dahlstrom & Ho, 2012). For example, climate scientist Tamsin Edwards (2013) believes that advocacy conducted by her peers has directly harmed trust in science, as climate change denial within the public is propelled by the notion that environmental activism influences how scientists gather and interpret information. By leaving

the field of climate science open to criticism, Edwards argues, “We risk our credibility, our reputation for objectivity, if we are not absolutely neutral” (para. 5).

Despite these criticisms, research suggests that there are numerous benefits in using narrative to communicate science. First and foremost, at a cognitive level, narratives represent the default mode of human thought that shapes decision-making (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Research also shows that narrative and evidence-based thoughts act separately from one another, with narrative text read twice as fast and recalled twice as well as evidence-based text. Narrative communication also generates self-efficacy, builds interest and engagement in a topic, increases comprehension, and boosts the likelihood of persuading an audience to make belief changes (Dahlstrom & Ho, 2012).

“Truth” in the Post-Truth Era

Regardless of whether or not one supports using narrative to communicate science, an inarguable aspect of storytelling is that narratives can be hard to counter. By ascribing their own values to real-world counterparts, narratives create a sense of reality that no one is obligated to defend. In turn, it is difficult to argue against their claims, and the speed and ease at which modern technology allows stories to disseminate only amplifies their influence (Dahlstrom & Ho, 2012). In 2016, for example, the U.S. Presidential Election and other contentious events across the globe made it clear that feelings matter more than facts, allowing some politicians to face little, if any, resistance when using falsehoods to gain power in a “post-truth” world. With such immense changes in how knowledge transfers from media to the public, along with growing distrust not only in science but other long-held institutions that support social infrastructure, “the power of truth as a tool for solving society’s problems could be lastingly reduced” (“The Post-Truth World,” 2016, para. 9).

“Post-truth” would not have emerged as Oxford Dictionaries 2016 Word of the Year without the growing influence of social media. According to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of U.S. adults now get their news on social media and a fifth do so often (“The Post-Truth World,” 2016). A crucial element of social media is the process of “homophilous sorting” that enables like-minded people to form clusters, as “individuals with shared interests are far more likely to find each other or converge around a source of information online than offline” (“The Post-Truth World,” 2016, para. 25). Social media also enables members of so-called “thought bubbles” to reinforce each other’s beliefs by shutting out contradictory information and taking collective action with little foresight (“The Post-Truth World,” 2016).

Perhaps more troubling is that fact that Facebook, Google, and other technologies rely on meticulously designed algorithms to highlight news stories that align with an individual’s online history, “which means that the version of the world we encounter every day in our own personal stream has been invisibly curated to reinforce our pre-existing beliefs” (Viner, 2016, para. 25). This “filter bubble” fails to challenge our worldview, as we are less likely to encounter facts that disprove false information shared by others (Viner, 2016). Furthermore, Facebook—which now has more than 1.9 billion users—and other social networks see themselves first and foremost as technological entrepreneurs, not media companies. As such, the journalistic notions of responsibility and integrity are continually pushed aside in favor of developing artificial intelligence tools that dictate how users receive information, no matter how inaccurate those stories might be (“The Post-Truth World,” 2016).

This does not mean that truth no longer exists. It does mean, however, “that we cannot agree on what those truths are, and when there is no consensus about the truth and no way to

achieve it, chaos soon follows” (Viner, 2016, para. 19). Quite literally, we now have entire countries in which one half of the population knows little about the other half’s way of life, so much so that “instead of strengthening social bonds, or creating an informed public, or the idea of news as a civic good, a democratic necessity, [social media] creates gangs, which spread instant falsehoods that fit their views, reinforcing each other’s beliefs, driving each other deeper into shared opinions, rather than established facts” (Viner, 2016, para. 39).

The “Industrial” vs. “Sustainable” Rhetoric of Agricultural Communication

Why, then, am I arguing for the beneficial use of narrative in a post-truth world? As a science communicator located at an internationally renowned agricultural research center, I understand firsthand the importance of relaying new information regarding technology, policy, and profitability to both farmers and consumers. However, I also believe that we must urgently craft stories of creativity and resourcefulness that offer tangible solutions regarding agricultural and its ties to climate change and other issues of social and environmental justice. This is hard to achieve, however, as U.S. agricultural policy is often discussed using divisive rhetoric that supports only one of two perceived systems—“conventional” agriculture or “sustainable” agriculture—allowing little room for dialogue, compromise, or understanding in an industry that is substantially more than a two-sided issue. Quite simply, agricultural communication has existed in a post-truth vacuum for generations, and for better or worse, stories remain a driving force in how individuals view their respective roles within our shared food system.

Those involved in agriculture often don’t even speak the same language. A popular definition of sustainability is one in which a perfectly balanced model encompasses the three components of economic, environmental, and social well-being; rarely, however, do these three factors hold equal weight in dictating agricultural decisions. For example, many farmers

understandably value sustainability solely from an economic perspective, as the business of agriculture ensures the livelihoods of themselves and their families. Famed author Aldo Leopold (1949) examines this notion in his seminal text *A Sand County Almanac*, arguing that U.S. farmers often ignore ecological health and the values of the greater community in favor of profit and protectionism. As a result, “there is as yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land... is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (p. 203).

These agrarian values are deep-rooted in productionism, “the philosophy that emerges when production is taken to be the sole norm for ethically evaluating agriculture” (Thompson, 1995, p. 48). When European settlers first rushed to the New World for “errands into the wilderness’ that combined civil, religious, and mercantile aspirations,” (Thompson, 1995, p. 52), hard work could truly lead to greater wealth and social advancement. Later, as the Industrial Revolution changed the dynamics of Western society, factory workers were distanced from the visible fruits of their production. In contrast, farmers produced tangible harvests that publicly legitimized their efforts and established their occupation as one “both romanticized and privileged over other forms of labor” (Allen, 2004, p. 120). Likewise, productionism was reinforced by the myth of the garden—just as God tended the Garden of Eden, so must a farmer control, manipulate, alter, and tame the surrounding landscape.

Consequently, “the myth of the garden is arguably the most potent source of misunderstanding between agricultural leaders and environmentalists,” (Thompson, 1995, p. 57) as some modern farmers no longer see the value in land conservation and preservation. This means that individuals and groups that prioritize environmental sustainability have failed to

project their vision more than any other set of agricultural advocates. As Donella H. Meadows (1994) notes:

Most people associate environmentalism with restriction, prohibition, regulation, and sacrifice. Though it is rarely articulated directly, the most widely shared picture of a sustainable world is one of tight and probably centralized control, low material standard of living, and no fun... Whatever the reason, hardly anyone envisions a sustainable world as one that would be wonderful to live in. The best goal most of us who work toward sustainability offer is the avoidance of catastrophe. We promise survival and not much more. That is a failure of vision.
(p. 2)

As a result, agriculture is treated as an economic commodity made more efficient and profitable by modern technology; the myth of the garden thus pervades in maintaining a system of productionism rather than conservation. However, monoculture commodities diminish ecological diversity and threaten human resilience in times of environmental crises. The food system also relies on exploitation and oppression in which the labor of one social group benefits another, with these relations “produced and reproduced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves” (Young, 2004, p. 49-50). As a result, capitalism has granted power to a dominant American viewpoint of individualism, merit, and self-reliance that prioritizes profits and neglects basic human rights, thus making it difficult for a sustainable agricultural system that values ecological preservation, social justice, and food security to emerge.

Furthermore, we live in an era of passivity and cynicism in which we have devalued human life to the point that our fears are more widely discussed than our dreams. In this regard, “vision is not only missing almost entirely from policy discussions; it is missing from our whole culture. We talk about our fears, frustrations, and doubts endlessly, but we talk only rarely and with embarrassment about our dreams” (Meadows, 1994, p. 1). Yet in rethinking both our individual and collective viewpoints, we can effectively begin to challenge the corporate systems that propagate disempowerment and fear. Perhaps the best approach is to engage with a sense of citizen science in which:

Instead of trying to convince the public that we already “know” all we need to know to solve the problems of our food and agriculture enterprises (especially as we face incredible new challenges in our future), we should inform the public about the many black cats that are still out there. Such an approach would emphasize the unknown, the puzzles still waiting to be solved, which could create opportunities for innovative conversations... that could be immensely productive to address the problems we face with current and future food systems.

(Kirschenmann, 2013, p. 6)

In summary, narrative is the most accessible, relevant, and persuasive mode of thought for adults and children—the fact that we now live in a post-truth society in which facts, figures, and statistics aren’t effective for mass communication only reinforces this notion. While I do not support fabricating information or misleading the public in my role as artist and advocate, I believe in finding the “emotional truth” of a story, that elusive nugget of magic that can spur audiences to change their minds and take action. Art allows us to envision a better world and create a definition of sustainability that moves beyond the promise of mere survival, and in a

world in which it seems increasingly more difficult to listen to one another, we desperately need tales of hope and resilience that can bring us closer together.

CHAPTER 3. STORYTELLING AND AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

In an effort to combat our culture’s growing sense of powerlessness, I think it is especially important to provide agricultural education to children. However, the definition of “agricultural education” varies widely amongst teachers, students, parents, community members, and policy makers. Despite these differing viewpoints, most agree that agricultural education serves one or more of five primary purposes: to support the learning of academic content (often with an emphasis on STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) that also prepares students for post-secondary learning; to provide students with skills, career training, and job opportunities that will enable them to find long-term work in the agricultural industry; to build agricultural literacy and the understanding of food systems; to promote agricultural leisure skills such as gardening or beekeeping; and to benefit special needs students, as well as students who do not perform well in traditional learning environments. Unfortunately, the significance of these individual components and their relation to one another continues to be debated, resulting in numerous opportunities and challenges for providing agricultural education to K-12 students (Moore, 2004).

Agricultural Education in Iowa’s K-12 Schools

In 2008, the Iowa Core established state content standards for agricultural education and all other areas of the K-12 curriculum. This mandate requires that all districts “offer and teach” a prescribed number and variety of competency-based classes that align with the Iowa Core’s academic areas of literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as the 21st century learning skills of civic literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, health literacy, and employability. However, each district has the freedom to select its own curriculum, textbooks, and other learning materials (“About the Iowa Education System,” 2017).

Agricultural education falls into the “employability” categories of career and vocational education, neither of which is required to be taught in grades K-6. Grades 7-8 must teach career education, while grades 9-12 must offer a minimum of three sequential units in four of the six vocational service areas: agriculture, arts and communication, business and marketing, health occupations, home economics, and industrial technology (“About the Iowa Education System,” 2017). Although there are no additional requirements for grades 7-8, agricultural education at the high school level must be taught using three major components: classroom/lab instruction, supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs), and Future Farmers of America (FFA) (Miller, 2016).

Under this system, classroom/lab instruction provides students with academic skills that prepare them for post-secondary learning. State law mandates that educators use the Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (AFNR) Career Content Standards developed by the National Council for Agricultural Education. These standards comprise eight areas of agricultural study, only one of which a teacher must use to develop the three sequential instructional units required by the Iowa Core, including: agribusiness, animal systems, biotechnology, environmental services, food products and processing, natural resources, plant systems, and power, structural, and technical systems (“National AFNR Standards,” 2015). Additionally, SAEs allow students to explore a variety of careers and job-skill opportunities, such as participating in a student-owned business or interning with a community establishment, while FFA participation helps students build teamwork and other life skills that can be carried into their personal lives (Miller, 2016).

Given these requirements, Iowa’s current framework for providing agricultural education works well in many ways. The majority of agricultural educators do an excellent job meeting state and district learning standards, SAEs prove especially rewarding in terms of student

engagement, and FFA chapters' emphasis on student competitions, awards ceremonies, and alumni banquets helps garner much-needed attention, acclaim, and funding for agricultural education programs. However, teachers find it extremely difficult to balance all three components equally, resulting in a tricycle model of agricultural education in which the two "small wheels" of SAEs and FFA offer additional support to the "big wheel" of classroom/lab instruction. Yet when SAEs and FFA fail to receive as much attention as the dominant teaching tool of classroom/lab instruction, major inconsistencies can form amongst the state's individual agricultural education programs (Miller, 2016).

As such, a district's freedom to develop its own curriculum ensures that few Iowa students receive agricultural education before 9th grade. With more than 480,000 students in approximately 338 districts ("Education Statistics," 2017), only 20,000 students—less than 5% of the state's total student population—participate in formal agricultural education programs (Iowa FFA Association, 2017). For the remaining 95% of students, especially those in grades K-8, perhaps the only alternative is to participate in Iowa's Farm to School Program, which provides locally sourced food, nutrition programs, and funding for agricultural projects. However, making use of this resource requires extra time that teachers often don't have, and at least one-third of Iowa districts have yet to participate in the program since its founding in 2007 (Iowa Farm to School Program, 2017).

Furthermore, high school students only have the option to study agriculture as an elective if their district selects it as a vocational service area in the first place. Since districts must also focus their agricultural curriculum on a single AFNR content area—ignoring the other seven content areas—students are provided with a limited perspective that only focuses on one aspect of the global food system. While a group of students in one district might receive their

entire agricultural education through the lens of natural resources, another group might only understand agriculture as it relates to biotechnology. Likewise, of the 630,000 members in the national FFA organization, 73% are located in rural areas, while only 9% live in urban areas (National FFA Organization). Yet when 63% of the American population lives in cities (United States Census Bureau, 2015), relegating agricultural education to predominately rural districts only perpetuates the problem that food is an “invisible” resource for those who don’t produce it.

Experiential Learning for the Agricultural Classroom

Despite these challenges, there are many benefits of agricultural education that move beyond the scope of academic skills and professional development. Exposing students to agricultural education at a young age supports the development of healthy eating habits and can increase the number of fruits and vegetables that children incorporate into their diets. Districts that procure food through local farms and/or school gardens also see an average 10% increase in school meal program participation, thus increasing revenue for other initiatives. Additionally, every \$1 spent on farm to school programs can add an additional \$2.16 for the local economy (National Farm to School Network, n.d.).

However, perhaps the greatest benefit of agricultural education is its ability to teach students using Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), a famed model developed by David A. Kolb that has influenced countless teachers and researchers in the field of agricultural education. Kolb’s viewpoints are rooted in those of famed educator John Dewey, who believed that “an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has a vital and verifiable significance” (Cheek & Arrington, 2011, p. 6). As a more holistic approach, ELT is closely aligned to the goal of readying students for the real world and counters the model of direct instruction, “a skill-based instructional technique in which teachers

promote sequential development of student competencies by following a scripted instructional routine and providing praise at appropriate times” (Baker & Robinson, 2016, p. 130).

More specifically, Kolb identifies four cyclical steps of experiential learning: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation (Clark, Threton, & Ewing, 2010). This model can be applied to existing units of instruction with little modification, often only requiring an educator to change the typical order of teaching steps. Rather than begin a unit with introductory principles, follow with an activity, and culminate in an exam, ELT allows students to participate in the activity first, then examine vocabulary and principles through a facilitated process of sharing, processing, and generalization (Mowen & Harder, 2005, p. 8).

The ELT method of teaching is an inherent part of agricultural education—a commitment long embodied by the FFA motto “Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.” In fact, some scholars define experiential learning in agricultural education as “encompassing all practical agricultural activities of educational value conducted by students outside of class and lab instruction time or on school-released time for which systematic instruction and supervision are provided by teacher, parents, employers, and others” (Stone, 2014, p. 24). Agricultural education also supports experiential learning via field trips, laboratories, and SAEs, the latter of which educators have traditionally identified as the primary experiential learning tool in agricultural education (Baker, Robinson, & Kolb, 2012, p. 8).

An informal yet equally important aspect of ELT is the role of an open classroom environment that involves student choice, individualized instruction, and diverse learning materials; these tools are all well suited for agricultural education yet rarely enter mainstream classrooms, which often frown on alternative teaching styles. Most importantly:

Could it be the unstructured nature of agricultural education classrooms that is criticized most often by administrators and state leaders is actually the most beneficial element of the program? So often educators, researchers, and stakeholders share there is “something” that is developed within agricultural education students that cannot be measured. Possibly, it cannot be measured because the measurements used are too narrowly focused on academic performance [rather than the mode of learning itself]. (Baker & Robinson, 2016, p. 138)

Although agricultural education is increasingly pressured to become more academic in its approach, experiential learning is essential to its success and has been scientifically proven to increase productivity and student engagement. One study found that experiential learning had a higher impact on increased creative and practical intelligence compared to direct instruction (Baker & Robinson, 2016). Another study found that students who were taught using ELT “discovered and were motivated by their power and agency to direct their learning toward personally interesting topics and activities to develop interest-relevant knowledge and skills” (Parr & Trexler, 2011, p. 178). This motivation included encouraging other students to be more self-directed in their own education, creating an even greater sense of empowerment that emerged from the freedom to direct learning activities and experiences based on personal interests and one’s own sense of purpose. Thus, if we train teachers to embrace ELT as more than a one-step “hands-on” approach, as well as continue to research this model’s effectiveness, experiential learning can only help our students grow into more intelligent and independent adults.

From Fairy Tales to *The Hunger Games*: Teaching Agriculture Through Art

While ELT is an effective way to teach agricultural education, another approach is to incorporate agricultural literacy into other areas of the curriculum. It is quite easy to connect agriculture to STEM, and many teachers already do so, yet it is harder to connect to the areas of social studies, English, and the arts. However, as noted earlier, narrative—the very basis of history, language, and entertainment—is an incredibly useful teaching tool with many benefits. In response, it is no coincidence that “Magically Modified Grimm’s” takes on the structure of classic fairy tales. As ancient oral traditions first put into writing in the 18th century, fairy tales have been revised and honed countless times with a sense of inspiration, wisdom, and wonder that has appealed to audiences for thousands of years—ancient versions of Cinderella, for example, can be traced back to China, Germany, Iran, and numerous other countries (Dewan, 2016). In the present day, fairy tales are perhaps more popular than ever and show no signs of relinquishing their cultural influence—in only three weeks of release, Disney’s live-action version of the French fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast* has already amassed \$900 million globally, with many experts expecting it to gross more than \$1 billion dollars by year’s end (McNary, 2017).

Such enduring popularity ensures that “fairy tales touch children in profound ways because they reenact patterns that are especially significant and memorable for them—patterns that have had to pass through the distillation process of oral transmission before being committed to print” (Dewan, 2016, p. 30). Even though fairy tales explore magic and its chaotic power to manifest strange events and unknown forces, children learn to recognize the conventions of these stories early in life: “once-upon-a-time” beginnings, “happily-ever-after” endings, generalized settings, good and evil characters, and the recurring use of the number three. This enables fairy

tales to not only teach valuable life lessons but also to increase children's appreciation and knowledge of basic story structure, in turn increasing reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and other literacy skills.

Fairy tales also make use of formulaic patterns that resonate with children. For example, a forest or other unfamiliar place often serves as the central setting for fairy tales. More so, the forest becomes a place of initiation where the completion of various trials and tasks leads to a drastic change in the protagonist's maturity, mirroring the audience's own progression from childhood to adulthood (Canepa, 1999). In fairy tales, underdog characters also routinely outwit seemingly unstoppable opponents: Jack cuts down a beanstalk to slay a giant; Rapunzel woos a handsome prince to release her from a towered prison; and Hansel and Gretel escape from a witch by shoving her in an oven. In a similar manner, other fairy tale protagonists often escape harm by showing compassion or offering assistance to needy individuals. In both situations, characters are rewarded in the form of royal power, boundless wealth, eternal happiness, and/or true love. As a result, these heroes use the virtues of bravery and kindness to demonstrate how children can take control of their own actions and strive to be their best selves (Dewan, 2016).

By reading and listening to these stories, children also experience the same anxiety and fear as the characters. This allows them to develop coping skills for frightening situations in a similar yet safer environment, "providing them with a dress rehearsal for life's challenges" (Dewan, 2016, p. 28). Fairy tales also "allow the reader to explore each virtue and path of action through the different characters' fates. The child decides their own personal stance after deliberating each consequence. Through the telling, the child is exposed to ethical reasoning without being preached at" (Zehetner, 2013, p. 161).

Although Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* cannot be classified as a fairy tale, it does draw upon common tropes of the format: good and bad characters, a journey into unknown settings, and kindness as a path to reward. In drawing upon these classic elements, Collins helped ensure that her young adult novel, as well as its two sequels, would become one of the most remarkable literary success stories of the 21st century. To date, the trilogy has sold 70 million copies in the U.S. alone, and its four film adaptations amassed nearly \$3 billion at the global box office (Scholastic, 2017). More importantly, "*The Hunger Games* is perfect for teaching environmental and social justice: it has a gripping plot, it thinly veils the global food system in fiction, making it nonthreatening and visible, and it argues that practicing compassion is the only way to survive a system based on competition" (Burke, 2013, p. 53).

The novel follows Katniss Everdeen, a teenage girl who lives in Panem, a heavily militarized country comprised of twelve districts that supply products and resources to the Capitol. Every year, the Capitol selects two children from each district to participate in the Hunger Games, a competition in which the children fight to the death so that the winner's district can be rewarded with enough food to feed its citizens for an entire year. After her sister is selected for the Hunger Games, Katniss nominates herself to take her place. At novel's end, when Katniss is faced with killing her friend Peeta in order to win the competition, she instead suggests that they eat poisonous berries to take their own lives and spoil the Capitol's annual tradition. In response, the Capitol intervenes and instead declares both children as victors. In doing so, Katniss utilizes her traditional knowledge of food to undermine a political system that strips its populace of basic rights and opportunities, creating "a powerful message for young readers who, in maturing, may be starting to grasp that they live in an exploitative system they

may not fully endorse, even as they benefit from it” (Burke, 2013, p. 60). When teaching *The Hunger Games*, Burke believes that:

This is an opportunity to raise complicity, because we are all complicit in the global marketplace, and this is why students often express feelings of guilt and shame. I stress to students that we are all born into a system, and how that system conducts business is often invisible to us. We may not agree with its methods or how it exploits less fortunate people (precisely why it is hidden), but we do benefit from it, especially here in the United States. In this way, the system co-opts our consent; it makes us complicit in suffering and oppression. But if we can see this system at work, the way Katniss does, and understand where our commodities come from, how they were obtained, and the real cost of their production, we can think of ways to work around—or even outside of—the system...The message that compassion is contagious and the key to undermining an exploitative system is the most radical statement of the novel. (p. 61-62)

Ultimately, Collins’s novel offers solutions that counter young people’s growing sense of powerlessness and disillusionment, and the fact “that these messages are wrapped in a juicy love triangle, a gripping plot, and laden with teenage angst merely makes them more delicious to the target audience” (Burke, 2013, p. 62). *The Hunger Games* is the rare work of literature that provokes deep thought yet speaks to students in their own language and on their own terms. Collins’ success shows that we desperately need more authors who can articulate such profound issues of environmental and social justice to an audience that is often believed to be too cynical to enact change.

In writing “Magically Modified Grimm’s,” I must believe that I too can instill children with the sense of hope that they so desperately need. Even if children fail to pick up on the play’s themes related to the global food system, I have set out to create a work of art that does not patronize my target audience. Rather than craft something shallow and without meaning, I have strived to honor children’s imagination, creativity, and profound ability to relate to a character’s inner struggles. At the very least, my play will make children laugh, sing, dance, and scream with delight. As the character of Goldilocks says to Jack, “That’s what superstars do—we spread joy and happiness to everyone.” And really, what could be a better gift when our capacity for delight seems to diminish with every passing day?

CHAPTER 4. MAGICALLY MODIFIED GRIMM'S (SCRIPT)

Characters:

JACK, 12 years old
 GOLDBLOCKS, 10 years old
 HANSEL, 8 years old
 GRETEL, 8 years old
 MR. WOLFE, many years old
 THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN, one day old

Setting:

The modern-day lands of fairy tales: forests, farms, shopping malls, suburbs, etc. JACK paces center-stage. He holds a cardboard sign that reads CHICKEN 4 SALE. A crate sits behind him.

JACK

Chicken? Chicken? Anybody want chicken?

(JACK tosses the sign into the air and catches it. He repeats this several times until he drops it.)

Chicken! Come and get it! Chick-chick-chicken!

(JACK picks up the sign, tosses it, and drops it again.)

I scream, you scream, we all scream for chicken!

(JACK picks up the sign, tosses it, drops it, groans, and sits.)

This blows. Everybody else gets to stay home and watch cartoons in their pajamas, but no, I have to get up at the crack of dawn and sell some stupid chicken because my parents are too busy milking cows and driving tractors. Whatever. Farming is lame. Someday I'm going to draw comic books and invent my own superhero and then my superhero is going to get super famous and then somebody else will make a movie about my superhero and then there will be sequels and videogames and a TV show and then I'll get super rich and never have to do anything ever again. Especially selling chickens.

(JACK collapses onto his back.)

I'm bored.

(GOLDDILOCKS enters carrying a bowl of porridge and singing into a spoon that she uses as a microphone. She wears oversized bright yellow headphones and dances enthusiastically. As she sings, she takes bites of porridge, some of which falls to the ground.)

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. Now get outta that chair, if you dare—but beware, it’s a bear, your worst nightmare!

(JACK crawls to the sign, waves it, and gets up.)

JACK

Chicken?

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

Now wave your hands in the air if you like my hair. Put your feet to the sky if you think I’m fly.

JACK

Hey, you want some chicken? Good taste at a good price!

(GOLDDILOCKS takes a bite of porridge, sets down the bowl, and dances even more enthusiastically.)

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

Looking for a campsite. Gotta be just right. Not too big. Not too small. Oh yeah. Not too big. Not too small. Just right. Just right. Campsite. Oh yeah—

(JACK taps GOLDDILOCKS on the shoulder.
GOLDDILOCKS takes off her headphones.)

JACK

I said, do you want any chicken?

GOLDDILOCKS

You don’t have to yell. What’s your deal, anyway? I was in the middle of a performance.

JACK

You call that a performance?

GOLDILOCKS

Excuse me, but it's part of my concert. I was practicing. Because if you don't practice you never get good at something. At least that's what my guidance counselor says. And so I practice my concert moves every day and visualize myself as the future pop-slash-rap-slash-dance superstar sensation...

(singing)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

JACK

G-Locks? Is that short for Goldilocks?

GOLDILOCKS

Yeah, well, it has a nice ring to it. Whatever. I bet your name's totally lame. Something extra boring. Like John. Or Jim.

JACK

It's Jack, actually. Listen, are you sure you don't want chicken?

GOLDILOCKS

(taking another bite of porridge)

Maybe. Is the chicken good?

(JACK runs to the crate and picks it up.)

JACK

Good? Oh, it's good! I mean, you'll need to cook it, but after that it'll be so good.

GOLDILOCKS

Hold up. You're trying to give me a live chicken? That's alive? With feathers? And a beak? And a little thing that pops out eggs?

(JACK pushes the crate into GOLDILOCKS' arms.)

JACK

She's nice! I promise! And well priced! Make me an offer! Whatever you want!

(GOLDILOCKS screams and pushes the crate back into JACK'S arms.)

GOLDILOCKS

Ew! What is wrong with you? You and your chicken are so gross. Ew!

(GOLDILOCKS exits with her bowl in hand. JACK sets down the crate and collapses. After a beat or two, he sits back up.)

JACK

Maybe Goldilocks was right. Practicing is important. I could draw or something. I guess.

(JACK pulls out a pen and begins drawing on the back of the CHICKEN 4 SALE sign.)

(singing)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. Get outta that chair—it's a bear...nightmare! Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah—

(HANSEL enters, picking up dropped lumps of porridge, talking over JACK as he sings.)

HANSEL

All we have to do is keep following this trail of porridge. Surely it will take us somewhere. Right? Right?

(GRETEL enters, crying. Both she and HANSEL wear backpacks.)

GRETEL

I miss Mommy.

(JACK flips over the sign.)

JACK

Hey, you want chicken?

HANSEL

Mom isn't coming back. And neither is Heather. Or Cookie. Or Rashida. Now we have to deal with Tatiana.

GRETEL

Can we go home now? I don't like running away anymore.

JACK

I know what's good for running away—chicken! Guaranteed to make your journey more exciting and fulfilling!

HANSEL

Gretel, do you actually like Dad's fifth wife?

GRETEL

No.

HANSEL

Then we can't go back. Not now.

(JACK shoves the crate into HANSEL'S arms.)

JACK

Here, take this with you! She's real nice, I promise!

HANSEL

Why do we need a chicken?

JACK

Won't you get lonely running away?

(HANSEL shoves the crate into JACK'S arms and steps closer to GRETEL.)

HANSEL

No. We have each other.

(JACK shoves the crate into HANSEL'S arms.)

JACK

What about food? Won't you get hungry?

HANSEL

And eat a chicken?

GRETEL

We're vegetarians.

JACK

Oh. That must be nice. My family can't afford to eat vegetables.

(HANSEL hands the crate to JACK.)

HANSEL

I think we better get going now.

JACK

Well, good luck, then. I hope you find what you're looking for. Sorry about your family stuff. My parents aren't so great either.

HANSEL

Listen, we really gotta go.

JACK

Maybe I'll see you around?

HANSEL

We're running away! That's the point. So we don't have to see you and certain other people ever again!

GRETEL

Hey, do you want to know something cool? It's about chickens. For real, this is something that everybody should know but most people don't so actually it's like a super special secret I'm only telling you. Want to hear it?

JACK

Not exactly.

GRETEL

Well, our kingdom raises eight billion chickens a year!

JACK

Oh. My chicken doesn't lay eggs anymore.

HANSEL

Gretel...

GRETEL

And chickens have to eat four pounds of feed just to lay one egg.

HANSEL

Let's go.

GRETEL

And chickens that lay brown eggs have red ears and chickens that lay white eggs—

HANSEL

Porridge. Now!

GRETEL

Okay, okay.

(GRETEL hesitantly follows HANSEL. HANSEL exits. GRETEL turns to JACK, waves, smiles, and exits. After a beat or two, JACK sets down the crate, runs after them, and stops at the edge of the stage.)

JACK

Hey, you're probably gonna meet this little girl who keeps dropping—Forget it. They'll figure it out soon enough.

(JACK collapses beside the crate.)

JACK

What is wrong with me? No. No. What is wrong with you? Why are you ruining my life? I should be drawing. But no. Here I am selling a chicken. And I am never ever ever ever gonna sell this stupid chicken!

(MR. WOLFE, well dressed in a gray suit, enters with a cane and watches JACK for a beat.)

MR. WOLFE

Excuse me. Why are you yelling at that chicken?

JACK

I... I'm selling it. You interested?

MR. WOLFE

Depends. What do you want in exchange?

JACK

Money.

MR. WOLFE

Ah. Yes. Money. I can't offer you any money. Not yet, anyway.

JACK

Figures. What else you got? Candy?

MR. WOLFE

Sounds like you are having a bad day. Let me guess, your parents sent you here and you would rather be doing something else somewhere else all because this is one big waste of time. Am I right?

JACK

Something like that. Only I'm not selling this chicken for advice. I think you should move along now.

MR. WOLFE

But what if I can assist you? What if I can help you and your parents thrive like you never imagined? What if you had more time to do what you actually want to do? Doesn't that sound nice?

JACK

I'm not selling my chicken for some dumb prediction. You think I'm an idiot or something?

MR. WOLFE

My boy, have you ever heard of magically gigantified orbs?

JACK

Gigantic what?

MR. WOLFE

Magically gigantified orbs. MGOs.

(MR. WOLFE pulls an MGO container from his breast pocket and shakes it loudly.)

JACK

What do they do?

MR. WOLFE

They grow into money.

JACK

Yeah right. Not interested.

MR. WOLFE

No need for doubts. I personally guarantee they work. My colleagues and I conjure them ourselves. We have sold them everywhere to everyone. There are MGOs in the forest, in the queen's castle, in the Far Away Kingdom, and in the kingdoms even farther away than that. The Mad Hatter tweets about them at all his tea parties. Little Red's grandmother absolutely adores them in her pastries.

JACK

Okay, okay. I get it.

MR. WOLFE

Jack Sprat—do you know him? Maybe there is a relation? Well, he and his wife lick their plates clean whenever MGOs are for dinner.

JACK

Will you please just let me think?

MR. WOLFE

And Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater —

JACK

I said, I get it!

MR. WOLFE
So is it a deal?

JACK
I don't know...

MR. WOLFE
What else is there to know? Is it a deal or not?

(MR. WOLFE offers his hand to JACK.)

JACK
Sure. Deal.

(JACK and MR. WOLFE shake hands. MR. WOLFE picks up the crate and tosses the MGOs into JACK'S lap.)

Hold on, wait!

(JACK runs to the crate and leans into it.)

(whispering)
I'm sorry I yelled at you earlier. I don't really think you're that stupid.

MR. WOLFE
Just remember, watch where you plant those. And come see me sometime, won't you? I live just down the lane.

JACK
Hey, thanks again, mister. Mister, uh, what was your name?

MR. WOLFE.
Mr. Wolfe. Nice to make your acquaintance.

(MR. WOLFE exits. JACK tries to draw more, grows bored, throws a handful of MGOs over his shoulder, and exits in the opposite direction.)

Suddenly: lights, sound, magic. The sun shines. Rain falls. The MGOs grow and fill the stage. After several beats, the magic fades away.

Following the trail of porridge, HANSEL and GRETEL roll an enormous, round, brightly colored MGO onstage. HANSEL stops and looks around.)

HANSEL

This doesn't make any sense. The porridge was going this way. And now it's going that way and that way and lots of other ways too.

GRETEL

I think the store's that way.

HANSEL

No. It's... Oh, I don't know. We must be —

GRETEL

Hansel, do you hear something?

GOLDILOCKS

(singing offstage)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

GRETEL

That sounds horrible!

GOLDILOCKS

(singing offstage)

Walking through the woods eating tasty goods. Dancing in the dirt while I twirl my skirt.

HANSEL

Maybe it's someone who can help us?

GRETEL

But maybe it's someone who will hurt us? Don't you remember last time when Dad's bounty hunter chased us down? That goblin is not drooling on me ever again!

(HANSEL and GRETEL stand in front of the MGO and attempt to hide it. GOLDILOCKS enters, dancing enthusiastically and singing into the spoon. She is noticeably larger than before.)

GOLDILOCKS

(singing)

Singing like Madonna. Moves like Lady Gaga. Oh yeah. Just right. Googoo. Gaga. Googoo. Gaga.

HANSEL

Don't worry. It's just a little girl. I think...

(HANSEL claps his hands in front of GOLDILOCKS, who takes off her headphones.)

GOLDILOCKS

You need something? Otherwise I need to get back to practicing.

HANSEL

Do you know the way to the nearest Magic Surplus Superstore?

GOLDILOCKS

Oh. My. Gosh. I love the Magic Surplus Superstore! That's where I got this nail polish and my socks and these really awesome headphones.

(singing)

Headphones! On my head! On my head! Oh yeah!

HANSEL

So do you know the way?

GOLDILOCKS

Um. Maybe that way?

HANSEL

You sure?

GOLDILOCKS

Well. No. Not exactly. I'm trying to find this place that's just right but, you know, sometimes I sing and dance so much that I lose my way a little. Hey, what do you got back there?

(GOLDILOCKS points to the MGO.)

HANSEL

None of your business.

GOLDILOCKS

Looks like something pretty special if you ask me. Where did you find that thing?

GRETEL

Near this.

(GRETEL pulls the CHICKEN 4 SALE sign from her backpack.)

GOLDILOCKS

Ew! Did you get that from Jack?

GRETEL

Jack? His name is Jack?

(GRETEL hugs the sign to her chest and smells it.)

GRETEL

Yes. We know Jack. He's wonderful. I found this on the side of the road after we first met. On the back there's all these neat drawings of a big strong man with a cape flying over a farm and blowing up chickens. It's pretty cool. He left it for me.

HANSEL

Gretel, get your head in the game! Our dad owns the largest factory in this entire kingdom and he tells us everyday that if we have an opportunity to do something great we should take it because that's what he did and now we're taking our opportunity to get rich too. Then maybe he'll finally pay more attention to us than that stupid Tatiana. Let's go!

GOLDILOCKS

Well, my opportunity is going to make me rich *and* famous. I'm a superstar in training. Want to hear one of my songs?

HANSEL

Sis, let's go.

GRETEL

Hey, want to hear something cool? Did you know that ninety percent of everyone in our kingdom lives fifteen minutes from a Magic Surplus Superstore?

HANSEL

Gretel —

GRETEL

And that there are more than 11,000 Magic Surplus Superstores in twenty-seven different kingdoms?

HANSEL

Gretel —

GRETEL

And that Magic Surplus Superstores sell \$500 billion worth of magical items every year?

HANSEL

Gretel! Porridge! Now!

GRETEL

Okay, okay. Fine.

(HANSEL and GRETEL roll the MGO offstage.)

GOLDILOCKS places her headphones back on: lights, sound, magic. She dances across the stage several times until she is in the middle of a large MGO field.)

(For the next several scenes, all of JACK'S lines are offstage.)

GOLDBLOCKS
(singing)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

JACK

Goldilocks! Help!

(GOLDBLOCKS takes off her headphones.)

GOLDBLOCKS

Hello?

JACK

It's Jack. Remember me?

GOLDBLOCKS

Where are you?

JACK

In here.

GOLDBLOCKS

In where?

JACK

In here!

GOLDBLOCKS

Are you a ghost? Are you dead? Am I dead? Oh no, no, no, no. I do not mess with this supernatural stuff. I have seen way too much TV to know that you don't talk to ghosts. I'm outta here.

JACK

Wait, please! I'm not a ghost. I'm alive. I'm just stuck.

GOLDBLOCKS

Stuck where?

JACK

I can't see anything—I just know I'm in here because I bought these MGOs from an old man and then I threw some on the ground and then I started walking home and then there was this big rain storm and stuff started growing up toward the sky and then I got tired and took a nap and when I woke up I was trapped inside an entire MGO field and now I can't get out.

(GOLDILOCKS moves closer to the sound of JACK'S voice.)

GOLDILOCKS

You mean, you're in *there*? Jack, I don't think I can get you out. I don't know what you did but these are big. Like really, really, really big. Maybe I should go get help.

JACK

No! Stay here. Please.

GOLDILOCKS

But I don't even know what do with these. Do you just kick them or something?

JACK

I don't know. I mean, it kind of smells like food in here. Maybe you eat them?

GOLDILOCKS

Gross. The only things I like are cookies and pizza and grilled cheese sandwiches and porridge with lots and lots of sugar. I am not touching something that is growing from the ground. You eat it.

JACK

But I can't move my arms! Or my legs! I can't even see! Will you please just try?

GOLDILOCKS

Why should I help you anyway? All you did was try to sell me a chicken. Besides, I gotta practice. Adios.

(Pretending to leave, GOLDILOCKS stomps loudly and slowly softens her steps.)

JACK

Are you still there?

GOLDILOCKS

No.

JACK

Yes you are.

GOLDILOCKS

No, I'm not! And you still haven't told me why I should help you. What do I get out of all this?

JACK

I can help you find somewhere safe.

GOLDILOCKS

What makes you think I need help?

JACK

Because you've been lost since the moment I met you. And I heard that song you were singing about those bears. If you're in trouble, I can help.

GOLDILOCKS

I wasn't lost. And I'm not in trouble! I was practicing. Okay. Fine. I was lost. I mean, I am lost but that still doesn't —

JACK

Goldilocks, will you please get me out of here!

GOLDILOCKS

Hey, just because you're trapped in some magic shrub doesn't mean that you have to be rude. I get it. Here, I'll take a bite if that makes you happy. But I bet it tastes like poison. Which is what Snow White said and look what happened to her...

(With caution, GOLDILOCKS nibbles the MGO and chews excessively.)

Ew! That's too chewy!

(With caution, GOLDILOCKS takes another bite.)

Ew! That's too crunchy!

(With caution, GOLDILOCKS takes another bite.)

Oh... No... No... I don't... Oh... Okay... Yeah... Oh... That's just right!

(singing)

Just right! Just right! My tasty buds are hopping cause this MGO is rocking! Tasty buds! Tasty buds! Oh yeah!

(Lights, sound, magic. GOLDILOCKS dances around the stage, eats the MGOs ravenously, and exits.)

HANSEL and GRETEL enter carrying a giant Publishers Clearinghouse-style check.)

JACK

Hello?

Hello?
 HANSEL
 Goldilocks?
 JACK
 Goldilocks?
 HANSEL
 Is that you?
 JACK
 Who are —
 HANSEL
 Jack!
 GRETEL
 (GRETEL lets go of the check and runs closer to the sound of JACK'S voice.)
 GRETEL
 It's me! Gretel. Remember?
 (GRETEL pulls the CHICKEN 4 SALE sign from her backpack and hugs it to her chest.)
 JACK
 Are you the one who's running away with the grumpy brother?
 GRETEL
 You do remember.
 JACK
 Can you help me? Goldilocks is supposed to —
 HANSEL
 Dude, we don't have time to deal with your problems right now. We're just here to grab an orb and roll it to the Magic Surplus Superstore for more money.
 JACK
 Wait, you got money for my MGOs? Why does the Magic Surplus Superstore want my MGOs?
 HANSEL
 Because they put MGOs in everything. There's magic sodas and magic candy bars and magic chips and magic apples and magic carrots and magic pie and magic ice cream and magic sausage and magic bacon and magic everything. Duh.

JACK
But those are my MGOs!

HANSEL
Says who?

JACK
Says me, because if I weren't trapped in here then I would be the one taking my MGOs to the Magic Surplus Superstore!

GRETEL
Oh no... You're trapped? How can we help? What can —

HANSEL
Grab the orb and start walking.

GRETEL
But —

HANSEL
But nothing. Let's go.

JACK
Wait, please, I need —

HANSEL
Butt out! You're the one who got trapped in there anyway. Now let's go.

GRETEL
No.

HANSEL
Gretel, come on.

GRETEL
I'm staying to help Jack.

HANSEL
And I'm not leaving without you.

GRETEL
Jack needs us and if you won't help him then I'll do it myself.

HANSEL

So what if I leave and that goblin comes back to drool all over you? Is Jack going to help you then? Or will you just go back to Tatiana so she can force you to try on different outfits all day?

GRETEL

Hansel, please.

HANSEL

Can we just get to the store before it closes?

GOLDBLOCKS
(singing offstage)

When you see my boy Jack you better holla back. Holla! Holla! Where you at?

JACK

G-Locks! Help! Get me out of here NOW!

(GOLDBLOCKS enters. She is noticeably larger and slower than before.)

GOLDBLOCKS

I don't feel so good. I think I ate too much.

JACK

Goldilocks, please, don't stop. Just a few more bites! I'm almost out!

GOLDBLOCKS

I can't.

(GOLDBLOCKS sits down.)

GRETEL

Are you alright?

HANSEL

Sis, she's got it covered. Let's go!

(Lights, sound, magic: furiously, GRETEL takes several bites from the MGOs. JACK bursts onto stage, pointing his finger at HANSEL.)

JACK

If you take one step with my MGO —

HANSEL

Later.

(HANSEL drops the check and runs offstage with the MGO. JACK looks at GRETEL.)

JACK

And that's the comic book I was drawing, you little thief!

(JACK takes the CHICKEN 4 SALE sign from GRETEL and runs after HANSEL.)

GRETEL

Jack!

(GRETEL picks up the check and runs after JACK. GOLDILOCKS is alone.)

GOLDILOCKS

Hey, don't leave me here! What am I supposed to do? I can't even move! Oh no. I don't like this. Okay. Okay. Breathe. Put on your superstar face.

(singing)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah. G-Locks...

(GOLDILOCKS cries. MR. WOLFE enters carrying JACK'S chicken crate. It takes GOLDILOCKS a moment or two to notice.)

MR. WOLFE

Are you alright?

GOLDILOCKS

I'm fine. I was just helping my friend Jack.

MR. WOLFE

Ah, yes, that little chap who gave me this chicken.

GOLDILOCKS

Yeah, that's him. Say, how do you... Oh. I think I should move along now.
(GOLDILOCKS tries to get up but can't.)

MR. WOLFE

What have you been eating?

GOLDILOCKS

All of this... stuff. Whatever it is. Jack told me to do it. I had a lot of porridge earlier too.

MR. WOLFE

Trust me, there are worse problems to have than being too full.

GOLDBLOCKS

Well, if you ask me this stuff isn't so great. Tastes alright but that's about it.

MR. WOLFE

But MGOs feed our entire kingdom! They are in everything and eaten by everyone. Isn't that wonderful?

GOLDBLOCKS

I'm not so sure about that.

(Beat.)

MR. WOLFE

Would you like to hear a story?

GOLDBLOCKS

Do I really have a choice?

MR. WOLE

(laughing)

I suppose I could turn back home. Won't your friends be coming back soon?

GOLDBLOCKS

Fine. Tell the story.

(MR. WOLFE sets down the crate and sits beside GOLDBLOCKS.)

MR. WOLFE

Once upon a time, a couple had little money and stole from a neighbor's garden in order to feed their family. Actually, it was my family—twelve boys and two parents all in one tiny cottage. I was the youngest until one day my mother became pregnant with her very first daughter. Mother gained a ferocious appetite for lettuce—or maybe it was radishes. Or maybe it was both...

GOLDBLOCKS

I think I've heard this story before. It was lettuce.

MR. WOLFE

You most certainly have not heard this story! Anyway, my parents began taking more and more food from the neighbor's garden. Our neighbor was an old woman, so she never noticed what they were doing. But my older brother did not like this. He felt he was being raised in a family of tricksters, and on the morning that my sister was born he told our neighbor about my parents.

GOLDBLOCKS

Well, that was the right thing to do, wasn't it?

MR. WOLFE

Not quite. You see, unknown to us, our neighbor was actually a witch. When she learned the truth, she flew into a rage, stole my baby sister, and then locked her in a secret tower. A blind prince once told me that he had heard rumors of a maiden with long golden hair and a beautiful voice trapped in the woods, but that is all I know. No one's seen her since. I keep walking through the woods thinking I'll find her but I never can.

GOLDILOCKS

Oh my. That's terrible. One time, I... I... Nevermind.

MR. WOLFE

What is it, my girl?

GOLDILOCKS

It's nothing. I'm not even supposed to talk about it.

MR. WOLFE

Says who?

GOLDILOCKS

My guidance counselor. I mean, I told my cousin once and then she got all mad, and then I told my guidance counselor, and that's when I started seeing her every other week to talk about our feelings.

MR. WOLFE

Tell me, did you do something you weren't supposed to do?

GOLDILOCKS

I can't talk about it, remember?

MR. WOLFE

But wouldn't your guidance counselor be proud of you for sharing your feelings?

GOLDILOCKS

So this one time when I was at this other girl's house I took her headphones. Not because I was trying to be mean just because I couldn't afford to buy me own. And I really needed headphones for my vocal lessons and I just took them so I could practice and live my dreams. But then she found out and I had to take them back and fill out a lot of worksheets and look at a bunch of inspirational posters and then I started saving to buy some on my own. And so I saved and saved but then my mom got really sick and so I gave her the money for other things. When she got better, I started saving again and now I can finally do my superstar training with my very own headphones.

(singing)

G-Locks in the house. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

MR. WOLFE

I'm sorry you had to do that. No doubt it made you feel awful. And of course what you did wasn't mean, not when you were only trying to live your dream. When my family stole, we weren't being mean either. We were just hungry. No one should have to steal anything, especially not food. And so that's why I do what I do. Because what if that had been you, my girl, instead of my sister? Would you want to be locked away forever all because your mommy stole some lettuce?

GOLDBLOCKS

No. I guess not.

MR. WOLFE

Well then, aren't you glad that my colleagues and I conjure these MGOs so that you and Jack and all the other children in our kingdom can be happy and healthy and strong?

GOLDBLOCKS

Yeah. I guess so. But I don't know. Sorta sounds, like, complicated.

MR. WOLFE

And whatever do you mean by that?

GOLDBLOCKS

Well, in my neighborhood, everywhere you go there's a Magic Surplus Superstore. There's one on my street and one on the corner across from that one and now there's even one where my grandmother used to live and that's why she had to move in with us after they tore down her shack. Also, my grandmother smells a little weird so I'm still getting used to having her around. But now everywhere I go I see a Magic Surplus Superstore. That's nice and all but it still doesn't mean I can buy whatever I want all the time.

MR. WOLFE

My girl, what is your point?

GOLDBLOCKS

Geez, don't get pushy. It's just that magic isn't going to fix all your problems. Just like having Magic Surplus Superstores everywhere didn't help me save up money to buy headphones. No *one* solution can fix everything. At least that's what my guidance counselor told me and so I'm trying to change how I look at things sometimes.

MR. WOLFE

Do you truly dare to question the soundness of my methods? If so, then your guidance counselor must certainly dabble in strange and fabricated thoughts. Of course magic can solve everything! Countless wizards conduct spell after spell to ensure that magic is safe and accurate and of benefit to everyone in our kingdom. To doubt magic is a dangerous path, my girl.

GOLDILOCKS

Yeah, but maybe my guidance counselor is on to something. Like, when I stole my friend's headphones, she thought everything happened this one way, but I thought everything happened this other way and then all we did was fight about who was wrong. And so my guidance counselor said we were both wrong. But she also said that we were both right. It was confusing at first and I really didn't understand how you could be right and wrong at the same time but I think I'm starting to get it now because everybody always acts like it's their side versus this other side and actually there's lots of different sides. Just because I don't think magic solves everything doesn't mean I don't believe in magic at all. Like I said, it's complicated.

MR. WOLFE

Most things are.

GOLDILOCKS

Ah! Listen to me! Talking about my feelings! My guidance counselor would be so proud. I feel a little bit better now. Thanks. You know, maybe you should see my guidance counselor sometime? I'm not sure if she works with adults but if she does she could probably teach you a thing or two about listening.

MR. WOLFE

That might have to wait for another time. I should be going now.

(MR. WOLFE stands up.)

Are you sure you wouldn't like some help? I live right down the lane. Besides, you never know who or what you might run into out here. Bears, perhaps?

GOLDILOCKS

That's all right. I just need to rest and then I'll get back on my feet and head on.

(MR. WOLFE gently slides the crate towards GOLDILOCKS.)

MR. WOLFE

Here, let my chicken keep you company. She'll find her way back home, I'm sure.

GOLDILOCKS

Ew! I hate chickens!

(MR. WOLFE exits.)

I told you, I don't like chickens! I don't want this!

(GOLDILOCKS peers into the crate.)

Ew! It's gross and dirty and smelly. Get it out of here!

(GOLDILOCKS awkwardly adjusts herself so that her body faces the crate. She pushes against the crate with her feet and slides it offstage. We hear a clucking noise followed by a loud crash.)

GOLDILOCKS

Oh no! Are you alright? I didn't mean to—Hey, get away from there! Stopping eating all that! It's only going to make you sick. Oh no...

(Lights, sound, magic: offstage, THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN devours the MGOs and grows bigger and bigger before GOLDILOCKS' very eyes.)

That's not good. Why are you getting so big? Chickens aren't supposed to be that big. Oh dear. I don't like this. Maybe I should sing. Maybe I should just get up. Yes. That's right. I have to get up. I have to run away. I have to get help.

(GOLDILOCKS tries to stand but can't. The BIG GIANT CHICKEN clucks loudly. GOLDILOCKS screams and covers her ears. She then brings her hands together and closes her eyes.)

Dear Fairy Godmother, it's me, Goldilocks. I know we don't talk all that much but I really need your help right now. Will you please just fly outta the sky and give me some wishes like you did with Cinderella?

(THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN clucks.)

I wish that chicken would go away!

(THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN clucks even louder.)

I wish I could stand up!

(THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN clucks even louder.)

I wish I was the pop-slash-rap-slash-dance superstar of the world and that I was singing in front of millions of people and not about to pee my pants because in real life I'm lost in the woods about to be eaten alive by a big giant chicken!

(THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN clucks so loudly it shakes the stage. GOLDILOCKS screams and opens her eyes. She points directly at the audience.)

You! And you! And you over there! Get up here and HELP ME GET AWAY FROM THIS BIG GIANT CHICKEN!

(GOLDILOCKS continues to yell for help until several AUDIENCE MEMBERS get up from their chairs, walk on stage, and help her to her feet. GOLDILOCKS and the AUDIENCE MEMBERS exit.

Lights, sound, magic: THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN enters, runs after GOLDILOCKS, exits. HANSEL enters, rolls the MGO across stage, exits. JACK enters, still carrying the CHICKEN 4 SALE sign, and runs after HANSEL.)

JACK

Thief!

(JACK exits. GRETEL enters, still carrying the oversized check, and runs after JACK.)

GRETEL

Jack!

(GRETEL exits. GOLDILOCKS and the AUDIENCE MEMBERS enter, scream, run across stage, exit. THE BIG GIANT chicken enters, clucks, runs after GOLDILOCKS, exits.

The MGO rolls across stage. HANSEL enters, screams, runs after the MGO, exits. JACK enters, screams, runs after HANSEL, exits. GRETEL enters, screams, runs after JACK, exits.

THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN enters, clucks, runs after everyone, exits. JACK, GOLDILOCKS, HANSEL, GRETEL, and the AUDIENCE MEMBERS enter, scream, run across stage, exit.

THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN enters, clucks, runs halfway across stage. MR. WOLFE enters and strikes a powerful, calming pose. Mid-cluck, THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN stops in its tracks. MR. WOLFE pulls a flute from his breast pocket and plays a lullaby. THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN grows sleepy and snores. MR. WOLFE steps forward and pets it.)

MR. WOLFE

There, there, that's a good girl. No need to worry now.

(With his cane, MR. WOLFE whacks THE BIG GIANT CHICKEN. It falls to the ground. Mr. Wolfe drags it offstage and immediately reenters with a giant piece of cooked chicken.)

MR. WOLFE

It's alright, you can come out now.

(JACK and GOLDBLOCKS enter from one side of the stage, while HANSEL and GRETEL enter from the opposite. All four children surround MR. WOLFE. GOLDBLOCKS has returned to her normal self. GRETEL'S check is torn in half. HANSEL'S MGO is nowhere in sight. There is a long silence before anyone speaks.)

JACK

That was crazy.

GOLDBLOCKS

That was traumatic.

HANSEL

I think I'm going to be sick.

GRETEL

I think I'm going to touch Jack's hair.

(GRETEL runs toward JACK but MR. WOLFE stops her before she can cross.)

MR. WOLFE

Now, now, do not get ahead of yourselves, children. You must be starving after an experience like that. Who wants dinner?

(MR. WOLFE waves to the chicken.)

JACK

Dude, you are messed up.

MR. WOLFE

Pardon?

JACK

Don't get me wrong—a McMagic Meal with chicken nuggets is my favorite food, especially when you mix it up with macaroni and cheese and a whole bunch of ketchup and it makes the most delicious thing anybody can ever, ever have in this entire kingdom—but that chicken, which, I guess used to be my chicken, just tried to eat us! And now you want us to eat it?

MR. WOLFE

That's right.

JACK

Holy bologna. I gotta put this in my superhero comic.

(JACK begins to draw on the back of his CHICKEN 4 SALE sign. MR. WOLFE turns to HANSEL and GRETEL and bows.)

MR. WOLFE

I do not believe we have met. Mr. Wolfe, at your service. Won't you try some of my secret recipe chicken?

GRETEL

I'm a vegetarian.

HANSEL

So am I.

MR. WOLFE

Surely one of you will try this delicious meal? My darlings, this is an entire MGO-fed chicken freshly caught by yours truly. Just think about all that running and screaming—I could hear you from a mile away. You must eat. You must. Goldilocks, won't you try some?

GOLDILOCKS

No thanks.

MR. WOLFE

Aren't you hungry?

GOLDILOCKS

I've had plenty. Trust me. Besides, I told you that I don't like gross, smelly animals but then you left that thing with me anyway and it went crazy and got big and tried to eat everybody!

HANSEL

Oh, so you're the one who let the chicken out? Well, if it hadn't been for you and your dumb mistake then I would have made it to the Magic Surplus Superstore. Now I don't even have my orb!

GRETEL

Hansel, I think there's something you should know.

(GRETEL waves the torn check at HANSEL.)

HANSEL

Our money!

JACK

You mean my money.

MR. WOLFE

Children —

(JACK stops drawing and looks up.)

JACK

That was my MGO you stole!

MR. WOLFE

Children, please —

JACK

You little thief!

GRETEL

Hey, stop calling my brother names! He didn't mean to hurt anybody. He was just taking his opportunity.

MR. WOLFE

Children, won't you —

HANSEL

That's right, we were just taking our opportunity like Dad said.

(MR. WOLFE waves his arms in frustration. He sits down and begins eating the chicken—*all* of it. The children don't notice.)

GOLDBLOCKS

Well, when you ran after your opportunity, you left me alone. All of you! Especially you, Jack, even after I helped you!

HANSEL

She's right. You did this.

JACK

Me?

GRETEL

Jack didn't do anything!

HANSEL

Don't defend him!

GOLDBLOCKS

You never should have taken those MGOs.

JACK

But I didn't want to take those MGOs in the first place. Mr. Wolfe made me.

GOLDBLOCKS

That's what I said two minutes ago. Mr. Wolfe made you sell that chicken and then he left me with it!

(JACK, GOLDBLOCKS, HANSEL, and GRETEL simultaneously turn and point at MR. WOLFE, who clutches his chest, howls in pain, and falls to the ground. The children become quiet.

Lights flash. A siren blares. MR. WOLFE exits, perhaps with AUDIENCE MEMBERS dressed as doctors. Lights stop flashing. The siren fades.)

GOLDBLOCKS

Do you think he's dead?

HANSEL

Poor guy just ate too much chicken and had a heart attack. He'll be fine at the hospital, right?

GRETEL

I don't think he made healthy choices. At least that's what Mom always said when we wouldn't eat our vegetables. Hey, did you know that only two percent of all the children in our kingdom eat the right amount of fruits and vegetables?

HANSEL

Gretel, not now. Can't you tell that some people are sad?

JACK

I'm not sad. The old man had it coming.

GOLDBLOCKS

That's not very nice!

GRETEL

And did you know that two-thirds of everyone in our kingdom is overweight?

HANSEL

Grete, this isn't the time for your fun facts.

GRETEL

And that only one in three children exercises every day?

HANSEL

What does exercise have to do anything right now? We've been running around all day. Don't you think that's enough exercise? I mean, some of us are mourning here.

GRETEL

Well, maybe we should do something. Make healthy choices. Just like Mom always said.

HANSEL

You're losing it.

GOLDBLOCKS

Hey, maybe she's right. Maybe we should do something for Mr. Wolfe.

JACK

Yeah, like what?

GOLDBLOCKS

I don't know. Like, maybe we could have a charity concert and I could sing and you could be my backup dancers? We can sell tickets and donate all the money to Mr. Wolfe. I have routines if you want to practice.

JACK

Uh, no thanks.

HANSEL

We could try and find more MGOs to sell at the Magic Surplus Superstore.

GOLDBLOCKS

No more MGOs! Okay? All you did was yell and fight and scream at each other about those stupid things. And then I had to eat them all and now I feel terrible. But you know what, I did it to help you. Because that's what superstars do—we spread joy and happiness to everyone.

JACK

Maybe she's right. Mr. Wolfe warned me to watch where I planted those MGOs but I didn't listen. I never should have traded that chicken.

GRETEL

Yeah, well, maybe we shouldn't have sold the MGOs you accidently planted. We were just trying to take our opportunity. Sorry if we made you mad. Right, Hansel?

HANSEL

Sure. What she said.

GRETEL

Hansel...

HANSEL

Fine, fine. Maybe we shouldn't have done it. But what else were we going to do? We were running away!

GRETEL

But we're still running away! We can do anything we want. What if we started a garden? Remember the one Mom had? And how we used to grow all those incredible things like beans and pumpkins and radishes and lettuce? What if we did that for Mr. Wolfe?

GOLDBLOCKS

Hey, that's a great idea.

JACK

No it's not. Gardening is boring.

GOLDBLOCKS

So? You'll have help. Besides, we all have to eat. Why not grow some food ourselves? That way if we grow a lot and have anything left over we could maybe even sell some.

HANSEL

Come on Jack, I'll do it if you do it. What do you say?

JACK

Okay, okay. Whatever.

GOLDBLOCKS

Oh yeah. Just right. Let's go...

(Lights, sound, magic: the four children begin planting a garden. As they work, GOLDBLOCKS sings. The other children serve as her CHORUS.)

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

G-Locks in the house.

CHORUS
(singing)

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

G-Locks in the house.

CHORUS
(singing)

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

The soil is so dark. The soil is so smooth. If you wanna garden, listen to my groove.

CHORUS
(singing)

Garden Groove! Garden Groove! Do the Garden Groove!

GOLDDILOCKS
(rapping)

Don't be afraid, put your hands in the Earth. Plant some seeds and watch them birth. Divide in rows side by side. Roots go deep, leaves spread wide. Water and sun keep them alive. A little bit of love will help them thrive. Beans in summer and pumpkins in fall. Watch them grow then eat them all.

CHORUS
(singing)

Eat those veggies! Eat those veggies!

GOLDDILOCKS
(singing)

Veggies, veggies, eat those veggies. Oh yeah. Just right. Tasty buds! Tasty buds! Do the Garden Groove!

CHORUS
(singing)

Garden Groove! Garden Groove!

(GOLDBLOCKS, JACK, HANSEL, and GRETEL do the Garden Groove. They dance and garden, dance and garden, dance and garden. The party winds down. MR. WOLFE enters.)

MR. WOLFE

Children, what in the world are you doing?

GOLDBLOCKS

You're back!

GRETEL

How do you feel?

HANSEL

What were the doctors like?

JACK

Did you fight any more chickens?

MR. WOLFE

No need to worry about me. I am fine. Never better. Now what have you done here? My property didn't look like this before.

(JACK points at GRETEL.)

JACK

It was her idea.

GRETEL

We made you a garden. Like it? We planted all sorts of things. Tomatoes and peppers and onions and cabbage and peanuts and apple trees and pear trees and avocado trees and broccoli and eggplant and lettuce and —

MR. WOLFE

Lettuce? I love lettuce.

HANSEL

So do we. It was our Mom's favorite.

MR. WOLFE

But I don't understand. Why would you do this?

GOLDBLOCKS

Remember that story you told me?

MR. WOLFE

Of course.

GOLDBLOCKS

Well, it's like you said. No one should have to steal lettuce. But no one should have to buy all their food at the Magic Surplus Superstore, either. So the more you can do to help yourself and the people around you the better off you'll be.

JACK

Hey, what about this story? Can we hear it? I love stories!

MR. WOLFE

Really, my boy, now is not the time. Perhaps later —

GOLDBLOCKS

Basically Mr. Wolfe was poor and he had a big family and so they stole lettuce from the neighbor's garden but the neighbor turned out to be a witch and so she kidnapped his baby sister and locked her in a tower forever.

GRETEL

Oh, we know that story.

MR. WOLFE

I'm positive you don't.

HANSEL

Yes, we do. Mom told it to us all the time before she died.

MR. WOLFE

Your mother?

GRETEL

Yeah, same thing happened to her. Some witch locked her up until Dad rescued her.

MR. WOLFE

Your father? Is he blind?

HANSEL

Well, he used to be, then Mom cured him with her magic tears. Kinda weird, I know.

MR. WOLFE

May I ask your mother's name?

GRETEL

Rapunzel.

(Beat.)

MR. WOLFE

Children, do you know what this means? Your mother was my sister! I... I'm your uncle!

HANSEL

Uncle Wolfe?

MR. WOLFE

Please, call my Theodore. Uncle Teddy, if you like.

(MR. WOLFE hugs his niece and nephew.)

GRETEL

Hey, can we live with you?

HANSEL

Gretel!

GRETEL

What? I'm tired of running away. Can't we just stay here and live with Mr. Wolfe and help him with his nice garden?

MR. WOLFE

Children, I wish I could but... I know what it feels like to lose someone you love. I am sure your father misses you very much. Perhaps you should head home soon? But of course you can visit whenever you like. After school, on the weekends, whatever you want.

GRETEL

Promise?

MR. WOLFE

Promise.

GRETEL

But what about your garden? Who will help you take care of it?

GOLDDILOCKS

I could help. I mean, I want to help, but I also kinda have to. My guidance counselor says I need to do more volunteer hours or else.

MR. WOLFE

No worries. I can make do. Actually, when I was little, when we didn't have much food, I always wished that I could have my own restaurant. One of those nice ones with fancy menus and napkins folded like flowers and a bewitching woman singing in the corner. But once Rapunzel left my dreams didn't seem that important anymore...

GOLDILOCKS

Did you say singing? Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. What if this is my big break? Okay, get it together. Mr. Wolfe, I sing. And I rap. And I dance. And I'm gorgeous with a capital G. I could totally sing for you! Everybody would love me. But I'm not cheap. I need perks, okay? Like all the root beer I can drink.

JACK

Yeah, and what if I made the menus? I'm really good at that stuff. I mean, just look at my artwork.

(JACK turns to MR. WOLFE and shows him the back of his sign, which now reads ~~CHICKEN~~ COMICS 4 SALE.)

JACK

Elderly MGO enthusiast by day, valiant hero by night. Mr. Wolfe is... the Chicken Clunker! Trust me, this thing is going to go like mad. Maybe we could even sell it at your restaurant?

MR. WOLFE

How... nice. You certainly have talent. And Goldilocks has potential too. Hansel and Gretel, what do you think?

(GRETEL runs to JACK and kisses his cheek.)

GRETEL

I think it's perfect.

HANSEL

Maybe this is finally our opportunity to make it big! Maybe Dad could even help us!

GRETEL

Yeah! And whenever we visit, we can cook and fold napkins and serve food and all that other fun restaurant stuff!

MR. WOLFE

I don't know what to say. All I have ever done is look for my sister and sell MGOs. Maybe this is a bad idea...

GOLDILOCKS

It's never too late to chase your dreams. At least that's what my guidance counselor says, so I guess it's true enough. Hey, I like the sound of that. I think I feel a hot beat coming on. Oh yeah. Just right. Get ready, Mr. Wolfe...

(singing)

Better chase that dream, chase that dream, now you got help from your superstar team. Dig that soil. Grow those greens. Set that table. Serve those beans. Oh yeah. Just right. Now you got help from your superstar team. Cause when we work together we can do whatever. Feeling well and eating swell. So don't delay. Move this way. Try the fresh spuds at Uncle Teddy's Tasty Buds!

(While GOLDILOCKS sings, MR. WOLFE, JACK, HANSEL, and GRETEL exit. JACK reenters with a beautiful hand-drawn sign advertising “Uncle Teddy’s Tasty Buds.” HANSEL and GRETEL enter carrying menus, which they begin handing out to imaginary customers. MR. WOLFE enters carrying a tray of food.)

CHORUS

Tasty Buds!

MR. WOLFE

Well then. That’s certainly been enough excitement for one day. Who wants lettuce?

BLACKOUT

CHAPTER 5. “FOOD & FAIRY TALES” CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Unit Overview

“Food & Fairy Tales” is a five-week long writing residency that will be taught to two 6th grade classrooms at Colo-NESCO Community Schools. The residency uses “Magically Modified Grimm’s” as a teaching tool to build skills in the areas of reading writing, and agricultural literacy. In the accompanying curriculum overview, I provide a list of learning objectives, methods, activities, and AFNR standards, competencies, and benchmarks that align with my project. The learning objectives follow the literacy guidelines of the district-selected curriculum, “Being a Writer,” which also follows Iowa Core standards. The methods and activities describe in brief how I will teach this unit. I have also included the AFNR competencies that meet Iowa’s high school agricultural education standards (as there are no state standards for grades K-8) in order to show how “Magically Modified Grimm’s” can build agricultural literacy skills. During the residency, students will write their own fractured fairy tales, attend a performance of the play, and learn more about sustainability as it pertains to food.

Week One

“Being a Writer” Learning Objectives:

- Students hear and discuss fiction.
- Students informally explore elements of fiction.
- Students generate and quick-write ideas for fiction.
- Students draft fiction pieces.

Methods & Activities:

- Perform and analyze Russian fairy tale “Baba Yaga.”
- Discuss common elements of fairy tales: magical creatures, morals, etc.

- Writing exercise: create fairy tale characters using character profile sheet.

AFNR Standards, Benchmarks, & Competencies:

- CRP.04.02.01.b: Research and summarize the purpose of different forms of written and visual communication in formal and informal settings (e.g., letters, emails, reports, social media, graphics, diagrams, etc.).
- CRP.04.02.01.b: Compare and contrast the structure of different forms of written and visual communication.
- CRP.04.02.01.c: Evaluate the effectiveness of different forms of written and visual communication for achieving their intended purpose.

Week Two

“Being a Writer” Learning Objectives:

- Students hear, discuss, and draft fiction.
- Students explore character, setting, and plot.
- Students explore conflict, resolution, and suspense.
- Students generate and quick-write ideas for fiction.
- Students cultivate creativity in their writing.

Methods & Activities:

- Read and analyze “The Elves and the Shoemaker” and “Rapunzel.”
- Writing exercise: describe “magic” objects using the five senses.
- Writing exercise: learn to develop conflict using “Story Machine.”
- Begin writing first drafts of fractured fairy tales.

AFNR Standards, Benchmarks, & Competencies:

- CRP.04: Communicate clearly, effectively and with reason.

- CRP.04.02: Produce clear, reasoned and coherent written and visual communication in formal and informal settings.
- CRP.04.02.02.a: Identify and examine methods for producing clear, reasoned and coherent written and visual communication that are appropriate to the task, purpose and audience (e.g., audience analysis, objective development, etc.).
- CRP.04.02.02.c: Compose clear and coherent written documents and visuals (e.g., agendas, audio-visuals, drafts, forms, etc.) that are adapted to the audience needs in both formal and informal settings.

Week Three

“Being a Writer” Learning Objectives:

- Students review their fiction drafts, and each selects one to develop, revise, proofread, and publish.
- Students learn about a professional author’s writing process.
- Students analyze their drafts and think of ways to develop characters and plot.
- Students explore transitional words and phrases.
- Students explore strong opening and endings that bring stories’ events to a close.
- Students confer with one another and the teacher.

Methods & Activities:

- Read and analyze opening pages of “Magically Modified Grimm’s.”
- Discuss how to create successful openings.
- Discuss how fractured fairy tales differ from the source material.
- Q & A with playwright Adam Blake Wright about writing and sustainability.
- Continue writing first drafts of fractured fairy tales.

AFNR Standards, Benchmarks, & Competencies:

- CRP.04: Communicate clearly, effectively and with reason.
- CRP.04.02: Produce clear, reasoned and coherent written and visual communication in formal and informal settings.
- CRP.04.02.02.a: Identify and examine methods for producing clear, reasoned and coherent written and visual communication that are appropriate to the task, purpose and audience (e.g., audience analysis, objective development, etc.).
- CRP.04.02.02.c: Compose clear and coherent written documents and visuals (e.g., agendas, audio-visuals, drafts, forms, etc.) that are adapted to the audience needs in both formal and informal settings.
- CRP.05: Consider the environmental, social and economic impacts of decisions.

Week Four

“Being a Writer” Learning Objectives:

- Students explore developing the setting of their stories by adding descriptive details.
- Students develop second draft of their stories, integrating revisions.
- Students explore using dialogue to develop character.
- Students explore first- and third-person points of view.
- Students assess their own writing.
- Students confer with one another and the teacher.

Methods & Activities:

- Perform “Magically Modified Grimm’s” for students.
- Discuss elements of global food system.
- Reread “Baba Yaga” and analyze point of view.

- Writing exercise: rewrite a fairy tale in the first person point of view.
- Begin second drafts of fractured fairy tales.
- One-on-one conferences with students.

AFNR Standards, Benchmarks, & Competencies:

- CRP.05.02.02.a: Examine information about environmental, social and economic impacts when making decisions in the workplace and community.
- CS.01: Analyze how issues, trends, technologies and public policies impact systems in the Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources Career Cluster.
- CS.01.01: Research, examine and discuss issues and trends that impact AFNR systems on local, state, national and global levels.
- CS.04.01.02.a: Read and interpret the definition of sustainability and summarize how it relates to AFNR activities.
- ESS.02.03.02.a: Examine how social views and movements (e.g., zero-waste philosophy, carbon footprints, recycling, etc.) have affected the implementation and need for regulation of environmental service systems.
- FPP.04.01: Examine the scope of the food industry by evaluating local and global policies, trends and customs for food production.
- FPP.04.01.01.b: Analyze the similarities and differences amongst policies and legislation that affect the food products and processing system in the U.S. or around the world.
- FPP.04.02.03.a: Research and describe current and emerging technologies related to food products and processing (e.g., high pressure processing of foods, automation, biotechnology, etc.).

Week Five

“Being a Writer” Learning Objectives:

- Students proofread their second drafts for spelling and punctuation.
- Students proofread for noun-pronoun agreement and unclear pronoun antecedents.
- Students write their final versions and publish them as books.
- Students present their books to the class from the Author’s chair.
- Students confer with one another and the teacher.

Methods & Activities:

- Revise and edit fractured fairy tales.
- Review what students have learned about writing and sustainability.
- Celebrate with end-of-year party.

AFNR Standards, Benchmarks, & Competencies:

- CRP.04.02.02.b: Apply techniques for ensuring clarity, logic and coherence to edit written and visual communications (e.g., emails, reports, presentations, technical documents, diagrams, etc.).
- CRP.05.02: Make, defend and evaluate decisions at work and in the community using information about the potential environmental, social and economic impacts.
- FPP.04.01.01.c: Articulate and defend a personal point of view on policies and legislation that affect the food products and processing system in the U.S. or around the world.

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