

Some history on the Cinderella story

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### **The first Cinderella was Greek!**

There are two faces to Cinderella: there's the European folk tale that evolved into the modern-day story of a girl in a big blue ball gown, and there's the centuries-old plot that has been passed between cultures for millennia.

The story of overcoming oppression and marrying into another social class to be saved from a family that doesn't love or appreciate you is an incredibly powerful one, too powerful to be contained by the story we all know.

The first recorded story featuring a Cinderella-like figure dates to Greece in the **sixth century BCE**. In this story, a Greek courtesan named Rhodopis has one of her shoes stolen by an eagle, who flies it all the way across the Mediterranean and drops it in the lap of an Egyptian king.

Taking the shoe drop as a sign from the heavens (literally and metaphorically), the king goes on a quest to find the owner of the shoe. When he finds Rhodopis, he marries her, lifting her from her lowly status to the throne.

### **China**

Another one of the earliest known Cinderella stories is the ninth-century Chinese fairy tale, *Ye Xian*, in which a young girl named Ye Xian is granted one wish from some magical fishbones, which she uses to create a gown in the hopes of finding a husband.

Like Rhodopis' tale, a monarch comes in possession of the shoe (this time, the shoes have a gold fish-scale pattern) and goes on a quest to find the woman whose tiny feet will fit the shoe. Ye Xian's beauty convinces the king to marry her, and the mean stepmother is crushed by stones in her cave home.

### **The European version of the story originated in the 17th century**

In total, more than 500 versions of the Cinderella story have been found just in Europe, and the Cinderella we know best comes from here (France, specifically).

The first version of Cinderella that bears a significant similarity to the most famous version emerged in the 17th century, when a story called *Cenerentola* (pronounced Chen-er-en-TOE-lah) was published in a collection of Italian short stories. *Cenerentola* has all the ingredients of the modern-day tale — the wicked stepmother and stepsisters, the magic, and the missing slipper — but it's darker and just a bit more magical.

In the story, a woman named Zezolla escapes the king, who wants to marry her, at two separate celebrations — before he finally catches her at the third one and prevents her from leaving. Instead of a story of requited love, *Cenerentola* is a story of forced marriage and six very wicked stepsisters.

**Sixty years later**, in 1697, the Italian tale got a **French twist and became the story we know**. In *Cendrillon*, **Charles Perrault** — a French writer credited with inventing the fairy tale — cast the form that Cinderella would take for the next 300 years and more. He introduced the **glass slipper**, the pumpkin, and the fairy godmother (minus the bibbidi bobbidi boo). **This is the version Disney later adapted into its animated classic.**

**The Brothers Grimm** had a 'grim' take on the tale

The Brothers Grimm also collected the tale in their famous fairy tale compendium. That story, called *Aschenputtel* (*Cinderella* in the English translations), appeared more than 100 years after Perrault's version in the 19th century (1812).

*Aschenputtel* is a much darker tale. Cinderella's wishes come not from a fairy godmother but from a tree growing on her mother's grave. Her father, instead of being absent as in Perrault's tale, is wilfully ignorant of his daughter's suffering.

In the Grimm version, the heroine's slippers are made of gold (not glass), and when the Prince comes to test the stepsisters' feet for size, one of them cuts off her own toes to try and make the shoe fit. In the end, Cinderella marries the prince, her stepsisters serve as her bridesmaids, and doves peck their eyes out during the ceremony. It is, needless to say, a beautiful tale for children!

A quote to remember when thinking of all the Cinderella stories and the 'ugly' sisters:

“If a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face. And when that person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, every year, the face gets uglier and uglier until you can hardly bear to look at it. A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts it will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely.”

— Roald Dahl, *The Twits*: