

**Happy Summer Holidays 2023  
to you all!**

**Your English teachers look forward to  
meeting you in September**

We are sending you a story that is told in at least Korea and Vietnam, but there seem to be even more versions to be found in the Far East.

Soon you will be doing an autobiography unit at William Ellis and we will be asking you to tell stories about your own life and read others' life stories. This particular tale, though, is about the act of story-telling itself. At the end, you have a chance to write a version of a traditional tale for the William Ellis English teachers to read.

You will need a writing pad or some lined paper to write some short responses on, and two pieces of lined paper if you do the whole story challenge at the end.

# What do you think?

The following statements are all about stories. Choose three of them, note them down in separate bubbles and underneath each one, write your opinion on it.

- stories belong to everyone.
- stories aren't true but they can be real.
- the author of a story isn't only the person who tells it.
- parents should tell their children stories.
- stories are about things that didn't happen, but they can still be true.
- stories belong to everyone.
- stories should be shared and passed on.
- it's important that GCSE students can write good stories.

Dialogue parts if you are reading  
in a small group:

Spirit 1

Spirit 2

Spirit 3

Oldest spirit

The old man

The young man

# THE STORY SPIRITS

Part I

**A STORY FROM KOREA OR VIETNAM OR...**  
**WILLIAM ELLIS YEAR 6-7, SUMMER 2023**



Once, long ago – was it in Vietnam or was it in Kampuchea or was it in Korea? – I’m not sure, but I do know that in a certain village lived a husband and wife. They had one child, a boy, who was so fond of stories that he liked hearing them told **even better than eating his dinner.**

Once, long ago – was it in Vietnam or was it in Kampuchea or was it in Korea? – I'm not sure, but I do know that in a certain village lived a husband and wife. They had one child, a boy, who was so fond of stories that he liked hearing them told even better than eating his dinner.

His father and mother made sure that, every evening, there should always be some neighbour who would come in and tell him a story. Most of these stories, which were usually about fox spirits or tigers (who were bad) and dragons or heavenly fairies (who were good), most of these old tales were told at bedtime by a certain old man who often did work about the house and who knew a great many of the old stories.

Of course, this boy sometimes played with other children, and when they got to know about what happened every evening, they naturally wanted him to tell *them* the stories. But, beg as they would, this boy never took the trouble to tell than even a single one.

On the wall in one corner of the room in which this boy slept, there was a nail, and on the nail hung an old leather bag. The mouth of this bag was tightly bound with string. It hung there year after year, quite forgotten.

But every time a new story was told in that room, the spirits from the story had to go into the bag, and because the boy would never pass on the stories to anybody, the unfortunate story spirits could never get out.

As you can guess, the bag got terribly full, so that the story spirits had no room to breathe or move. There they had to stay, and the bad spirits – such as magic centipedes, foxes and, worst, the talking tigers, got more and more angry.

After a time the boy's parents died, but the faithful old man who had always worked about the house went on looking after him, and even when the boy was nearly grown up this kind old man used to tell him a new story nearly every night.

Well, the time came when the lad was old enough to be married, and now, as he had no father or mother, it was a certain uncle's job to find a wife for him.

This uncle was rich, so he managed to arrange a very fine marriage. He chose a lovely daughter of a well-off family who lived in the next valley.

On the morning before the day fixed for the wedding, the faithful old man was busy in a little cubbyhole just outside the bridegrooms old room. This was where the door to the heating stove was, I'm the old man was stoking the stove to make the room nice and warm. To his astonishment he heard a whispering. It seemed to come from the room. But the young bridegroom was out with his friends and there was no one else about. Who could be whispering and talking? The old man stopped moving the logs, stood very still, and listened.

'So he's going to be married?' said a discontented voice

'Yes. A splendid wedding it's going to be.'

'He is going to have all the fun, but we've been cramped up in the dark here – and some of us half dead – all these years.'

'It isn't fair.'

'We've put up with it too long. It's time we had our revenge. That's what I think.'

## PAUSE!

- *What do you think the spirits will decide?*
- *Write down in detail what you think their plan of action will be. Match your guesses to some of the story spirits' personalities.*

Then there was a murmuring, as if a lot of creatures were all speaking and grumbling at the same time. But what creatures? The old man was puzzled, so, without making sound, he crept out and went around outside the house to where there was a window from which he hoped he could see into the room.

Now in the old days, in that part of the world, windows used to be made of paper instead of glass, so that it was difficult to see into a room from outside, but the old man remembered that in one place there was a small hole in the paper of one of the windows. The hole was high up, but he stood on tiptoe and put his eye to it.

The odd thing was that there was nobody in the room. All the same the voices went on, and it seemed to him that they came from one corner. Then he noticed that the old leather bag was swaying on its nail, and its sides were moving, for all the world as if there was something alive inside. He listened again.

‘He’ll be sure to ride on horseback to the bride’s house.’

‘Yes, it’s quite a long way.’

There was no doubt about it. The voices were coming from inside the old leather bag.

‘On a ride like that he’s sure to get thirsty. I’ll be a well by the roadside and it shall have a drinking gourd floating all ready on it. If he drinks he’ll feel very ill. I’ll see to that!’ Then there was a laugh.

‘A good idea,’ said another voice. ‘Just in case he doesn’t drink, I’ll be I field of delicious strawberries a little farther on. If he eats even one strawberry, it’ll be the worse for him.’

Then a squeaky voice said, ‘I’ve been here longer than most of you. I want to be revenged too. In case he doesn’t drink or eat strawberries, I’ve thought of another idea.’



‘What’s that?’

‘Well, maybe you young stories don’t know, but I’m a very old story, and I know that when a bridegroom gets to the bride’s house, people always put a big sack of rice husks on the ground – just to make it easy for him to get down from his horse. I’ll turn myself into a red hot poker and hide in the sack. There will be such a hullabaloo when his foot gets burned!’

‘I’m the oldest story of all,’ said a deep bass voice. ‘I’m going to be a snake and I’m going to hide under the mat in the bride’s room. I shan’t do *her* any harm, but as for *him*! If you all fail, then I shall come out when everyone is asleep and bite him.’

Then all the voices called out, ‘Agreed.’ The bag stopped swaying on its nail and there was silence.

The old man was dreadfully shocked at what he had heard. But of course it was only to be expected that all the fierce story spirits would be angry. The good spirits hadn’t spoken up at all – and as for those fox and centipede spirits and the tigers – you could hardly blame them, for the boy had behaved very badly in not letting them out by retelling the story to anyone.

The old man went off and sat on the mountainside to think. But the more he thought, the more it seemed to him that the danger was real, and also that it would be difficult to do anything to protect the young man. He shook his head as he thought about it. The young man would never let the poor things out! He never would tell so much as a single story! No, not however much he was asked. ‘But what’s to be done?’ thought the old man. ‘I daren’t tell him, and as for his rich uncle, he never believes a word I say! But if I was to interfere with that old leather bag, it might be worse still. Goodness knows what those stories spirits mightn’t do!’ In the end, the old man resolved to say nothing.

IF THE SPIRITS FROM THE STORIES **YOU** READ, LISTEN TO AND PLAY AND WATCH CAME TO LIFE WHAT MIGHT THEY DO?

PAUSE!

- Now write down what three of the spirits **from your stories** might do if they were trapped in a bag and wanted to take their revenge. Pick the sinister or dangerous or wilder characters in the stories you know. They can be from stories you heard when you were much younger.
- Use the title: The Voices of the Trapped Story Spirits

Dialogue parts if you are reading in a small group:

The old man

The young man/bridegroom

Rich uncle

# **THE STORY SPIRITS**

Part 2

**A STORY FROM KOREA OR VIETNAM OR...  
WILLIAM ELLIS YEAR 6-7, SUMMER 2023**

“GOODNESS KNOWS WHAT  
THOSE STORIES SPIRITS  
MIGHTN’T DO!”

IN THE END, THE OLD MAN  
RESOLVED\* TO SAY  
NOTHING...’

- *Will the wedding of the young man and his bride go to plan?*
- *Will the story spirits ever be liberated?*

\* *resolved = decided (silently here)*



Next morning the wedding procession was made ready. There were attendants on site, and a splendid saddle-horse for the bridegroom, and a horse with red tassels for his uncle. There was a groom to lead each horse. Everyone was dressed in his best clothes.

‘Let me lead the young master’s horse,’ begged the old man.

‘No, no,’ said the rich uncle, ‘you’d better stay at home here and mind the house, and then you can have everything ready when we bring back the bride.’

However, the old man begged so hard that at last the uncle gave way and off they went. First came the bridegroom at the head of the procession, then a lot of attendants who carried a crimson palanquin ready for the bride, then right at the end of the procession, rode the uncle.

‘Why is that silly old man leading the bridegroom’s horse so fast?’ complained the uncle. ‘It’s not at all proper with a bridal procession. At this rate we shall all be quite hot and breathless before we get to the bride’s house.’

After they had gone about half a mile, the bridegroom said to the old fellow, ‘Just stop for a moment. I feel thirsty and I can see a nice well full of clear water. It even has a gourd-cup floating ready on it. Just fetch me a drink!’

But the old man shook his head and answered, ‘No sir! We shall be late if we stop,’ and with that he tugged at the horse’s bridle and hurried on the faster.

So now the old man had got the young man past the first danger.

But one of the attendants had heard what was said and passed word back to the uncle. Before long the young man said, 'Look at that splendid field of strawberries. How ripe and juicy they look! Just pick me a few, will you. I'm still thirsty.'

'No sir!' said the old man, hurrying on the faster. 'They would be bad for you! You're sure to get much better strawberries at the bride's house.'

Again word passed back to the uncle. This time he rode forward, pushing past the rest of the procession.

'How dare you disobey the young master like this! You wouldn't let him have water, and now you wouldn't even let him have a strawberry! There is no time to punish you now, but I shan't forget. After the wedding, I shall see to it, you stupid old man!'

But the old man wouldn't stop, so by this time they were past the strawberries. So the second danger had been overcome.

At last they got to the bride's house. More guests than the house would hold had been invited. A great feast was ready and the whole garden had been covered with the tent. This was not just to keep out the rain, but so that if any bad-luck bird should happen to fly over while the wedding ceremony was going on, its shadow wouldn't fall on the bride and bridegroom.

In front of the door of this large tent stood attendants and, when they saw the procession, coming along, two of them ran out, as was the custom, with a sack of rice husks to make it easy for the bridegroom to get down from his horse. But, to the astonishment of the whole wedding party, the shabby old man who was leading the bridegroom's horse snatched the sack of husks away. He did this in such a hurry, just as the bridegroom was dismounting, that the young man lost his balance and fell.

Everyone was surprised that the shabby old man should do such an ill-natured thing. As for the uncle, he was furious at what seemed to him a third piece of malice. He said nothing, but vowed to himself that, when they got home, no punishment would be too hard for the ill-natured and ill-mannered old fellow. However, this was no time for scolding.

The bridegroom picked himself up and his wedding robes were dusted. And then the bride's father led them all into the tent. Here everything was ready for the ceremony. In the middle stood a carved table, and on it were a cockerel and a hen, each dressed up in such splendidly embroidered clothes that you could hardly see what they were. Both birds had been tied to a wine cup, one by a red thread and the other by a green one. Beyond this table was a beautifully decorated screen painted with pictures of luck-bringing dragons, and on another table besides that stood a wooden duck.



The bridegroom took his place on the eastern side of the table and waited there. Presently, from behind the decorated screen and from the western side, the splendidly dressed, pretty young bride came in, with two girls as her attendants. Bride and bridegroom bowed to each other and the wedding ceremony began. It ended with the two of them taking a sip from the wine cup to which the cockerel and hen were tied. When the whole ceremony was over, the bride and her attendants went back to her room and her father led the bridegroom to the main room of the house.

*scolding = telling off*

Now it was time for all the relations and guests to visit the bride and bridegroom in turn. In each room was a table loaded with delicious food and plenty of wine. Everyone was happy, except of course the bridegroom's poor worried old friend. He knew that there was yet one more danger.

Finally, all the guests went home or lay down, or went to bed in the house, and, at last, the newly married couple were left alone. They should have been able, now that the long day of feasting was over, to have a little peace and get better acquainted for, according to custom, they had so far hardly had a chance to speak to each other.

But not a bit of it! No sooner were they alone than there was loud knocking at the door. When the bridegroom opened it, who should rush in but his old neighbour with a drawn sword in his hand. The old man took no notice when the bride screamed in fright, but, still holding the sword, turned back the mat that covered the floor. There, sure enough, coiled a snake. Then, with tremendous blows of the sword, the old man cut the poisonous creature to pieces.

All this made such a commotion that it awakened everyone in the house and they all came crowding in. The bridegroom's uncle, the bride's father and all the rest wanted to know what was the matter.

Then at last, the poor old man knew that it was safe to explain his strange behaviour. Leaning on the sword he told of how he had overheard the story spirits planning revenge, and about the poisoned well and strawberries. They could hardly believe the tale, so when he told about the sack of rice husks a servant was sent to fetch it. Sure enough, there was the poker! It was cold now, but all round it the rice husks were blackened and burnt. Last of all, the old man showed them the pieces of snake.

Then the uncle begged the old man's pardon and immediately gave him a reward, promising him much more when they got home. As for the young bridegroom, he too thanked his old friend from the bottom of his heart.

'I am to blame!' he said. 'But from now on I will tell stories to all who ask for them.' Then he turned to his bride and comforted her saying, 'If we are blessed with children, I shall tell them a story every night! I shall tell them this story especially, so that no story spirits shall ever again suffer from being crowded up in an old leather bag.'



# THINKING ABOUT THIS FOLKTALE

- Can you remember a story that you were told when you were very young? Can you ask a parent or a grandparent if they were told stories when they were children?
- Write up any special example of a story, myth or folktale you remember or that your relative tells you. Are there special stories linked to your family background or to your cultural heritage?
- We would love to read versions of these stories as long as they are not too long! You can bring them in with you or email them to [damms@williamellis.camden.sch.uk](mailto:damms@williamellis.camden.sch.uk) if you want to send them before September.

Finally, do you think it is important to tell and listen to stories, and can you share any reading recommendations?