

Awake Not Sleeping

READER'S COMPANION GUIDE

UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, 2021



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



Produced by the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

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*For thousands of years, people have been telling fairy tales to each other...
These tales have been remembered and passed on, from friend to friend,
from parents to children, across borders and over time.
All the stories shared one common thread – like living things, they were
always changing, as they danced from one storyteller to the next.*



—S. Davidson et al., *Forgotten Fairy Tales of Brave and Brilliant Girls* (2019)

We thank you for choosing to read the *Awake Not Sleeping* collection and for engaging with a storytelling tradition that has been passed down across the ages through spoken word, songs and books. UN Women leads action across the world to advance gender equality and to prevent violence against women and girls. Gender equality is a human right that ensures people of all genders are equally valued, experiencing equal treatment and opportunities to realize their full potential and dignity. We believe in the power of stories to spark the imagination and to activate gender equality in our minds, homes and communities.

Fairy tales are a widely loved part of every society's cultural heritage, yet they are often cruel towards girls and women. If read passively, these harmful tales can model and reinforce gender inequality, casting women as evil stepmothers and witches to be destroyed, or as silent, passive princesses or daughters to be wooed or rescued by handsome princes. UN Women has worked alongside more than 30 feminist writers to look at old tales from across Europe and Central Asia with 'affectionate scepticism' and to create this new, powerful collection of 28 fairy tales for young readers.

To enrich your explorations of how these stories might impact you, this **Reader's Companion Guide** offers two sets of questions. These stories and questions offer a safe way to explore the challenging concept of gender inequality and to generate new ways of thinking and of having curious conversations to bring gender equality closer to reality. The first set of questions can be considered after every story in the collection, while the second set of questions explores the unique themes of each story.



Curious Questions for All of the Stories

1. Who is the **narrator** of the story? Why are they telling the story? How might the other characters have told this story differently?
2. How do the characters in these stories learn about **what is expected of their gender**? How do they challenge such expectations? Are there differences in how people of different genders are talked about in your community?
3. How do the characters use their **personal power** to support and care for one another? How do they hold one another responsible for their actions and behaviours? What would you do differently if you were in the position of each of the characters?
4. How do these stories relate to your experience of **gender equality in your family**? How does your family talk about gender equality and respectful relationships?
5. What do the communities in these stories learn to value about gender equality and respectful relationships? How can everyone work together to create thriving, **gender-equitable communities**?

Curious Questions for Each Story



Wee Little Khavroshechka

by Daria Apakhonchich

1. What do you think the inner shapes that Khavroshechka and Three-Eyes can see mean?
2. The young women in this story are expected to marry. Ask the older women in your family: were they expected to marry too?
3. What does this story say about greed and about how people and money are valued?



The Child Without Golden Hair

by Kalina Maleska

1. How do the different characters react to the King's violence, his use of power and his leadership?
2. What did Nomi learn from the fairy about power and how it can be used?
3. What role does the fact that Lan is blind in one eye play in how he is treated?
4. What is possible in your community when adults are led by children's ideas?



Snow

by Altyn Kapalova

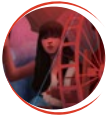
1. How does Shami the wind respond when Aman asks him to control his emotions and play?
2. How is Aman's relationship with her mother remembered in this story? How does your family and community support people who are grieving?
3. How does the telling of stories like the legend of San-Tash and Ulan model people's expectations of relationships?
4. The narrator shows us the magic of talking to the wind. What part of your environment do you wish you could talk with, and why?



The Frog Girl

by Ivanka Ferenčić Martinčić

1. How did the King use his position of power and leadership to influence his children and the community?
2. What do you think the Frog Girl and the Prince like about one another? What do you think equal and respectful relationships look, sound and feel like?
3. The Frog Girl's parents are so happy to have a child. They didn't care about the baby's gender. How does gender influence the way people think, feel and talk about a new baby in your community?
4. Are there messages in your community about what makes a 'real' girl or boy? What would that mean for someone who identifies as non-binary or transgender?



The Spinning Girl

by Bergrún Íris Sevarsdóttir

1. How does the Spinning Girl see herself in the fairy-tale world she imagines?
2. How do you think the Spinning Girl's stepfather may have treated her mother before she died?
3. Older women in fairy tales are often violent queens, stepmothers, trolls or witches. How does Gilitrutt the troll surprise us with her actions and behaviours as the story unfolds?
4. Do you think people consider who has spun their thread or cloth and how it was done?



Jack and the Beanstalk

by Siobhan Tebbs

1. Which of Jack's strengths and skills are valued in the story?
2. How does Jack's mother talk to Jack about his mistakes?
3. What is most important in life for Jack and his mother?
4. Why does Ophelia decide to leave her ogre husband and cut down the beanstalk? How does your family and your community talk about and support women who experience violence in their relationships?



Beyond the Woods

by Aslı Karataş

1. How could the community have responded to support Daphne and her mother when her father was taken away?
2. How could the authorities have supported Daphne's family in working towards a more sustainable way of making money?
3. Whose knowledge and support help Daphne to have the skills and confidence to lead her family and community?
4. Daphne models how it is possible to care for the environment and earn an income. How are people in your community creating new sources of income while also caring for our planet?



The Woman of Flowers

by Bethan James

1. The narrator tells this story in a mysterious and magical way. What do you think happened in the story?
2. How does the Woman of Flowers use her magical powers to try to help with the little girl's fear of darkness?
3. What does this story tell us about trust and giving away our power to others?
4. What would give you the confidence to stand alone for what you believe in?



The Haughty Princess

by Deirdre Sullivan

1. Why does this narrator want to retell her own story?
2. How does the Princess being “too much”—smart, assertive, angry—challenge the power of the men in her community?
3. How does the Princess realize that her life is controlled by the men in her community?
4. How is men's and women's anger talked about differently in your community?



The Ghost Rider

by Doruntina Vinca

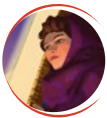
1. What is deep, loving and caring in the relationships between Jurendine, Konstantin and their horses?
2. Why do you think the Mother of the Hearth was “deaf to a man’s voice”?
3. The women are the leaders of Jurendine’s household. What kind of leadership do women in your family show?
4. The children in this story are trusted to solve problems. What opportunities are there for young people in your community to help solve problems?



The Storyteller

by Asli Tohumcu

1. The characters in this story demand that “we need a storyteller who will not... put absurd ideas into readers’ minds.” What ideas do you think they are talking about?
2. Thinking about your favourite fairy tales, how are the characters described and treated based on their gender?
3. The characters are impatient for change, saying it “seems like it will take ages for it to be our turn.” What would you change now? What would it take to make that change happen now?
4. How could the new storyteller use his or her power to support a gender-equitable world where “everyone could live their lives as they wish”? What stories would you like to read or write?



Hana, the Girl Who Caught the Sun

by Rovena Rrozhani

1. While the “strongest men” could not defeat the Jinni, how did Hana use her knowledge of science as her strength in defeating him?
2. The Jinni is described as someone who “could not bear the happiness of the people.” What does this tell us about someone who uses violence or misuses their power?
3. Once the Jinni is defeated, it takes a year for the village environment to recover and for life to return. What does this tell us about how people and places recover from difficulties?
4. Hana’s father and community tell her that although she is “just a girl,” she “can achieve anything.” What are the mixed messages told to girls in your community? What do girls and women in your community have to overcome to achieve equality?



The Girl with the Short Hair

by Nina Horvat

1. How does the narrator play with our existing ideas about what will happen in this typical fairy-tale world?
2. How do Lena and her parents negotiate decisions throughout the story?
3. How do Lena's parents give conflicting messages about gender equality? How does Lena influence her parents' understanding of gender equality and expectations? How do you and your parents talk about gender equality?
4. How does the narrator use humour to show that marriage simply isn't important to Lena? How are women and men who do not wish to marry talked about in your community?



The Princes and the Peas

by Louise Young

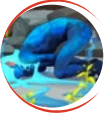
1. What is it about Amy's Dad's behaviour and actions that makes him an "ogre," both in his family and in his business?
2. How does Amy's Dad's behaviour impact how Amy feels about herself?
3. What has her Dad told Amy about her mother? How are women talked about in your community when they leave their home because of violence that they have experienced in their relationships?
4. We are left knowing that Amy has planted the pea to signal to her Mum to come find her. What do you think might happen next?



The Wound of a Heart Too Kind

by Esther Obi Smith

1. How is Adalene and Muiyiwa's growing relationship different from how 'falling in love' is portrayed in traditional fairy tales?
2. Adalene challenges the doctor's racism. How do you see people challenging racism in your family and community?
3. The story takes place in the late 1960s. How do you think this story might be the same or different today, in a hospital near you?
4. What might be possible in a place free from racism, "far away from war and prejudice"?



The Sirens of Carraig Mhór

by Laura Niemeyer

1. What power do the people of the village give up by following their deities' examples?
2. Fionnabhair was not recognized for her care of the community in this story. How does your community value the contributions of girls and women?
3. Would you like to join the sirens on Carraig Mhór, where nobody is ruling over anyone else? Why or why not?
4. What can we learn from this story of destruction and tragedy, and of the possibilities of the world afterwards?



A Tale of Two Ševalas

by Emrah Güler, Amila Hrustić Batovanja,
Hatidža Gušić and Masha Durkalić

1. Ševala Zildžić-Iblizović's parents were supportive of her ambitions. How would this have made a difference in her ability to stand up to the challenges in her life?
2. Some people weren't happy about a woman becoming a doctor. Are women still discriminated against in education and employment in your community? If so, in what way?
3. Ševala Zildžić-Iblizović was the first woman Muslim doctor in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What other questions do you have about the challenges and successes she experienced during her life?
4. Little Ševala is so excited to see her name in a street sign and to learn about Ševala Zildžić-Iblizović. How can you learn more about courageous women in your own community?



Marta

by Karina Bezrukova

1. What does this story tell us about communities giving power and decision-making to only one person?
2. How would the life of this family and village have been different if the Witch Doctor had not misused his power by acting on his jealousy and anger?
3. How do you think Marta will use her great powers to lead her community?
4. What qualities would you like to see in the leaders of your own community?



The Discovery of Princess Jane

by Khulya Jafarova

1. How are Jane, Ella and their (step)mother's relationships in this story different from the way step-sisters and step-parents are normally described in fairy tales?
2. Jane feels less deserving of success or love than Ella because of how she looks. How do narrow definitions of beauty impact how children feel about themselves and their bodies?
3. What does Jane learn about herself that others could already see? What do you love about your friends that they may not see in themselves?
4. Jane wants to explore the world and her place in it, before she gets married. How do young women in your community explore different possibilities for themselves?



The Room with Formulas on the Wall

by Kalina Maleska
based on a story by Irina Solomatina

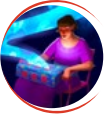
1. What role does Alena's father play in her interest in mathematics and in believing that she could overcome her learning difficulty, dyslexia?
2. Alena, her cousin Sofya and Sofya Kovalevskaya fall in love with mathematics. How is this different from other kinds of love stories? Do you feel this kind of love for anything?
3. What became possible for Alena and her Aunt after they expressed their anger and grief? How does your family talk about their grief and loss?
4. Alena says that they "are lucky to live in this time." Ask the women in your family how women's lives have changed and what still needs to change to make gender equality a reality.



Aisha in Dreamland

by Ana Stjelja

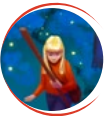
1. Why does Aisha feel both scared and curious as she enters this adventure through the scrolling *One Thousand and One Nights* book?
2. How does dreaming and having new experiences support Aisha in thinking differently about her mother's illness?
3. Aisha sees her mother holding two babies in her dream. How does your community support children and families around the loss of a child?
4. Ghina asks Aisha, "Do you believe everything you read?" Why should we ask questions about what we read or watch?



The Belted Sona

by Alex Chighwinadze

1. How does Sona create and maintain an inclusive and respectful culture for everyone visiting her tavern?
2. How do the other characters respond to the caring and respectful culture that Sona creates?
3. Which places in your community provide healing, love and care like Sona's tavern does in her community?
4. What do you think might change or stay the same after this event with Sona, Kukula and the hurdy-gurdy at the bottom of the river?



The Sleeping Castle

by Tania Kasian

1. How is the Fairy's Encyclopedia of Magic "stuck in the past"? What ideas about gender inequality or equality do you hear that are stuck in the past?
2. How does Summer's exuberance and passion awaken the Sleeping Castle?
3. Summer and Princess Winter find each other "enchanting." In other stories you have read, what assumptions are usually made about who the characters are romantically attracted to?
4. By focusing on "preserving harmony," the fairies try to change Summer. How would you want to rewrite the 'traditions' or rules that limit girls and women in your community?



The Myrtle Tree and Pomegranate-Shaped Mirror

by Katerina Paouri

1. How did the villagers' fears and superstitions about the forest influence the actions, violence and trickery of Mirtiya's stepmother and stepbrother?
2. Which characters possess wisdom in this story? Who carries wisdom in your family and community?
3. How does nature provide safety and comfort for you and your community, like the myrtle tree and the animals of the forest do in the story?



Zumrad and Kimmatt

by Saida Rashidova

1. How does Zumrad and Kimmatt's family model respectful relationships in good times and bad? Whose relationships do you admire in your family and community, and why?
2. How do Zumrad and Kimmatt use their different strengths to support one another?
3. What becomes possible when Zumrad and her stepmum are open and honest with one another?
4. How do fairy tales about stepfamilies influence how Zumrad and Kimmatt understand their own family?



House 92

by Natalia Remish

1. How do the teachers, especially Mr. Jaap, use harmful gender stereotypes in their teaching and discipline? How could they establish gender equality in the way they teach children of all gender identities in House 92?
2. How do Jack and the other boys use their power to support Angela in this story? Why did they not use their power to hold Mr. Jaap accountable earlier?
3. The children decide to share the housework in House 92. How is the housework and care of others shared in your own home?
4. Angela wants to be the Head of House 92 and "change all the rules." What rules would you change to reimagine schools that are inclusive of everyone?



The Wyvern of Lake Léman

by Noémie Pétremand

1. The children discover that the wyvern is real. What mythical creature would you love to meet?
2. How do Maëlle and Jeannot each react to the tale about the wyvern's diamond?
3. Maëlle believes firmly that they must not take what is not theirs. What is the impact and harm that is caused when others take land or possessions that are not theirs?
4. The wyvern says, "If one can only imagine me / then truly I must exist!" How can you, your family and your community use your imaginations to bring gender equality into existence?



A Tale of a Brave Daughter

by Zebuniso Rasulzade

1. How does the Brave Daughter show us what it means to be brave and kind? How is this different from the bravery we are often shown by the 'heroes' in traditional fairy tales?
2. How does the old woman support the Brave Daughter to succeed?
3. How might the servants and vassals share the land and create a community together now that Monster Div is dead?
4. How might a leader who is "wise and just" benefit everyone? What could wise and just leadership look like in a community?

The *Awake Not Sleeping* Gender Equality Quick Quiz

The *Awake Not Sleeping* Gender Equality Quick Quiz will support you in noticing, considering and reflecting on how **gender equality, respectful relationships, cruelty and violence towards girls and women**, and **gender inequality** are represented in any story or book you may be reading.

To complete the quick quiz, go through each of the statements below, and circle those that most describe any story or book that you have read.

Part 1 Who tells the story, and how is it told? Does the narrator...



- A Talk from an authoritative, dominant and often male point of view that is not questioned?
- B Talk openly about cruelty and violence towards girls and women, gender stereotypes and gender inequality as normal parts of everyday life?
- C Weave themes and imagery across the story that accept cruelty and violence towards girls and women, gender stereotypes and gender inequality?
- D Stay silent about cruelty, violence or gender inequality towards girls and women that is occurring in the story?
- E Support you as a reader in noticing, reflecting and challenging gender inequality and violence when it occurs in the story and/or in celebrating characters who disrupt gender stereotypes?
- F Give girls and women voice and agency so that you, as the reader, hear what these characters think and feel, including about gender inequality?
- G Celebrate a gender-equitable world and explore multiple characters' points of view?
- H Make links between dismantling gender inequality and other intersecting issues (like racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism)?

Part 2 How are the characters and their relationships portrayed in the story?

Does the story show relationships between characters where...



- A** Violence against girls and women is normal and unchallenged for the characters?
- B** Men are considered superior and have all the power to make decisions in the family, and women conform to passive or wicked gender stereotypes and roles?
- C** It is normal and unchallenged that only men hold all the power, especially white men?
- D** Intimacy and love are only between men and women?
- E** Gender inequalities are recognized, exceptional girls or women succeed, but there is no expectation of broader change across society?
- F** Gender inequality is explored, but intersecting issues are not (like racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism)?
- G** Those who do not conform to gender stereotypes, including in their sexual and gender diversity, have power and are shown to succeed?
- H** Equality is modelled, including exploring, negotiating and sharing power?

Part 3 What are the main community and cultural values about gender equality in the story?

Does the story show communities...



- A** Prioritizing men, particularly white men in leadership roles, and centering their needs and interests?
- B** Using and accepting acts of cruelty and violence as punishment towards children and women?
- C** Remaining silent when cruelty and harm is directed towards women and children?
- D** Recognizing but not challenging those taking others' resources, exploiting working people and/or monetizing land and nature for individual wealth (like through capitalism and colonization)?
- E** Holding one another accountable for violence and misuses of power?
- F** Only taking small steps towards gender equality, but intersecting issues are not challenged (like racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism)?
- G** Celebrating the sexual and gender diversity of people and families?
- H** Building a gender-equitable society that values all people and cares for the planet?

How did your story score in the Gender Equality Quick Quiz?

Add up which letters (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H) you circled the most.



If you circled mostly As and Bs, this story most probably reinforces harm to women and girls. Such stories actively reinforce gender inequality and violence against women and girls. Any character who challenges the inequality and harm is themselves punished.



If you circled mostly Cs and Ds, this story ignores gender inequality. Such stories actively ignore gender inequality and violence against women and girls when it is present in the relationships of the characters and the values of the community.



If you circled mostly Es and Fs, this story responds to gender inequality. Such stories recognize and respond to the constraints and harm of gender inequality and violence against women and girls. They model small incremental actions and changes for individuals but do not expect gender equality across the whole community.



If you circled mostly Gs and Hs, this story most probably reimagines gender-equitable societies. Such stories work to disrupt and transform harmful gender norms, power relations and intersecting inequalities with the goal of building gender-equitable societies. They model how to challenge inequality and harm, as well as how to build respectful and equitable relationships. They show that gender equality *is* possible.

How can you challenge gender inequality when you see it in a story?

If the story or book got mostly **As**, **Bs**, **Cs** and **Ds**, then you have recognized that it reinforces harm towards women and girls or ignores gender inequality.

If you have higher expectations of authors and publishers to promote gender equality, here are some things you can do to take action:

1. Talk to your parents about the story. Ask them whether they think the story normalizes harm and violence towards women and gender inequality.
2. Contact the author and share your thoughts about the story. Ask them questions about why they normalized harm and violence towards women and gender inequality.
3. Contact the publishing house and share your thoughts. Ask them questions about why they are publishing books that normalize harm and violence towards women and gender inequality.
4. Talk to the bookshop or library that you got the book from. Ask them to be more considerate of the potential harm that the books they are selling/lending can have on young readers.
5. Bring the story to school and discuss it with your class, exploring how the story could be changed to respond to gender inequality and reimagine gender-equitable societies. Reimagine the story with your class to share with the author and publisher.
6. Share the *Awake Not Sleeping* collection with your friends, school and library and with other publishers and writers!



UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; all women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; and women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, as well as benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.









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