Title: Vasilisa the Brave in 'Giants, Trolls, Witches, Beasts'

Author(s): Craig Phillips

Illustrator(s): Craig Phillips

The aim of the The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is for your thoughts, questions and notes about different aspects of the book and to consider how you might frame discussion with students.

The book

Physical object

A solid, large vertical format book with a smooth, shiny, glossy cover. It's heavy and the pages feel thick, and look opaque, semi-glossy and high quality. Is this to hold the colour of the illustrations?
The author's name and title at the centre of the cover is raised and bumpy — you can feel them as you run your hand over the cover.

Design & cover

Cover is divided into thirds. These are bursting with illustrated creatures/ events: a polar bear, giant snake and beasts. The title's large white font looks pre-medieval, reflecting the myths and stories, and sits on a black box in the centre of the cover making it 'pop'. The action and vibrant colour and contrasts of the figures grab attention.
Contents page has an illustration that links to the idea of 'finding a way'.

Illustration

The illustrations are critical/ key to the story and have an anime influence. Strong, dark, purple/blue images create ominous 'deep, dark' woods and the wicked witch. Light yellows and greens are used for happiness and goodness — Vasilisa/mother and father.
A whole page image of Baba Yaga is powerful/menacing, would the impact be as great if it was a smaller image? The characters sometimes 'bleed' out of the comic boxes for effect/impact i.e. the Night horseman.

Characters

The character are archetypes (we see them repeated): Vasilisa, the girl is the main character. Kind, brave, gentle with an affinity with nature, she represents good. She contrasts with the wicked witch Baba Yaga, who has sharp teeth, a hooked nose, long spindly fingers. The stepmother/sister are the archetypal cruel/selfish ones. Physically large, ugly, they loom over Vasilisa to intimidate her.

Plot

It is classic female hero's journey: a young girl (without a mother) completes a series of impossible tasks set by her stepmother with help from her late mother's magical doll. One is to fetch light from Baba Yaga in the woods. She succeeds with the doll's help and uses the light Baba Yaga gives her to banish the stepmother and step sisters

Setting

The story is set in rural Russia in Vasilisa's father's house on the edge of the wood's, in the woods and Baba Yaga's house. There is no technology and the clothes/objects suggest the story is set in the distant past — Medieval Europe? A young girl facing danger by walking through the woods is classic fairytale, ie *Hansel and Gretel*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Goldilocks* etc.

Theme & message

Good overcomes evil — in this case kindness and bravery win out over the cruelty and bullying seen in the stepmother and stepsisters tormenting Vasilisa. Vasilisa also outwits the scary Baba Yaga, who represents the perils of travelling to unknown places/strangers and all magic. Again good vs evil — this is a common feature in modern fantasy and comic book heroes, but is this theme of good versus bad common in folktales?

Language

Names of food/trees (crispels, birch/poplar) and olde English word styles (unbeknownst) help locate the story in olde Europe and add to character, setting and genre.
Use of onomatopeia, as with comic style, help with the action and tension — 'b'dum, b'dum', 'whoosh', 'snap' — and stand out in a different font/ colour/style.

Mood & feeling

The mood is first creepy/mysterious when the wood and Baba Yaga introduced, sad as Vasilisa's mother dies, becoming tragic and oppressive as the stepmother's cruelty intensifies, then frightening when Vasilisa ventures into the dark, scary woods and outwits Baba Yaga. The mood lifts, becoming happier with the resolution/ending as Vasilisa's stepfamily is removed and her father returns home.

Genre & format

Comic book format or medium.
Genre: myths and legends or folklore. The book provides a retelling in comic form of 10 tales. The introduction in the book by another author, and the library labelling on copy also describe it as a graphic novel.

The inquiry

Rich question(s)

This section is for creating and exploring questions that might guide an overall inquiry for a particular book. These questions might be inspired by ideas in the book section and/or personal responses and/or the NZ Curriculum and/or available resources.

Why and how are myths, legends and folklore important in our society?

How and why are there similarities in tales like *Vasilisa the Brave* and tales from other cultures/countries?

Why do some stories survive and get retold for hundreds of years and others disappear? What makes a story timeless?

Make connections

The aim of The Book and Beyond is to inspire an interest and passion for books and reading. This section is designed to help students use the book as inspiration to share, wonder, question, and explore ideas, possibilities, connections, feelings, experiences and other viewpoints — either alone or together.

Personal

Create
This book might be used to inspire students to draw their own comic or zine or develop an urban myth or fractured fairytale based on those of the past. Could you use a theme from the book to shape the comic?

Explore
It's interesting to hear a writer's work backstory, what inspires them and how they work. See an interview with Craig in *The Sapling* with examples of the stages of his illustrations https://www.thesapling.co.nz/single-post/2018/06/13/A-Day-in-the-Life-Illustrator-Craig-Phillips

Explore
Find out more about myths, legends and folktales. Topic Explorer has quality resources: images, video, webpages, articles. Check out the **Myths and Legends** and **Maori Myths and Legends** set at: www.natlib.govt.nz/schools/topics

Read more

○ Read the next in the series

● Read another book by the same author
The Adventures of Jack Scratch

● Read another book with the same idea/topic/ genre
*Fabulous Monsters/*Marcia Williams
*Goblins/*Gary Jeffrey
*The Shark King/*R. Kikuo Johnson
*The House with Chicken Legs/*Sophie Anderson (new novel 2018)

○ Listen to an audio version of the book

Social (Share your experience)

What connections can you make to yourself, other texts, the world?

Text to self

Text to text
Hans Christian Anderson Fairytales and Grimm's tales.

Vasilisa the Brave is very much like *Cinderella* — with the characters, setting, and *Hansel and Gretel* with a witch in a remote house threatening to eat a young character.

Text to world
The text may prompt student to wonder and question in relation to the world: Does good triumph over evil in the real world? Is it comforting to hear stories where the good prevail? Is this how all stories end?

NZ Curriculum

This section is intended as a prompt for thinking about how the book might relate to the NZ Curriculum. For example, is it a story about *cultural diversity*? What *language, symbols and text* tell the story?

Learning areas		Principles		Values		Key Competencies	
● English	○ Maths & Statistics	○ High expectations	○ Future focus	○ Excellence	○ Community & participation	● Thinking	● Relating to others
● The Arts	○ Science	○ Treaty of Waitangi	○ Learning to learn	○ Innovation, inquiry, curiosity	○ Ecological sustainability	○ Using language, symbols & text	○ Participating & contributing
○ Health & PE	○ Social Sciences	○ Cultural diversity	○ Community engagement	○ Diversity	● Integrity		
● Languages	● Technology	● Inclusion		● Equity		● Managing self	