

Selected and annotated by Anna Shustitzky
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Cultures all over the world have produced a variety of stories featuring trees, their fruits, and their natural and mythological inhabitants. This collection includes historical adaptations of traditional tales, a few more modern selections and interpretations, and several fully illustrated options, each with a note indicating its geographical origin. Some stories here are perfect for a young storytime crowd, while others feature themes that are better appreciated by a more mature audience.

Ada, Alma Flor, ad. *The Three Golden Oranges*; illus. by Reg Cartwright. Atheneum, 1999. 32p. 7-10 yrs.

In this traditional Spanish folktale, three brothers set off on a journey to find wives for themselves with specific instructions to work together despite their differing matrimonial preferences. On their quest for the three golden oranges that will lead them to their wives, the two older brothers disobey the instructions with disastrous results, leaving the kindly younger brother to clean up the mess and bring the family back together.

Baker, Augusta, ed. "The Talking Tree." *The Talking Tree: Fairy Tales from 15 Lands*; illus. by Johannes Troyer. Lippincott, 1955. 255p. Gr. 2-5.

Drawing inspiration from actual storytelling records of years past, renowned storyteller and librarian Augusta Baker has collected here stories from fifteen different countries that consistently attracted the best audience. "The Talking Tree," a tale from Italy, features a bachelor king, an enchanted tree, and more marriage proposals than a king knows what to do with, with a satisfying conclusion to please any storytelling audience.

Bernhard, Emery, ad. *The Tree That Rains: The Flood Myth of the Huichol Indians of Mexico*; illus. by Durga Bernhard. Holiday House, 1994. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

This is the legend of Watakame, a Huichol farmer who works hard day and night in his fields with the help of his equally hardworking dog. When the trees he cleared grow back night after night, he discovers that Great-Grandmother Earth herself has been bringing them back. Presented here in a beautifully illustrated picture book, this story features other familiar story elements that will appeal to many young fans of myth and legend.

Berry, James. *First Palm Trees: An Anancy Spiderman Story*; illus. by Greg Couch. Simon, 1997. 40p. Gr. 4-6.

Inspired by tales of the ever-present trickster Anancy, Berry has presented here an original tale that captures the spirit of the legend. Challenged to create the world's first palm trees, Anancy enlists the help of many interconnected spirits while trying to avoid sharing his reward. This long, lyrical tale is beautifully complemented by fantastical artwork that brings Anancy to skittery, eight-legged life.

Booss, Claire, ed. "A Summer Night in a Norwegian Forest," "Elstorps Woods." *Scandinavian Folk and Fairy Tales*. Crown, 1984. 666p. Gr. 4-6.

Often rambling and somewhat dreamlike, the stories here represent the wide range of tales found throughout the Scandinavian lands. The first of the highlighted stories is a Norwegian boy's first-person account of a terrifying night in the forest, spurred primarily by his vivid imagination. The second, from Sweden, is a very short anecdote of an army's ingenuity during a war. There are hundreds more stories here, ranging from short historical note to the familiar and fantastical, although the austere format makes this perhaps more appealing for research than entertainment.

Chase, Richard, ed. "Jack and the Bean Tree." *The Jack Tales: Folk Tales from the Southern Appalachians*; illus. by Berkeley Williams, Jr. Houghton, 1943. 201p. [Age range n/a]
Telling one of the most popular "Jack Tales" of the Appalachian region, this rendition reads like your grandmother might tell it to you, I reckon. A fussy child's gardening project leads to sky-high adventures with man-eating giants, complete with trespassing, thievery, and a generally unpunished disregard for the rules that rings true throughout every other tale in this collection.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. "The Oakthing." *The Fairy Reel: Tales from the Twilight Realm*; ed. by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling; illus. by Charles Vess. Viking, 2004. 544p. Gr. 7-12.
Abandoned by accident as her family flees an approaching invasion, an old woman finds herself in charge of another left-behind creature that seems to have come from the old oak near her home. This original tale is presented with a no-nonsense style and a satisfyingly fantastical quality consistent with other tales and poems in this collection, though the rest tend to focus on less arboreal creatures. Fantasy fans will recognize many familiar voices and styles in this otherworldly collection.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. *The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest*; ed. by Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling. Viking, 2002. 368p. Gr. 9-12.
This award-winning anthology features new and retold stories and poems of the magical wilderness by a formidable host of fantasy writers. Tales range from the familiar ("Fee Fie, Foe, et. Cetera" by *Wicked* author Gregory Maguire) to the modern ("Grand Central Park" by Delia Sherman), with each author bringing a distinct voice to the collection. As with other Datlow and Windling collections, these fairy tales are ideal for an older set, especially those who appreciate a shivery twist on childhood favorites.

DeSpain, Pleasant. "The Friendship Orchard." *Eleven Nature Tales: A Multicultural Journey*; illus. by Joe Shlichta. August House, 1996. [Age range n/a]
Kindness is often rewarded in tales, but this tale from Kazakhstan demonstrates a rare and wonderful kind of friendship. Facing hardship together, two elderly friends agree to share the benefits that come from a patch of land with an extraordinary story. As with other collections here, the stories were curated with an overarching message of environmental consciousness based on traditional tales. Practical and straightforward, this collection lends itself to both independent reading and storytelling performance with additional notes on each tale at the end.

Echewa, T. Obinkaram, ad. *The Magic Tree: A Folktale from Nigeria*; illus. by E. B. Lewis. Morrow, 1991. 32p. 5-8 yrs.
Orphan Mbi is well-known around his village when there is work to be done, but somehow forgotten when it's time to eat. During another lonely dinner, Mbi discovers a magical fruit that produces a tree to keep him from going hungry. When another child becomes trapped after trying

to steal fruit from the tree, the villagers experience a change of heart and Mbi is welcomed as one of their own. This picture book version of the tale is presented with lovely, expressive watercolor illustrations.

Grimm, Jakob Ludwig Karl. “The Juniper Tree.” *The Juniper Tree and Other Tales from Grimm*; in two volumes; selected by Lore Segal and Maurice Sendak; tr. by Lore Segal with four tales tr. by Randall Jarrell; illus. by Maurice Sendak. Farrar, 1973. 332p. 2v. [Age range n/a] This collection of Grimm stories is distinctive for two reasons: its faithful translation and adherence to the truly horrifying originals, and its beautiful, iconic illustrations by Maurice Sendak. “The Juniper Tree” excellently portrays both qualities in telling the story of an evil woman, her kindhearted daughter, and her ill-fated stepson-turned-bird, but stories in both volumes are a worthy read for fans of the best-known Grimm tales as well.

Helfman, Elizabeth S. *Maypoles and Wood Demons: The Meaning of Trees*; illus. by Richard Cuffari. Seabury, 1972. 122p. [Age range n/a] This international collection brings together stories of famous trees, forest spirits, and the many ways that people rely on trees in everyday life. Beginning with ancient superstitions and legends, Helfman then transitions to more modern tales highlighting the continued importance of trees in a call for a more eco-friendly lifestyle, all followed by an extensive index and bibliography for more in-depth study.

Keding, Dan. “Johnny Appleseed,” “The Oak Tree Conspirator.” *The United States of Storytelling: Folktales and True Stories from the Eastern States*. Libraries Unlimited, 2010. 290p. [Age range n/a] Although one of these tales is clearly better known than the other, both are steeped in truth and represent unique points in American history. In “The Oak Tree Conspirator,” discover how a tree helped protect the colony of Connecticut against King James II. Looking for more reality that’s stranger than fiction? This account of “Johnny Appleseed” explains the bizarre truth behind one of America’s best-known legends. Other state-by-state tales in this collection range from truth to urban legend, and there’s more to be found in the *Western States* companion.

Mahy, Margaret. “The Good Wizard of the Forest,” “The Trees.” *The Girl with the Green Ear: Stories about Magic in Nature*; illus. by Shirley Hughes. Knopf, 1992. 100p. Gr. 4-6. This collection of original tales encourages a closer look at the magic to be found in our own natural world. In the first of the arboreal tales, a misunderstood wizard shares his culinary expertise with an appreciative tree, leading to a forest’s worth of friendship and the end of the wizard’s loneliness. “The Trees” tells a much more true-to-life story—in the same lovely, magical tone—of loggers coming to cut down the beloved trees around a young girl’s house.

McCormick, Dell J. *Paul Bunyan Swings His Axe*; written and illus. by Dell J. McCormick. Caxton, 1990. 111p. [Age range n/a] Even today, the American legend of lumberjack Paul Bunyan lives on. Here, McCormick has collected seventeen stories specially tailored for a child audience, organized to chronicle many of his larger-than-life exploits around the country. Babe the Blue Ox is featured, of course, but a whole host of lesser-known tales make an appearance as well.

Pullman, Philip, ad. “The Juniper Tree.” *Fairy Tales From the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version*. Penguin, 2012. 406p. [Age range n/a]

In this lesser-known of Grimm’s tales, a young boy subjected to his stepmother’s cruelty turns into a bird and shares his story with his village in melodious tones. In spite of the morbid lyrics, the villagers are delighted, with the exception of his guilty stepmother. In true Grimm fashion, the wicked are punished and the family is reunited in the end. This and all of Pullman’s Grimm interpretations are carefully rendered, cannibalism and all, with fascinating historical notes following each grisly tale.

Say, Allen, ad. *Under the Cherry Blossom Tree*; adapted and illus. by Allen Say. Walter Lorraine Books/Houghton, 1974. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

A curmudgeonly old landlord does not seem overly concerned when he swallows a cherry pit and a cherry tree sprouts from his head—that is, until cherry blossom season arrives and his tenants gather around to speculate about his plight. He pulls out the tree in a rage, and resigns himself to life with a big hole atop his head; indeed, he makes the best of it until his tenants once again get too close. This amusing tale from Japan is supplemented with expressive drawings by this Caldecott-recognized author and illustrator.

Schwartz, Howard, comp. and ad. “The Diamond Tree.” *The Diamond Tree: Jewish Tales from Around the World*; comp. and ad. by Howard Schwartz and Barbara Rush; illus. by Uri Shulevitz. HarperCollins, 1991. Gr. 3-5.

This short story from Morocco sees a poor man being whisked away to a magical land with a tree that grows diamonds. Children will recognize classic fairy tale features, from the evil witch to the good man’s reward in the end. Other tales in this kid-friendly collection include an 8th century Noah’s Ark story from Palestine, oral folk tales from Turkey, and 19th-century Eastern European fare. End matter helpfully discusses the origin of each story as well as its particular use in a storytelling setting.

Van Laan, Nancy. *The Magic Bean Tree: A Legend from Argentina*; illus. by Beatriz Vidal. Houghton, 1998. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Faced with a terrible drought that threatens his village and their herds of llamas, a boy named Topec sets out to find rain. The Carob Tree, the only thing still growing in the drought, teaches Topec the secret to scaring away the great bird that has kept the rain away. Enlisting the help of the whole village and its animal neighbors, Topec leads the charge to chase the bird away and call the rains back to the land.

Walker, Barbara, ad. “The Dancing Palm Tree.” *The Dancing Palm Tree and Other Nigerian Folktales*; illus. by Helen Siegl. Parents’ Magazine, 1968. 112p. [Age range n/a]

When his friend and provider the farmer passes away, Turtle doesn’t know how he will find food on his own. Inspired by the hubbub of market day, clever and magical Turtle dances through town in a palm tree, scaring the local farmers into abandoning their goods for him to collect again and again. The terrified villagers petition the help of the king and his incredulous advisors, who devise a plan to trap the culprit and bring him to justice.

Yolen, Jane, ed. “The Magic Pear Tree.” *Favorite Folktales from Around the World*. Pantheon, 1986. 475p. [Age range n/a]

A miserly farmer gets what he deserves when he refuses to help a priest in this brief lesson from China. Other tales in this assortment truly span the globe, all helpfully organized according to familiar categories such as “Heroes” and “The Fool.” Aspiring tellers are sure to find tales for any number of audiences, schedules, and themes in this collection edited by the prolific and multitalented Jane Yolen.