

Selected and annotated by Alice Mitchell
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Irish folktales and legends are full of great warriors and tricksters, rich men and fools, giants and leprechauns, tragedy and humor. Look to these books for some traditional storytelling fare from Ireland.

Bateman, Teresa. *The Ring of Truth: An Original Irish Tale*; illus. by Omar Rayyan. Holiday House, 1997. 32p. Gr. 3-6.

Peddler Patrick O’Kelley must have kissed the Blarney Stone and gotten some stuck in his teeth, for he could tell the most outlandish stories. When he says he can “spout better blarney than the king of the leprechauns himself,” he gets himself in a spot of trouble and lands himself with a ring that forces him to tell the truth.

Behan, Brendan. *The King of Ireland’s Son*; illus. by P.J. Lynch. Orchard, 1997. 32p. 5-7 yrs.

In this retelling by the noted Irish playwright, the King of Ireland had three sons, all of which he sends to look for the source of mysterious and beautiful music that can be heard across the Irish countryside. The oldest brother descends into a cavern to find the source of the music, journeying for days in the darkness, until he comes upon a beautiful princess, her harp, and her giant captor.

Bennett, Richard. *Little Dermot and the Thirsty Stones, and Other Irish Folk Tales*; written and illus. by Richard Bennett. Coward-McCann, 1953. 92p. Gr. 4-6.

Collecting traditional stories like “Clever Tom and the Leprechaun,” “The Pooka,” and “The Strange Little Piper,” Bennett pairs them with simple illustrations that support but never overpower the stories.

Greene, Ellin. *Billy Beg and His Bull*; illus. by Kimberly Bulcken Root. Holiday House, 1994. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

As he was growing up, Billy Beg’s mother, the queen of Ireland, gave him a bull calf, and they became close friends. When Billy’s father remarried after the queen’s death, the new queen plots to separate Billy and the bull by faking an illness only the blood of the bull could cure. The pair flees and encounters fierce bulls, giants, a dragon, and a princess.

Haviland, Virginia. *Favorite Fairy Tales Told in Ireland*; illus. by Catharine O’Neill. Beech Tree Books, 1994. 92p. 8+ yrs.

Haviland has adapted five traditional Irish fairy tales directly taken from collections by Mrs. Seumas MacManus and Ruth Sawyer Durand: “The Bee, Harp, Mouse, and Bum-clock,” “The Old Hag’s Long Leather Bag,” “Billy Beg and the Bull,” “The Widow’s Lazy Daughter,” and “Patrick O’Donnell and the Leprechaun.” These tales are rife with riches, giants, talking animals, and tricksters.

Heaney, Marie. *The Names Upon the Harp: Irish Myth and Legend*; illus. by P.J. Lynch. Levine/Scholastic, 2000. 96p. Gr. 5-8.

Heaney retells nine Irish myths and legends from the time of the Tuatha De Danaan accompanied by expressive and colorful illustrations. These tales of great warriors like Cuchulainn and Finn Mac Cumhaill, and heartbreaking tragedies like “The Children of Lir” and “Deirdre of the Sorrows,” bring old Irish legends to life again for contemporary retelling.

Latimer, Jim. *The Irish Piper*; illus. by John O’Brien. Scribner’s, 1991. 32p. 5-9 yrs. The Pied Piper from County Clare played the most splendid music anyone could imagine. He could play bird music and sad music, but his specialties were his cheese-and-bacon music and his balloon-and-butterfly music. The Pied Piper then went over to Germany to visit Hamelin – a town with a serious rat problem.

MacGill-Callahan, Sheila. *The Children of Lir*; illus. by Gennady Spirin. Dial, 1993. 32p. [Age range n/a]. King Lir was immensely proud of his four children: a set of twin boys and twin girls. After Lir remarried Aoife, she grew jealous of the children and set a curse upon them. She turned them into swans “for three times three hundred years, or until the Man from the North shall be joined to the Woman from the South,” forcing the children into a life of loneliness until their curse is lifted.

MacManus, Seumas. *The Bold Heroes of Hungry Hill and Other Irish Folk Tales*; illus. by Jay Chollick. Pellgrini, 1951. 207p. Gr. 4-6. This collection of stories stretches the length of Ireland from Donegal and Connaught to the Ocean Beyond the World’s End. From stories of true love with “The King of Araby’s Daughter” to great adventures in “The Giant of the Brown Beech Wood,” MacManus has a little something for every kind of storyteller with a true taste of the classic Irish story.

Milligan, Bryce. *The Prince of Ireland and the Three Magic Stallions*; illus. by Preston McDaniels. Holiday House, 2003. 32p. 6-10 yrs. The prince lives happily with his family until his stepmother, jealous of the king’s attention towards the prince rather than his half-brothers, lays a *geis* upon him. The curse forces him not to stay in the same place more than a day until he returns to the queen with the three stallions of the giant Sean O’Donal, and so the prince rides off to fetch the horses and defeat the giant.

O’Hare, Colette. *What Do You Feed Your Donkey On?: Rhymes from a Belfast Childhood*; illus. by Jenny Rodwell. Collins, 1978. 32p. [Age range n/a]. Some of these playful rhymes are well suited for jump rope games, but all of them are good for a giggle. The illustrations have a sense of playfulness that works well for the humor in these short rhymes. There are notes in the end matter that tell children small details about a few of the rhymes.

O’Sullivan, Sean ed. *Folktales of Ireland*. University of Chicago Press, 1966. 321p. Gr. 5+. With an informative foreword about the study and collection of Irish folktales, O’Sullivan introduces an in-depth compilation of stories. Stories are separated by the subject: Animals and Birds, Kings and Warriors, Saints and Sinners, People of the Otherworld, Magicians and Witches, Historical Characters, and The Wise, The Foolish, and the Strong. Usual figures like

Fionn mac Cumhaill pepper the pages of these shortened retellings, along with people like the infamous Oliver Cromwell.

Osborne, Mary Pope. “The Enchanted Cap.” *Mermaid Tales from Around the World*; illus. by Troy Howell. Scholastic, 1993. 84p. Gr. 4-6.

Dick Fitzgerald laments his lack of a wife before stumbling upon a beautiful woman with sea-green hair lying on a rock. Realizing that she is a mermaid by the red cap sitting next to her, Dick snatches it up to capture her, and the two fall in love and wed. They live together for many years before she comes upon her cap hidden in their house, returning to the sea never to be seen again.

Protter, Eric and Nancy ed. *Celtic Folk and Fairy Tales*; illus. by Charles Keeping. Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1967. 210p. 10+ yrs.

“Up the airy mountain, Down the rushy glen, We daren’t go a-hunting For fear of little men.” With this quote from William Allingham, the Protters begin their collection of traditional stories. Mischievous fairies, riches, and magic abound, accompanied by folk-heroes like Finn McCool and villains like the giant Cuchulain. These stories come from Ireland primarily, but there are also stories from Wales, Scotland, and Brittany.

Scott, Michael. *Magical Irish Folk Tales*. Colour Books, 1995. 122p. [Age range n/a].

This collection begins with a story from Seamus Ban, King of the Leprechauns, recalling the time when the Tuatha De Danann came to the Land of Erin. It continues with stories about the famous builder Goban Saor, the mermaid daughter of the Lord of the Sea, the Lost City of Bannow, and the warrior Finn. These stories are much longer than typical folk tale retellings, providing a lot of room for adaptation.

Sherman, Josepha. “The Leprechaun’s Gold.” *Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World*; illus. by David Boston. August House, 1996. 172p. Gr. 4-6.

No one can out-trick a leprechaun, though it doesn’t stop folks from trying. Young Tom happens upon a leprechaun cobbling a shoe and tries to outsmart him for a chance at the leprechaun’s gold. Catching a leprechaun is tricky enough, but once Tom catches the wily creature, getting to the gold is another challenge in itself.

Shute, Linda. *Clever Tom and the Leprechaun*; written and illus. by Linda Shute. Lothrop, 1988. 32p. 5-7 yrs.

Tom stops to investigate a strange noise from a nearby hedge while walking, only to find a leprechaun. He creeps closer to the leprechaun until he finally has the opportunity to snatch the small man, holding him prisoner until the leprechaun takes Tom to his gold. He leads Tom until they come to a field of weeds. Needing to fetch his spade, he ties his red garter the treasure and, very foolishly, releases the leprechaun.