

Selected and annotated by Heather Riley

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This is a collection of adaptations of Russian folk and fairy tales featuring characters like Baba Yaga, Grandfather Frost, and more. This bibliography includes a range of picture books and collections of tales to tell.

Afanasyev, Alexander Nikolayevich. *The Fool and the Fish: A Tale from Russia*; ad. by Lenny Hort; illus. by Gennady Spirin. Dial, 1990. 24p. 4-7 yrs.

“Fish, fish, fish! Grant my wish” is the refrain in this tale of a lucky fool who saves the life of a wish-granting fish. Through the magic of the fish, Ivan the fool is able to complete his chores and eventually catches the attention of the Tsar and the Tsar’s daughter. The gorgeous illustrations by Gennady Spirin make this well worth a read.

Ayres, Becky Hickox. *Matreshka*; illus. by Alexi Natchev. Doubleday, 1992. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

After becoming lost in the woods, Kata narrowly escapes becoming Baba Yaga’s supper thanks to her magic nesting dolls, Matreshka. Alexi Natchev’s illustrations are a wonderful folksy accompaniment to this tale.

Cech, John. *First Snow, Magic Snow*; illus. by Sharon McGinley-Nally. Four Winds, 1992. 34p. 5-8 yrs.

In this retelling of the traditional Russian tale of the Snow Maiden, a barren couple creates a child from the first snow of the season. When she disappears after the spring thaw, the couple travels north in search of Grandfather Frost to beg for their daughter’s return. In the end an arrangement is made where Snowflake can spend the winter months with her parents, but must reside with Grandfather Frost the rest of the year.

Ginsburg, Mirra, ad. *Clay Boy*; illus. by Jos. A. Smith. Greenwillow, 1997. 32p. 5-7 yrs.

With straightforward words and illustrations, Ginsburg and Smith relate the story of the greedy clay boy. An elderly couple whose children are all grown create a new child for themselves out of clay. He comes to life ravenous; no matter how much they feed him, he wants more, eventually consuming the couple, and then the rest of the village. It seems nothing will stop the creature until he comes upon a particularly clever goat.

Lurie, Alison, ad. *The Black Geese: A Baba Yaga Story from Russia*; illus. by Jessica Souhami. DK Ink, 1999. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

When Elena's parents go off to market, they warn her to keep her baby brother indoors because Baba Yaga's baby-snatching black geese have been spotted nearby. Elena intends to obey her parents, but leaves her brother unattended outside while she plays with her friends, leading to his abduction by Baba Yaga's geese. Elena sets off to rescue her brother, helping three different animals in the forest along the way. Each animal gifts Elena with a token which helps her outrun Baba Yaga and return with her brother before their parents ever know they were gone.

Mikolaycak, Charles, ad. *Babushka*; retold and illus. by Charles Mikolaycak. Holiday House, 1984. 26p. Gr. K-3.

In this beautifully illustrated tale, Mikolaycak tells the story of Babushka who is briefly visited by the three wise men as they follow the star on their way to the child king. The next day Babushka decides to follow as well, but becomes lost. For ever after she wanders, looking into the eyes of every child she sees in the hopes of seeing a king look back at her. Compared with the Robbins version of this tale (discussed below), Mikolaycak provides a much more fleshed-out story that is perfect for the holiday season.

Oram, Hiawyn, ad. *Baba Yaga and the Wise Doll*; illus. by Ruth Brown. Dutton, 1998. 30p. 4-7 yrs.

After being taunted by Horrid and Very Horrid, Too Nice wanders into the woods in search of the legendary witch Baba Yaga. She brings on her search the only thing of value she has to her name, a precious doll given to her by her mother. With the help and advice of her doll, Too Nice completes Baba Yaga's impossible tasks and earns a reward. Horrid and Very Horrid, meanwhile, earn their just deserts.

Pushkin, Alexander. *The Golden Cockerel and Other Fairy Tales*; illus. by Boris Zvorykin. Doubleday, 1990. 111p. [Age range n/a].

This stunningly illustrated collection brings together four of Pushkin's tales which were briefly lost before being discovered by a rare book dealer. Anyone with an interest in the folklore and artwork of Russia should read the tales in this volume.

Pushkin, Alexander. *The Tale of the Tsar Saltan*; based on a translation by Pauline Hehl; illus. by Gennady Spirin. Dial, 1996. 26p. Gr. 6-10.

Much of this story will sound familiar to fans of fairy tales. When the youngest of three sisters marries the tsar, the jealousy of her older sisters and the tsar's cousin leads to the new tsarina and her infant son being cast out to sea. The discovery of a wish-granting swan saves the lives of the tsarina and her now grown son, eventually leading to a happily ever after for all.

Robbins, Ruth. *Baboushka and the Three Kings*; illus. by Nicolas Sidjakov. Parnassus, 1960. 25p. [Age range n/a].

This is a sweet and simple adaptation of the Russian folktale. Three wise men stop by Baboushka's house on their way to visit a new child who has been born under a star. After

thinking about their journey, Baboushka decides to visit the new child as well, but becomes lost in the snow. Every year after she wanders around giving “poor but precious gifts” to the children she finds along the way.

San Souci, Robert D., ad. *Peter and the Blue Witch Baby*; illus. by Alexi Natchev. Doubleday, 2000. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

Tsar Peter is in search of a bride, and after rejecting the witch Molnya, he goes on a quest to find the Little Sister of the Sun to be his bride. His quest ends with his court in ruins thanks to a blue witch baby left on his doorstep. Tsar Peter recovers his kingdom with some help from a mouse, three giants, and the Sun. Once again, Natchev provides the perfect folkloric flair with his illustrations.

Spirin, Gennady, ad. *The Tale of the Firebird*; tr. by Tatiana Popova; ad. and illus. by Gennady Spirin. Philomel, 2002. 32p. 6-10 yrs.

The gorgeous illustrations alone are reason enough to peruse this text, but Spirin’s rich text solidifies its spot on this list. Spirin combines three Russian fairy tales to create this version of the *Tale of the Firebird* and the result is a richly engaging story, sure to draw the reader in.

Tolstoy, Aeksei. *The Gigantic Turnip*; illus. by Niamh Sharkey. Barefoot Books, 1999. 40p. 3-5 yrs.

For fans of the Halloween story *The Big Pumpkin*, this Russian folktale will be very familiar. In the spring, an elderly couple sows their seeds: peas, carrots, potatoes, beans, and turnips. Come harvest time, the turnip is so large that they cannot pull it out of the ground. The couple enlists the assistance of their cow, pigs, cats, hens, geese, and canaries to no avail. It is only after the old woman asks for assistance from one little mouse that they can finally harvest the gigantic turnip.

Winthrop, Elizabeth, ad. *The Little Humpbacked Horse: A Russian Tale*; illus. by Alexander Koshkin. Clarion, 1997. 27p. 5-9 yrs.

Ivan becomes the Tsar’s new Master of Stables and quickly finds himself at the mercy of jealous courtiers, resulting in a series of quests to prove his worth and save his life. With the assistance of his little humpbacked horse, Ivan succeeds each time. Despite being a thin book, this story is long and broken up into several chapters. It is well worth the read, but most children will require more than one sitting to get through it all.

Winthrop, Elizabeth, ad. *Vasilissa the Beautiful: A Russian Folktale*; illus. by Alexander Koshkin. Harper, 1991. 40p. 5-8 yrs.

Vasilissa is a beautiful young woman with an evil stepmother and stepsisters. One night they send her out to Baba Yaga’s hut to ask for light, but upon finding the hut, Vasilissa is put to work and told that if she fails to accomplish her tasks, Baba Yaga will eat her for supper. A wise magic doll, a final gift from her mother, helps Vasilissa escape, but she still has a few more tasks

on the way to her happy ending. Winthrop's story is a more richly detailed version of Oram's adaptation, *Baba Yaga and the Wise Doll* (discussed above).