

# Wild Kids



## Little Red's Ongoing Story

by Kevin Strauss

**Y**ou have all heard the *Little Red Riding Hood* story, right? But have you really? In your version, does Little Red trick the wolf and escape? Does she get gobbled up with her granny?

Folktales are stories that pass from one generation to another and from one country to another by word of mouth. These stories may have changed over time as storytellers adapted them for their own purposes. It wasn't until the 1800s that folktales were written down for the first time, allowing hundreds of generations of storytelling and story adapting to take place before that.

You can often find several versions of the same story because there is no one "right" version of a traditional folktale. Each one represents the time, place and person telling it. Examining the cultural values expressed in a folktale will help you understand the story and its underlying messages better.

The classic tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* is a good example of a story that reflects cultural values.

Most versions of the story can be traced back to the 1600s to the farming areas of central Europe. The people of that time and place possessed a general dislike for wolves due to the wolf's predation on farm animals. So the wolf was universally considered a villainous character.

The story also gives us insight into other cultural values such as the role of women and children in society. Some versions emphasize the vulnerability of little girls to moral perils

in the world. Others demonstrate the dangers of talking to shady characters. The oldest known versions of the story stress the importance of clever, resourceful thinking in getting a person out of a difficult situation.

No matter which version of *Little Red Riding Hood* you find, be sure to look deeper than its face value, and consider the underlying cultural values expressed to get a full understanding of the story's meaning. ■

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### Try this!

Go to your library, and check out as many different versions of the *Little Red Riding Hood* story as you can find. Look for versions in children's picture books as well as in folktale collections in the 398.2 section of the library. Read through at least four different versions of the story, and discuss with a friend:

- How are the stories different?
- Describe one or two lessons that each version of the story teaches.
- Speculate about the time, place and person telling these stories...what do you guess might be true?
- How does the artwork accompanying the story contribute to your impression of Red or the wolf?

