

**Overview**

I am going to be examining a way to engage my students in empathy. This is due to an increasing need in our students. There is much research that speaks of the development of empathy in children. I have chosen a basic and repetitive model of experiential indirect learning while examining the difference between telling students and providing access. I teach a grade 3/4 French Immersion class at a school in small community in Winnipeg.

**Objectives**

I have chosen to look at empathy because it is something I feel is lacking in many of the students I teach. There is a strong competitive nature within the students, which is apparent in the classroom, gym and outside at recess. The students are quick to react and unaware of how their actions or words may affect someone else. The students have been taught the basics of empathy and conflict resolution skills. They are able to recite ways in which to react and methods for avoiding conflict. They are also able to apologize quickly and say just the right thing to avoid consequence. These skills are memorized behaviors and applied in most cases to their actual lives. I would like to be able to help the students develop a skill for reflecting rather than reacting.

**Rationale**

Empathy is an important social skill. When used properly, empathy can be a very powerful interpersonal communication tool. The ability to respond in an empathic manner needs to be developed. Empathy can help people move past judgment toward a sense of acceptance and generosity.

All humans are capable of being empathic and it is best started at an early age. Salmon states that “kids are born with this potential – but they need to make it blossom” (Salmon, 2003, p. 167-173). Children start to show signs of empathy at an early age and need to be encouraged to continue to develop this skill. When a child is taught how to be empathic, it builds character and can “go a long way in helping turn negative social behaviors...into more acceptable ones” (Harrington, 2005, p. 146). Some children naturally show more empathic responses in their daily routine. This difference in empathic aptitude can be attributed to the way in which they were raised and taught from an early age.

Children benefit from positive role models and empathy training. With this in mind teaching empathy can “enhance affective and cognitive empathy in children” (Cotton). What’s more, children need to be shown what empathy is, how they can develop it, and how they can respond to other people’s emotions. Children need to first be able to recognize their own emotions so they are then able to look for

similar feelings in others. The more exposure a child has through modeling, the more likely they are to understand the role empathy plays.

Knowing the research on empathy and the benefits of children being taught about empathy, I am not seeing the day-to-day application in my classes. The students are able to describe and recognize emotions, yet are not applying these skills when interacting with others. It for this reason I have chosen an approach of storytelling. I would like to be able to reach my students at a new level. There is a genuine difference between telling students what they should know and providing access for learning these skills. Storytelling makes it an option to not make the learning apparent and allows for the minimal analysis of the actual moral of the story (in this case empathic response).

This plan is significant because it will hopefully reach my students at a new level and allow them to direct their learning and application of these skills. It will be a challenge for them to think in a different way and observe their own growth and learning.

### **The Plan**

It is difficult to imagine the reactions of students and to assume their understanding and awareness of a specific theme. For that reason I have chosen to create a plan with four parts. These parts will consist of a story to be told to the students throughout the year, personal stories written by the students, language development to promote greater reflection from the students, and discussion to aid in community empathy. I felt it important to focus on activities with simple execution and repetition in order to maintain the facility of genuinely implementing the plan.

An emphasis will also be placed on community building through daily activities to engage the students physically and cognitively. These activities will start at the beginning of the year and will continue throughout. They will be taken from previous experiences of the teacher and resources on icebreakers and team-building activities. As this is not the focus of this project I have not included resources for these activities.

### The Story – Baba Yaga (See Appendix A)

The story will be the main part of the unit and will be told several times. I chose a storytelling approach in order to reach the children in an indirect way of learning. Rather than teaching them empathy I am hoping to use the story, which has examples of compassion and empathy in order to instill a deeper connection and understanding in the students.

I have chosen a story with an indirect message of empathy and compassion. There are several versions of the story and I have chosen two fairly different versions with the same message but a change in characters. The main idea is helping those in need even when in a challenging situation yourself. I chose this story because it has definite examples of compassion and demonstrations of empathy. It is an interesting story that the children will be able to understand and expand.

I have developed a few activities for the story but did not want to get too far ahead as I am not yet sure how the students will respond or how quickly or slowly we will accomplish any of the activities. I would like to involve the students as much as possible in determining where they want to take the story. I would like to begin giving my students more power, something that will be difficult for me, and take more of an inquiry based approach to learning in certain areas. The starting activities have been created to reach each area of learning and provide the students with as dynamic an experience and opportunity as possible.

Experience	Activity	Rationale
Research	Using a world map locate Russia and discuss such geographical questions such as continent, environment etc. There is also an opening for cultural comparisons. The internet and encyclopedias can be used to assist the students in their research. This activity can be done quickly and in one class or can become a larger research project over some time.	This activity will give the students the opportunity to connect with another country via the character(s) in the story. They will be able to gain insight into the culture and region from where the story takes place.
Discussion	The teacher will ask the students to take a few moments and think of a time someone who helped them. How did	This activity will begin the reflection process. Each student should be able to think of one example when they were helped. By asking the

	that person know you needed help? The students can then join with a partner and share their story. When coming together as a group, students will be asked to share their story with the larger group.	second part of the question the students will be able to think of what it is about them that gave the message they needed help. By sharing with a partner the students have the experience of speaking the words and hearing themselves share their story. The larger group will be another part of community building and expression.
Writing	The students will be given the following question to write about for a few minutes.  'If you could add one more character to the story to help the children, who would it be and why (if you know)'.  Students can volunteer to share their answers after.	I want the students to see the story as more than just a story and instead as he possibility to have them apply what they are experiencing to real life. This will embed a part of them into the story.
Art	Each version of the story has Baba Yaga cross a river to reach the child(ren). The river is a gift from the other characters that were shown compassion. Each child will receive a piece of blue construction paper in the shape of waves. They will be asked to look through magazines and choose words or images that stand out to them as describing the story. They will glue their words to the river piece. The pieces will be attached and put somewhere in the classroom. This spot on the wall will be an area to add other artwork and writing from the students.	This artwork is inspired by the activity from The Great Python (Simms). The visual of something being connected will bring the students together. By using words from magazines they students will have safety behind the words. They will have found the words rather than have come up with them on their own. Asking the students to discuss later will be less confrontational for the students. The words will also create a strong visual for the students to see on a regular basis. They can be referred back to for other activities such as what some of the words mean in other contexts.

## Language and Reflection Development

In trying to provide a base for the students to begin reflecting from, I will need to help them develop their language and thought. It is for that reason I would like to take their basic knowledge of qualities and characteristics and expand them into deeper reflection. The students will participate in these activities once every week or two. The students will be able to use what is already familiar to them and expand it.

The class will start by secretly choosing the name of another student from a box the teacher passes around. On a separate slip of paper the students will write one good quality about that student. The qualities will go back into the box and the box will be placed in a safe place in the classroom. Each time the class engages in the activity one student will be responsible for going to get the box for the class. The teacher will then draw a quality from the box and read it to the class. It may be helpful for the teacher to go through the box and take out any repeats and add some qualities they would liked touched upon.

Experiences in the past lead me to believe the activity will bring characteristics such as 'you run fast', 'you're a good artist' and 'you're smart'. Once a quality is chosen the teacher will lead the students in a discussion starting with the question 'what does it take to have this quality'. For example: If the quality chosen is 'fast runner' the teacher will ask 'what does it take for someone to be a fast runner?' or 'what does someone need to have to be a fast runner?'

### Fast runner

- endurance
- patience
- training
- technical ability
- dedication (to practice)

In building this vocabulary the students will have new tools and language in order to express themselves. There will be a form of the list posted somewhere in the classroom and referred to throughout the year. When writing and sharing the students will be asked to think for a moment and see if they can use some of their new words when using description.

Follow-up activities could include a group of students making a poster describing the activity using pictures and words. Another activity could see the students spending a few minutes writing a story about a child with the particular skill that was discussed.

## Discussion

We will start each class by taking a moment to acknowledge one another and say good morning or another greeting. This will be a time not as much for reflection but to slow down and engage with each other. The end of the day will be a time to reflect and discuss how they day went and bring up any thoughts. This will occur for sure once a week and possibly another day when the mood is particularly rushed or tense. We will take the time to each have a chance to speak and share what went well during the week or if a student had a particular difficulty. We will also talk to about goals and wishes. I will start by modeling each time we share. As I model for them they will hear language that is sincere and from the heart. The more examples they have, hopefully they will be able to relate.

The reason behind this activity is to make sharing a more natural part of the students' daily routines and comfort levels. Hopefully after sharing and building community the students will begin to reflect deeper and be able to be present while others speak. In listening to each other the goal is to have the students understand each other and slowly develop empathy in being able to relate as they will likely have experienced the same emotions at some time.

A more formal council or sharing session will be used on occasion and will follow specific guidelines and procedures. The sharing at the end of the day will be quicker while the council will be scheduled for enough time for the students to truly express their feelings in detail and begin to share their personal stories more in depth.

In addition to the discussions I would like to incorporate some regular activities to encourage them to keep talking and respond to more personal questions. These I will also model by providing them with my response first. Our division has taken a large initiative in increasing technology and working with the new framework that has come out by the province. I am on a team at my school and am required to increase the use of technology in my classroom and demonstrate not only for the students but also my colleagues. One of the ways I intend to incorporate a few questions on a classroom Blog which is intended to increase communications not only with the students but also help the students to communicate with their parents. I plan to post questions weekly to have the students answer and since their answers are anonymous I will be able to post a few answers on the website as well as share them with the students in class. I also intend to have one student a week responsible for adding a weekly reflection to the site including what we have done academically as well as anything personal insights they would like to add. The students will be able to respond to each other's messages and add their thoughts. I believe in meeting the students where they are and technology is a huge part of their lives. They communicate with their friends and spend a large part of their free time on the computer. By using the

Internet and computer as a communication tool the students will feel comfortable and be able to apply what they do in their everyday lives.

Personal Stories – Writing (Adapted from Laura Simms in class activity)

I would like to include a more concrete aspect of the project. Although I hope to achieve some results through indirect learning I would also like to have the students take responsibility for applying what they are working on. I have chosen story writing because my students are very strong in their English language skills and for the most part engage very easily in writing. I would also like them to include a type of illustrated journal as they add new parts to their writing. The illustration will serve as a tool to help the students tell their story orally.

The questioning to start the writing is meant to have the students not only think about their personality but also they personality of other students who may not be exactly like them. This will help them to see that rather than engaging in conflict that there may be a way two opposite personalities can appreciate one another. It also shows that there is not one right way to play.

The story will be written in sections as to not overwhelm the students and to help them focus on the smaller details of what they're writing.

Part 1 – I will ask the students to think of their favourite game. It can be game they play at home, school or somewhere else but it must involve at least one other person when they play. After they have thought for a few seconds I will ask them to pair up with someone and describe their game to the student. They should imagine that this person is from another planet and has never heard of this game before. The students will need to use as much descriptive language as possible in order to explain their game. Once they have finished explaining the game they will spend a few minutes writing about it.

Part 2 – I will ask the students to close their eyes and picture themselves playing their game. With their eyes closed I will ask them a series of questions such as,

- What do you see around you?
- What colours do you see?
- Do you hear anything?
- How do you feel?

I will continue the visualization for some time to ensure the students have a good image of where they play their game. I will then ask them to draw their scene with no people in it, though the game can be in the picture.

Part 3 – The students will be asked to imagine child playing their game. This can be any child because I don't want them to necessarily identify with the character yet. If this child were playing your game the best way possible, what would they be doing? What would be special about that child. Write a few characteristics about that child and how they would be playing your favourite game. The students will then collage their child into their landscape.

Part 4 – The next part of the story will require the students to work with part 3. They will be asked to describe the opposite of the first child and everything that makes the first child so much fun to play with. They will then add this character to their illustration. It will be interesting to have a discussion about the appearance of the characters and see if the students identify with one character more than the other or if both characters are the same gender.

Part 5 – This time when the students get ready to write I will ask them what it would like if they students were to play together. Assuming they will have a conflict what will that look like. The students will then describe how the conflict starts.

Part 6 – The last part of the formal writing will have the students imaging the children playing together but instead of having a conflict they discover a similarity they have or something they each really like about the other one and that helps them play. What is that similarity or appreciated quality and how do they use that to get along.

The students will finish their illustrations by including any more detail they like, they will then practice telling their story to a friend. We will spend a few classes changing partners and as the students become more comfortable they can share their story with the whole class.

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Appendix A

## Baba Yaga

Taken from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/fttr/chap06.htm> on August 22, 2008.

Somewhere, I cannot tell you exactly where, but certainly in vast Russia, there lived a peasant with his wife and they had twins -- a son and daughter. One day the wife died and the husband mourned over her very sincerely for a long time. One year passed, and two years, and even longer. But there is no order in a house without a woman, and a day came when the man thought, "If I marry again possibly it would turn out all right." And so he did, and had children by his second wife.

The stepmother was envious of the stepson and daughter and began to use them hardly. She scolded them without any reason, sent them away from home as often as she wished, and gave them scarcely enough to eat. Finally she wanted to get rid of them altogether. Do you know what it means to allow a wicked thought to enter one's heart?

The wicked thought grows all the time like a poisonous plant and slowly kills the good thoughts. A wicked feeling was growing in the stepmother's heart, and she determined to send the children to the witch, thinking sure enough that they would never return.

"Dear children," she said to the orphans, "go to my grandmother who lives in the forest in a hut on hen's feet. You will do everything she wants you to, and she will give you sweet things to eat and you will be happy."

The orphans started out. But instead of going to the witch, the sister, a bright little girl, took her brother by the hand and ran to their own old, old grandmother and told her all about their going to the forest.

"Oh, my poor darlings!" said the good old grandmother, pitying the children, "my heart aches for you, but it is not in my power to help you. You have to go not to a loving grandmother, but to a wicked witch. Now listen to me, my darlings," she continued; "I will give you a hint: Be kind and good to everyone; do not speak ill words to any one; do not despise helping the weakest, and always hope that for you, too, there will be the needed help."

The good old grandmother gave the children some delicious fresh milk to drink and to each a big slice of ham. She also gave them some cookies--there are cookies everywhere--and when the children departed she stood looking after them a long, long time.

The obedient children arrived at the forest and, oh, wonder! There stood a hut, and what a curious one! It stood on tiny hen's feet, and at the top was a rooster's head. With their shrill, childish voices they called out loud:

"Izboushka, Izboushka! Turn thy back to the forest and thy front to us!"

The hut did as they commanded. The two orphans looked inside and saw the witch resting there, her head near the threshold, one foot in one corner, the other foot in another corner, and her knees quite close to the ridgepole.

"Fou, Fou, Fou!" exclaimed the witch; "I feel the Russian spirit."

The children were afraid, and stood close, very close together, but in spite of their fear they said very politely:

"Ho, grandmother, our stepmother sent us to thee to serve thee."

"All right; I am not opposed to keeping you, children. If you satisfy all my wishes I shall reward you; if not, I shall eat you up."

Without any delay the witch ordered the girl to spin the thread, and the boy, her brother, to carry water in a sieve to fill a big tub. The poor orphan girl wept at her spinningwheel and wiped away her bitter tears. At once all around her appeared small mice squeaking and saying:

"Sweet girl, do not cry. Give us cookies and we will help thee."

The little girl willingly did so.

"Now," gratefully squeaked the mice, "go and find the black cat. He is very hungry; give him a slice of ham and he will help thee."

The girl speedily went in search of the cat and saw her brother in great distress about the tub, so many times he had filled

The sieve, yet the tub was still dry. The little birds passed, flying near by, and chirped to the children:

"Kind-hearted little children, give us some crumbs and we will advise you."

The orphans gave the birds some crumbs and the grateful birds chirped again:

"Some clay and water, children dear!"

Then away they flew through the air.

The children understood the hint, spat in the sieve, plastered it up with clay and rilled the tub in a very short time. Then they both returned to the hut and on the threshold met the black cat. They generously gave him some of the good ham which their good grandmother had given them, petted him and asked:

"Dear Kitty-cat, black and pretty, tell us what to do in order to get away from thy mistress, the witch?"

"Well," very seriously answered the cat, "I will give you a towel and a comb and then you must run away. When you hear the witch running after you, drop the towel behind your back and a large river will appear in place of the towel.

If you hear her once more, throw down the comb and in place of the comb there will appear a dark wood. This wood will protect you from the wicked witch, my mistress."

Baba Yaga came home just then.

"Is it not wonderful?" she thought; "everything is exactly right."

"Well," she said to the children, "today you were brave and smart; let us see to-morrow. Your work will be more difficult and I hope I shall eat you up."

The poor orphans went to bed, not to a warm bed prepared by loving hands, but on the straw in a cold corner. Nearly scared to death from fear, they lay there, afraid to talk, afraid even to breathe. The next

morning the witch ordered all the linen to be woven and a large supply of firewood to be brought from the forest.

The children took the towel and comb and ran away as fast as their feet could possibly carry them. The dogs were after them, but they threw them the cookies that were left; the gates did not open themselves, but the children smoothed them with oil; the birch tree near the path almost scratched their eyes out, but the gentle girl fastened a pretty ribbon to it. So they went farther and farther and ran out of the dark forest into the wide, sunny fields.

The cat sat down by the loom and tore the thread to pieces, doing it with delight. Baba Yaga returned.

"Where are the children?" she shouted, and began to beat the cat. "Why hast thou let them go, thou treacherous cat? Why hast thou not scratched their faces?"

The cat answered: "Well, it was because I have served thee so many years and thou hast never given me a bite, while the dear children gave me some good ham."

The witch scolded the dogs, the gates, and the birch tree near the path.

"Well," barked the dogs, "thou certainly art our mistress, but thou hast never done us a favor, and the orphans were kind to us."

The gates replied:

"We were always ready to obey thee, but thou didst neglect us, and the dear children smoothed us with oil."

*"The children ran away as fast as their feet could possibly carry them"*

The birch tree lisped with its leaves, "Thou hast never put a simple thread over my branches and the little darlings adorned them with a pretty ribbon."

Baba Yaga understood that there was no help and started to follow the children herself. In her great hurry she forgot to look for the towel and the comb, but jumped astride a broom and was off. The

children heard her coming and threw the towel behind them. At once a river, wide and blue, appeared and watered the field. Baba Yaga hopped along the shore until she finally found a shallow place and crossed it.

Again the children heard her hurry after them and so they threw down the comb. This time a forest appeared, a dark and dusky forest in which the roots were interwoven, the branches matted together, and the tree-tops touching each other. The witch tried very hard to pass through, but in vain, and so, very, very angry, she returned home.

The orphans rushed to their father, told him all about their great distress, and thus concluded their pitiful story:

"Ah, father dear, why dost thou love us less than our brothers and sisters?"

The father was touched and became angry. He sent the wicked stepmother away and lived a new life with his good children. From that time he watched over their happiness and never neglected them any more.

## Baba Yaga

Taken from [http://hazel.forest.net/whootie/stories/baba\\_yaga\\_russia.html](http://hazel.forest.net/whootie/stories/baba_yaga_russia.html) August 22, 2008.

Once upon a time an old man, a widower, lived alone in a hut with his daughter Natasha. Very merry the two of them were together, and they used to smile at each other over a table piled with bread and jam, and play peek-a-boo, first this side of the samovar, and then that. Everything went well, until the old man took it into his head to marry again.

So the little girl gained a stepmother. After that everything changed. No more bread and jam on the table, no more playing peek-a-boo around the samovar as the girl sat with her father at tea. It was even worse than that, because she was never allowed to sit at tea at all anymore. The stepmother said that little girls shouldn't have tea, much less eat bread with jam. She would throw the girl a crust of bread and tell her to get out of the hut and go find someplace to eat it. Then the stepmother would sit with her husband and tell him that everything that went wrong was the girl's fault. And the old man believed his new wife. So poor Natasha would go by herself into the shed in the yard, wet the dry crust with her tears, and eat it all by herself. Then she would hear the stepmother yelling at her to come in and wash up the tea things, and tidy the house, and brush the floor, and clean everybody's muddy boots. One day the stepmother decided she could not bear the sight of Natasha one minute longer. But how could she get rid of her for good? Then she remembered her sister, the terrible witch Baba Yaga, the bony-legged one, who lived in the forest. And a wicked plan began to form in her head. The very next morning, the old man went off to pay a visit to some friends of his in the next village. As soon as the old man was out of sight the wicked stepmother called for Natasha.

"You are to go today to my sister, your dear little aunt, who lives in the forest," said she, "and ask her for a needle and thread to mend a shirt."

"But here is a needle and thread," said Natasha, trembling, for she knew that her aunt was Baba Yaga, the witch, and that any child who came near her was never seen again.

"Hold your tongue," snapped the stepmother, and she gnashed her teeth, which made a noise like clattering tongs. "Didn't I tell you that you are to go to your dear little aunt in the forest to ask for a needle and thread to mend a shirt?"

"Well, then," said Natasha, trembling, "how shall I find her?" She had heard that Baba Yaga chased her victims through the air in a giant mortar and pestle, and that she had iron teeth with which she ate children. The stepmother took hold of the little girl's nose and pinched it.

"That is your nose," she said. "Can you feel it?"

"Yes," whispered the poor girl.

"You must go along the road into the forest till you come to a fallen tree," said the stepmother, "then you must turn to your left, and follow your nose and you will find your auntie. Now off with you, lazy one!" She shoved a kerchief in the girl's hand, into which she had packed a few morsels of stale bread and cheese and some scraps of meat.

Natasha looked back. There stood the stepmother at the door with her arms crossed, glaring at her. So she could do nothing but to go straight on. She walked along the road through the forest till she came to the fallen tree. Then she turned to the left. Her nose was still hurting where the stepmother had pinched it, so she knew she had to go on straight ahead. Finally she came to the hut of Baba Yaga, the bony-legged one, the witch. Around the hut was a high fence. When she pushed the gates open they squeaked miserably, as if it hurt them to move. Natasha noticed a rusty oil can on the ground.

"How lucky," she said, noticing that there was some oil left in the can. And she poured the remaining drops of oil into the hinges of the gates. Inside the gates was Baba Yaga's hut. It wasn't like any other hut she had ever seen, for it stood on giant hen's legs and walked about the yard. As Natasha approached, the house turned around to face her and it seemed that its front windows were eyes and its front door a mouth. A servant of Baba Yaga's was standing in the yard. She was crying bitterly because of the tasks Baba Yaga had set her to do, and was wiping her eyes on her petticoat.

"How lucky," said Natasha, "that I have a handkerchief." She untied her kerchief, shook it clean, and carefully put the morsels of food in her pockets. She gave the handkerchief to Baba Yaga's servant, who wiped her eyes on it and smiled through her tears.

By the hut was a huge dog, very thin, gnawing an old bone. "How lucky," said the little girl, "that I have some bread and meat." Reaching into her pocket for her scraps of bread and meat, Natasha said to the dog, "I'm afraid it's rather stale, but it's better than nothing, I'm sure." And the dog gobbled it up at once and licked his lips.

Natasha reached the door to the hut. Trembling, she tapped on the door.

"Come in," squeaked the wicked voice of Baba Yaga.

The little girl stepped in. There sat Baba Yaga, the bony-legged one, the witch, sitting weaving at a loom. In a corner of the hut was a thin black cat watching a mouse-hole.

"Good day to you, auntie," said Natasha, trying to sound not at all afraid. □

"Good day to you, niece," said Baba Yaga.

"My stepmother has sent me to you to ask for a needle and thread to mend a shirt."

"Has she now?" smiled Baba Yaga, flashing her iron teeth, for she knew how much her sister hated her stepdaughter. "You sit down here at the loom, and go on with my weaving, while I go and fetch you the needle and thread."

The little girl sat down at the loom and began to weave.

Baba Yaga whispered to her servant, "Listen to me! Make the bath very hot and scrub my niece. Scrub her clean. I'll make a dainty meal of her, I will."

The servant came in for the jug to gather the bathwater. Natasha said, "I beg you, please be not too quick in making the fire, and please carry the water for the bath in a sieve with holes, so that the water will run through." The servant said nothing. But indeed, she took a very long time about getting the bath ready.

Baba Yaga came to the window and said in her sweetest voice, "Are you weaving, little niece? Are you weaving, my pretty?"

"I am weaving, auntie," said Natasha.

When Baba Yaga went away from the window, the little girl spoke to the thin black cat who was watching the mousehole.

"What are you doing?"

"Watching for a mouse," said the thin black cat. "I haven't had any dinner in three days."

"How lucky," said Natasha, "that I have some cheese left!" And she gave her cheese to the thin black cat, who gobbled it up. Said the cat, "Little girl, do you want to get out of here?"

"Oh, Catkin dear," said Natasha, "how I want to get out of here! For I fear that Baba Yaga will try to eat me with her iron teeth."

"That is exactly what she intends to do," said the cat. "But I know how to help you."

Just then Baba Yaga came to the window.

"Are you weaving, little niece?" she asked. "Are you weaving, my pretty?"

"I am weaving, auntie," said Natasha, working away, while the loom went clickety clack, clickety clack.

Baba Yaga went out again.

Whispered the thin black cat to Natasha: "There is a comb on the stool and there is a towel brought for your bath. You must take them both, and run for it while Baba Yaga is still in the bath-house. Baba Yaga will chase after you. When she does, you must throw the towel behind you, and it will turn into a big, wide river. It will take her a little time to get over that. When she gets over the river, you must throw the comb behind you. The comb will sprout up into such a forest that she will never get through it at all."

"But she'll hear the loom stop," said Natasha, "and she'll know I have gone."

"Don't worry, I'll take care of that," said the thin black cat. The cat took Natasha's place at the loom.

Clickety clack, clickety clack; the loom never stopped for a moment.

Natasha looked to see that Baba Yaga was still in the bath-house, and then she jumped out of the hut.

The big dog leapt up to tear her to pieces. Just as he was going to spring on her he saw who she was.

"Why, this is the little girl who gave me the bread and meat," said the dog. "A good journey to you, little girl," and he lay down with his head between his paws. She petted his head and scratched his ears.

When she came to the gates they opened quietly, quietly, without making any noise at all, because of the oil she had poured into their hinges before.

Then -- how she did run!

Meanwhile the thin black cat sat at the loom. Clickety clack, clickety clack, sang the loom; but you never saw such a tangle of yarn as the tangle made by that thin black cat.

Presently Baba Yaga came to the window.

"Are you weaving, little niece?" she asked in a high-pitched voice. "Are you weaving, my pretty?"

"I am weaving, auntie," said the thin black cat, tangling and tangling the yarn, while the loom went clickety clack, clickety clack.

"That's not the voice of my little dinner," said Baba Yaga, and she jumped into the hut, gnashing her iron teeth. There at the loom was no little girl, but only the thin black cat, tangling and tangling the threads!

"Grrr!" said Baba Yaga, and she jumped at the cat. "Why didn't you scratch the little girl's eyes out?"

The cat curled up its tail and arched its back. "In all the years that I have served you, you have given me only water and made me hunt for my dinner. The girl gave me real cheese."

Baba Yaga was enraged. She grabbed the cat and shook her. Turning to the servant girl and gripping her by her collar, she croaked, "Why did you take so long to prepare the bath?"

"Ah!" trembled the servant, "in all the years that I've served you, you have never so much as given me even a rag, but the girl gave me a pretty kerchief."

Baba Yaga cursed her and dashed out into the yard. Seeing the gates wide open, she shrieked, "Gates! Why didn't you squeak when she opened you?"

"Ah!" said the gates, "in all the years that we've served you, you never so much as sprinkled a drop of oil on us, and we could hardly stand the sound of our own creaking. But the girl oiled us and we can now swing back and forth without a sound."

Baba Yaga slammed the gates closed. Spinning around, she pointed her long finger at the dog. "You!" she hollered, "why didn't you tear her to pieces when she ran out of the house?"

"Ah!" said the dog, "in all the years that I've served you, you never threw me anything but an old bone crusts, but the girl gave me real meat and bread."

Baba Yaga rushed about the yard, cursing and hitting them all, while screaming at the top of her voice.

Then she jumped into her giant mortar. Beating the mortar with a giant pestle to make it go faster, she flew into the air and quickly closed in on the fleeing Natasha.

For there, on the ground far ahead, she soon spied the girl running through the trees, stumbling, and fearfully looking over her shoulder.

"You'll never escape me!" Baba Yaga laughed a terrible laugh and steered her flying mortar straight downward toward the girl.

Natasha was running faster than she had ever run before. Soon she could hear Baba Yaga's mortar bumping on the ground behind her. Desperately, she remembered the thin black cat's words and threw the towel behind her on the ground. The towel grew bigger and bigger, and wetter and wetter, and soon a deep, broad river stood between the little girl and Baba Yaga.

Natasha turned and ran on. Oh, how she ran! When Baba Yaga reached the edge of the river, she screamed louder than ever and threw her pestle on the ground, as she knew she couldn't fly over an

enchanted river. In a rage, she flew back to her hut on hen's legs. There she gathered all her cows and drove them to the river.

"Drink, drink!" she screamed at them, and the cows drank up all the river to the last drop. Then Baba Yaga hopped into her giant mortar and flew over the dry bed of the river to pursue her prey.

Natasha had run on quite a distance ahead, and in fact, she thought she might, at last, be free of the terrible Baba Yaga. But her heart froze in terror when she saw the dark figure in the sky speeding toward her again.

"This is the end for me!" she despaired. Then she suddenly remembered what the cat had said about the comb.

Natasha threw the comb behind her, and the comb grew bigger and bigger, and its teeth sprouted up into a thick forest, so thick that not even Baba Yaga could force her way through. And Baba Yaga the witch, the bony-legged one, gnashing her teeth and screaming with rage and disappointment, finally turned round and drove away back to her little hut on hen's legs.

The tired, tired, girl finally arrived back home. She was afraid to go inside and see her mean stepmother, so instead she waited outside in the shed.

When she saw her father pass by she ran out to him.

"Where have you been?" cried her father. "And why is your face so red?"

The stepmother turned yellow when she saw the girl, and her eyes glowed, and her teeth ground together until they broke.

But Natasha was not afraid, and she went to her father and climbed on his knee and told him everything just as it had happened. When the old man learned that the stepmother had sent his daughter to be eaten by Baba Yaga, the witch, he was so angry that he drove her out of the hut and never let her return. From then on, he took good care of his daughter himself and never again let a stranger come between them. Over a table piled high with bread and jam, father and daughter would again play peek-a-boo back and forth from behind the samovar, and the two of them lived happily ever after.

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