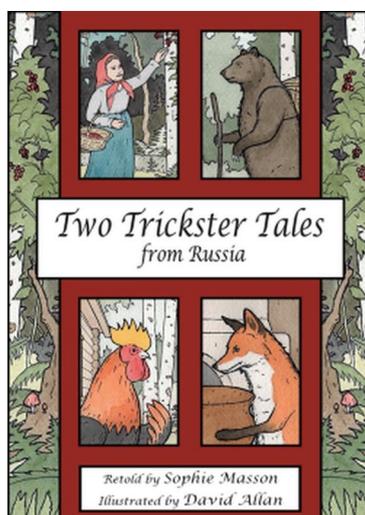


## TWO TRICKSTER TALES FROM RUSSIA

### TEACHERS' NOTES

Copyright Notice: These Teachers' Notes are available free of charge for use and study within schools but may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale. Copyright in these Notes remains with Christmas Press.



#### Publication Details:

#### ***Two Trickster Tales from Russia***

Retold by Sophie Masson

Illustrated by David Allan,

ISBN 978-0-9922838-0-3

Published by Christmas Press,

PO Box 1932, Armidale NSW, Australia 2350.

Softcover, A4 size, 32 pages, each illustrated in colour or sepia/black and white.

RRP: \$22.95

First published October 2013. Reprinted November 2013.

Audiobook edition: *Two Trickster Tales from Russia*, ISBN 978-0-9922838-1-0, produced by Sounds Like Books, available from December 2013.

With the new curriculum refocussing interest in schools on traditional tales from around the world, as well as visual literacy, Australia's newest children's picture book publisher, Christmas Press, is creating a wonderful list of great interest to readers and educators around Australia. Indeed, it was a love of traditional tales from around the world and classic illustration which led a collective of three creators to found Christmas Press, which launched in October 2013 with its first title, *Two Trickster Tales from Russia*.

Christmas Press specialises in publishing traditional stories—folktales, fairytales, legends and myths-- from many lands, retold by well-known authors and stunningly illustrated in a classic style reminiscent of the countries the stories come from.

Future titles, to appear in 2014, will include *Two Selkie Stories from Scotland*, retold by Kate Forsyth and illustrated by Fiona McDonald, ISBN 978-0-9922838-2-7, and

*Two Tales of Twins from Ancient Greece and Rome*, retold by Ursula Dubosarsky and illustrated by David Allan, ISBN 978-0-9922838-3-4

*Two Trickster Tales from Russia* includes the lively, funny Russian folktales, *Masha and the Bear*

and *The Rooster with the Golden Crest*, retold in a fresh and engaging style by award-winning writer Sophie Masson, author of more than fifty books for children and young adults. It is the first book for new illustrator David Allan, and his gorgeous illustrations are inspired by classic Russian children's picture books.

Suitable for a wide age range, *Two Trickster Tales from Russia* is a delight to read aloud to pre-schoolers and infants, as well as for older primary-school and lower-secondary students to read on their own and explore the stories, concepts and illustrations.

### **About the stories:**

We have called this book *Two Trickster Tales from Russia* because they are both Russian, of course, but also both about a battle of wits--in the case of our stories, in *Masha and the Bear*, a spirited young girl named Masha outwits the mean but stupid bear who holds her captive after catching her in his house in the woods; in *The Rooster with the Golden Crest*, the gullible rooster is constantly falling prey to the tricky fox—but is saved by his friends, who outwit the fox--the trickster tricked, if you like!

*Masha and the Bear* is one of the most popular folktales of all in Russia, retold again and again in different versions and editions. It first appeared in writing in the 1850's in the huge collection of Russian folk and fairy tales compiled by the great Russian folklorist Alexander Afanasyev (1826-1871), who is sometimes known as the Russian 'Grimm' (after the Grimm brothers, famous collectors of fairy and folk tales in Germany) brothers. His collection of 600 stories was published in eight volumes in Russia from 1855 to 1857, and many of the stories were translated into other languages.

With its spirited young heroine who could also be 'the girl next door' (the name 'Masha' which is very common in Russia, is a diminutive of the name 'Maria') and its moral of always keeping your wits about you and bullies getting their just desserts, this story is a perennial favourite. The bear, whose position in Russian folklore is of course a central one, is in this tale an unpleasant individual who is as brutish as he is stupid, but that isn't always the case in Russian tales, where bears can sometimes be seen as protectors. Readers familiar with *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* may find echoes of that tale in *Masha and the Bear* (the house in the woods, the little girl going in uninvited) but they are not specifically connected and were created independently of each other.

*Masha and the Bear* has also been adapted for plays, puppetry, has featured as a motif in 'matrioshka' (nesting) doll sets and most recently, has been at the centre a very popular Russian children's TV series of the same name, which has also been bought by many other countries, including in Australia, where it features on ABC3. The TV series, however, has radically adapted the story by transforming the central relationship between Masha and the Bear into one of friendship.

*The Rooster with the Golden Crest*, another traditional tale beloved in Russia, is a comic take on friendship and gullibility and follows the classic pattern of three perils before safe resolution. The rooster of the title, who is beautiful but also naïve, vain and gullible, keeps house for his other two friends, a cat and a thrush, in their cottage in the woods. His constant tricking by the sly fox, consequent danger, and rescue by his long-suffering friends, provide an enjoyable pattern for a story that you know will end well but which has a few tense moments along the way.

The story has some similarities to other classic tales of animal heroes and villains, such as the Musicians of Bremen (with its music-loving friends), as well as stories of Reynard the Fox, Brer Rabbit, and others.

Both stories have been adapted and retold by Sophie Masson in a fresh, clear, simple and rhythmic style, with some sharp, unexpected images and phrases to give a very particular atmosphere: for instance, the bear says, 'Little girl, I will crack your skull like an egg!' and he uses 'bear swearwords', such as 'jumping jellied salmon!'

### **About the author:**

The award-winning and internationally-published author of more than 50 books for children, young adults and children, Sophie Masson was born in Indonesia of French expatriate parents and came to Australia as a school-age child, spending much of her childhood shuttling between France and Australia, in the process developing an intense love of writing and reading. Her delight in traditional stories, combined with a lifelong fascination with Russia, a country she has visited several times, has resulted in several books with a Russian theme, including two novels, *The Firebird* (Hachette 2001) and *Scarlet in the Snow* (Random House Australia 2013), and her first picture book, *Two Trickster Tales from Russia*, which is the realisation of a long-held dream.

Sophie says: *The stories in Two Trickster Tales from Russia, Masha and the Bear and The Rooster with the Golden Crest are two folk tales that are well-loved in Russia, but not so well-known outside it. I chose them because the two of them embody a lively sense of fun--it's great to see the small and apparently powerless outwitting big brutes or cunning schemers! There's also a strong feel of the woods, which are so much a part of Russian life and culture. And there's a great rhythm to the stories which I've added to by having little verses here and there.*

*I am really happy that with this book we are giving a flavour of this distinctive, rich and beautiful traditional culture. With my text, I've tried to convey that sense of fun and sparkling wit that you so often find in traditional Russian stories and David's gorgeous illustrations, inspired by classic Russian illustrations, really convey the beauty of it.*

### **About the illustrator:**

David Allan completed a Diploma in Fine Art and has been part of several Fine Art exhibitions of Landscapes and Portraits in Oils. He's worked in bookshops and as a graphic designer and web designer, but always dreamed of becoming an illustrator. Influences in his work include classic illustration masters such as Arthur Rackham and Russian illustrator Ivan Bilibin (especially for *Two Trickster Tales*), along with Art Nouveau artist Alphonse Mucha and more recent illustrators such as Alan Lee and William Stout. *Two Trickster Tales from Russia* is his first book. He is currently working on another title for Christmas Press, *Two Tales of Twins from Ancient Greece and Rome* (retold by Ursula Dubosarsky).

David says: *For the artwork I used pen and watercolour on paper. The style for this book is pretty much an extension of what I normally do. Prior to starting the project, Sophie introduced me to the work of the great Russian Illustrator Ivan Bilibin whose work I had somehow missed before and now love. His use of a clean line and areas of flat colour style has been a huge influence on the look of the illustrations I produced for Two Trickster Tales from Russia.*

### **Background on the illustrator's quoted classic artistic influences:**

**Ivan Yakovlevich Bilibin** (1876–1942) was a Russian illustrator and stage designer who as well as illustrating numerous books, contributed as a stage designer to the famous Ballets Russes in the 1920's. Born in St Peterburg, he studied at an art school in Munich, Germany, and then with one of the most famous of all Russian painters, Ilya Repin, in his native country. He became famous in 1899, when he released his illustrations of Russian fairy tales. Fascinated by the traditional folklore and art of Russia, but also by traditional Japanese prints, he became one of the most popular of Russian illustrators. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, he fled to Egypt, and later to Paris, where he settled in 1925. There he took to decorating private mansions and Orthodox churches. But homesick for his native country, he returned to Soviet Russia in 1936. He died in World War Two, during the terrible Siege of Leningrad. His beautiful illustrations to classic Russian stories, however, continued to be published both in Russia and internationally, throughout the Soviet period and to the present day.

See some of Ivan Bilibin's illustrations at Google Images: <https://www.google.com.au/search?>

[q=Ivan+Bilibin&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=AyR3Uti9BIShkAX-y4DwDw&ved=0CAcQ\\_AUoAQ&biw=1138&bih=497](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Ivan+Bilibin&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=AyR3Uti9BIShkAX-y4DwDw&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAQ&biw=1138&bih=497)

**Arthur Rackham** (1867 – 1939) was an English illustrator who is regarded as a leading artist from the so-called 'Golden Age' of British book illustration in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He illustrated many books of traditional folk and fairy tales. As an 18 year old, he studied part-time at Lambeth Art School while also working as a clerk, and in his twenties got a job as an illustrator and reporter on a magazine. His first book illustrations were published in 1893, and after 1894 he became a full-time book illustrator. He died in 1939, soon after the outbreak of World War Two. Rackham's distinctive style is often described as influenced both by a northern European 'Nordic' style and by 19<sup>th</sup> century Japanese woodblock print tradition. His work remains enormously popular to this day, and is often found in reprinted editions of classic tales, as well as on cards and other merchandise.

See some of Arthur Rackham's illustrations on Google Images: [https://www.google.com.au/search?q=arthur+rackham&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=GCd3UoPFF4rBkgW-5oEY&sqj=2&ved=0CAcQ\\_AUoAQ&biw=1138&bih=497](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=arthur+rackham&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=GCd3UoPFF4rBkgW-5oEY&sqj=2&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAQ&biw=1138&bih=497)

*About the designer, Fiona McDonald:*

A graduate of the Julian Ashton Art School in Sydney, Fiona McDonald has worked as a graphic designer, doll-maker, cloth sculptor and artist. She is also the author of several books of non-fiction, including the best-selling *The Popular History of Graffiti* (Skyhorse Publishing 2013), as well as an illustrated novel for younger readers, *Ghost Doll and Jasper* (Skyhorse, 2012). Currently she works as a graphic designer as well as running her own toy-making business, *Granny Fi's Toy Cupboard*.

For *Two Trickster Tales from Russia*, Fiona created a design style reminiscent of the classic editions of Russian fairytales illustrated by Ivan Bilibin, with a cover featuring pictorial elements from the stories, as well as borders which also repeat certain elements and patterns in the body of the illustrations. The cover also gives a visual clue to the two main antagonists in each story: Masha and the Bear in the top two panels, and the rooster and the fox in the bottom two panels. Internally, she used the classic, even retro-looking 'Papyrus' font and created borders and other design features based on small details within the illustrations such as berries, mushrooms, etc. The layout of the book, with carefully selected double-page spreads, and different types and positions of illustration, was worked on jointly between illustrator, designer and author.

**Some suggested themes and questions for further discussion and exploration in class:**

Tricksters: What other stories do you know of that feature battles of wits, or tricky creatures?

Setting: What other traditional stories do you know of that are set in the woods or the forest? Why do you think this setting is so popular?

Talking animals: Can you think of other stories that feature talking animals? Why do you think some animals nearly always seen in a certain kind of way, like the cunning fox, for instance?

Folktale versus fairytale: *Masha and the Bear* and *The Rooster with the Golden Crest* are often referred to as 'folktales' rather than 'fairytales.' What do you think is the difference between those two kinds of stories?

Language: Sophie Masson uses some striking images and phrases, such as 'I'll crack your skull like an egg.' Can you find others?

Reading the pictures: Sometimes, as with the double-spread illustration of the bear returning home, it is the pictures only and not words that tell the story. Can you find other instances in the book when this happens?

Illustrative styles: Have a look at the artists who influenced the illustrator of *Two Trickster Tales*, David Allan. How do you think his style has been inspired by them?

**Some ideas for creative activities:**

\*Tell the story of *The Rooster with the Golden Crest* from the viewpoint of the cat or the thrush.

\*Create a menu Masha might use when she cooks for the bear.

\*Write a song that the three animal friends might sing at night in their cottage

\*Draw your impression of Masha hiding in the bear's basket.

\*What if the bear came back to Masha's village, or the fox came back to the woods? Write a short story about what might happen in a further adventure of the two tricksters!

©Christmas Press 2013.

Christmas Press,

PO Box 1932,

Armidale NSW 2350.

[www.christmaspresspicturebooks.com](http://www.christmaspresspicturebooks.com)