

Our own version of the *Silver Bridge* story is based on stories collected by the storyteller and writer Csenge Virág Zalka.

You can use the elements of the fairy tale in a flexible way: adapt it to the group and the location, and create your own version of the tale, adding legends and tales from your area.

Once upon a time, many other creatures lived on earth alongside humans, animals and plants.

- **What magical creatures do you think might have lived in the world?**

On the banks of the Danube and in the Danube river there used to live many water fairies. Their crystal dome-shaped, golden-roofed palace glistened beneath the surface of the water when the sun shone on it. The fairies combed their golden hair over the river. They sang to the fishermen, as well as for their own amusement, and when a single strand of their hair fell into the water, it turned to gold dust that even today can be panned out of the river sediments.

At night they would go out to the banks of the river and have feasts and parties, and if a human happened to be there, they would treat him to a hearty meal. There were many different kinds of water fairies, and many of them had a very delicate sensibility.

- **Which of the fairies' senses do you think were particularly sensitive?**

For a long time, the fairies were able to live in peace with the other creatures of the world, but then, slowly, the world changed. The time of the fairies was coming to an end, and the rule of the humans became stronger as humans began to shape the world to their own convenience.

- **What could have disturbed the different types of fairies (tasting-, seeing-, hearing-, touching-, and smelling-fairies) in the world dominated by humans?**

People cut down the fairies' favourite riverside trees and straightened the winding streams so they could build houses and grow crops. The riverbed was excavated to get the gravel for the construction of the taller and taller houses of humans. So eventually the reeds and marshes along the river were slowly replaced by wheat fields, factories, cow pastures and ever-growing villages. The places the fairies liked to visit were disappearing. Even the shimmering waters were disturbed by fishing boats, tourist boats and speedboats. And so the world the fairies loved so much came to an end.

Among the legends of the Danube fairies, there is also a story which says that the lord of Mogyorós once wandered to an old willow tree on the other side of the Danube, where the fairies were feasting with great delight.

The queen of the fairies, Fairy Ilona, was there as well, and on behalf of her people she hosted the lord, who ate and drank and feasted with them, and when the fairies were all sleepy and dozing around the feast table, the lord came up to Fairy Ilona, shamelessly, cut off her golden braid of hair, and to make his evil deed complete, he relieved himself in the middle of the table. You may imagine the shock of the fairies when they saw the results of the destruction! That was the last straw, Fairy Ilona decided to move her people elsewhere.

Tip: It is worth adapting the description and setting of the fairy world to the characteristics of your own environment from the very beginning of the story, e.g. if the area is riverside, elaborate on the water fairy environment, if it is wooded, highlight other characteristics. It is worth including as many characteristic elements as possible that the children can later discover during the nature walk (e.g. reeds, willows, water birds, flowers, a tree or rock with a characteristic shape, etc.).

Tip: Describe the skills and qualities of the tasting-, seeing-, hearing-, touching-, and smelling-fairies according to the interest of the audience!

- **Where do you think Fairy Ilona moved to?**

Legend also has it that when Fairy Ilona and her people said goodbye and moved away, the entire fairy folk crossed the Danube, and the ferryman who ferried them across found a golden horseshoe in his boat the next morning as a reward. Fairy Ilona built her new home along the Milky Way and it is there where her crystal-domed palaces still glitter until today - on a clear summer night you too can see her home.

So almost all the fairies left, except for one or two who loved the humans so much that they wanted to stay among them at any cost.

Fairy Ilona called them to her, and since she was so worried about them, she only allowed them to stay in this evil and dangerous world if they took other forms.

- **If you were a fairy and you wanted to stay here, what form would you most like to take, what creature would you most like to be?**

Some turned into water lilies, others into other water plants or water birds. In this way, they could stay here in the form of plants or animals, protecting the people, but also listening to their stories, which the fairies loved.

When the people were in great difficulties and their fate seemed hopeless, it happened more than once that Fairy Ilona and her people came to their aid. For example, during the Mongol invasion, the Hungarians fled towards the Danube, but due to the lack of a bridge they could not cross the river, and the Mongols were already pressing them from behind. The Hungarians searched for the crossing point until it darkened. Then one of the children noticed that the moonbeams dancing on the Danube were getting larger and larger in the middle of the water, until they became a silver bridge across the river. The child who had noticed it tried to stand on it, and sure enough, the bridge held him. So all the fleeing people walked across this silver bridge, sent by the fairies from the Milky Way, to the other side of the Danube.

- **Do you think the bridge was able to carry also the Mongols?**

The Mongols were no longer held by the bridge, so those who tried to cross it fell into the water.

So Fairy Ilona and her people are watching humans from the Milky Way, looking for the moment when they can return. Fairy Ilona also said that after 777 years, if there is once again a human on Earth who treats the fairies with dignity, and if humans are able to repair the nature they have exploited and destroyed, and make their environment nice and livable again, then the fairies can return to the human world again.

- **I start you off with this guidance: now you know the story of the fairies - open your eyes, look for their traces, where the fairies might be hiding. In the meantime, 777 years have passed, but the fairies have not yet returned. What do you think is the reason? Think about what you can do to make our environment a place where fairies have a reason to come back and make a place for fairies in our world again.**

We have further elaborated on the story by dividing the fairies into several groups to explore the world from the point of view of a fairy with different senses and special abilities. The activity sheets accompanying the walk are also based on sensory perception, so we considered it important to include this aspect in the story.

EXAMPLES OF INCORPORATING FAIRIES' ABILITIES INTO THE STORY:

"There were no secrets in the visible world for the **seeing-fairies**: they could see in the darkness of the caves, but they could also look into the sun without being harmed. They knew a thousand shades of every colour and could distinguish between cherry and plum leaves from a hundred metres away. But they could even see into the invisible: into the hearts of people. They also saw into their heads, and taught them to tell stories, to weave the images in their minds. That's how fairy tales were born."

"The fingers of the **touching-fairies** could feel the slightest bump on the smoothest river pebble. Stroking the bark of trees and the tips of grasses, they could talk to plants and tame humans and animals with a single touch. They flattened the tops of the hills, they made the rocks of the mountains mesmerising. They drew in sand, in earth, in the sky, giving beautiful shapes to everything they touched, "

"It was no secret to the nose of the **smelling-fairies**. From the other side of the river they could smell what was cooking in the poor man's pot at the other end of the village; which flower was sending a desperate cry of »water, water, for I am about to die!« and which tree was sending a desperate cry of »help!« to the wind against the caterpillars that were chewing its leaves. By its smell they recognised the rain, the dawn, the midnight. They even found gems by following their scent."

"The **hearing-fairies'** ears could not only hear the songs of birds, the ultrasound of bats, the chatter of animals and the chatter of people from far away, but also the words that were not spoken. The stream brought them news with its trickle, the leaves whispered the secrets of the forest. They understood the rain's drumbeat. They taught people music."

"The **tasting-fairies** have tasted everything. And not only could they tell whether the thing they put on their tongue was sweet or salty, bitter or sour, but they could tell the whole story of its taste. What the mother baked the gingerbread with, where she bought the ingredients, who she was thinking of when she decorated it, and even what she was humming while she drizzled the icing on it. But they also got a taste of the bitter stories behind the sweet taste."