



## Lesson Extensions and Activities for *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave*

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Reading Is Fundamental

Google Voyager Folktales Unit

### Book Description

In this Russian fairy tale, kind and beautiful Vasilisa lives with her cruel stepmother and stepsisters. When her stepmother decides to get rid of Vasilisa for good, she sends her on an errand to Baba Yaga. The witch asks Vasilisa to complete seemingly impossible tasks, threatening to eat her for dinner if she fails. In the end, will cruelty be punished and kindness rewarded or the other way around?

### Folktale Background

Baba Yaga appears often in Russian folktales. Baba means “grandmother” or “old woman” in most Slavic languages. Yaga could be a derivation from a Slavic name or it could come from the old Russian verb *yagat*, which means to abuse/to find fault. Baba Yaga is an interesting character because she’s not good but she’s also not completely evil, which can be seen in *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave* since she threatens to eat Vasilisa and orders her to do tough work, but she also helps Vasilisa escape her stepmother and stepsisters as well. ([Source](#))

### Vocabulary

- Crooked – Bent out of shape.
- Evidence – Signs or indications of something.
- Hapless – Unfortunate.
- Indulge – To allow oneself to enjoy the pleasure of something.
- Whim – A sudden desire or change of mind.
- Menial – A task that doesn’t require much skill.
- Mercy – Compassion or forgiveness.
- Homely – Unattractive or plain looking.
- Sinister – Evil or harmful.
- Rickety – Likely to collapse.
- Mortar – A cup-shaped receptacle.
- Pestle – A heavy tool with a rounded end.
- Ravenous – Very hungry.
- Chaff – The husks of corn.
- Tzar – An emperor of Russia.
- Sumptuous – Splendid and expensive looking.
- Conceal – To hide.
- Weary – Showing tiredness.
- Resolute – Purposeful and determined.

### Prior to Reading

- Ask students if they have heard of Russia. On chart paper, create a Venn diagram and have students share what's similar about the U.S. and Russia and what's unique to each of the countries. Note students' answers even if they're incorrect as you will go back and discuss the answers after learning more about the country.
- Walk students through the Russia [Google Voyager Experience](#). Students will learn about the country where the story is set. Add additional notes to the Venn diagram as you walk through the experience.
- Share with students that this is a folktale is set in Russia. Ask if they've heard any other stories set in Italy and call on volunteers to share.

## While Reading

- Stop reading on the page that says, "Instead, she indulged her two daughters' every whim and made Vasilisa's life as miserable as possible." Ask students if they can think of any other tales that have a similar family structure, and call on volunteers to share their examples.
- Stop reading on the page that says, "'Listen to me child,' said the doll. 'Don't despair. You must be brave. Do as your stepmother has told you, but take me with you.'" Ask the students to guess what will happen to Vasilisa.
- Stop reading on the page that says, "'Now it's my turn to ask a question,' announced Baba Yaga gleefully. 'Just how did you succeed in doing all the many tasks I set for you?'" Ask the students what they would ask Baba Yaga if they were in Vasilisa's shoes.

## Post Reading Activities

- Lead a discussion about the tale. Ask students such questions as:
  - Why did Vasilisa go to visit Baba Yaga?
  - What did Vasilisa see in the forest on her way to Baba Yaga's house?
  - What chores did Vasilisa have to do for Baba Yaga?
  - What help did Vasilisa have for her chores?
  - Why did Baba Yaga send Vasilisa home?
  - How did Vasilisa escape Baba Yaga's house?
- Have students complete the Criss Cross, Memory Matching, and Word Search puzzles about *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave* on RIF's Literacy Central (<https://www.rif.org/literacy-central>).

## Lesson Extensions and Activities

Here are some ways to further explore the story:

Primary Standard for all activities: RL.K.10 (Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.)

- **Math** – Have students complete word problems related to the story using representations of the foods that Vasilisa serves Baba Yaga.
  - Example word problem: Vasilisa prepares fifteen blinis, six piroshki and three cups of borscht. Baba Yaga is not very hungry. She only eats five blinis, two piroshki and one cup of borscht. How much food is left over for the next day's dinner?

Objective: Students will be able to use representations to solve addition and subtraction problems.

Standards: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.1.OA.A.1 (Use addition and subtraction within 20 to solve word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.)

Materials:

- Printouts with word problems related to *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave*
  - Paper representations of the foods in *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave*
  - Pencils
- **Arts** – Baba Yaga’s house is described as “fearsome, for there stood a high fence made of bleached bones, and on each fencepost a hollow-eyed skull sat glaring. The gate was also made of bones, the latch was a sharp-toothed mouth, and the bolt was a skeleton’s hand. On the other side of the fence stood Baba Yaga’s hut on its rickety stilts of bones.” Without showing the students the illustrations in *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave*, have students create visual representations of what they envision Baba Yaga’s house looks like.

Objective: Students will design and create artistic works based on a description.

Standards: National Core Arts Standards, Anchor Standard #3 (Refine and complete artistic work.)

Materials:

- Markers
  - Colored pencils
  - Construction paper
  - Pencils
  - Magazines that can be cut
  - Scissors
- **Science** – In *Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Brave*, Vasilisa’s home is thrown into total darkness when a curse makes it impossible to light a candle or a match. Have students experiment with air’s effect on matches by completing this experiment on [kidspot.com.au](http://kidspot.com.au).

Objective: Students will explore how air affects fire.

Standards: NSES Physical Science Standards Levels K-4 (Properties of objects and materials.)

Materials:

- Blu-tack, playdough, or chewing gum
- Match
- Plate
- Highball glass
- Water
- Food coloring

- **Writing** – Baba Yaga asks Vasilisa to do many difficult chores. Instruct students to write a journal entry from Vasilisa’s perspective about what she experiences during the days that she spends at Baba Yaga’s hut. Then, have students write a journal entry from Baba Yaga’s perspective.

Objective: Students will recall details from a book to write from multiple characters’ perspectives.

Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3 (Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.)

Materials:

- Journals
- Pens