

## Program 2–Kids Who Save the Day

This program is a natural extension of the initial one. You will first be treated to a tour of Baba Yaga’s home as envisioned and drawn by elementary school children from around the Boston area[1]. Again, if you find her proclivities towards building her home on chicken legs or installing a door latch from an arm—or a lock from teeth—disturbing, remember that these stories, not reality, are a brilliant way for children to embrace, explore, and conquer their fears.[2]

As they hear these stories about unlikely young heroes and heroines, children are asked to contemplate their gifts: Are you a good runner? Can you solve riddles? Do you read well? Are you a good friend? This program provides an opportunity for children to identify their own unique strengths and create stories about how they might use them to ‘save the day.’

### **Story 1 – Elena and the Black Geese (Russian Folklore)**

You first met Baba Yaga in Program 1. Today, she is searching for neglected baby brothers to dine on. On a psychological and developmental level, this is a brilliant story to help children ages 3-7 come to grips with the emotions that emerge from the birth of a younger sibling. By accepting and dramatizing the older child’s negative emotions, it offers a blueprint for growth. In the story, Elena must develop compassion and use her superior physical capabilities to save the day, rescuing the baby from Baba Yaga’s clutches. Ultimately, like Elena, the elder child will no longer identify a new baby as competition, but envision a nurturing role for him- or herself.

### **CURRICULUM EXTENSIONS:**

#### **Pre Concrete Operational Skill Building:**

Cognitively, as Elena develops a sequence of allies in her search for her little brother, this story reinforces sequencing and recall, . The listener needs to remember the gifts each creature bestowed and the order in which they were given as Elena uses them while escaping from Baba Yaga. Grouping skills are reinforced as each gift, which represents the habitat of its giver, expands into an enlarged part of that habitat on the reverse journey.

Fish à Shell à Lake

Squirrel à Nut à Tree

Mouse à Pebble à Mountain

To reinforce these skills, invite the children to participate in all the repetitions.

### **Social/Emotional Development**

Offer students an opportunity to share what they can do that their younger siblings cannot. You can share in a circle or have them draw a picture of their skill. Ask them when they think the younger child will be ready to learn this skill and how they will teach it to them.

### **Geography and Environmental Studies:**

Have students choose a different environment for Elena and her family to live in: a desert, a jungle, an urban area, etc. Determine three creatures or insects or beings that would live in different parts of this environment. How might Elena help them? What gift would they bestow, and what would each gift become? As an example, let's say your students are studying sustainable farming in New England:

“Elena and her family lived and cared for a family farm in Holderness, New Hampshire. She was, but of course, neglecting her baby brother (and the beans that needed weeding) when out of the White Mountains flew the Black Geese and stole the baby away.”

During her journey, Elena might help by milking a forgotten cow with very heavy udders. The cow would then give Elena some pieces of the grass she eats. Next, she could help a lost white perch make its way back to Squam Lake. Its gift would then be representative of its habitat—perhaps some drops of lake water. Finally, Elena might free a raccoon that got stuck in a campsite trash can, or a moose with its antler caught in a dense bush. What could they give her, in thanks for her kindness? When Baba Yaga is chasing Elena, the grass tossed behind her would transform into a large field that separates them. What would the other gifts become?

You can take this story into any ecosystem or geographic location to reflect the classroom curriculum. The shift will work because your students are drawn by this primal story of a child avoiding her responsibility to her younger sibling, and her strength and courage in making it right.

### **Creative Writing and/or Thinking**

At this point in the program I ask students to think about their special gifts and how they might use them to solve problems and save the day. Many students sent story boards displaying how they saved the day. Ask your students to each identify one strength that they possess. Next have them come up with a big problem that their gift could help solve. Possibly an elephant has escaped from the zoo and taken up residence on the family's front lawn. Cute as she is, she is destroying the grass and eating the family out of house and home. If you are a good dancer, as most elephants are, you could start dancing, get her on her feet and dancing with you, and before she knows it, you've danced her right back to the zoo. If students are too young to create the written story, a story board that they can create the story from is just as effective.

### **Story 2 – The Fly (Vietnamese Traditional)**

This traditional Vietnamese story is considered a trickster tale—a story in which a smaller, less powerful person or creature gets the best of a bigger, less intelligent, and usually greedy being. [3] Children are drawn to these stories because it allows them to feel that they have power that is comparable to, or sometimes greater than, that of the adults in their lives. From Anansi the Spider in Africa to Brer Rabbit in the American south to Raven and Coyote in the Native American tradition, tricksters have always been with us. Bugs Bunny is really just Brer Rabbit's great great grand son! The boy in The Fly is clever and sly, but he uses his trickery in order to save his hard-working parents from a merciless, money-hungry landlord.

### **CURRICULUM EXTENSIONS:**

#### **Pre Concrete Operational Skill Building:**

Have children draw a picture of their favorite part of the story. Then, as a group, have them sequence their drawings along the chalkboard. Help them to share the decisions about where a picture belongs in terms of the sequence of the story. (Which images logically precede it? Which ones should come after?) Once all of the pictures have been sequenced on the board, encourage the students to take turns telling parts of the story, using the pictures as guideposts.

#### **Geography:**

Find Vietnam on a world map. Why does bamboo grow so well there?

What can you tell about the country from its location?

### **Language Arts and Creative Thinking:**

This tale is based on a riddle. Have your students ever heard a riddle? Ask them to share a riddle they know with the rest of the class. Listen to riddles that students sent into the show. Have your students create their own original riddles. Often it is easier to start with the answer, then come up with the question! .

[1] Baba Yaga, whose American pseudonym is Old Bony Legs, is the protagonist of many Russian tales. She is the region's most famous witch. Baba Yaga travels in a mortar and propels herself with a pestle. She has among her servants the dawn, the sun, and the moon, and she lives in a hut set atop chicken legs. Like her European counterpart, she also eats small children – but only the bad ones – and uses her dark powers only on those who would injure the innocent or destroy the world we live in.

[2] **The Dove and the Dragon: Binding Adult Objectives and Children's Needs in Storytelling**

[http://www.storiesalive.com/Education/Edu\\_articles.html](http://www.storiesalive.com/Education/Edu_articles.html)

[3] Note that the 4th show in this series is specifically dedicated to Tricksters. You might choose to view this specific story again as part of that investigation.