

FREE
Reading & Writing
Activity!

Recommended
for ages
9 & up



Literary Analysis Activity

Comparing & Contrasting Beliefs about Identity in
Scripture & “The Little Mermaid”
with Text & Optional Creative Response Activity

FIRST PUBLISHED 1837

Fairy Tales, Vol. 3

Hans Christian Andersen

C.A. Reitzel • Copenhagen

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Guide

WHO

We recommend this activity for students 9 and older, those beginning to ask questions about their own identity. This activity is intended to spark discussion about the deeply personal issue of identity, and it should be grounded in truth and completed with loving parental guidance.

WHAT

This activity explores themes of identity. The activity provides simple steps and questions to help parents guide their upper elementary, middle, and high school-aged children through a simple, natural process of analytical comparison and contrast activity that is grounded in scripture.

WHY

Story is all around us, even if we don't read or watch movies. Our children constantly process media, narratives, and life events as story. In life, it can be difficult to distinguish fiction from nonfiction. Shared literature is an excellent way of fostering meaningful conversation within the supportive and loving environment of home and family relationships. Being equipped to think carefully about the values stories teach—and to thoughtfully compare them against scriptural values and our own desires—is an essential life skill best practiced in the supportive environment of home. This activity offers parents the opportunity to equip their children for navigating deep questions in a sea of narrative values and voices (AKA: the world we live in).

HOW

We recommend completing this activity in steps throughout 1-2 weeks. This allows time to process ideas more carefully. For extra processing power, require students to respond in writing.

Step 1: Pray for the Holy Spirit to give discernment and read Psalm 139 together to begin with God's truth in mind.

Step 2: Read "The Little Mermaid" (text follows this overview)

Step 3: Discuss questions on the next page.

Step 4: Repeat process watching another version.

Step 5: Complete comparison and contrast.

Step 6: Re-read Psalm 139 together. Compare and contrast lessons about desires and identity in both versions of "The Little Mermaid" with God's word to us in Psalm 139 (and other scriptures that teach who we are in Christ). Use the questions and your families answers as a guide to think through what Psalm 139 and other scriptures about identity tell us about these ideas.

Step 7: Process through writing original version of your own.

Optional step 8: Send it to us for possible publication!

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

questions

WHO

Who is effected by the Little Mermaid's decision?
Who benefits or suffers?
Who does the prince choose to marry?

WHAT

What increases The Little Mermaid's desire to go above the sea?
What does she hope to gain by becoming human?
What does she sacrifice & risk to become human?
What must happen for her to become human?

WHERE

Where does The Little Mermaid live?
Where are her parents in the story?
Where does her fascination with humans lead her?

WHY

Why does (or doesn't) it hurt The Little Mermaid to walk & dance?
Why is she willing to suffer so greatly (or how does it impact the story if she doesn't)?
Why are we able to relate to her risky decision?

HOW

How does this story reveal the danger of our desires?
How does this story deal with discontent?
How does this story explore identity?
How does this story make us feel about God-given identity?

WHEN

When is it (or is it ever) okay to deliberately change who we are?
When should we talk to someone about a desire or discontent to do so?
When should we consult others before acting?
When might you feel pressure to change something about yourself?

Other Formats & Versions

Available Online

- [Graphic Kingdom's Timeless Stories Animated on YouTube](#)

Condensed version is great for those with shorter attention spans (just over 5 minutes long). It's a stretch to call the story animated, but the illustrations are lovely and hold interest. It's also read in an easily understandable but also authentic accent.

- [Classic Audiobooks with Elliot YouTube Version](#)

This read-aloud version is faithful to the text. There is simple and lovely a low-fi animated cover that loops while the reader's pleasant voice reads the story, faithful to the text shared above. Great for those who just want to listen along. The reader has a British accent.

- [Stories Told Brightly YouTube Version](#)

No animation, but we love the gentle sound of waves playing in the background while this female narrator with an American accent reads the story losing none of Andersen's gorgeous description.

- [Magic Tales Tree YouTube Version](#)

The background music runs a bit loud for our screeners; however, this version still makes our list due to its beautiful, low-fi animation and faithful use of the full text with full descriptive detail. It's good for those who would like to listen to the text above while also watching instead of reading along.



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DANISH ...
1846



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A

Danish Story-Book.

BY

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.



TRANSLATED BY CHARLES BONER.

WITH

NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE COUNT POCCI.



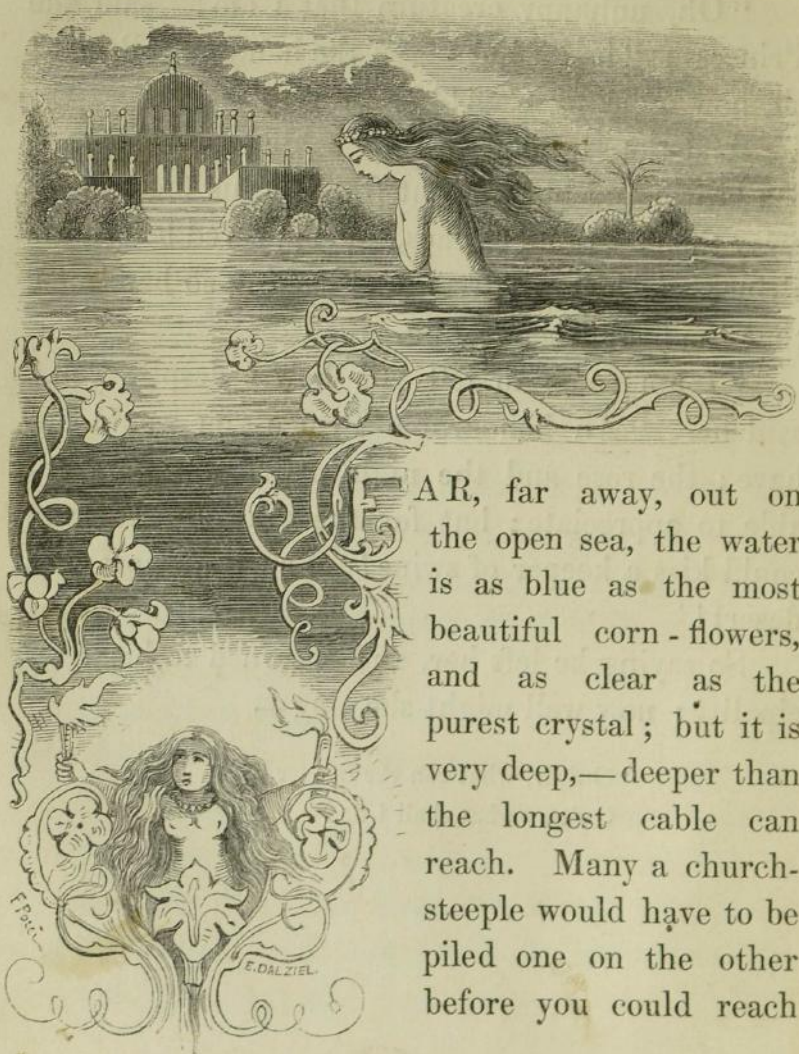
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THE LITTLE MERMAID.



AR, far away, out on the open sea, the water is as blue as the most beautiful corn-flowers, and as clear as the purest crystal; but it is very deep,—deeper than the longest cable can reach. Many a church-steeple would have to be piled one on the other before you could reach

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from the bottom of the sea to the surface ; and here, in these depths, dwell the Mermaids.

Now you must not fancy that there is nothing down there but white sand ; far from it. The most beautiful trees and plants grow there, whose stems and leaves are so pliable that they move to and fro at the slightest motion of the water, as though they were living creatures. Large and small sea-fishes glide through the branches, as the birds fly about in the air with us above. At the spot where the sea is deepest lies the palace of the Ocean-King. The walls of the palace are of coral, and the high pointed windows of amber, the roof is of sea-shells cunningly joined together, that open and shut with the swell of the waves, which has a charming effect ; for in every shell shining pearls are lying, one alone of which would be a costly jewel for the crown of an earthly monarch.

The Ocean-King, who lived in this palace, had been a widower many years ; but his old mother kept house for him. She was a clever woman, but she was very proud of her lineage, and bore therefore twelve oysters on her tail, while other Mermaids of rank could only have six. In everything

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besides she merited unreserved praise, particularly on account of the great affection she bore her grand-daughters, the little Ocean-Princesses. They were six particularly beautiful children ; the youngest Princess, however, was the loveliest of all the sisters. Her complexion was as fine and delicate as a rose-leaf, her eyes as blue as the deepest sea ; but, like all Mermaids, she had no feet ; her body ending in the tail of a fish.

The whole day long the children were allowed to play in the spacious halls of the palace, where all around flowers were growing from the walls. The large amber windows were then opened, and great fishes swam in ; just as the swallows fly in with us, when we leave the doors open. But the fishes were bolder than our swallows are ; they swam right in to the little Princesses, ate out of their hands, and allowed themselves to be caressed.

In front of the palace was a large garden with crimson and dark-blue trees, whose fruits sparkled with gold ; but the flowers of the garden were like a burning sun. The mould there was the finest sand, but of a violet colour, something like the flame of brimstone, and over the whole was spread

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a wondrous blue, so that one might have fancied oneself high up in the air, with the heavens above and below, instead of being at the very bottom of the sea. When the water was tranquil, one could see the sun, which looked then like a purple flower, out of whose chalice the light of the world was streaming.

Each of the little Princesses had her own flower-bed in the garden, in which she could plant and sow as she liked. One laid it out in the form of a whale, another liked that of a mermaid better ; but the youngest made hers quite round, like the sun, and planted only flowers that were red, to resemble it in colour too. She was indeed an extraordinary child, reserved and reflective. While her sisters put up all sorts of things as ornaments, which they had got from a ship that had been wrecked, she asked for the beautiful white boy only, a marble figure which had been found in the vessel. She placed the statue in her garden, and planted a red weeping willow beside it, which grew right pleasantly ; and its long branches hung down to the blue ground, on which the flitting shadows played

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in violet tints, as though the roots and the tops of the boughs played with and kissed each other.

Nothing delighted the little Princess so much as to hear of the world inhabited by man, that was up above the waters. Her old grandmother was obliged to tell all that she knew about ships and towns, men and land-animals; and she was particularly delighted to hear that the flowers on the earth had a sweet odour, which is not the case with the flowers of the ocean; to learn that the woods there were green, and that the fishes that fluttered about in their branches were beautiful, and sing aloud. It was the birds she meant; her grandmother called them fishes, because her granddaughters, who had never seen a bird, would otherwise not have understood her.

“When you have reached your fifteenth year,” continued the old lady, “you may rise up to the surface of the sea, sit on the rocks in the moonlight, and see the large ships sail by, and become acquainted with men and cities.” The following year the eldest sister attained this happy age; but as to her sisters, unfortunately one was always a year

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younger than the other, and the youngest therefore had to wait five whole years before the glad moment should come for her to rise to the surface of the ocean, and behold how the upper world did look. But each promised the other to tell what she had seen, and what she thought most beautiful, as soon as the first day of her coming of age should arrive; for really their grandmother told them so very little, and there were so many things that they wanted to know about.

But none of the sisters felt so lively a longing for this day of liberation from infantile restraint as the youngest; she who must wait longest, and who always moved about so quietly and absorbed in thought. Many a night did she stand at the open window, and look upwards through the clear blue water, when the fishes were splashing with their fins. She could see the sun and the moon, of course in dimmed brightness only; but to her the orbs seemed larger than to the dwellers upon earth. If a cloud concealed them, then she knew that it was either a whale or a passing ship with human beings upon it, who certainly little thought that, far below them, a little ocean-maiden stretched her

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white hands upward towards the keel of their ship, with an ardent longing.

The day was now arrived when the eldest Princess had reached her fifteenth year, and was therefore to rise to the surface of the sea.

At her return she had a thousand things to relate ; but yet her greatest enjoyment had been to sit on a sand-bank in the moonlight, and to see the large city lying on the coast, where lights like stars were shining, music sounding, and where the noise and hum of carriages and men might be heard afar. Then, too, to behold the high church-towers, and to hear the chime of the bells,—it was for these very things she longed most, just because they were beyond her reach.

How attentively her youngest sister listened to these words ! And when she now stood by night at her open window, and looked upwards through the blue flood, she thought so intensely of the large noisy town, that she fancied she could hear the sound of the church-bells.

The following year the next sister was allowed to rise to the surface, and swim whither she pleased. She rose to the top of the water just as the sun was

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going down ; and this sight so delighted her, that she said, of all she had seen above the sea, this was the most magnificent. “The whole heaven was like gold,” said she, “and the beauty of the clouds it is out of my power to describe : now red, now violet, on they sailed above me ; but faster than they flew, a flock of white swans flew over the water at the very spot where the sun stood. I gazed, but the sun disappeared, and the rosy light gradually died away on the surface of the ocean, and on the edges of the clouds.”

It was now the third sister's turn to rise. She was the most beautiful of the three, and therefore she swam up a river that fell into the sea. Here she saw on the banks green hills with grapevines, castles and houses that rose up from among the woods ; she heard the host of birds singing ; and the sun shone so warm, that she was often obliged to dive beneath water to cool her burning countenance. In a small bay she found a whole company of little children—the children of mortals who dwell upon the earth—that jumped about naked and splashed in the water. She wished to join in their sport ; but the children fled frightened to the

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land, and a little black animal barked so dreadfully at her, that at last she grew afraid, and swam back again to the sea. But she could not forget the sight of the green woods, the leafy hills, and of the nice little children who swam about in the water although they had no fins.

The fourth sister was not so bold ; she remained in the open sea, and when she came back to her ocean-palace, related that there it was more beautiful than any where else, for one could see miles around one, while the sky, like a large bell, hung over the waves. She had seen ships too, but only so far off that they seemed to be sea-gulls ; while sprightly dolphins sported on the water, and whales spouted high jets into the air that looked like a thousand fountains.

The following year the fifth sister was fifteen. Her birthday was in winter ; and so she saw what the others had not seen when she went up for the first time. The sea had become green, and icebergs were swimming about. These looked like pearls, she said, but were higher than the church-towers on the land. She had seated herself on one of these swimming ice-pearls ; but every ship had

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quickly hoisted its sails, and had hastened frightened away. The same evening the sky was covered with clouds, and while the huge blocks of ice sank and rose again out of the sea, and shone in the red glare, the clouds sent forth lightning and thunder. Then on every ship the sails were furled, and fear and terror reigned on board. But she remained quietly seated on her icy rock, and watched the blue zig-zag of the lightning rushing into the sea.

The first time that each of these sisters rose from the sea, she was astonished and enchanted at the sight of the many new and beautiful objects which she had seen in the upper world. But when now, as grown-up maidens, they had permission to go up as often as they liked, it soon lost the charm of novelty, and it was not long before their own home seemed much more delightful than the upper world ; for here all seemed congenial.

Many an evening did the five sisters, arm-in-arm, rise to the surface of the sea. Their voices were much sweeter than that of any mortal ; and when a storm was approaching they swam before the ships and sang, oh, so beautifully ! of the joy it was to dwell at the bottom of the ocean, and begged the

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mariners not to be afraid to go there. But the sailors did not understand their words; they took the song for the whistling of the blast, and so lost the sight of the beauties of the deep; for when a ship went down, the men on board were drowned, and arrived dead at the palace of the Ocean-King.

When the sisters thus swam in the evening hours on the tops of the waves, the youngest stood quite alone in her father's palace, looking after them; and at such times she felt as though she should weep. But the Mermaids have no tears, and therefore suffer immeasurably more in their sorrow than men.

"Oh, were I but fifteen years old!" sighed she. "I know, for certain, that I should love the upper world, and the men that live upon it, very dearly!"

At length the much-desired fifteenth year was attained!

"Now, then, we are quit of you," said the old grandmother. "Come here, that I may dress you like your other sisters." So saying, she placed a wreath of white lilies in her hair, but each leaf of the flowers was the half of a pearl, and the old lady

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ordered eight large oysters to hang themselves to the tail of the Princess, as a sign of her high descent.

“But that hurts me so!” said the little Princess.

“Little discomfords are not to be minded, if we wish to look well,” answered the grandmother.

She would so gladly have cast aside all her finery, and taken off the heavy wreath, for her red flowers out of the little garden became her much better; but she dared not do so before the old lady. “Adieu,” said she, and rose out of the sea as light and as beautiful as an air-bubble in the water.

The sun had just left the horizon as she, for the first time in her life, appeared on the surface of the ocean; but the clouds still shone golden and rose-coloured, the evening star gleamed in the pale red sky, the air was mild and refreshing, and the sea as smooth as a mirror. A large ship lay on the tranquil waters; a single sail was hoisted, for not a breath of air was perceptible, and the sailors were sitting on the yards or in the rigging. Music and song sounded from on board; and when it was dark, hundreds of lamps suddenly glittered on the ship, and it looked as if the flags of every nation were

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fluttering in the air. The little Mermaid swam to the cabin-windows, where, each time the waves lifted her on high, she was able to see through the clear glass panes. Here she saw many gaily-dressed persons ; but the handsomest of all was the young Prince with the large dark eyes. He was certainly not more than sixteen. It was his birthday that was being kept, on which account were all these festivities. The seamen danced on the deck ; and when the young Prince appeared among them, hundreds of rockets flew into the air, turning the night into bright day, and frightening the little Mermaid so much that she dived for a moment or two. But she soon peeped out of the water again, and it now seemed as if all the stars of heaven were falling around her. Such a rain of fire had she never seen : of such arts, known but to men, she had never even dreamed. Large suns turned round, glowing fishes swam in the air, and the whole spectacle was reflected in the clear water. On the ship itself it was so light, that one could distinguish the smallest object, and see all the persons distinctly—oh, how handsome the young Prince was ! To many of the people he gave his hand, and joked and

laughed ; while the music sounded pleasantly in the silence of the night.

It was already late ; however, the little Princess could not tear herself away from the sight of the ship and the handsome Prince. But there was a hissing or roaring in the depths of the ocean, while the Princess still rose on the surface in order to see the Prince through the windows of the cabin. The ship began to move more quickly, the sails were hoisted, the waves tossed, black clouds gathered, and afar the thunder rolled. Already the huge vessel rocked on the heaving sea like a mere skiff, and the waves, towering on high like black mountains, broke over it ; but the good ship glided downwards in the hollow of the sea like a swan, and appeared again immediately riding on the crest of the waves. To the little Mermaid this appeared very amusing ; but not so to the sailors on board. The vessel creaked and groaned, and her thick ribs bent under the heavy blows of the waves against her side, while the water rushed in. For a moment the ship reeled ; the mainmast snapped as though it had been a reed : she capsized and filled. Now the little Mermaid comprehended that the people

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on board were in danger ; for she herself was obliged to take care of the spars and timbers that had been torn away from the ship, and were now floating about on the waves. But at this moment it became so dark that she could distinguish nothing : though when the dreadful lightning played, it was so light that she recognised everybody on the wreck. Her eyes sought the young Prince just at the moment when the ship went to pieces and sank. Then she felt so glad that the Prince would now come to her ; but she immediately recollected that men cannot live in the water, and that therefore the prince would only reach her palace as a corpse. Die ? no, that he should not ! So she swam through the pieces of wreck that were being driven about in all directions, forgetful of her own danger, dived and rose again, till at last she reached the spot where the Prince, almost exhausted, but just kept himself with difficulty above water. His eyes were already closing, and he would inevitably have been drowned if the little Mermaid had not been his preserver. But she seized hold of him, and, while she was driven along by the waves, bore him above the water.

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Towards morning the storm abated ; but not a trace of the ship was to be seen. The sun rose as red as fire from the sea. Its first rays seemed to colour the Prince's cheeks, but his eyes were still shut. The young Mermaid kissed his high forehead, and put back his hair from his face. While in this state he resembled the marble figure down in her garden : she kissed him once more, and wished sincerely that he might revive.

Now she beheld the firm land with its high mountains, on which the white snow was shining. A green wood stretched along the coast, and fronting it lay a chapel or a cloister ; she could not well distinguish which. Citrons and oranges displayed themselves in the garden, and before the gates stood two high palms. The sea formed here a small bay, in which the water was quite still, but very deep ; and only under the rocks on the shore the fine sand that had been washed up formed a firm ground. Hither the Mermaid swam with the seemingly dead Prince, laid him on the warm sand, and took care to place his head the higher, and to turn his face towards the sun.

In the large white building that stood before

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her, the bells began to sound, and many young maidens passed through the garden. The little Princess withdrew from the shore, hid herself behind some pieces of rock, covered her head and hair with the froth of the sea in order that her face might not be seen, and watched carefully to see who would approach the Prince.

It was not long before a young lady went towards him. She seemed quite terrified at the sight of the lifeless Prince ; but, soon recovering herself, ran back to fetch more of her sisters. The little Mermaid saw too that the Prince revived, and smiled kindly on all who surrounded him ; but on her he cast no look, for he did not know that it was to her he owed his preservation. And when the Prince was carried into the large building, she grew so sad, that she dived down and returned to her father's palace.

If she had been formerly pensive and still, she was henceforward still more so. Her sisters asked her what she had seen in the world above, on the first day of her majority ; but she gave no answer.

She often rose of an evening near the shore where she had left the prince ; she saw how the

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fruits of the garden ripened and were gathered ; she saw how the snow on the high mountains vanished ; but the Prince she could never see ; and she always, therefore, returned to her submarine dwelling melancholy and sad. Here it was her only consolation to sit in the little garden, and to embrace the little statue that resembled the handsome Prince ; but she tended her flowers no longer ; they grew up wild, covered the paths, and twined their long stalks and leaves in such rank luxuriance round the branches of the trees, that the whole garden was turned into a gloomy bower.

At last she could no longer bear her grief, and disclosed it to one of her sisters. The other sisters now learned the secret immediately ; but only they and some few of their friends. Among the latter was one who knew the Prince ; she, too, had been a witness of the festivities on board ; she knew also in what country he was to be found, and the name of his sovereign.

“ Come, little sister ! ” said the other Princesses, and, twining their arms together, they rose in a line out of the sea before the castle of the Prince.

This castle was built of pale yellow shining

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stones, and furnished with a flight of steps of white marble, the last of which reached to the very margin of the sea. Over the roof was spread a magnificent gilded dome, and between the columns which surrounded the castle stood white figures resembling living men. Through the clear glass of the high windows one could see into the splendid halls, where the silken curtains were looped up in festoons, and all the walls decorated with the finest pictures ; so that the sight of this gorgeous dwelling was a real delight for the little Mermaid. In the middle of one of the halls of state a jet of water made a splashing noise, sending up its stream to the glass cupola above ; and through it the sun shone on the water, and on the sweet plants and flowers growing in the basin.

Now, then, the little Princess knew where her dear Prince lived ; and from this hour she shewed herself nearly every evening, and many a night on the water. She often approached the land nearer than her sisters had ventured to do ; she even swam up the whole length of the narrow canal that led below the marble balcony, whose long shadow was reflected in the water. Here, then, she tarried to

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gaze at the young Prince, who imagined himself alone in the clear moonlight.

She often saw him, too, on the waters in his splendid barge, where the many gay flags were flying. She listened from among the green rushes to hear his voice ; and if by chance a light breeze caught her silver veil, and the fluttering was observed by those in the Prince's boat, they thought it was only a swan stretching out its long white wings.

Many a night when the fishermen were at their occupation by torchlight, she heard them relating much good of the Prince. Then she rejoiced greatly at having saved his life, when, half-dead, he was drifting on the waves ; and she remembered how his head had rested on her shoulder, although he knew nothing of it, nor even dreamed of such a thing.

Dearer and dearer did the human race become to her, and more and more did she wish to belong to them. Their world seemed to her much larger than that of the dwellers in the sea ; for they could fly away in their ships over the ocean, climb to the summits of the highest mountains, that reached the

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clouds of heaven ; and their countries, bordered by woods and decked with pleasant fields, extended themselves much farther than the eye of a Mermaid could reach. There were so many things about which she would have gladly asked for information ; but her sisters could give her no satisfactory answers. So she was obliged to have recourse to the old Queen-mother, who was well acquainted with the upper-world, which she very aptly termed the countries above the sea.

“Does the human race live for ever if the people are not drowned?” asked she once of her grandmother. “Do they never die, like us who live at the bottom of the sea?”

“Yes,” replied the old lady, “they must die as well as we ; and besides, their lifetime is much shorter than ours. We can live to be three hundred years of age ; but then when we die we become but froth on the sea, and have not even a grave here below among those we love. We have no immortal soul, we do not live again, but are like reeds that, once cut, can never more grow green. But men, on the contrary, have a soul that still lives on when their bodies are turned to earth, and

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which soars upward to the shining stars in heaven. As we rise out of the water to see the countries of men, so do they rise to unknown fair abodes, which our eyes are not permitted to behold."

"Why did we not have immortal souls?" asked the little Mermaid. "I would give all my three hundred years to be a human creature only for a day, and then to be allowed to dwell in the heavenly world."

"You must not think of such a thing," answered her old grandmother. "Why, we are much better off than men, and are far happier."

"Then I must die, and be drifted about like foam upon the waves! I shall no longer hear the sweet murmur of the sea, nor behold the beautiful flowers, nor the red sun!—And is there nothing I can do, grandmother, to obtain an immortal soul?"

"No," answered she. "When only a mortal loveth thee so much that thou art more to him than father and mother; when every thought and all his love is concentrated in thee, and he gives his hand to the priest to be laid in thine with the promise of everlasting constancy,—then only canst thou become immortal; for then would his soul dissolve in

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thine, and thou wouldst be made a partaker of human happiness. But that can never happen ! What in our eyes is the handsomest part of our bodies, the fish's tail is considered frightful by the inhabitants of earth, because, forsooth, they know no better. According to their notions, one must have two awkward props to one's body, 'legs,' as they call them, in order to look well !"

Then the little Mermaid sighed, and look sorrowfully at the scaly part of her otherwise beautiful body.

"Let us be happy !" continued the old lady. "We have three hundred years to skip and leap about, and that is, after all, a pretty good time for enjoyment ; when it is over, I do not doubt but that our sleep will be a quiet one. To-night there is a ball at court."

And a splendour was there, such as one never sees on earth. The walls of the spacious ball-room were of the thickest, yet clearest crystal ; many hundred colossal grass-green and rose-coloured shells stood in rows at the sides ; and in these blue flames were burning, that not only illumined the whole hall, but, shining through the crystal walls, lighted

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up the sea far around. From the hall, therefore, could be seen the innumerable large and small fishes of the ocean, some with scales of gold and silver, and some quite red and purple. Through the middle of the large ball-room flowed a clear broad stream, and on it danced the Mermen and the Mermaids to the sound of their own sweet voices. The little Princess sang most beautifully of all; and the others applauded and clapped their hands. This pleased her very much, although she well knew that neither in the sea nor on the land was to be found a more charming voice than hers. But soon all her thoughts were occupied with the world above her: she could not forget the handsome Prince, and her grief at not possessing an immortal soul was very great. She therefore stole away from her father's house; and while all within was merriment and joy, she sat absorbed in thought in her little neglected garden. On a sudden she heard the sound of horns echoing from above through the water; and she thought, "He is about to depart for the chase,—he whom I love more than my father and mother, who occupies my thoughts incessantly, and in whose hand I would so gladly lay the hap-

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piness of my life! All, all, will I hazard to win him and an immortal soul! While my sisters are dancing in the palace, I will go to the Witch of the Sea, whom it is true I always dreaded, but who, after all, is perhaps the only one who can counsel and assist me."

The little Mermaid now left the garden, and went to the roaring Maelstrom, beyond which the sorceress dwelt. She had never been that way before: no flower grew here, no sea-weed, and nothing but the bare, grey, sandy ground extended itself to the Maelstrom, in which the water whirled like rushing mill-wheels, and hurled all that it seized on down into the abyss. She would have to pass through the middle of this crushing whirlpool, to arrive at the territory of the Ocean-Witch; and here, again, a long way led through boiling ooze, called by the sorceress her moor-ground. Behind this waste lay her house, in a wood of a peculiar sort. All the trees and bushes consisted of polypi, hundred-headed, and looking like serpents shooting up out of the earth. The branches were long shiny arms, with fingers of supple worms, that, from the roots to the very highest top, unceasingly stretched

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out in every direction. What they caught in this manner they held so tight that it could never get loose again. The little Mermaid stood quite horrified before this frightful wood; her heart palpitated with fear, and she had nearly turned back, her mission unaccomplished, when her thoughts fell on the Prince and the immortal soul, and inspired her with new strength. She therefore bound up her long flying hair, that the polypi might not seize it and drag her towards them, folded her arms crosswise over her bosom, and then, more swiftly than a fish darts through the water, she flew by the hideous polypi, who now in vain stretched out their greedy arms towards her. But she saw how each tree had seized a something, and a thousand little arms held it as fast as though it were enlocked by hands of iron. Mortals who had been lost at sea, and had sunk in the abyss, grinned as white skeletons from out the arms of these polypi; rudders, chests, skeletons of land-animals, were held fast in their embraces, and even a little Mermaid was there that they had dragged into their clutches and strangled, which, for the poor Princess, must have been a dreadful sight.

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After she had passed safely through the fearful wood, she reached a slimy place where large fat sea-snails were wallowing; and in the middle of this place stood a house built of the bones of human beings who had been lost at sea. Here sat the Witch, letting a toad suck at her mouth as one often sees persons feeding a canary with sugar. The disgusting fat snails she called her chickens, and allowed them to sit upon her spongy shoulders.

“I know well what you want,” said she to the little Princess; “your intention is foolish enough, but, nevertheless, your wish shall be fulfilled, my pretty maiden, though it will lead to misfortune. You would like to get rid of your tail, and to have in its place two stilts such as men use, that the young Prince may fall in love with you, and so you may get an immortal soul.” While the Witch of the Sea said this she laughed with all her might, and so frightfully, that the pet toad and the snails tumbled down and rolled about upon the ground. “You come just at the right time,” continued she. “If you had come to-morrow after the sun had risen, I should have been unable to help you until a year’s end. I will prepare you a potion, with



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which you must swim to the land; then seat yourself on the shore, and drink it. Your fish's tail will immediately fall off, and shrivel up into the things which men call 'legs;' but this transformation is very painful, and you will feel the while as if a sharp instrument were thrust through your whole body. All who then behold you will say you are the most beautiful mortal they have ever seen; you will retain your gliding gait, and no dancer, be she ever so light, will move with so elastic a step; but at every motion you will suffer intolerable pain; you will feel as though you were treading on pointed blades and your blood flowing from the wounds. If you will subject yourself to all these torments, I will grant your request."

"Yes, I will!" answered the little Princess, with trembling voice; for she thought of her beloved Prince, and of the acquirement of an immortal soul.

"But remember," said the Witch, "that you can never be a Mermaid again, when you have once taken upon yourself the human form; you will never be able to descend to your sisters and to your paternal dwelling; and should you not gain the

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Prince's love in such degree that, for your sake, he forgetteth father and mother, that all his thoughts and all his joy be centered in you, and a priest join your hands together that you become man and wife,—without this you will obtain no immortal soul. The morning after he is united to another will be the day of your death ; your heart will then break for grief, and you will be like the foam on the wave."

"I still will venture!" continued the little Mermaid, pale and trembling like one on the point of death.

"But I must be paid too, and it is no trifle that I require of you for my trouble. You have the most charming voice of all the Mermaids, and on it you reckon to captivate the Prince ; but this voice I must have as payment for my cure. The best of your possessions I demand for my miraculous potion ; for I must give of my own blood to impart to the mixture the sharpness of a two-edged sword."

"But if you take my voice," said the Princess, "what have I left to captivate the Prince?"

"Your lovely form," answered the Witch ; "your

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light ærial step, and your expressive eyes. These are surely enough to befool a poor human heart! Well, what do you say? Have you lost courage? Come, out with your tongue, that I may cut it off and take it in exchange for my spell."

"Be it so!" answered the Princess; and now the Witch set her caldron on the fire, to seethe the charmed potion. "Cleanliness is a principal thing," said she, taking a handful of toads and snails to scour her kettle with. She then scratched her bosom, and let the black blood drop into the vessel. The vapour that rose from the mixture took such horrid forms as to terrify the beholder. Every moment the Witch threw in new ingredients; and when the caldron boiled, sighs and lamentations rose from it resembling the wail of the crocodile. At last the mixture was ready, and was now become as clear and transparent as pure water.

"There it is," said the hag to the Princess; and at the same moment she cut off her tongue. The little Mermaid was now dumb; she could neither speak nor sing.

"Should the polypi try to catch hold of you when you pass through my bower," observed the

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Witch, "you need only sprinkle a drop of this potion upon them, and their arms will break in a thousand pieces." But the Princess found this unnecessary ; for the polypi drew back affrighted when they perceived the shining phial in her hand, that gleamed before her like a beaming star. In this way she soon passed the dreadful wood, crossed the heath of the sorceress, and the roaring Maelstrom.

She now perceived her father's palace ; the lamps in the ball-room were extinguished, and all her family were doubtless gone to rest. She would not enter, as she was unable to speak, and was, besides, on the point of leaving her home for ever. At the thought her heart was well-nigh broken ; she glided into the garden, picked a flower from the bed of each sister as a remembrance, waved with her hand many a farewell towards the palace, and then rose through the dark blue waters to the upper world.

The sun had not yet risen when she reached the Prince's dwelling, and ascended the well-known marble steps—the moon was in the sky. And now the little Mermaid emptied the phial with the subtly-piercing draught, which convulsed her whole

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frame like the thrust of a cutting sword, and affected her so violently that she sank lifeless on the ground. When the sun rose she awoke, and felt a burning pain in every limb; but before her stood the object of her fervent love, the handsome young Prince, who fixed his dark eyes upon her. She looked down ashamed when she saw that, in place of the fish's tail which she had had hitherto, the finest legs were grown which it was possible to have. But she was naked, and she covered herself therefore with her long hair. The Prince asked who she was, and whence she came; and, smiling sweetly, she looked at him with her bright blue eyes, for unfortunately she could speak no more. He then took her hand, and led her into his castle. At every step it was as the Witch had said,—as though she was treading on sharp-cutting blades; but she bore the pain willingly. She moved along beside the Prince like a zephyr; and all who saw her wondered at the charming grace and lightness of every movement.

In the palace, robes of muslin and of costly silks were handed to her, and she was the most lovely among the ladies of the court; but she could speak

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and sing no longer. Female slaves, prettily dressed in silk and gold brocade, now appeared, to sing before the Prince and his royal parents. One was particularly distinguished from the others by her beautiful clear voice ; and the Prince testified his approbation by clapping his hands. This made the little Mermaid quite melancholy, for she could have sung much better than these slaves. " Oh," thought she in silence, " did he but know that for his sake I have sacrificed my voice for ever !"

The slaves now began to dance. Then the dainty little Mermaid stretched out her delicate white arms, and danced with such a step and air as none had ever done before. With every movement the lovely grace of her body seemed more apparent, and her looks appealed to the heart far more movingly than the songs of the female slaves.

All present were enchanted with her, but especially the young Prince, who called her his dear little foundling. And she danced again, and more beautifully still, although at every step she was obliged to bear the smart of cutting knives ; and the Prince said she should always remain in his

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palace ; and an apartment was prepared for her, and a bed of velvet cushions.

And the Prince had a riding-dress made for her, that she might accompany him on horseback ; and they rode together through the fragrant woods, where the green boughs touched their shoulders, and the little birds rejoiced from behind the fresh leaves. With the Prince, too, she climbed the highest mountains ; and although her delicate feet bled as she went, so that the attendants remarked it, she only laughed, and still followed her dear Prince up on high, where she saw the clouds drifting below her like a flock of birds passing to other lands.

At night, when all in the palace were asleep, she descended the marble steps to cool her feet in the refreshing sea ; and she thought then of her own dear ones in the deep.

Once, while standing there in the night, her sisters came swimming by, arm-in-arm, and their singing was most melancholy. She beckoned to them, and her sisters recognised her, and told her how great had been the mourning for her in their father's house. Henceforward they visited their

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sister every night; and once brought with them their old grandmother, who for many years had not been in the upper world, and their father too, the Ocean-King, with the crown upon his head. But the two old persons did not venture so near the land as to be able to speak to her.

Each day the little Mermaid grew dearer to the Prince; he loved her like a good dear child; but to make her his wife never even entered his thoughts; and yet she must become his wife, before she could obtain an immortal soul, and not be driven like foam over the sea.

"But do you not care most for me?" her eyes seemed to say, when he pressed her in his arms and kissed her beautiful forehead.

"Yes," then said the Prince, "you are dearer to me than all beside; for in goodness there is none like you. You are devoted to me; and, moreover, you resemble a maid that I once saw standing before me, but shall probably never behold again. I was on board a ship that was wrecked in a sudden storm; the waves threw me on the shore near a sacred temple, in which many virgins were performing the offices of their religion. The youngest

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found me on the shore, and saved my life. I saw her but once; yet her image is vivid before my eyes,—she is the only one I can ever love. But you are so like her!—yes, you almost drive her remembrance from my soul! She belongs to the holy temple, and my good fortune has therefore given me you as a consolation. Never, never will we part!”

“Oh, he does not know that it was I who saved his life!” thought the little Mermaid, with a sigh. “I bore him over the wild flood to the grove where the temple stands; I sat behind the rocks, and listened if mortals came; it was I who saw the beauteous maiden come whom he loves more than me.” And she sighed deeply at these words; for she could not weep.—“She belongs to the holy temple, he says; she never goes into the world; she will therefore never meet him again. But I am near him; I see him daily; I will tend him, and love him, and to him will I devote my whole life.”

“The Prince will soon wed the daughter of the King our neighbour,” said the people; “and that’s the reason why the stately ship is being got

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ready. 'Tis true, they say he is only going to travel through the country; but the real reason is to see the Princess. That is the cause of his taking such a large retinue with him." But the little Mermaid laughed at such reports; for she knew the Prince better than all the rest.

"I must make a journey," said he to her; "I must go and see the beautiful Princess. My parents require me to do so; but force me to marry her—to bring her back as my betrothed—that they will never do. Besides, it is impossible for me to love the Princess; for she cannot be as like the lovely maiden of the temple as you are; and if I am to choose, I would rather take thee, my dearest foundling, with expressive eyes!" And he kissed her, and hid her head on his heart; and then she dreamed of mortal happiness and of an immortal soul.

"You do not fear the water, my dumb child?" asked he tenderly, as she stood on the splendid ship that was to convey him to the territories of the neighbouring monarch. And then he told her of storms at sea, and of calms, of rare fish that inhabited the deep, and what divers had seen be-

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low. But she smiled at his words: she knew better than any mortal creature how it looked in the depths of the ocean.

In the moonlight night, when all on board slept except the man at the helm, she sat at the bow and looked over the ship's side into the sea. It seemed to her as though she could see her father's palace, and her old grandmother with her silver crown, as she gazed down into the parted waters. And then her sisters appeared upon the waves, looked at her fixedly and with sorrowful expression, and stretched out their arms towards her. She beckoned to them, smiled, and would have told them by signs that she was happy; but just at that moment the cabin-boy approached, and the sisters dived down so suddenly that the boy thought the white appearance he saw upon the waters was only the foam of the sea.

The next morning the ship entered the harbour of the splendid capital of the neighbouring king. The bells rang a merry peal, and the clarions sounded from the high towers, while the soldiers in the streets paraded with waving colours and glittering arms. Each day brought with it

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some new festival. But the Princess had not yet arrived in the town: she had been educated in a convent far off, where she learned the exercise of all royal virtues. At last she came.

The little Mermaid was curious to see her beauty; and she was forced to acknowledge that she had never on earth beheld more noble features. The skin of the Princess was so fair and delicate that her veins were seen through it; and from behind her dark lashes smiled a pair of deep-brown eyes.

“Thou art she,” cried the Prince, on beholding her, “who saved my life when I lay senseless on the shore!” and he pressed his blushing affianced bride to his beating heart. “Oh, now I am more than happy!” said he to his little dumb foundling. “That which I never hoped to see fulfilled has happened. Thou wilt rejoice at my happiness; for thou lovest me more than all who surround me.”

Then the little Mermaid kissed his hand in her dumb sorrow, and she thought her heart would break; for his marriage-day was to bring her unavoidable death.

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And again the church-bells rang, and heralds rode through the streets of the capital and announced the approaching wedding of the Princess. Odorous flames burnt out of silver vases on every altar ; the priests swung the censers, and bride and bridegroom gave each other the hand while the clergyman blessed the holy union. The little Mermaid, clad in silk and gold, stood behind the Princess and held the train of her bridal dress ; but her ear heard not the solemn music, her eye saw nothing of the holy ceremony ; she thought of her own death which that night was to bring, and of her irrevocable loss of this world. On the same evening the bride and bridegroom went on board the ship ; the cannons thundered, flags waved, and in the middle of the deck stood a magnificent tent of gold cloth and purple, furnished with the most costly cushions for the princely pair. The sails swelled with a favourable wind, and the vessel glided lightly over the surface of the blue sea.

When it grew dusk, coloured lamps were hung up, and the ship's crew began dancing on deck. The little Mermaid was unconsciously reminded of the sight the ship presented at her first appear-

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ance in the upper world, before the wreck took place. A like magnificence was then displayed ; and now she must skim along in the dance like a swallow that is pursued. All shouted applause ; for never had she been seen to dance so enchantingly. It is true, her delicate feet suffered indescribably all the while ; but she was now insensible to the pain, and her heart only had to endure its suffering. It was the last evening that she was to see him for whom she had left her home and all who were dear to her ; for whom she had given up her charming voice, and daily endured the most violent pains, without his having even the slightest suspicion of the matter. It was the last night that she would breathe the same air in which he, the dearly loved one, lived ; the last night in which she would enjoy the sight of the deep sea and of the starry sky ; for an eternal night, without sense or dreaming, awaited her. And all was joy on board till long past midnight ; and even she laughed like the rest, with the thoughts of death and everlasting annihilation in her bleeding heart. The Prince kissed his lovely bride, and arm-in-arm they went to rest in the beautiful tent.

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Now all was still and quiet on the ship; the helmsman only continued standing at the rudder. The little Mermaid laid her white arms upon the gallery, and looked towards the east for the coming dawn: the first sunbeam would be her death—that she knew. Then she saw her sisters rise from out the sea; their faces were deadly pale, and their long hair was no longer fluttering on their necks, for it had been cut off.

“We have given it to the Witch,” said they, “that she might lend her aid, and that thou mightest not perish this night. She has given us a knife; here it is; feel how sharp it is! Before the sunrise thou must plunge it in the heart of the Prince; and when his warm blood drops upon thy feet, they will again grow together and become the tail of a fish; thou wilt be again a Mermaid, and wilt live full three hundred years before thou art as the froth of the sea. Quick, then! for he must die, or thou, before the sun appear! Our old grandmother mourns so sadly for thee, that her silver hair has fallen off, as ours under the scissors of the Witch. Kill the Prince, and come to us! Haste—haste! dost thou not see a red streak in

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joy to all. When in this manner we have for three hundred years done all the good that lay in our power, we obtain eternal life, and share the immortal bliss of man. Poor little Mermaid ! Thou, by the impulse of thy own heart, hast done the like ; thou hast borne and suffered ; and now, raised to the world of ærial spirits, thou mayest by good deeds earn for thyself an immortal soul at the end of three hundred years."

And the little Mermaid stretched her transparent arms upwards to the sun, and, for the first time, tears wetted her eyes.

On the ship was now noise and rejoicing ; she saw the Prince and his lovely bride, and watched how both sought after her. Sorrowfully they looked at the froth of the sea, as if they knew that she had plunged into the waves. Unobserved she kissed the bridegroom's forehead, smiled at him, and then rose with the other children of air on the rosy clouds that floated gently over the ship.

"So, after three hundred years, shall we be soaring in the kingdom of God !"

"But we may get there sooner !" whispered one of the sisters in her ear. "Unseen, we fly into

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the abodes of men where children are, and for each day in which we find a good child that is a joy to its parents and deserves their love, does God in his great mercy shorten the time of our probation : no child knoweth when we pass through his chamber ; but our joy at the sight calls forth a smile, and one year is taken from the three hundred that we have to wait. But if we see a naughty or wicked child, we shed tears of sorrow, and every tear prolongs the time of our probation by a day."



Respond Creatively!

Improve the Story

The most wonderful thing about the creative folk tradition is that works were intended to be copied and shared! This tale is one that you can freely translate, update, and create with. So...

1. Take what you loved most from one or more versions, maybe it was the description style, maybe it was specific details, or perhaps you only liked a very general idea that the story gave you. Make a quick list.
2. Consider the issues you found, especially the ones that confused God's truth about identity. What would you say or show instead? How would that change the story? What needs revised to clearly reveal your new idea? Write out your ideas under your list of favorite elements.
3. Now think about (1) the parts that inspired you + (2) the new ideas you need to show to improve the story's message + (3) your creative interests and skillsets! Would they best be communicated graphically, through beautiful illustrations or a video? Would a play or video production really let the emotional scenes you envisioned speak? Decide what form your improved version will take (written, audio, visual, or all 3)! Add that to your list.
4. Make one more list of the resources you'll need: actors, puppets, action figures for a play or video; art supplies for a piece of art...get creative! (Let the materials you have inform your plan; using what you have is actually a great way to come up with original, unlikely, and surprising new ideas! Remember that the story's message matters far more than medium.)
5. Plan your creative project. Keep production small enough that you can actually do it during your evenings in 2 weeks or less (more than that gets hard to stick with unless you're super driven).

We want to see what you've done & inspire others with it! You're invited to share your creative response with us by emailing us at hello@anistemibooks.com. The subject line must say: Improved Little Mermaid or it will be misplaced in our email systems. We also require that you submit your notes and process with us; we want to see your work because that adds to its originality & majorly inspires others. Don't think your submissions have to be perfect. We reach out to our members with collaborative projects based on submissions as much as possible! We can't promise publication, but we can promise to SERIOUSLY consider any work that raises up worthy words and meaning! If selected for publication, we'll follow up with an offer to publish, copyright, and display your work!

