

## The Stinky Cheese Man takes a new twist on old tales

Would you believe me if I said that the princess from the fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea" actually slept on a bowling ball and not a pea? Is it possible that the duckling from the story "The Ugly Duckling" never turned into a swan, but was actually just a really ugly duck? Do you think that Cinderella could not have ended up with the prince, but instead stayed home from the ball and still had to clean the house? Well, if you read *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales*, you will believe all of these strange story twists and more are possible.

The authors of this Caldecott Honor Book, Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, select ten of the most commonly read fairy tales and take them in new, creative directions. *The Stinky Cheese Man* would be an ideal book for an English teacher to use in class because the students could select a fairy tale of their own and change it any way they wanted or write a brand new tale themselves after seeing the tales from this book as examples. Parents can also use *The Stinky Cheese Man* to add a little creativity and variety to their children's story time. College students can really get into the humor of the book and spend a relaxing half hour or so chortling at the silly dialogue and zany illustrations.

The basic set-up of *The Stinky Cheese Man* is anything but "basic"; in fact, the title page, dedication page, introduction, table of contents, end page and back cover are part of the book's appeal. The title page is set in

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huge, boldface type that does not only catch your eye, but makes you spring back in astonishment. The dedication page is turned upside down and acknowledged as being so by Jack the Narrator (of "Jack and the Beanstalk" fame) who writes the introduction on the next page complete with a Surgeon General's Warning that says, "It has been determined that these tales are fairly stupid and probably hazardous to your health." This introduction and warning basically set the comical tone of the entire book.

The table of contents that usually never gets to do anything but take up space becomes a major player in the fairly stupid tale of "Chicken Licken," which has been adapted from "Chicken Little." The end pages have an entire page of illustration, and the words The End are written in bold face type with a picture of Jack the Narrator grinning and running off the other page. The back cover is not just a cover, but a continuation of the story of the Little Red Hen. In short, *The Stinky Cheese Man* is packed with fun from cover to cover to say the least.

The illustrations in the book are colorful, creative and fun. Lane Smith takes the traditional pictures of the fairy tale characters and turns them

into something of his own creation. By that I don't mean that the pictures are necessarily gorgeous, but that the characters are seen with a new eye of reality that is probably closer to the truth than the typical, idealized versions. The illustrations can be simple pictures of the characters or scenery, or they can be collages. The most interesting illustrations are actually part of the story text. For example, the Little Red Hen always talks in red ink, and the giant always speaks in capital letters, which really bothers Jack the Narrator.

The Stinky Cheese Man is so named because the main story at the end of the book is about a Stinky Cheese Man who is like the character of the speedy Gingerbread Man who can't be caught, but the Stinky Cheese Man smells bad, so no one really wants to chase him. Some of the other fairy tale favorites that are transformed in this book are "Chicken Little," "The Ugly Duckling," "The Tortoise and the Hare," "Cinderella," "The Princess and the Pea," "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Frog Prince," "Jack and the Beanstalk," and "The Little Red Hen."

Like the other stories, "The Little Red Hen" takes a new twist on the story, not in the plot, but in the

actual character of the Little Red Hen. She never actually gets to tell her story, she just pops up rudely on some pages and argues with Jack about her story, whines that no one will help her, and complains about the content of *The Stinky Cheese Man* as a whole. This is quite a different picture of the Little Red Hen than the one we learn at a young age. She does not measure up to the perfect, on-time and prepared hen that she appears to be in the other story.

*The Stinky Cheese Man* is a book that should literally be read from cover to cover because if you even miss a word on the inside of the jacket, you might have missed a good laugh. The authors say that the book is appropriate for children of all ages, and I agree that any child can enjoy and appreciate the pictures, but to really understand these stories, I think the child needs to be a little older (at least school age). This is not to say that the book should not be read to younger children, but it would be more effective and enjoyable for an older child. Perhaps the younger children should first be exposed to the real fairy tales and then these new, creative twists can be added. As a self-test to see if you have read the book with as much scrutiny as you should have to catch all of the jokes, you should be able to answer the Little Red Hen's question on the back cover—"Who is this ISBN guy?" Now go and read quietly and enjoy the book before the giant from the beanstalk wakes up!

## Recommended Reading list

compiled by the Colton English Club

Blooming by Susan Allan Toth  
Ivy Days by Susan Allan Toth

Interview with a Vampire by Ann Rice

Griffin & Sebine by Nick Bantock  
Sebine's Notebook by Nick Bantock  
The Golden Mean by Nick Bantock

Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now by Maya Angelou

Travels with Charlie by John Steinbeck

Breakfast at Tiffany's by Truman Capote  
Other Voices, Other Rooms by Truman Capote

The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales by Jon Scieszka/Lane Smith