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The Wise Woman (A Double Story)

George MacDonald · *1875 · original English text (Project Gutenberg #5676)*

There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. You could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. The hosted text is MacDonald's original English, Project Gutenberg #5676, also called A Double Story. For grades 3–5.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What can a wise woman do with two spoiled children, one a princess and one a shepherd's child, and how should a school read MacDonald's double story as a moral fairy tale rather than as a pretty wonder only?

"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"
The opening

In a country where things go oddly, a princess and a shepherd's child are both in need of being taught. The Wise Woman takes them in hand. The book is a fairy tale about pride, disobedience, and the hard charity of correction. Teach it as MacDonald wrote it, for grades 3–5. The work is also called A Double Story; label both names honestly.

KEY CHARACTERS

The Wise Woman
The corrector, whose charity is real and not soft

The princess
One of the two spoiled children

The shepherd's child
The other child, who must also be taught

A COUNTRY WHERE THINGS WENT ODDLY

> *"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"*
> The opening

Grades 3–5
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Country, Rather Oddly

THE OPENING

You could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether the milk would turn sour. It was even impossible to say what the next baby would be. The oddness is the door to a moral tale, not a joke only.

- The first sentence is exact.
- This is MacDonald, 1875, PG #5676, also called A Double Story.
- For grades 3–5.
- Quote the tale, not a preface.

> *"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"*
> The opening

02

A Princess, and a Shepherd's Child

THE DOUBLE STORY

Two children, differently placed, are both spoiled. The "double" in the other title is this pairing. A school should keep both children in view, not only the princess.

- Label the book honestly under both names.
- Pride is not only a royal fault in this tale.
- Teach the pairing as MacDonald's design.
- 3–5; the correction will be serious.

> *"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"*
> The opening

03

The Wise Woman

THE TEACHER

The woman of the title is not a fairy godmother who only grants. She is a corrector. Her charity is real, and it is not soft.

- Teach the correction as love, not as cruelty, and not as a game.
- MacDonald's fairy tales often work this way; name it.
- Do not soften the discipline out of the story.
- Do not make it harsher than he writes it.

> *"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"*
> The opening

04

Pride, and Being Taught

THE MIDDLE

The children must learn to see themselves. Wonder is in the book, and so is shame that leads to change. The tale is moral without being a tract only.

- Keep the fairy-tale mode; do not turn the lesson into a lecture over the page.
- Both children need teaching.
- Obedience and humility are the virtues to name.
- Quote MacDonald.

> *"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"*
> The opening

05

A Double Story

THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

Finish both halves. The hosted file is complete, PG #5676. A school should not stop at the odd country of the first sentence.

- Also called A Double Story; use both titles.
- For grades 3–5.
- Original English, 1875.
- The opening oddness is a door, not the point.

> *"There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly. For instance, you could never tell whether it was going to rain or hail, or whether or not the milk was going to turn sour. It was"*
> The opening

Correction as Charity | Pride | A Double Story | Obedience | A Moral Fairy Tale

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 3–5

1. The tale opens: "There was a certain country where things used to go rather oddly."
2. This is MacDonald, 1875, PG #5676, also called A Double Story. Label both names. For grades 3–5.
3. Two children, a princess and a shepherd's child, are both in need of being taught. Keep both in view.
4. The Wise Woman is a corrector, not a fairy godmother who only grants. Teach the discipline as he writes it, without softening it or making it harsher.
5. The opening oddness is a door, not the point. Finish the book.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text (Project Gutenberg #5676), Project Gutenberg #5676, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-wise-woman/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.