Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?

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This is a collection of stories that have a wolf at the center of each tale’s conflict. The wolf in each story is tricky and vicious. Some stories depict the wolf as not being very smart and is therefore easily outwitted. Others depict the wolf as so cunning that he easily outsmarts his victim. The typical characteristics displayed in each tale help to uncover the established nature that wolves have come to be associated with in literature.
The purpose of my project is to uncover the roles that wolves play in stories, compare the essential characteristics which they posses, and determine how these characteristics relate to the plot.
I located the stories in my collection by searching my local library and the Internet. I also consulted my personal collection of books. My search found a wide variety of stories and storylines, but their common elements tied them all together in support of my research.

One evening, Herb's fairytale book comes to life with the characters falling out of the book and appearing in his room. The storybook wolves decide to eat Herb. He is able to outwit them and use their ignorance against them. The wolves are returned to the storybook and Herb falls fast asleep.
Hog-Eye is captured by a wolf as he makes his way through the forest. The wolf tells Hog-Eye that he is going to make a soup of him. Hog-Eye outwits the wolf by convincing him that he has a better recipe for soup but each ingredient must be found. The wolf decides to follow Hog-Eye’s recommendations. Hog-Eye is able to outwit the wolf and escape by convincing him that he has cast a magical spell on the wolf which will make him itch wildly and will not be undone until the wolf sets Hog-Eye free. This actually occurs as a result of the wolf searching for the final ingredient, a special green leaf called Poison Ivy.

Three children are left at home while their mother visits their grandmother. A wolf, Lon Po Po, sees the mother leave and decides to trick the children into opening the door for him by pretending to be their grandmother so that he can eat them. The children discover the wolf’s true identity and outwit him by convincing him that he really needs to eat the magical gingko nuts they have in their back yard. The children tell Lon Po Po that they will help him up the gingko tree by raising him in a basket. The children raise him halfway up the tree and then drop the basket blaming their lack of strength. The third time this happens, Lon Po Po falls to his death. Their plan leaves the wolf dead and the children return safely to their home.
Mr. Wolf decides he wants to eat some pancakes. He asks for help from some characters that had previously been his victims in other fairy tales. They all rudely tell him “no”! After making the pancakes by himself, everyone who had denied him their help suddenly appears at his doorstep wanting to eat the pancakes. Mr. Wolf allows them to come in under the assumption that they will be allowed to eat the pancakes, but instead, they are all eaten by Mr. Wolf. He then eats the pancakes by himself afterward.

Preston the pig encounters a wolf on his way home from school. As the wolf follows him and tries to catch him, Preston makes some quick moves and outsmarts the wolf at every turn. Each of Preston’s moves are done “suddenly”. The wolf always winds up injured as a result of Preston’s smart thinking and in the end is carried off on a stretcher.
Three little pigs set out to make their lives and each one builds a house for themselves. The first pig builds his house of straw, and it is quickly blown down by the wolf and he is eaten. The same thing happens to the second pig although he build his house of sticks. The third pig build his house of bricks and the wolf resorts to trying to trick the pig into coming out of his home since his house cannot be blown down. The wolf tries to entice the pig with plans to find turnips, apples, and a carnival. The pig outsmarts the wolf and finds these things on his own before the designated meeting time. The wolf finally gets so upset, he decides to simply jump down the fireplace. The little pig lets the wolf cook up in the fireplace and then eats the wolf for dinner.
The Three Little Pigs decide to have a housewarming party at their brick house in which they all now reside. They invite Goldilocks, Baby Bear, Little Red Riding Hood, and Peter Rabbit. The wolf was not invited, but has been keeping surveillance on the house and has plans to attack the party with the help of his wolf cousin. The wolves are stopped in their tracks by Mother Bear who sees them and attacks them instead and saves the day.
Little Red Riding Hood is on her way to visit her grandmother who is ill. A wolf spies her on her way and decides to beat her to her grandmothers home and trick her. The wolf first pretends to be Little Red Riding Hood and tricks the grandmother into letting him in her home. He quickly eats her. He then waits for Little Red and pretends to be her grandmother. Little Red enters her grandmothers home and notices the extraordinary features of the wolf but is not quick enough to get away and is eaten by the wolf.
A mother goat leaves her seven kids at home alone while she is out but warns them not to be fooled by the wolf. When the wolf comes to their door, he tries to convince the kids that he is their mother. They question his appearance, so the wolf goes to town and finds ways to disguise himself. The kids are fooled by the wolf and six of them are eaten when they let him in. The seventh kid tells his mother what occurred. She later finds the wolf sleeping in the forest and sees his stomach moving. She cuts him open, takes out her kids who are still alive, and places large stones in the wolf’s stomach. She then sews him up. The wolf awakes later and loses his balance due to the large stones in his stomach and falls into a well and dies.
A wolf spies a chicken who he would love to eat in some chicken stew. He decides however, that his stew would be much better if he could fatten up this chicken first. He proceeds to make a wide variety of dishes and leaves them at the chicken’s doorstep. He finally decides that the chicken should be fat enough and peers through her door’s keyhole to see how fat she is. The door flies open and reveals a very thankful chicken and all of her very thankful chicks who thank the wolf for his kindness in bringing all that food for them. Not only does he not eat the chickens, but he becomes their “Uncle Wolf”.
In order to truly understand the wolf character in these stories, we must consider several elements. They are the wolf’s physical appearance, his hunting nature, and his mental abilities.

The wolf is a fierce creature in appearance. They have large sharp teeth, keen hunting eyes, long fur that covers their body, and the average adult male weighs approximately 100 pounds. These physical characteristics have lead to the perception that wolves should be feared in real life. This naturally lead to wolves being portrayed as fierce characters, and naturally are seen as attacking, vicious, evil creatures. Therefore, the reader instantly knows that the wolf is an evil creature to be feared and this lends to the readers understanding of what role the wolf will probably play in the story.
It is in the wolf's nature to hunt other animals and eat them. The attack is usually quick and swift. This has naturally led to the wolf being seen as a vicious beast who preys upon those weaker than him. This also lends to the wolf always being strong, and quick. Therefore, the reader knows that when the wolf is ready, he will attack and his victim is doomed. This lends to the wolf playing the role of villain in these tales.

While the wolf is a fierce character, his skill is mainly focused on his physical abilities rather than his mental abilities. This lends to the notion that wolves are fierce, but can often be outsmarted. In these stories the wolf is unable to see the trap that is being set before him by his victim and is ultimately outwitted. In the few instances where the wolf actually does prevail and eats his victim, it is accomplished by the wolf's keen hunting skills and not by his intelligence.
With these elements in mind, we can easily see how these ideas are supported in our literature collection. In all of the stories, the wolf is out to attack and eat the characters in the story. Also, the wolf is sneaky and sly and uses his hunting skills to try to catch his prey. In most of these stories, the wolf is outsmarted however due to his lack of wit or intelligence. In the stories where the wolf actually does get to eat his victims, he accomplishes this through his keen hunting skills rather than true wit or intelligence. The wolf is established as an evil character who simply exists to fill his own need to feed. Each story plays upon these established perceptions and uses them to create an element of fear or danger.
The plot in each of these stories is the same. The wolf is out to attack and eat a character in the story. He uses his hunting skills and whatever wit he has to try to accomplish this feat. The climax is reached in each tale as the pending attack approaches. This parallels to the basic idea of good verses evil. The wolf of course is the evil that must be overcome by the good. The plot’s resolution has one of two outcomes. The prevalent outcome finds the wolf being outsmarted by his victim. This naturally lends to the notion that good can overcome evil when the character is good. In the few instances where the wolf prevails, the notion is that ignorance or poor character are what prevented the victim from being able to overcome the wolf.
Symbolism Analysis

The wolf in these tales symbolizes evil or danger. The wolf is the problem that must be overcome. In each tale the wolf is sly and sneaky. This naturally conveys to the reader that evil or danger can overcome you if you are not weary and wise. It also lends to the thought that only those who are good in nature can truly overcome the evil in their lives. It also supports the notion that if you are not a good person, you will be the victim of the evil or danger that approaches you.
In doing this research, I found that my original perceptions of wolves in literature were not 100% correct. While wolves are often depicted as evil characters, my collection of stories found that quite often these wolves are outsmarted. This additional element softens the evil persona that I had originally associated with wolves because it grants the idea that while they are evil, they can be overcome with a little quick thinking on the part of their victims.

I learned that while the characteristics I had always associated with wolves were correct, the story’s plot also lends to the characteristics of the wolf in that it shows him often being outwitted. The plot allows the character to further evolve and reveal other elements in their personality. I therefore learned that all elements of the story must be considered in order to truly understand the characters in the story and the roles that they play.
If I were to continue this work, I would strive to create a balanced collection of stories so that an equal representation of the wolf overcoming his victims and the wolf being outsmarted could be given. I was surprised at how my original perceptions of wolves was only half right in that I had not considered how the storyline also added to the character of the wolf. I had simply attached the “evil” characteristic to wolves, but had not considered how in the end they are often outwitted and therefore also need to have that element added to their character.

Overall I came to further understand how the elements in a story truly develop not only the plot, but the characters in the story as well. This research allowed me to discover how important each element in a story truly is and how we must consider all of the elements in order to truly understand the story.