Women overcoming adversity.

Girls, especially those in the middle school years, need to hear stories of strong women overcoming adversity, of strong women being different, of strong women succeeding against the odds. Every nine weeks our middle school students must complete an Individual Project. Many of the students ask for suggestions and are interested in myths and stories from other cultures. This collection will form the beginning of a collection of positive female stories for use in the Individual Projects.

The Women Overcoming Adversity collection has a central theme of women prevailing over entity with more perceived power. Middle school students are transitioning from children to adults; the broad range of options open to females sometimes leaves young girls questioning which path they would like to take. Do they want the stay at home, supported by a spouse role? Do they want a high powered career? Are they only beautiful bodies getting their self worth from male approval? The collected stories show women controlling the situation, making decisions and guiding outcomes, yet most the women in the stories are not living in cultures known for valuing both sexes equally. The holistic theme of the collection is women using their talents to survive and thrive in a variety of cultures.

Specific behaviors are demanded of both sexes in cultures throughout the world. Most individuals conform to societal codes for acceptability and normality. There are specific and general behaviors considered as unacceptable or undesirable for each of the sexes within a social structure. Until recently, brains, cunning, cleverness, bravery and physical prowess were not considered necessary for females to succeed in life and be accepted as normal. Men leave home, hunt, kill, quest and solve problems, women stay home take care of children, create a pleasant home life and obey the male leaders. In each of the stories in this collection, women use a combination of brains, cunning, cleverness, bravery and physical prowess along with traditional female skills to overcome adversity, solve a problem and resolve a particular situation.

The stories in the collection are:

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<tr>
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<td>Otoonah</td>
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<td>That Will Teach You</td>
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Knowledge, skills and characteristics used to resolve the problem in the story.

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<th>Physical Prowess</th>
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<td>Otoonah</td>
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<td>Pirate Princess</td>
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<td>Watch Out!</td>
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The archetypes used here are the archetypes of myths and fairy tales, not Jung. An example of a fairy tale archetype is Cinderella, a girl capable of surviving great hardship, meets and marries a prince and lives in luxury for the rest of her life. In the old fairy tale we never hear what happens to this young female with a strong inner character after she marries the prince. The book Cinderella Complex questions the abdication of women's power to males. Would a girl strong enough to survive her home life abdicate power to the prince? Would she give opinions and voice her desires? In the traditional fairy tale we never hear the answer. The typical archetype of Cinderella is that, all a girl must do is find a man and he will take care of everything. The Cinderella archetype is slowly being questioned and is changing. Currently there are several children's books, novels and movies, Just Ella, Ever After and Cinder Edna, that explore different views of a strong female and her male partner. In Just Ella, the heroine uses her abilities and skills to escape the repressive soft castle life and change the corrupt war torn kingdom. In this collection of stories, females use their skills to overcome stronger more powerful adversaries.

All the women in this collection fit the archetype and have characters traits of caring nurturing females, with at least one additional skill of bravery, cleverness, physical prowess or spirituality. The women in the collection use their cunning and resourcefulness to trick a person of higher status or trick a person with more power. None of the female heroines rely on physical beauty or warrioress princess skills to resolve the action of the story. None of the females expect a male to solve their problems; these females are the problem solvers. These are the "Penelopes" of the world. Penelope was cunning, brave, and possessed feminine skills; she willing used her skills to save her community and family; tricking the more powerful male who sought to take over her country.

The acceptable roles for females in most societies are nurturers, homemakers, housekeepers, cooks and beauties; they are the supporters for the males of the society. In eight of the ten stories the women use tradition "female" skills in ways that resolve the plot of the story. In addition to
using traditional feminine skills, each of these female heroes uses a skill or trait not often associated with women.

Hekeke keeps house for a human eating ogre; then finds a way to kill him. She is the ogre's only victim brave and clever enough to out wit the ogre. The feminine skill of cooking is used by the main characters of Dragons to Dine, That Will Teach You and The Day it Snowed Tortillas to resolve the action of the story. In Dragons to Dine, cooking is used to lure the dragons into a death trap. In That Will Teach You, cooking is used to teach a lesson to a selfish man; in The Day It Snowed Tortillas cooking is used to trick some robbers. Each female cleverly uses the feminine skill of cooking or housekeeping to trick a stronger more powerful character.

Nurturing skills are used in Mella, That Will Teach You, and The Girl and the Puma. Mella seeks a cure for her ill father, in The Girl and the Puma Senorita Maldonado helps a Puma deliver and care for cubs, in That Will Teach You the mother helps her son earn land. Each of these characters uses a typical female role to resolve the struggle in the story and the characters display bravery and a willingness to sacrifice comfort and possibly life to achieve their goal.

Otoonah and Atalanta are both deserted by their families. Atalanta is left to die as an infant; Otoonah is left to starve by her brothers, with her parent's permission. Each survives and gains hunting and wilderness survival skills. The hunting skills are used to survive and later used to serve the community in a positive way. At first, each woman is denied true love because of her hunting skills, but later, after several trials each achieves their love/soul match.

The archetype of Penelope fits well with all these heroines, they have feminine skills and talents and they display the more masculine characteristic of bravery, intelligence and in two cases physical prowess.

Bibliographic Citation and Story Synopsis


The Day It Snowed Tortillas

There is a married couple, he is a strong hard working simple woodcutter, and she is a clever hard working housewife. The woodcutter finds three bags of gold in the mountains, the wife tells him not to tell anyone about the gold. The woman does not think her husband will keep quiet; she stays up all night making flour tortillas. She places the tortillas outside at dawn and wakes her husband by telling him it has snowed flour tortillas. They gather the tortillas and eat them for breakfast.

The husband tells people of finding the gold. Robbers come to house during the day and demand the gold. The wife says she remembers no gold. The husband returns and states he found the gold the day before it snowed flour tortillas. It should be an easy day for all to remember because it had not snowed flour tortillas before or since. The robbers assume that the man is crazy and leave the house. The man and his clever wife keep the bags of gold.
There is a very rich and powerful man in Mexico who made bets on almost anything, but always found a way to get out of paying when he lost. A young poor boy working for the man hears the rich man tell a friend that he would pay a thousand dollars and hundred acres of land to anyone who could stay on the cold mountain over night with no fire and no blanket. The poor boy says he can stay unsheltered on the mountain and the rich man accepts the bet. The poor boy tells his mother of the bet, she says she will keep a large fire burning all night in the village square miles away to give him the strength and knowledge that his beloved mother is there keeping the fire going for him.

The rich man sends servants with the boy and the boy stays in the mountain all night with no shelter blanket or fire. When he returns the man talks to him and when he hears that the boy's mother had a fire miles away he refused to pay off because the boy did have a fire. The boy is very disappointed, but is not powerful enough to argue with the rich man.

The daughter overhears the conversation and asks her father if she may prepare a feast for his friends. The wonderful smells of food fill the house, but the meal is not served. The man asks why the guests are not served. The daughter says that just as the distant fire warmed the boy the food smells will feed the guests. The guests protest and demand a meal and that the boy be paid.

A couple can barely make a living on their poor land. Each year they borrow money from the evil selfish moneylender; most years something happens to keep them in debt one more year. One Sunday, after church, the moneylender says he will take the land if they can not pay him back. The couple begs and the landlord feels foolish because he is in front of the church and showing no charity. He says he will give them a chance. He will pick up two stones, one white one black and hold them in his clinched fist. If they pick the hand with the white stone the debt is forgiven, if they pick the hand with the black stone they lose the farm. The landlord picks up two stones, the couple notice that he picked up two black stones. What will they do?

The wife asks to pick the stone. When she picks a stone, she lets it fall on the ground and says the stone remaining must be the opposite color. A clever woman has tricked the greedy landlord and the farm is saved.

Mella's father lay sick and dying, she prays to Bomu Rambi to ask for assistance in saving her father. Bomu Rambi says she must to the Python Healer to get a cure. When she gets to the python cave, the python replies that she is brave, but she must allow the python to wrap around
her and then have the strength to carry him to the village of her father. She does as requested. The father is healed and Mella carries the python back to his cave. The python gives her a gold and silver moon amulet to remind her of Bomu Rambi and the Python Healer. When she returns to her village the men decide they will go and kill the python. Mella gets her bow and arrows and runs to defend her friend. Fire and thunder burst from the moon amulet to kill the men. Mella and the Python Healer are spared. Mella and her father live many more years, when the father dies the people make Mella the leader of the tribe.

*Dragons to Dine*, pp. 1-4.

**Dragons to Dine**
The dragon Illuyankas and her children are destroying the people, villages, crops and animals. Taru, the god of weather, attempts rid the country of the dragon and dragon children.

Inaras asks the dragons to dine. The dragon and all the dragon children come; they eat so much that when they attempt to return to their homes in the caves of the volcanoes they get stuck. Inaras calls the people and they kill the dragon and the dragon children.

*Hekeke*, pp. 103-109.

**Hekeke**
The one legged ogre, Yayali, hunts the humans in the forest to eat them. While gathering food, Hekeke is captured by Yayali. Instead of fainting, like most the victims, she expresses a desire to see his home and she would like to see him move the rock from in front of the cave. He agrees and says he will then eat her, she says ok and off they go. She marvels at his strength when they come to the cave, but says how sorry she is that the cave is so dirty and no better than a dog's house. She offers to be his wife, clean the cave and make it a suitable dwelling for a being as great as he. All the while she looks for a way to slay the beast. She becomes so thin that she can slip out through the hole left for smoke. She runs to the village and brings back warriors. They slay the beast by shooting him through his heart, located in his ankle.

*Otoonah*, pp. 111-118.

**Otoonah**
Otoonah brothers convince their parents that they can not feed her and the rest of the family for the winter, so they leave her on a small island with very few supplies. Just as she is about to die from hunger she is told in a dream to go and seek a gift from the goddess of the sea. She finds a knife, some berries and life giving water. She uses the knife to hunt, make a shelter, make clothes and make a boat. She survives the winter, but misses her family. In the spring her brothers come and ask what man has taken care of her, she says none and challenges them to a hunt. They hunt she beats them, they steal her knife and her self-created comforts, she goes and gets her knife and possessions back. As she returns, a storm is approaches and she invites her brothers to her home, but they refuse and are killed in the storm. She returns home to take care of
her parents. She wants to find a husband, but will not give up hunting. The man she loves will not marry a woman who can hunt. Finally, she saves him from a polar bear and he realizes that he loves her and can learn to live with the fact that she hunts.


Atalanta the Huntress
Atalanta is left by her father, king Iasus, to die in the forest because she is not a son. A bear nurses her for three years. A hunter finds her; he and his wife raise the girl teaching her woodcraft and housecraft. They die and Atalanta goes to the goddess Artemis and asks Artemis to be her mother and protector.

Meleager, son of the king, goes to hunt a savage boar. Over the protests of the men Atalanta hunts the boar. Atalanta arrow weakens the boar, but when Meleager attempts to honor her shot, there is protest and men are killed. Atalanta flees, her fame grows and finally her father realizes that Atalanta must be the daughter he attempted to kill. Her father brings her home and forces her to marry. She says she will marry the man who beats her in a foot race. Her father says he will kill the losers. One young prince, Melanion, sees Atalanta and falls in love, but he knows he cannot beat her. He prays to Aphrodite and she gives him three golden magic apples. He wins the race and releases Atalantis from the promise that she marries the man who wins and asks that she marry him for love. In this version of the tale, they live happily ever after.


The Girl and the Puma
During the siege of Buenos Aires the population is starving; Captain Ruiz Galan gives an order that anyone leaving will be hanged. Senorita Maldonada cries that dying of hunger or being hanged is not much of a choice.

She sneaks out, finds food and helps a Puma deliver her young. Later Querandi Indians capture her. She lives with the Indians; when the Spanish over-run the Indian village, she alone remains. She returns to Buenos Aires, Captain Ruis Galan says he will hang her. When the crowd acts mutinous, he relents and agrees to tie her to a tree outside the town. She remains tied for four days, when the people return she is still alive guarded and fed by a Puma.


The Pirate Princess:
Prince and Princess are promised to each other before birth. They are sent to the same school and fall in love, but do not know that they were promised at birth. Their fathers forget vow and the girl's father arranges a marriage. The two lovers run away, on their voyage they are separated. A merchant captures the princess and falls in love with her; she tricks him and steals his boat. A king captures her and wants to marry her, so she agrees if he will grant three wishes. Among the
wishes are eleven royal ladies in waiting, the princess gets the ladies drunk and sails away with them on the ship. The royal ladies learn to sail the boat and manage to escape from pirates and stealing the pirate treasure. The ladies journey until they arrive in a kingdom looking for a king, by a fortuitous accident the Kingship falls on the head of the disguised princess. A marriage is planned for the supposed male sailor and the royal daughter of the kingdom. The disguised princess asks that her image is placed all over the kingdom and that all that react strongly to the image be brought to her. In this manner she finds her former prince/lover, the merchant who captured and loved her, and the disposed king. She finds a way to fix all the problems and be reunited with her vowed husband.

**Summary of my trip**

At the start of the course, I was very worried about the last two assignments, the filmed story and the thematic collection. I decided early that I would use the theme of the weak overcoming the strong. I would love to say that due to my brilliant research ability, I found just the right stories. A better description is that when I opened myself to stories they came flooding in through many different routes.

Early this year our school had a bilingual class moved on campus due to the over crowding of a near by campus. I went to the local branch of the library to check out Spanish/English books to use with this bilingual class, I found a great book, *Beware of Clever Women*. I never managed to learn any of the stories in Spanish, but I found some really great stories for the collection.

I sponsor the **Name That Book** team, one of the books they had to read was *Not A Damsel In Distress*. As I made out the practice questions for the team, I found several more stories for the collection. I now had six stories in the collection, all found by accident. While shelving in my own library I found *The Bronze Cauldron* and *Women Warriors*; finally I searched the catalog and found two other collections. When I had eight stories I really liked, I started working on the archetypes and realized that all the stories were about women, so I continued with my search to find more women stories. I actually had to leave stories out of the collection. I found several movies, but like the written stories better.

As I attempted to analyze the stories with archetypes, holistic theme and characteristic of the women, I kept coming up with more and more similarities in the stories. The "trickster" aspect of cunning along with the nurturing nature of the characters made for women who were feminine and capable of taking care of a variety of situations. The fact that none of the women relied on their beauty or warrior nature to succeed, appealed to me. As I discussed the collection with friends, co-workers and my spouse, I found more insight into myself. I needed to make this collection for me; I needed stories of women who had succeeded in patriarchal societies, yet were still nurturing, community and family oriented characters. What a wonderful journey this collection has taken me on.