

The Princess

The Princess and the Pea by Hans Christian Andersen (1835)

Once upon a time there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess; but she would have to be a real princess. He travelled all over the world to find one, but nowhere could he get what he wanted. There were princesses enough, but it was difficult to find out whether they were real ones. There was always something about them that was not as it should be. So he came home again and was sad, for he would have liked very much to have a real princess.

One evening a terrible storm came on; there was thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down in torrents. Suddenly a knocking was heard at the city gate, and the old king went to open it.

It was a princess standing out there in front of the gate. But, good gracious! What a sight the rain and the wind had made her look. The water ran down from her hair and clothes; it ran down into the toes of her shoes and out again at the heels. And yet she said that she was a real princess.

“Well, we’ll soon find that out,” thought the old queen. But she said nothing, went into the bed-room, took all the bedding off the bedstead, and laid a pea on the bottom; then she took twenty mattresses and laid them on the pea, and then twenty eider-down beds on top of the mattresses.

On this the princess had to lie all night. In the morning she was asked how she had slept.

“Oh, very badly!” said she. “I have scarcely closed my eyes all night. Heaven only knows what was in the bed, but I was lying on something hard, so that I am black and blue all over my body. It’s horrible!”

The Princess

Now they knew that she was a real princess because she had felt the pea right through the twenty mattresses and the twenty eider-down beds.

Nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that.

So the prince took her for his wife, for now he knew that he had a real princess; and the pea was put in the museum, where it may still be seen, if no one has stolen it.

Answer the following questions.

- 1. What did the prince want to marry?**
- 2. What kind of weather arrived one evening when someone knocked at the city gate?**
- 3. Who went to open the city gate when there was a knocking?**
- 4. What did the old queen place on the bottom of the bedstead before adding mattresses and eider-down beds?**
- 5. How many mattresses did the old queen place on top of the pea?**
- 6. What was the prince searching for all over the world?**

The Princess

7. Why did the prince decide to marry the princess at the end of the story?

8. What physical evidence did the princess show that she had slept poorly?

9. What quality proved that she was a "real" princess?

10. What was the king's role when the knocking was heard at the city gate?

11. What was the queen's initial thought about the princess's claim?

12. Why did the queen's test confirm the visitor was a real princess?

13. How does this idea of a "test" or proving oneself relate to you as teenager?

14. Have you ever felt like you had to prove something about yourself to others, similar to how the princess had to prove she was "real"?

The Princess

15. The prince had a very specific ideal of what a "real princess" should be. What kind of ideals or expectations do teenagers face today about what they "should" be like (e.g., successful, popular, beautiful, intelligent)? Where do these ideals come from (e.g., media, friends, and family)?

16. A tiny pea made a huge difference to the princess. Can you think of small actions, words, or details in a teenager's life (especially in digital spaces) that can have a big impact, either positive or negative, on themselves or others? (e.g., a comment online, a small act of kindness, a rumor)

