

BOOKTALK

The Turkey Girl

A Zuni Cinderella Story

retold by Penny Pollock / illustrated by Ed Young

The father of the author is a descendent of a Native American Indian chief which gave Penny Pollock a special interest in this Zuni Cinderella version. The illustrator of this story has won the Caldecott Medal for *Lon Po Po: A Chinese Little Red Riding Hood*, and two of his other books were Caldecott Honor Books. His dreamlike illustrations are a perfect match for this lesson-teaching legend of the importance of friendship and keeping ones word.

In ancient times, a young orphaned girl, living in a pueblo village, makes her living by herding the turkeys owned by the wealthy families of Matsaki. She is so poor that she lives by herself and is shunned by the other young girls, presumably because of her tattered clothing and poverty. Turkey Girl, as she is called, not only cares for and tends the turkeys, but also considers them her friends. As usual in these tales, there is a messenger (the herald-priest) who invites all to attend a festival called the Dance of the Sacred Bird in nearby Hawikuh. Turkey Girl imagines dancing at the festival and talks aloud of her dreams as she goes about caring for the turkeys. The Old One, a huge gobbler, surprises her by speaking to her in words she can understand, and then, he and the other turkeys create a lovely white doeskin dress, beaded moccasins, and a mantle decorated with turkey feathers out of her ragged clothing. Treasures in the form of jewelry for her to wear to the festival rain down from the gullets of the turkeys as they fly above Turkey Girl. Her friends only ask that she return to them before nightfall as proof that she hasn't forgotten them.

As usual with the dancing young women in these Cinderella stories, Turkey Girl gets carried away and forgets the time. But in this situation, her turkey friends have given her an important charge and proof of her word depends on her return before "Sun-Father returns to his sacred place." The conclusion of the tale is a sad one as Turkey Girl's clothing returns to its original form, and she sees by the moonlight that the turkeys have left the stockade and she is left without her only friends. The story concludes by suggesting that this tale accounts for turkeys living ever after away from their tall brothers — human beings.

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MOTIFS AND IDEAS

- 📖 many Native American Indian names and references
- 📖 central character is an orphan
- 📖 Turkey Girl's only friends are the turkeys she tends
- 📖 a festival (Dance of the Sacred Bird) is announced
- 📖 an older person offers help (the Old One)
- 📖 clothing and jewels change her appearance
- 📖 a test of worthiness
- 📖 an unusual ending

CONNECTIONS

Using an atlas, locate the following places and areas on a map of New Mexico. You may want to find more information about each using the Internet, travel agency materials, and/or geographical and travel reference books.

- ★ town of Zuni
- ★ Zuni Indian Reservation
- ★ Continental Divide
- ★ Hawikuh Ruins
- ★ Zuni Mountains

VOCABULARY WORDS

arroyo	commotion	gullet(s)	orphan(ed)
ceremonial	dangled	latched	tattered
clad	delicate	mantle	tend

Choose the word that matches its meaning:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. locked | a. mantle |
| 2. a stream in a dry place | b. tattered |
| 3. dressed or clothed | c. commotion |
| 4. throat or esophagus | d. latched |
| 5. a child with no parents | e. gullet |
| 6. a loose sleeveless garment | f. ceremonial |
| 7. ragged and torn | g. clad |
| 8. to hang loosely | h. arroyo |
| 9. excitement or confusion | i. dangled |
| 10. belonging to a ceremony | j. orphan |

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This Native American Cinderella folktale is different from most of the other tales in that it does not end in the usual familiar and comforting way. After listening carefully to the story (or rereading it on your own), think about the story, and write about it on the lines below.

1. Did you predict that this story would not have the usual happy ending? Why did you predict it or why were you surprised?

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2. The Turkey Girl thinks of the turkeys as her friends. Humans are described as the turkeys' *tall brothers*. How do these ideas fit in with what you know about Native American beliefs?

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3. The Turkey Girl must come back to Matsaki "before the Sun-Father returns to his sacred place." Explain the words that are in quotations.

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4. The illustrations in this book were done in oil crayon and pastel. Why do you think the creators of this book selected this technique? How do you think the illustrations help tell the story?

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5. What is your favorite part of this book?

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6. Did you like or dislike the ending? Explain.

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SYNONYM — a word that means almost the same thing as another word.

ANTONYM — a word that means the opposite of another word.

THESAURUS — a reference book that lists groups of words with similar meanings.

Most dictionaries also include synonyms and antonyms for many of the entry words. Often these synonyms and antonyms are shown in capital letters.

Listed below are some words used in *The Turkey Girl*. Write at least one synonym beside each of the words. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if you have trouble thinking of a word. Remember that a synonym is one word, not a phrase or group of words.

- 1. hut
- 2. village
- 3. wealthy
- 4. dawn
- 5. festival
- 6. gobbler
- 7. unlocked
- 8. raced
- 9. proud
- 10. sorrow

Find an antonym for each of the following words from *The Turkey Girl*.

- 11. dawn
- 12. proud
- 13. unlocked
- 14. sorrow
- 15. poor
- 16. shortens