

Once upon a Time

Celebrating 200 Years of Hans Christian Andersen

BY KATHY HELIDONIOTIS

Danish author Hans Christian Andersen wrote some of the most famous fairytales of all time. To recognise the importance of this author and his work, this year the world is celebrating '200 Years of Hans Christian Andersen'.

Ugly Duckling

Hans Christian Andersen often wrote about the true beauty beneath an ugly **exterior**, possibly because of his own self-image. He was **self-conscious** of his height (he was over 180 centimetres tall) and his large hands and feet (his shoes were 33 centimetres long). He disliked his long nose and considered himself ugly. Despite this, he loved photography and posed for many portraits.

Born in Denmark in 1805, Hans and his brothers and sisters had a poor but happy family life. Hans' father doted on him and often read to him from *The Arabian Nights* and took him to the theatre.

Searching for Fame

His life changed forever when his father died in 1816. Hans was forced to leave school at

age 11 to work in a tobacco factory – which he hated!

At age 14 Hans left home and set off for Copenhagen seeking fame and fortune in the theatre as an actor, singer or dancer. He found neither and nearly starved to death! But he went on to become Denmark's most beloved writer and the father of fairytales.

Hans Christian Andersen 2005

April 2, 2005 marks 200 years since the birth of Hans Christian Andersen. To celebrate, the worldwide Hans Christian Andersen 2005 Festival kicks off in Denmark with an opening ceremony to be broadcast live around the world. The festival will run until 6 December and will feature concerts, films, art exhibitions and even acrobatics displays all based on or inspired by the works of Hans Christian Andersen.



PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN PICTURE LIBRARY

▲ Hans Christian Andersen

Fact File

- Name:** Hans Christian (HC) Andersen
- Born:** Odense, Denmark, 2 April 1805
- Died:** 4 August 1875
- Favourite things to do:** listening to stories, going to the theatre, putting on puppet shows at home
- Famous stories:** *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Red Shoes*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Shadow*, *The Dream of Little Tuk*, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*. Don't stop with this list – Andersen wrote at least 156 fairytales!



PHOTO: AKG-IMAGES

▲ An illustration from the fairytale *Thumbelina*

During the festival, well-known celebrities from around the world, including Australia's Cathy Freeman, will act as **ambassadors**. They will attend events and promote awareness of Hans Christian Andersen in their own country.

To find out more about Hans Christian Andersen, you could get on the next flight to Denmark, make your way to Odense and visit the Hans Christian Andersen Museum, his childhood home and the 'Tinder-Box' Children's Cultural Centre where you can dress up and star in your very own play. Of course it could be a bit easier to visit them online!

Take a tour at www.odmus.dk and, if your Danish isn't up to scratch, click on the Union Jack to read it in English.



PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN PICTURE LIBRARY

▲ Denmark's Crown Prince Frederick and Princess Mary will preside over many festival events in different countries.

Try this!



- Read a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale and see if you can find the moral lesson.

Did you know?

- Did you know that Hans Christian Andersen, not Disney, wrote *The Little Mermaid*? Other Hans Christian Andersen fairytales include *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Emperor's New Clothes* and *Thumbelina*. Many of these stories contain **moral lessons**.
- Andersen's fairytales have been translated into over 100 languages – the most translated **fiction** in history!

Glossary

- ambassador** representative of a country
- exterior** outside
- fiction** imaginary story
- moral lessons** stories that teach something about life
- self-conscious** embarrassed

Check this out!

www.hca2005.com
www.andersenfairytales.com
www.andersen.sdu.dk
 (the Hans Christian Andersen Centre)