When a bedraggled young lady appears at the castle door, the queen devises a unique test to determine whether the girl’s claims to be a princess are true. Preschoolers will love this delightful fairy tale that teaches it’s what’s inside that counts.

Meet the Writer

Denise Heyl McEvoy

Denise has been writing for kids and teachers for more than 20 years and has worked on games, toys, workbooks, educational software, and more. In recent years, she’s gotten help and inspiration from her two live-in educational consultants—her children.

Meet the Illustrator

Red Hansen

Red Hansen had some tiny, but tough, critics reviewing his illustrations for The Princess and the Pea. His daughters have some very specific criteria for princesses, so Red made extra sure his drawings lived up to their expectations. It’s a good thing creating the characters is his favorite part of the process!
The Gift of Reading Aloud

Reading aloud to your child is fun for you both. Plus, it’s the best way to encourage a lifelong love of reading and promote the skills necessary for school success. Here are some tips.

**Begin at the Beginning**
- Set aside a special time to read aloud each day and stick to it.
- Choose a comfortable spot: the couch, your child’s bed, a picnic blanket under a shady tree, a “reading hideaway” created by throwing a sheet over the table, etc.
- Vary the reading materials: different genres (fairy tales, fiction, non-fiction, poetry), children’s magazines on topics from nature to sports, joke and riddle books, newspapers and comics, etc.
- Invite your child to help plan your reading routine.

**Experience the Fun**
- Read slowly and with expression. Use different character voices.
- Talk about the pictures.
- Stop to answer your child’s questions. Discuss any unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Encourage your child to chime in on repetitive phrases, complete rhymes, and predict what might happen next.
- Follow the words with your finger to reinforce important reading basics, such as text is read from left to right.

**A Family Library**
Your neighborhood library is a treasure! But a home library demonstrates the value of books to your family. Used book stores, garage sales, and flea markets are all great places to pick up inexpensive books that your family will treasure for years!

Princess Fairy Tale Activities

Here are some hands-on activities to spark enthusiasm for learning and get your child excited about reading.

**Twenty is Plenty**
In the story, the queen commands that 20 mattresses and 20 quilts be placed on the princess’s bed. Practice counting to 20 with your child by having him or her make stacks of 20 objects. Here are some ideas: inexpensive sponges, blocks, boxes, books, and so on. Then, use the stacks to discuss different ways of making 20: 10 + 10, 15 + 5, 12 + 8, etc. For a giggle-inducing, gross motor activity, have your child pile cushions and pillows in a large area, safely away from furniture or breakables.

**Royal Scavenger Hunt**
In the story, the prince is on a quest to find a real princess. He travels all over the world looking for her. He brings back many treasures from his travels, but no princess. To sharpen your child’s observation skills and get some exercise, try a neighborhood quest or scavenger hunt to enjoy with your child. Make a list of items to find in your neighborhood. You can include items such as a stop sign, fire hydrant, red car, flower, bird, mailbox, and so on.

**The Princess’s Bed**
Your child can practice fine motor skills with this simple craft activity. Provide scrapbooking paper on which you have drawn straight lines to create one-inch strips. Have your child cut along the lines to create colorful mattresses for the princess’s bed. Next, set out a large sheet of construction paper on which you have drawn two bedposts. Have your child glue the mattresses one on top of the other from the bottom of the bedposts to the top. Then, have your child draw a princess on a separate sheet of paper and glue it to the top mattress. Finally, provide a dried pea (or one made of construction paper) to add below the bottom mattress.
Once, there was a lonely prince. Like his father before him and his father before him, the prince wanted to marry a princess. Only a true princess would do.
The prince searched the world. He met plenty of young ladies who claimed to be princesses, but something about them did not seem quite right. He returned to the palace alone.
One night, there was a terrible storm. The wind howled, and thunder shook the palace walls.
A knock was heard at the door.

“Who goes there?” demanded the king. “I am Princess Penelope,” said the visitor. “Please, your majesty, I need shelter.”
Her hair was a mess. Her clothes were drenched. Still, the prince thought something about her seemed just right.

“A princess!” he whispered to his mother, who had her doubts.
The queen set about preparing a room. “We shall see if Penelope is a true princess,” she thought.

She ordered the servants to gather 20 mattresses and stack them on top of each other.
Next, she ordered them to gather 20 thick, fluffy quilts filled to bursting with soft feathers. These they layered on top of the mattresses.
Finally, the queen slipped a single, solitary pea under the bottom mattress. “Only a true princess would be sensitive enough to feel this,” she said to herself.
“My goodness!” exclaimed Penelope when she saw the bed. “You’ve gone to a lot of trouble for me.”

“We have high standards here,” replied the queen. She wished Penelope a good night.
Alas, Penelope did not have a good night. She felt a dreadful lump in the bed. Try as she might, she could not sleep.

In the morning, her body was covered with bruises.
“How did you sleep?” the queen asked her guest. Penelope paused, unsure how to answer. A princess is truthful. But a princess is also kind. She did not want to hurt the queen’s feelings.
"I was grateful to be warm and dry," Penelope said, clasping the queen’s hand. When the queen saw the bruises that Penelope had been too kind to mention, she knew that Penelope was a true princess, inside and out.

"A princess!" the queen whispered to the prince, who had never had any doubts.
The prince and Princess Penelope were married. From that day forward, he was a true prince to her. And the pea that brought them together? It was placed in the royal museum as a reminder that, in finding love, little things sometimes matter most.