

READING GUIDE TO The Bath Fairy



Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

This reading guide was created by Agneta Edwards. Agneta is a literary educator, lecturer and author and served on the ALMA jury from 2002 to 2011.

**SWEDISH
ARTSCOUNCIL**

Astrid Lindgrens Memorial Award
Swedish Arts Council | P.O. Box 27215 | SE-102 53 Stockholm
Office: Borgvägen 1-5, Stockholm
Tel: +46 8 519 264 00 | literatureaward@alma.se | www.alma.se/en

READ! DISCUSS! CREATE!

We're excited that you want to read *The Bath Fairy* by Baek Heena! Here are some tips and ideas to inspire discussion, play and creative activities that you can use with children at home or in preschool, grade school or after-school programs. Baek Heena wants her books to uplift readers and entertain them. So get ready to read, enjoy, and follow *The Bath Fairy* into the world of imagination!

ABOUT THE PICTURE BOOK AUTHOR BAEK HEENA

Baek Heena was born in 1971 in Seoul, South Korea. She worked in advertising and film animation before publishing her first children's picture book, *Cloud Bread* (*Gu-reum-bbang*), in 2004. She is now the author of over a dozen books, is popular throughout Asia and has been honored with awards both at home and abroad. She received the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in the spring of 2020. "I was so happy. I couldn't believe it was true! It was like getting a phone call from God," she said after receiving the award.

Baek Heena is known for her innovative visual style, and she follows a time-consuming and uncompromising process to bring her picture books to life. She builds entire miniature worlds—drawing, painting, photographing, sewing, baking, snipping, gluing and assembling tiny environments, objects and figurines. These 3D collages are then lit to enhance them further before photographing each individual image/scene. This slow craft process, inspired by stop-motion animation techniques, lends her books a uniquely scenic and cinematic quality.

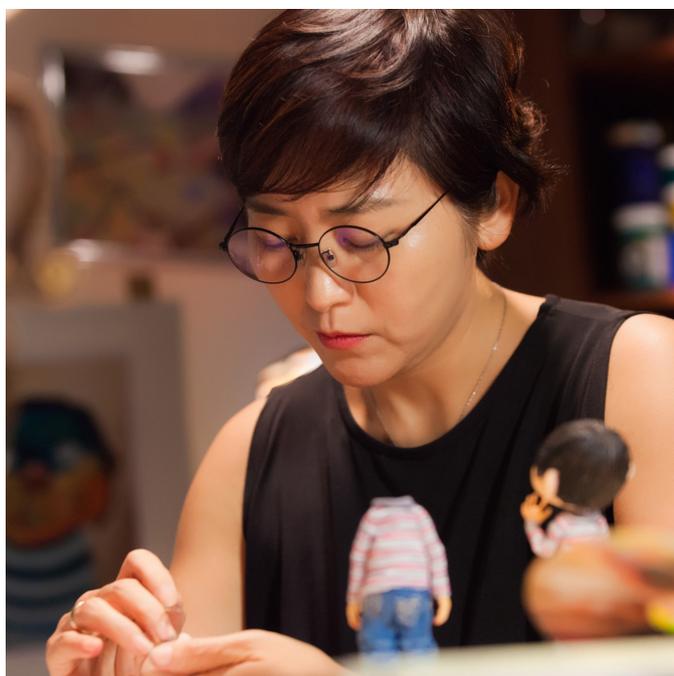


Photo: Bear Books.

Baek Heena's warm and humorous stories take up such themes as solitude, interpersonal encounters, cooperation and relationships. Just like children's own imaginative play, her books weave realism and magic together. A recurring motif is the way play and the imagination bring magic into everyday life.

Baek Heena's debut book, *Cloud Bread*, was published in English in 2011. Three of her books have been published in Swedish, all by Trasten: *Cloud Bread* (*Molnbullar*, 2019); *Magic Candies* (*Magiska godiskulor*, 2020); and *The Bath Fairy* (*En fé på badhuset*, 2020). Reading guides to all three are available in Swedish and English versions at www.alma.se



About *The Bath Fairy*

The Bath Fairy takes us to a very important place in Korean culture: the bathhouse. As in Japan, bathhouses in Korea are wretched in ritual. Bathers sit on small stools to scrub clean, and there are many different types of pools. The environments in *The Bath Fairy* were photographed in a real bathhouse, where Baek Heena staged each scene using her tiny figurines of modeling clay.

The story begins one day when a girl named Dukji and her mother visit their neighborhood bathhouse: a “very, very old” institution whose name translates to “Live Long and Happily.” On this particular day, something unexpected happens: Dukji meets an old lady who claims to be a fairy. The lady tells Dukji a story and they have fun playing games together in the water.

Before they leave the bathhouse, Dukji’s mother scrubs Dukji down in the heated pool. Then it’s time for a treat: a tasty yogurt! The yogurt just might be Dukji’s favorite part of visiting the bathhouse. But today, she gives her yogurt to the old lady.

That evening Dukji gets sick. Who should turn up but the old lady? As thanks for the yoghurt, she makes Dukji well again. Maybe she was a fairy after all...

Baek Heena often draws inspiration from traditional stories which reappear in new guises and interpretations in her books. *The Bath Fairy* is inspired by a Korean folktale about a fairy who loses her magical garments, and with them, the ability to fly. For a naked fairy, taking refuge in a bathhouse makes sense! Baek’s illustrations of the bathers—especially the wrinkly, roly-poly old lady—are relaxed and realistic. A welcome bit of body positivity! The wonderful scene where the fairy zooms along underwater with Dukji on her back radiates a powerful sense of *joie de vivre*.

The Bath Fairy also takes up a moral lesson that recurs in the folklore traditions of many cultures: be polite, generous and kind, and you will be rewarded. Baek Heena’s story gets the point across without being even a tiny bit preachy—just like a real fairy tale. The original Korean title of *The Bath Fairy* is *Jang-su-taang seon-nyeo-nim*, and it was first published in 2012. For readers ages 4 (Dukji’s age!) and up.

Before you read

Even before you open the book, take a few minutes to study the cover. This is a great way to get the imaginative juices flowing, to help your child or school group get focused before you start reading, and to set joint expectations about the book. Don't forget to look at the endpapers—the pages just inside the cover—for more clues about the story. *The Bath Fairy* will be extra exciting if you look at the cover and endpapers *before* you show or read the book title, since the title reveals something about where the action takes place and the character of the old lady.

You can also start developing expectations about the story by opening the book to the second page, which shows a mother and daughter on their way to...where, do you think? What could that be in the mother's basket? What is the daughter carrying?

Ideas for discussion questions:

- What do you see in the picture/pictures?
- Who might the people be? What are they doing? Do you think there will be more people later in the book?
- Where are they? Is it a place you recognize?
- How does the picture make you feel?
- What do you think the book might be about? Do you think it will be a funny book? An exciting book? Does it seem more like a fairy tale or a book about real life?



As you read

Picture books are wonderfully intricate constructions where words and images work in synergy. This means that reading a picture book is (at least) as much about reading the pictures as the words. For children encountering a book for the first time, listening quietly while you read out loud may be a challenge. Especially when the pictures are as striking as Baek Heena's, your listeners will probably have a lot to say about them! The primary way young children access books is through the pictures, so why not begin by focusing on them?

TAKE A PICTURE WALK

You could start by taking a picture walk—in other words, explore the story just through the pictures. Talk together about what you see, page by page. Children and grownups often notice different things. For example, children are often drawn to small details. A picture walk can help you establish a common frame of reference for the book. It can also help children to focus on the words the next time you read the book—especially since so many of the pictures in *The Bath Fairy* are so funny.

Tip: Point out the Korean written characters in *The Bath Fairy*, for example on the sign in the first picture, or on the yoghurt bottle.

READ TOGETHER

Even after you start reading the words of the story, you'll still want to stop every now and then to let everyone share their reflections about both words and pictures. Whenever we read a book, we form automatic associations to our own experiences and things we already know, as well as to other books, movies and stories. For example, if you read *The Bath Fairy* with older children, they might know the movie *Spirited Away*, which takes place in a bathhouse.

Questions and discussion help activate children's memories, prior knowledge and experiences. When you read *The Bath Fairy*, a lot of children may want to talk about times they have gone swimming or bathing in public baths, saunas or pools. Of course, don't assume that all your listeners are familiar with these settings.

Ask questions that involve all the senses to help bring the story to life. When you go swimming, what does the water feel like? Does it feel different to swim in warm water versus cold water? What does it sound like when you jump in?

When we read a book in dialog with one another, everyone learns new ways of thinking about the book. We discover that each of us may see the same picture or story quite differently. Reading becomes an interactive experience and something we do together: a social activity.

After you read

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

One way to deepen our experience and understanding of a book is by talking about it. It can help to have some concrete questions to use as a starting point. There are questions below that you could use for any book, as well some that are specific to *The Bath Fairy*. Some of the questions could also be asked as you read but to answer others you will need to have finished the book. By no means do you have to check off the whole list! On the contrary, just one question could fuel an entire discussion.

I wonder...

- Is there any picture in the book that you especially like/don't like?
- How does that picture make you feel?
- How would you describe the pictures in the book?
- Choose two pictures that convey completely different emotions/moods.
- Have you read any other books or seen any movies with fairies in them? Are those fairies any different from the fairy Dukji meets at the bathhouse? Does a fairy have to look a certain way?
- Who is the narrator of the book?
- How long do you think the fairy has been at the bathhouse? Does she always live there? What if she doesn't?

Here's a relatively advanced but intriguing question:

- Is there a single event in *The Bath Fairy* that is especially important?
- If that seems too difficult, consider this potential clue:
- If Dukji had drunk her yoghurt herself, would that have changed the story?

And, of course, some questions to stretch our imaginations:

- If you were going to meet a fairy, where it would be most likely to happen?
- The fairy emerges from the bowl of water in Dukji's room—which makes sense, since the two of them met at the bathhouse. If a fairy appeared in your room, where would it pop up?
- Dukji quickly starts to feel better, thanks to the fairy. What other things could a fairy help out with?
- In the book's final picture (on the endpaper) the fairy is looking at the refrigerator. What do you think is going through her mind? What do you think happens next?

TAKE THE STORY FURTHER!

Choose one of the questions above that feels fun and engaging (or pick something completely different from *The Bath Fairy* that inspires you!) and turn your response into a story. You could create an oral story, a written story, a story in pictures, a movie, a play, or any combination of the above. You could also use a digital tool for creating images and text.

A good tip is to establish a framework or a basic foundation for your story. For example, you could come up with an easy-to-complete sentence, such as:

- If I were a fairy, I would live in/on...
- If I were a fairy, my magic would be...
- If I were a fairy, I would want to help...X...when they...
- If I met a fairy and got a wish, I would wish for...
- In our neighborhood we have a very, very old...where you can...
- When I was at the bathhouse, I met a...

CHANGE YOUR POINT OF VIEW

Experiment with changing the narrative point of view. Instead of seeing the story from Dukji's perspective, imagine the old lady/fairy as the narrator. If she were the one telling the story, when would she begin it? The first time we see her in the book is in the background of one of the pictures, but maybe she was watching Dukji even before then. Perhaps the old lady/fairy could write a letter, e-mail, text message, etc. to someone else (another fairy?) in which she describes her encounter with Dukji.

EXPLORE THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN *THE BATH FAIRY*

Are the illustrations drawings? If not, how might Baek Heena have created them? What are some different ways of drawing, painting and creating pictures? Project the book on a big screen to make it easier to see the details, and loan extra copies to pass around.

What stands out most in the illustrations for *The Bath Fairy*? The backgrounds, the foregrounds, the characters? How does Baek direct our attention to different elements within the pictures? For example, look at the two pictures where Dukji meets the old lady for the first time. On the page where Dukji first sees the old lady, who is in sharpest focus? Now turn the page—what do you notice?

BAEK HEENA X 3

It's fascinating to compare the illustrations in different books by Baek Heena. Besides *The Bath Fairy* (Swedish: *En fe i badhuset*), two of her other books have been published in Swedish: *Cloud Bread* (*Molnbullar*, 2019) and *Magic Candies* (*Magiska godiskulor*, 2020). Naturally there are similarities among the books, but there are also differences. What materials did Baek use for each book? How does she work with details, lighting and visual perspective? Explore how these factors evoke an atmosphere in individual pictures, and perhaps also set a tone for the entire book.

SCULPT YOUR OWN FIGURINES

For *The Bath Fairy*, Baek Heena sculpted her characters out of modeling clay. Play with clay! Create a self-portrait, sculpt a fairy of your own or create a whole new character. For an extra challenge, sculpt the same figure more than once with different facial expressions. Study the way Baek forms mouths, eyes, etc. to convey a range of emotions.

MAKE A COLLAGE

Create a collage! You can do a one-dimensional collage on paper or try Baek Heena's technique of building an entire three-dimensional environment. Instead of buying new



supplies, try to repurpose leftover odds and ends: fabric scraps, ends of string, toilet paper rolls, aluminum foil and plastic wrap, cardboard boxes and packages, photographs, old newspapers and magazines, old books (ask your library for discards), etc.

FIND OUT ABOUT FAIRIES

One great activity is to look for nonfiction books that tie into your storybooks. Visit your local library for tips and ideas. You could look for books about mythological creatures, or books of fairy tales, like the story the old lady tells Dukji about the fairy and the woodcutter, or the Korean story about the fairy that loses the ability to fly. (Both motifs have counterparts in Nordic folklore.) Your children/students will gain a broader grasp of how different cultures and ages have portrayed fairies: their personalities, the way they look and their essential nature.

WHAT'S A WON? INVESTIGATE CURRENCIES!

How much does it cost to visit the bathhouse? Dukji's mother pays with a handful of bills. One of them has the number 1,000 on it. The price on the sign is 4,000 for adults and 3,500 for children. Wow, that's expensive! But hang on—the price isn't in dollars or pounds; it's in *won*, the currency of South Korea. In your own country's currency, how much would that be? How can you work out the answer? Trying choosing some countries of interest to your children/students and explore their currencies and the concept of monetary value. Maybe some of their families have coins or bills from other countries that you could borrow.

IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD...

The Bath Fairy opens with the words, "In our neighborhood..." Use the same phrase to kick off your own fictional story (see the suggestions above), or as the title of a project where you investigate the places around you. Photograph, draw, paint or build some of the environments around your preschool, school, or home neighborhoods. This is an exciting way to get to know your own area or the places where other people live. Level up by putting your own figurines in the environments you create and making a stop-motion narrative (there are several apps that can help). You could make a movie or craft a picture book to tell your story—just like Baek Heena.



Photo: Bear Books.

Learn more

ALMA.SE

Find a wealth of inspirational material and in-depth reading about Baek Heena and our previous laureates as well.

CHILDREN'S AND YA CATALOG

The 2020 children's and YA book catalog from the Swedish Arts Council features a profile of Baek Heena. The catalog is also packed with reading tips for children and teens. Order a free copy at www.kulturradet.se (in Swedish).

OP SIS MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN'S CULTURE

Issue 2/2020 of Opsis magazine includes an in-depth article about Baek Heena by ALMA jury member Maria Lassén Seger (in Swedish).

VARLDENSALMA.SE

At Hjulsta Elementary School in Stockholm, the staff make the ALMA award part of the yearly curriculum, drawing inspiration from each laureate's books and work. Their website, www.varldensalma.se, has a wealth of ideas for working with *Cloud Bread* and books by other ALMA laureates (in Swedish).

SHARE YOUR STORY

Would you like to share how you've used this book at your preschool, school, or after-school program? We'd love to hear from you. E-mail us at litteraturpris@alma.se—we can feature you on our website, alma.se. Or connect with us on social media using the hashtags #ALMA or #enfepåbadhuset (that's *The Bath Fairy* in Swedish). Let's build a treasury of information and inspiration together!

Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA)

The reading experiences we have as children mold us for life and shape our worldview. The young have a right to excellent literature: to books that are entertaining, innovative, challenging, or complex. One who knew this was the author Astrid Lindgren. When, in 2002, her voice fell silent, the Swedish government founded an international literature award: the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. The award money is SEK 5 million (\$513,000), making it the largest international children's and young adult literature award in the world. The prize amount is a signal to the world that Sweden takes children's reading very seriously. The laureates are chosen by a jury and each year, more than 200 candidates are nominated from around the world.

Check out our reading guides for Baek Heena's other books *Magic Candies* and *Cloud Bread* (translated into Swedish)! On our website alma.se/en, reading guides for books by various ALMA laureates can be found.



Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award