Baba Yaga – Monster or Guardian?

Subjects: English · Ethics | recommended from age 12 (B1) | Video: 9:13 min



Watch the video
youtu.be/77SfpTC0288

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

A · Before watching

1. How do you picture a typical fairy-tale witch? Describe her in two or three key words.

B · While watching

1. Why is there no single “correct” Baba Yaga story?

2. What decides whether Baba Yaga helps or punishes a girl?

3. How is Baba Yaga different from Western witches when she flies?

4. What does “Baba” mean – and what follows from that?

5. What did Vladimir Propp compare her chicken-legged hut to?

Useful words

witch	Hexe	polite	höflich
hut	Hütte	folklore	Volksüberlieferung
mortar	Mörser	evidence	Beweis
guardian	Wächterin	variant	Fassung

C · Put the story in order

Number the events from 1 to 8 in the order they happen in the video.

	The key question is asked: monster or guardian?
	Other researchers read the name “Yaga” as “horror” or “illness”.
	Collectors like Afanasyev write down the oral stories in the 19th century.
	Propp compares her tests to initiation rites.
	In some stories Baba Yaga eats children, in others she helps heroes.
	Andreas Johns collects all readings without choosing one.
	Two girls visit her hut one after the other – the polite one is rewarded.
	Propp compares the hut to Slavic burial houses.

D · Think and discuss

1. Researchers have not agreed. Is that a problem – or is that exactly what makes Baba Yaga interesting? Explain.

2. Why might a witch who only helps polite, hard-working visitors be a good figure for stories told to children?

E · Two theories compared

The video presents several explanations. Compare two of them.

	Guardian of the dead (Propp)	Demonic figure (meaning of the name)
What was Baba Yaga originally?		
What clues are there?		
What speaks against it or is uncertain?		
Which one convinces you more – and why?		

F · Get creative

1. In your exercise book, write a short fairy tale in which Baba Yaga helps someone – but only on one condition (about 10 sentences).