The Elves and the Shoemaker

About the Tale

We have Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm to thank for immortalizing this heartwarming tale. These German-born brothers studied law and collaborated on a dictionary, but are best known for their 1814 publication of *Nursery and Household Tales*. In these two thick volumes, the Grimms retold more than 200 oral folktales—“The Elves and the Shoemaker” among them. Although the brothers’ initial intention was to create a scholarly work for adults, their collection soon fell into the hands of story-hungry children and the rest, as they say, is history.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the elves might have decided to help the shoemaker?
2. How did the shoemaker and his wife grow very, very rich?
3. After the elves get their new clothes, they never return again. Where do you think they went? What do you think they did?

Notable Retellings

- *The Bootmaker and the Elves* by Susan Lowell (Orchard Books, 1997). Kids will adore this rib-tickling version, in which the action takes place in the rootin’ tootin’ Wild West.

Companion Reproducible

*Focus Skills:* Vocabulary Development, Critical and Creative Thinking, Writing

Distribute copies of the reproducible on page 98. Invite children to imagine they’re elves, then decorate and write about the shoes they’d create.
My Amazing Shoes

Pretend you are an elf. First, design an amazing pair of shoes. Then, describe them in writing.

Name ________________________________
They put the new clothes on the table and hid. When the clock struck midnight, in came the two elves.

The shoemaker and his wife never saw the two elves again. But thanks to their good deeds, all four of them lived happily ever after.

One day, they had only enough leather to make a single pair of shoes.
Once upon a time, there lived a kind shoemaker and his wife. Times were hard and they became very, very poor.

The shoemaker put the leather on his table. “Tomorrow, I will make one last pair of shoes to sell at the market,” he said sadly.

The elves were surprised to see the fine clothes instead of the leather. Zippity, zip! They put on the shirts, pants, and shoes. Then they danced a joyful jig and left.

All day, the shoemaker and his wife worked and worked. She made two tiny outfits. He made two tiny pairs of shoes.
“Two elves have been making the shoes!” said the shoemaker.
“Did you see their tattered clothes? Let’s make them some new ones to say thank you,” said his wife.

The shoemaker and his wife were happy, but also very curious. Who was making all the fancy shoes? One night, they decided to find out. Instead of going to bed, they hid behind a curtain.

But a magical thing happened. When the shoemaker woke up, the leather had already been turned into a fancy pair of shoes! “Wow! I will sell these at the market,” he said.

The shoemaker put the leather on his table. The next morning, he found two fancy pairs of shoes! “Wow! I will sell these at the market,” he said. And so he did.
The shoemaker sold the shoes for a bag of gold. With the gold, he bought more leather.

Again, the shoemaker used the gold to buy more leather. He put the leather on the table. The next morning, he found three fancy pairs of shoes!

When the clock struck midnight, in came two little elves. Zippity, zip! They made 100 pairs of the fanciest shoes ever seen. Then they danced a joyful jig and left.

Life went on like this for many months. In time, the shoemaker and his wife sold many shoes and became very, very rich.
1. Make double-sided copies of the mini-book pages. (You should have two double-sided copies for each one.)

2. Cut the pages in half along the dashed line.

3. Position the pages so that the lettered spreads (A, B, C, D) are face up. Place the B spread on top of the A spread. Then, place the C and D spreads on top of those in sequence.

4. Fold the pages in half along the solid line. Make sure all the pages are in the proper order. Staple them together along the book’s spine.

Book Badge Reproducibles

Let me read ________________ to you!

Let’s read ________________ together!