



# The House with Chicken Legs

SOPHIE ANDERSON  
TEACHERS' NOTES

*THE HOUSE WITH CHICKEN LEGS* IS A BREATHTAKING REIMAGINING OF A RUSSIAN FOLK TALE FROM NEW TALENT SOPHIE ANDERSON THAT KIRAN MILLWOOD HARGRAVE DESCRIBES AS “ENTICING, A LITTLE BIT DANGEROUS, AND THRUMMING WITH POSSIBILITIES”.

Baba Yaga is a character from Slavic (Eastern European) folklore. She appears in hundreds of folk stories, dating back to at least the eighteenth century although her origins may be far older; Baba Yaga has been linked to many ancient mythological characters.

Sophie Anderson’s reimagining of this tale, *The House with Chicken Legs* is aimed at 8-12 year-olds, and follows the journey of twelve-year-old Marinka who faces a lonely destiny as a guardian of The Gate between the living and the land of the stars. She dreams of a normal life, where her house stays somewhere long enough for her to make friends. But her house has chicken legs and moves on without warning. The only people Marinka meets are dead and they disappear when her grandmother, Baba Yaga, performs the nightly guiding ceremony with warmth and kindness as a kind of midwife of death. The book deals with the eternal themes of life, death, loneliness, love and betrayal in a refreshing, comforting and positive way.

Sophie says, “*The idea of death as a journey is an ancient one in lots of different cultures. I wanted that process of the death journey to be positive – filled with food, music and memories – reflecting on your life. I was trying hard not to make it a scary thing. It may be moving, it may be sad but essentially I want there to be a feeling of hope, that death is part of life, that even when people pass over we have memories of them which are important.*”





## THE AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Sophie's love of stories was inspired by her Prussian grandmother, who fled her homeland (Allenstein, East Prussia which is now Olszyn, Poland) during WW2, losing her family in the process. She carried in her soul the stories, music and food of her home and brought them with her to Wales...and to her granddaughter Sophie.

*"I adored listening to my grandmother tell fairy stories. On the surface they were just fun, short stories, but I knew they had deeper meanings. They offered me a safe space to explore some difficult ideas, and they set my imagination racing."*

Growing up, it was the tale of the chicken-legged house that captured Sophie's imagination the most. She thought it would be incredible to live in a house that could take you on adventures, to see new places or to visit the homelands of ancestors.

## READING GROUP NOTES FOR *THE HOUSE WITH CHICKEN LEGS*

1. In *The House with Chicken Legs*, Marinka lives in a house with chicken legs.

If you could live in a home with legs:

- a) What would it look like?
- b) Where would it take you?

2. Read the prologue of *The House with Chicken Legs*.

- a) What words or sentences give you an idea of how Marinka feels about living in a house with chicken legs?
- b) What is missing from Marinka's life, and how is the house preventing her from getting this?

3. In *The House with Chicken Legs*, death is portrayed as a journey. Marinka's grandmother, Baba Yaga, acts as a guide on this journey – helping souls move from this world to the next through "The Gate".

- a) A soul can be thought of as part of someone that is separate from their body. Try drawing a picture to represent your soul.

As souls pass through The Gate, Baba Yaga recites "the death journey words":  
*"May you have strength on the long and arduous journey ahead. The stars are calling for you. Move on with gratitude for your time on earth. Every moment now an eternity. You carry with you memories of infinite value. Peace at returning to the stars. The great cycle is complete."*





- b) What do these words mean to you?
- c) How do you think these words might help souls on their journey?
- d) Try to write your own “journey words” to help a soul about to embark on a long and unfamiliar journey.

Each time Baba Yaga guides a soul, a small sentence is added to the death journey words, to describe what the individual has gained from their life. For example, it might be the love of family or friends, the power of music, the excitement of discovery, or the light of hope.

- e) What would you like to gain from your life?

4. In *The House with Chicken Legs*, food, music and clothing are often used to create a sense of culture. What types of food, music and clothing do you associate with your culture?

5. Baba Yaga often quotes proverbs when she talks to Marinka. (Proverbs are short sayings that contain traditional wisdom or advice.) Here are a few of Baba’s proverbs – what do each of them mean to you?

- *It’s not how long a life, but how sweet a life that counts.*
- *Beware the goat from the front, the horse from the rear and the living from all sides.*
- *The morning is wiser than the evening.*
- *The nightingale that sings finds a song.*

What other proverbs have you heard, and what do they mean to you?

6. Marinka’s journey in *The House with Chicken Legs* involves a search for a way to break free of her destiny and control her own future. What are your thoughts about destiny? Do you believe we have a set destiny, or that through our choices and actions, we are able to control our own futures?





## A CREATIVE EXERCISE

Why not use this story starter based on another of Sophie's favourite fairy tales to write your own story...

*My father, Koschei, has no soul. I used to think he hid it so he could be ruthless as frostbite, and live forever with his gold. But yesterday I found out the truth...*

For further activities and ideas on how to use *The House with Chicken Legs*, including a Q&A with the author and chapter extract please visit Sophie Anderson's website:

[sophieandersonauthor.com](http://sophieandersonauthor.com)

