

# Creating the Future: Polish Folk Tale



# Epic Tales

## The Three Goats

### About this story

You will probably have heard a version of this story known as “The Three Billy Goats Gruff”. That version was collected and published by Norwegian folklorists Asbjørnsen and Moe in 1843, and went on to be the most famous version in western Europe (probably because it was in writing).

However, every folk tale existed as an oral story long before it was written down, and this story is no different. Moreover, folk tales tend to take on characteristics of the place where they are being told. Asbjørnsen and Moe were telling theirs in a Scandinavian country famous for its myths of trolls hiding under bridges; the Poles didn’t believe in such creatures.

Instead, the Polish version describes how goats entered their country from Germany. This is known as an “etiological myth” – i.e. it explains how something came to be. Because of this, it is most likely that the story originated in Poland first, and *then* went to Norway – where it would become “The Three Billy Goats Gruff” that most English children know.

(This is not unusual. “Cinderella” was originally a real-life Egyptian queen called Rhodopis, whose biography was combined with Egyptian myth – but by the time it was written by the Grimm brothers in 1812 it had been adapted to a typical German countryside setting.)

Another piece of evidence that this story originated in Poland is that the Polish have a choice of two endings to the tale, which suggests that the story was much loved and retold by their storytellers. The more a story is retold, the more likely it is to be adapted by new voices.

**The first of these endings is the most popular; there is a good chance that a Polish child will know it.** This is also the version that most likely found its way to Asbjørnsen and Moe in Norway.

**The second ending is less well-known** – but that doesn’t mean it’s any less enjoyable...

## The Plot

Between the measly fields of east Germany and the lush green grasses of west Poland sit the Sudetes mountains. Long, long ago, these mountains were inhabited by bloodthirsty wolves – but birds would fly safely over those wicked creatures on their way from east to west.

While the birds rested in Germany, they spoke of the beautiful sights they'd seen in Poland, and were overheard by a family of three goats. Since the food in Germany was scarce and piddling, the three goats agreed to make their way across the narrow mountain paths to find this promising land that the birds called "Poland".

The littlest of the goats was the fastest, and trotted ahead of the others along the mountain path. But after rounding a corner, he found himself face-to-face with a grinning, salivating wolf. The wolf said, "Run! Run, or I'll eat you up!"

The little goat said, "You won't want me. I am skinny, but a goat is coming who has two bellies. She will fill you up."

So the wolf let the little one go, and waited for the second.

When the second goat came round the corner, the wolf said, "Run! Run, or I'll eat you up!"

But the second goat said, "You won't want me. I am only half a meal, but a goat will come soon who has three bellies. He will fill you up completely."

So the wolf let the second go, and waited for the third.

At last the third goat came round the corner. The wolf said, "Run! Run, or I'll eat you up!"

The goat said nothing. Instead, he lowered his horns... then charged at the wolf!

The wolf received such a blow that he fell from the mountain path down to the chasm below, breaking all his legs. There the silly rascal lay; he'd wanted the biggest mouthful, but instead got nothing but pain.

As for the goats, they arrived happily in Poland – and their descendants have lived there ever since.

## Alternative Ending

At last the third goat came round the corner. The wolf saw straight away that he was fatter, and so prepared to pounce – but then noticed the spikes on the goat's head, and the tassels hanging either side of the goat's neck.

Curious, the wolf asked, "Tell me, goat: why are spikes on your head? And why are those bags by your neck?"

The goat smiled, and replied, "Oh, the spikes are pistols, and the bags are where I carry my gunpowder and shot."

Then the goat rubbed his head against his side...

...and the wolf thought, "He's loading his pistol... He's gonna *shoot me!*"

With that, the wolf turned tail and scarpered!

But the goat walked on peacefully to join his friends. They arrived happily in Poland – and their descendants have lived there ever since...

## Alternative Endings?

Perhaps you can think of a better way to end the story when the third goat comes around the mountain? Feel free to suggest it!

Don't forget the brief, though: to present a popular Polish folk tale in an attractive manner, but with dialogue that uses simple English. And remember: it is hoped that the Polish children will recognise the story, and so be able to get a quick grasp of the language used...