



Great Danes: Hans Christian Andersen

A Blog About Influential People from Denmark



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Hans Christian Andersen is renowned for his alluring and captivating fairy tales. Many people think of fairy tales as stories that are passed down from generation to generation, such as with Grimm's Fairy tales. The Brothers Grimm didn't make up their fairy tales and many of them were centuries old. They traveled around Germany looking for people who could tell them local fairy tales and stories to record in their books. They published these fairy tales in several volumes of books in the 1800s.

Hans Christian Andersen, however, was quite a unique author. While he did write down some already-known fairy tales in his books, he made up a fair amount of his own unique fairy tales. Some of his fairy tales have become popular through animated movies, such as *The Little Mermaid* and *Frozen*—Andersen didn't actually write a story called "Frozen," the movie *Frozen* was based on his story called "The Snow Queen." Incidentally, the

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movie *The Little Mermaid* ended in a drastically different way than the Andersen's original story "The Little Mermaid" and I highly recommend that you check out Andersen's version because I think its ending is much more powerful than the movie's. Spoiler alert: Ariel never gets her voice back, never wins Prince Eric, and dies in the end by turning into sea foam.

Andersen also wrote many fairy tales that you've probably known since you were little, like "The Ugly Duckling," "The Princess and the Pea," and "The Emperor's New Clothes." Other fairy tales, like "The Wild Swans" are less well known. After reading "The Wild Swans," I wondered if there was a connection between it and the story of "The Ugly Duckling" because both are about swan transformations. In "The Ugly Duckling," the Ugly Duckling (which is actually a cygnet—a baby swan) transforms into a beautiful swan. In "The Wild Swans," Princess Elisa's brothers transform into swans at daylight and back into princes when the sun goes down.



Hans Christian Andersen's childhood home in Odense, Denmark

Denmark on April 2, 1805. With hard work, he became one of Denmark's most beloved figures and one of the world's most beloved writers.

Andersen himself made a swan-like transformation in his lifetime from being a poor nobody to being a world-renown author. Andersen came from very humble beginnings, having been born in a one-room house in the poor area of Odense,

H.C. Andersen, as we call him in Denmark, moved to the city of Copenhagen in 1819 to work as an actor. He began writing around this time, but his teachers didn't think his work was very good and recommended that he quit writing. Luckily for everyone, Andersen didn't listen. He published some of his first stories starting around 1829. He published his first book of fairy tales in 1845, but it did not become popular in Denmark. Andersen's star only began to rise after his fairy tales were translated into other languages and sold in countries like England and Germany. Andersen actually became famous for his fairy tales in different countries around Europe long before he became famous in here Denmark.

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Eventually, the Danes came around and realized that Andersen was a national treasure—and we’ve celebrated him ever since. There are statues that show different scenes or characters from his stories all over Denmark, such as Ariel from “The Little Mermaid” and the swans from “The Wild Swans.” Over the years Denmark has printed lots of different postage stamps to honor H.C. Andersen that feature either Andersen’s picture or an image from one of his fairy tales. If you’re ever in Odense you can visit both Andersen’s birth home and the Hans Christian Andersen Museum to learn more about Denmark’s favorite son.



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Danish postage stamp from 1935

On April 2, 2005, Denmark held a national celebration in honor of the 200th anniversary of Andersen’s birth. The country went wild with remembering and honoring everything H.C. Andersen. You could buy coins, dinnerware, and even baby clothes with Andersen’s picture on them. There were TV shows about him that were created and aired just for this celebration. A huge live show in his honor was broadcast to 15 different countries from Denmark’s national soccer stadium. World-renown musicians performed at the show, including pop stars like Olivia Newton-John and Tina Turner.



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Statue of Hans Christian Andersen in Copenhagen, Denmark

So why make such a big deal about H.C. Andersen as opposed to other Danish authors? This is likely because Andersen’s stories appeal equally to children as well as adults and are popular all over the world. Andersen has captured the imagination of every generation since his fairy tales were first published. His works have been translated into more than a hundred different languages and are popular all over the world. We Danes weren’t alone in celebrating the 200th anniversary of Andersen’s birthday. People in cities around

the world also held celebrations and other events. Over the years, Andersen’s fairy tales have been turned into movies and plays. There is even an amusement park based on his work that opened in Shanghai in 2017.