

“The Five Clever Girls”

There are many variants of this type of story in many countries. In most cases it is only one girl who outwits a trickster by riddling. When telling this to young children, it is entertaining to use a set of nesting dolls.

NARRATOR: There was once a trickster named Gonella, who made his living by tricking people. He would go from town to town and always had enough to eat and coins in his pocket, without lifting a finger to work.

One day Gonella was coming to a small village in Poland where he had never been before. At the edge of the village he saw a small house, and in front of it was a young girl. She did not look too bright, so Gonella was sure he could trick her or someone in her family.

GONELLA: “Good day, Panna. Where is your father?”

GIRL 1: “Good day, sir! My father is busy. He is busy making many out of a few.”

NARRATOR: Gonella did not understand this answer, but he did not say so out loud. He just turned around to see if there was someone else in the family he could trick. At that moment, from behind the girl stepped her younger sister.

GONELLA: “Good day, Panna. Where is your mother?”

GIRL 2: “Good day, sir! My mother is busy. She is busy making something better out of something good.”

NARRATOR: Gonella did not understand that answer either. But he was not about to admit it. Just then, from behind the two girls stepped a still younger sister. Gonella addressed her just as politely and asked:

GONELLA: “Where is your older brother?”

GIRL 3: “Good day, sir! My older brother is busy. He is busy hunting between heaven and earth.”

GONELLA [to the audience]: Are these girls trying to trick me?

NARRATOR: He decided he had better go on to another house in the village. But just then a very small girl stepped out from behind the third sister. She was quite small. Gonella felt she would surely give an answer he could understand. After greeting her politely he asked:

GONELLA: “Where is your grandfather?”

GIRL 4: “Good day, sir! My grandfather is busy. He is busy closing the door to keep it open.”

GONELLA *[to the audience]*: These girls are answering me with riddles.

NARRATOR: He decided to go on to the next house. At that moment the baby of the family stepped out from behind her sisters. She could just barely talk.

GONELLA *[to the audience]*: I might as well ask her something.

NARRATOR: He approached the little girl and in a baby-talk voice said:

GONELLA: “Hello there, little one. You will surely tell me where your grandmother is, won’t you?”

GIRL 5: “Granny is busy. She is busy baking bread we’ve already eaten.”

NARRATOR: That was too much for Gonella. He shouted at the girls:

GONELLA: “You are all naughty. Why are you telling me all those lies?”

GIRL 5: “Oh no, sir! It’s the truth. Can’t you smell?”

NARRATOR: Gonella sniffed. He did smell bread baking. But how could it be bread they had already eaten? All of the girls rushed to give explanation.

GIRL 4: “Yesterday, Granny saw we had not more bread in the house.”

GIRL 3: “She sent us to the neighbor to borrow five loaves.”

GIRL 2: “That evening, we were so hungry we ate them all.”

GIRL 1: “This morning, Granny set about baking her usual five loaves of bread.

GIRL 5: “As soon as they were in the oven she said, ‘My goodness! I forgot we had to pay back five loaves to the neighbor. I’m baking bread we’ve already eaten.’”

GONELLA *[to the audience]*: What a clever answer for such little girls.

NARRATOR: But he said nothing aloud. He thought he had better find out what the other answers meant, so no one could trick him with them. He went to the next oldest girl and asked:

GONELLA *[to GIRL 2]*: “What did you mean when you said that your grandfather was closing the door to keep it open?”

NARRATOR: She pointed to a spot by the river.

GIRL 4: “There is Grandfather, mending the fish net in which we keep the fish we are going to eat some day. Yesterday, one of the fish made a big hole in the net. Grandfather said it was like a door letting out the other fish, so he had to close that door. But he did not want to close it so tightly that the fish could not move around. So Grandfather said he had to close the door just enough to still keep the net open.”

NARRATOR: Gonella turned to the next girl and asked:

GONELLA “What was that about your brother? How could he hunt between heaven and earth?”

GIRL 3 [*Pointing up to a tree*]: “There he is. He’s up in the cherry tree, hunting for the sweetest cherries. He’s not up in heaven. He’s not upon earth. He’s hunting between heaven and earth.”

NARRATOR: Gonella went to the next oldest girl and asked:

GONELLA: “What did you mean about your mother making something better out of something good?”

GIRL 2: “Listen and you will hear the thumping of her churn. She is making butter out of cream. Cream is good, but butter is better.”

GONELLA: “I would have figured it out if you had let me listen a bit longer. But what was that about your father making many out of a few?”

NARRATOR [*to the audience*]: Are you smarter than Gonella? Can you figure out what her father was saying? (Wait a few minutes and whistle the tune to Jeopardy).

GIRL 1 [*wait for cue*]: “He is planting seeds. For every hundred seeds he plants, he will harvest a thousand. He is making many out of a few.”

GONELLA [*to the audience*]: “Well, if the children around here are so clever, what must the grown-ups be like? I don’t think I will have any luck tricking them.”

NARRATOR: And he turned around and left that part of Poland, and never returned. And that’s how five clever girls saved their village from being tricked by Gonella.