



## "Jack and the Singing Leaves"

"Jack and the Singing Leaves" is a traditional story Bill learned from Duncan Williamson, a storyteller from Scotland. In the story, Jack a simple farm boy, befriends a wounded magic bird, who gives Jack a twig of singing leaves. When he gives it to the princess, the king demands one for himself. Jack's life is endangered, until the bird reappears again. The ending is an unexpected resolution, including a change in Jack's relationship with his two older brothers.

Jack tales are an important part of the cultural heritage of the English, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh peoples. While we are most familiar with "Jack and the Beanstalk", there are hundreds and hundreds of Jack tales. These stories are still current in Appalachia. Students and teachers interested in American Jack tales can refer to "The Jack Tales" by Richard Chase, and "Jack Always Seeks His Fortune" by Donald Davis (August House), two wonderful collections of Jack Tales.

Bill learned this story from Duncan Williamson. Duncan is an older man presently living near St. Andrew's Scotland. He is one of the "Traveler" people - like the Tinkers of Ireland and the Romany gypsies. As outsiders of mainstream culture, they are a source of oral tradition even today, though their way of life has been largely destroyed by the modern world. From an early age, Duncan was recognized as a storyteller and his stories appear in numerous collections - he is considered by many in Scotland to be a national treasure. It is interesting to note that many of the people in Southern Appalachia are of Scottish origin.

"The Singing Leaves" can lead to interesting discussions about the structure of folktales. As Bill points out in the story, the "Singing Leaves" is very similar to Cinderella - the most common folktale in the world. Also, a discussion of the characters in the story may lead to observations about how our characters influence what happen to us. In story, character - the thing that makes individuals do what they do - is what drives the plot. Questions might include:

- 1) How is the story like Cinderella? How is it different? Does it remind you of other stories?**
- 2) Tolstoy said "There are two stories. In one, the hero goes on a journey. In another, a stranger came to town." Which story is this one? Why?**
- 3) Why do we like Jack? What is it about Jack that gets him into trouble?**
- 4) All good stories have universal themes - things that say something about the way we are. What are the universal themes in "The Singing Leaves?"**