

Hans Christian Andersen Biography

Andersen was born in Odense, Denmark, on April 2, 1805. He was the son of an impoverished, sickly, twenty-two-year-old shoemaker and a laundress. The entire family lived and slept in a single tiny room.

Andersen's father apparently believed that he was related to nobility, and according to scholars at the Hans Christian Andersen Center. However, investigation proves these stories unfounded. The family apparently did have some connections to Danish royalty, but these were work-related. Andersen displayed great intelligence and imagination as a young boy, a trait fostered by the indulgence of his parents. Throughout his childhood, he had a passionate love for literature.

In 1816, his father died and the young boy had to start earning a living. He worked as an apprentice for both a weaver and a tailor, and later worked in a cigarette factory. At the age of fourteen, Andersen moved to Copenhagen seeking employment as an actor in the theatre. He had a pleasant soprano voice and succeeded in being admitted to the Royal Danish Theatre. This career stopped short when his voice broke. A colleague at the theatre had referred to him as a poet, and Andersen took this very seriously and began to focus on writing.

Following an accidental meeting, King Frederick VI of Denmark started taking an interest in the odd boy and sent Andersen to the grammar school in Slagelse, paying all his expenses. Before even being admitted to grammar-school, Andersen had already succeeded in publishing his first story, *The Ghost at Palnatoke's Grave* in (1822). Though a backward and unwilling pupil, Andersen studied both in Slagelse and at a school in Elsinore until 1827. He later stated that these years had been the darkest and most bitter parts of his life. He had experienced living in his schoolmaster's own home, being abused in order to "build his character," and he had been the odd man out among his fellow students, being much older than most of them, homely and unattractive.

The feeling of "being different" usually resulting in pain, is a recurrent motif in his work. This is both attributed to his early life in poverty, his homeliness and in particular to his lack of romantic and sexual life.

His tales are often tragic or gruesome in plot. His sense of fantasy, power of description, and acute sensitivity contributed to his mastery of the genre. Among his many widely beloved stories are "The Fir-Tree," "The Little Match Girl," "The Ugly Duckling," "The Snow Queen," "The Little Mermaid," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "The Red Shoes."

He died August 4, 1875. April 2, his birthday, is celebrated as International Children's Book Day.