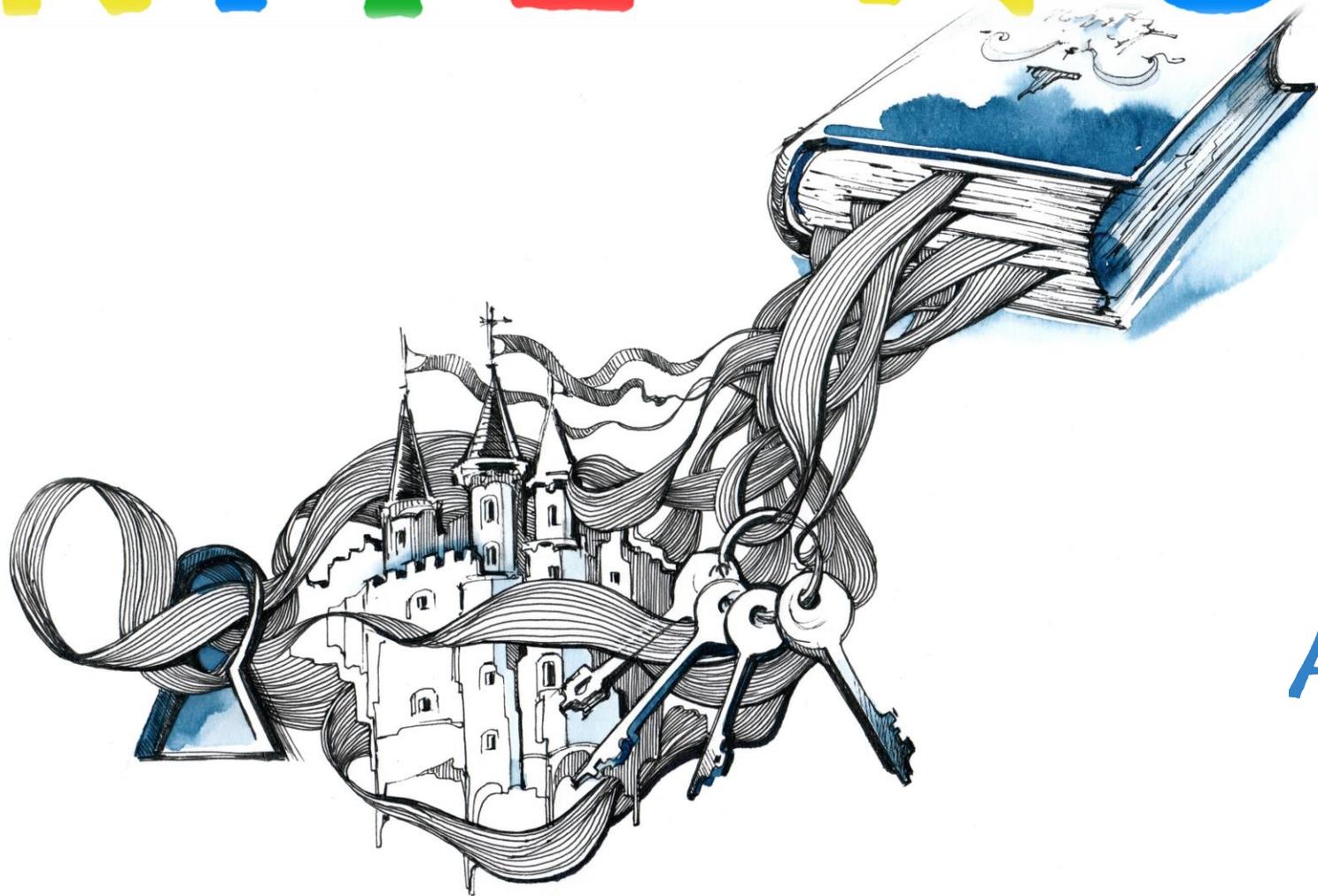


# WRITE NOW!



4:  
Advanced  
task

WRITE NOW!

# 4. Advanced task

Re-telling myths

# WRITE NOW!

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# WRITE NOW!

## 1. The Task

Make the opening of *One Thousand and One Nights* a feminist saga!

In the following two versions of *One Thousand and One Nights* lots of things are different. Not only do the writers have different styles, but in one it is Shahryar who is betrayed and in the other it is Shahzaman. This shows that myths evolve and change over time. Neither one is more right than the other. This gives us a lot of freedom as writers.

The one thing that remains true is that the Queens in both versions do not get a part; they are both silent and are talked about for their beauty only. Also, they both betray their powerful husbands with ordinary men.

Task:

Re-tell this legend from the point of view of the queen of your choice.

You should consider:

1. Whether the husband is really a good husband since he sees her as a possession.
2. Why she might be unhappy – is she lonely? Forgotten? Misunderstood?
3. Why the ‘servant’ might understand her?
4. Whether there has been a mistake or misunderstanding.

You can re-tell the myth in any style you like. You can decide whether to change it to give a happy ending. You can research more about the story or you can rely on your imagination.

It is up to you!

**Make the opening of One Thousand and One Nights a feminist saga!**

# WRITE NOW!

## 2. One Thousand and One Nights: Geraldine Mccaughrean

This extract is taken from the beginning where King Shahryar plans to visit his brother. This is an ancient Persian legend being retold by a British writer. You can search for 'Arabian Nights' or '1001 Nights' to find out more and to read other versions.

Stories are carried from the desert kingdoms of India and Persia and Arabia – but who can tell if they are true? – of the twin kingdoms of Sasan and Samarkand al-Ajam. Their rulers were brothers: the tall and glorious King Shahryar and his smaller brother King Shahzaman. The foundations of their cities and palaces were not moved by the shifting ocean of Arabian sand. Their domes and minarets on a horizon were as beautiful in the eyes of desert travellers as foaming water or banked rain clouds.

Just as his cities were wonderful to the eyes, so the young Shahryar was wonderful in the eyes of his people, for he ruled wisely and generously. The heart of Shahryar was lovely, for he took pleasure in the life that Allah gave him. Above all, Shahryar took pleasure in his wife – a lady as lovely as the moon reflected in lily pools. Only the queen of King Shahzaman, his brother, equalled her in beauty.

One morning King Shahryar took it in his heart to visit his brother in the kingdom of Samarand al-Ajam and called for camels to be mustered and loaded with presents. Bales of damask cloth, flasks of attar of roses, and panniers filled with oriental spices were heaped across the camels until their legs bent like an archer's bow. In the inner chambers of his palace, King Shahryar kissed his lovely wife goodbye and, of course, veiled her face so that no other man but the King should accidentally see her beauty.

The streets of the royal city of Sasan were filled with fragrance as the caravan wound its way from the palace to the Eastern gates. Just as they were leaving the city, King Shahryar remembered the small personal gift of red sulphur he had laid ready in his bedroom, intending to carry it to King Shahzaman. He hurried back to his palace alone and climbed the stairs, his calf-skin shoes making no sound on the stone staircase. As he opened the bedroom door, his heart jumped inside him like a startled hare. In one moment it leapt with delight at the sight of his wife's face, and in the next it leapt with anger that her veil was gone. A servant from the palace stables was sitting beside the queen. In one hand he held the crumpled veil and in the other he held the queen's hand.

# WRITE NOW!

## 3. One Thousand and One Nights: Hanan Al-Shaykh

This extract is taken from the beginning where King Shahryar plans to visit his brother. This is an ancient Persian legend being retold by a Lebanese writer. You can search for 'Arabian Nights' or '1001 Nights' to find out more and to read other versions. You can compare this version with the first version.

A long, long time ago lived two Kings who were brothers. The elder, King Shahryar, ruled India and Indochina. The younger, Shahzaman, ruled Samarkand. Shahryar was so powerful and strong that even savage animals feared him; but at the same time, he was fair, caring and kind to his people – just as the eyelid protects the eye. And they, in turn, were loyal, obeyed him blindly, and adored him.

Shahryar woke one morning and experienced a pang of longing for his younger brother. He realised, to his amazement, he hadn't seen Shahzaman in ten years. So he summoned his Vizier, the father of two girls, Shahrazad and Dunyazad, and asked him to go immediately to Samarkand and fetch his brother. The Vizier travelled for days and nights, until he reached Samarkand and met King Shahzaman, who welcomed him and slaughtered beasts in his honour, and he gave him the good news. 'King Shahryar is sound and well; he needs only to see your face and so he has sent me to ask that you visit him.'

Happy Shahzaman embraced the Vizier, replying that he too had missed his brother, and that he would be prepared to leave at once.

In no time everything was ready: troops, horses and camels, and sheep to be slaughtered for food. Shahzaman was filled with happiness and excitement, for he was going to see his brother, so he set out at once, not wanting to delay one minute longer as he heard the beat of the tambourine and the blowing of the trumpets. He rushed to his wife's quarters to bid her goodbye, but to his horror he found her lying in the arms of one of the kitchen boys. The world blackened and spun, as though he was caught in a hurricane.

'I am the sovereign King of Samarkand and yet my wife has betrayed me, but with whom? With another king? A general in the army? No - with a kitchen boy!'

In his fury, he drew his sword and killed his wife and the kitchen boy, then dragged them by the heels and threw their bodies from the very top of the palace into the trench below. Then he left his kingdom with his brother's Vizier and entourage, his heart bleeding with sorrow and grief.