Activity 1 - The Grimms' Stories

Although the Grimms professed a great interest in ordinary people, ‘das Volk’, they collected most of their stories from people who came from the same kind of background as themselves: middle and upper-class people, mostly women, provided them with their basic material, which they then re-wrote and developed according to their own ideas, sometimes changing the stories quite considerably from their original form. Although the first version of the Grimms’ stories was published in 1812, the most successful edition was first published in 1825. By then, Wilhelm Grimm had re-written a lot of the stories to make them child-friendlier by taking out references to sex and violence, or by giving the stories a happier ending. The original Rapunzel got pregnant, for instance!

Have a look at the website of the Brüder-Grimm-Museum in Kassel, the town where the brothers spent a lot of their adult life. This text on the collection of the stories gives a lot of information about the Grimms’ sources:


Read it, and think about the following questions.

- What previous project had helped the Grimms to learn how to collect and edit older texts?
- What were their sources?
- What was their goal in re-telling the stories, according to the introduction?
- Why were there some stories of French origin, and what happened to them?