The pedlar’s treasure: compare two tellings

Read the two adapted endings. Find what they share, what changes and what the texts can tell us.

In both tellings, a dream sends a pedlar to London Bridge. A shopkeeper’s dream points him back towards treasure at home in Swaffham. These endings are adaptations, not quotations.

A · Joseph Jacobs’s tale

The pedlar recognised his own home in the shopkeeper’s dream. He went back to Swaffham and dug beneath the great oak in his orchard. There he found a great treasure. Now he was rich. He helped rebuild the church, and the tale says that his image was carved there in stone to remember him.

B · The printed letter

John Chapman dug up a pot of money and kept the pot with his household vessels. A visitor read its Latin inscription, which said there was something twice as good below. Chapman dug deeper and found a second pot with more money. He later offered to pay for the church’s north aisle and a tall steeple.

1. What do both men find after returning home?

2. What clue leads to a second discovery in B?

3. How do the accounts of the church gift differ?

4. Does a name and extra detail prove that the dream came true?

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Read the two adapted endings. Find what they share, what changes and what the texts can tell us.

1. The shared discovery

Both find treasure after returning home. A gives the pedlar one great treasure. B describes a first pot and then a second, larger discovery.

2. The extra clue

A visitor reads a Latin inscription on the first pot. Its message tells Chapman that something twice as good is below. That reading prompts him to dig deeper. This second-pot episode does not appear in Jacobs’s main narrative.

3. The church gift

A says the pedlar helped rebuild the church. B specifies an offer to fund the north aisle and a tall steeple. Keep those claims attached to their texts, rather than combining them into an independently proven account of the building’s history.

4. Detail and evidence

No. A name and an inscription can make a story vivid, but neither independently proves that a dream revealed treasure. A document records that a story was told. Verifying a historical event would require evidence beyond the story itself.

The two witnesses

A follows Joseph Jacobs, More English Fairy Tales (1894), LXIII and its notes. B follows the letter from William Dugdale to Roger Twysden, dated 29 January 1652-3, as printed in Blomefield and Parkin’s History of Norfolk, volume VI (1807), pp. 211-213. We consulted the printed transcription, not the original letter. The date of a printed edition and the date of the document it transcribes are different things.

Adaptation and extension

Both passages shorten the journeys and endings. B omits Chapman’s excuse about where he obtained the pot and his secrecy about the money. Ask learners to invent a third ending and label it clearly as their own. They can explain one choice without calling it an old traditional version.

Read Jacobs’s tale · Read the Norfolk account · Explore the variants

Suggested for ages 9+, with reading support. The task compares these two witnesses only; it is not a survey of every treasure-dream story.