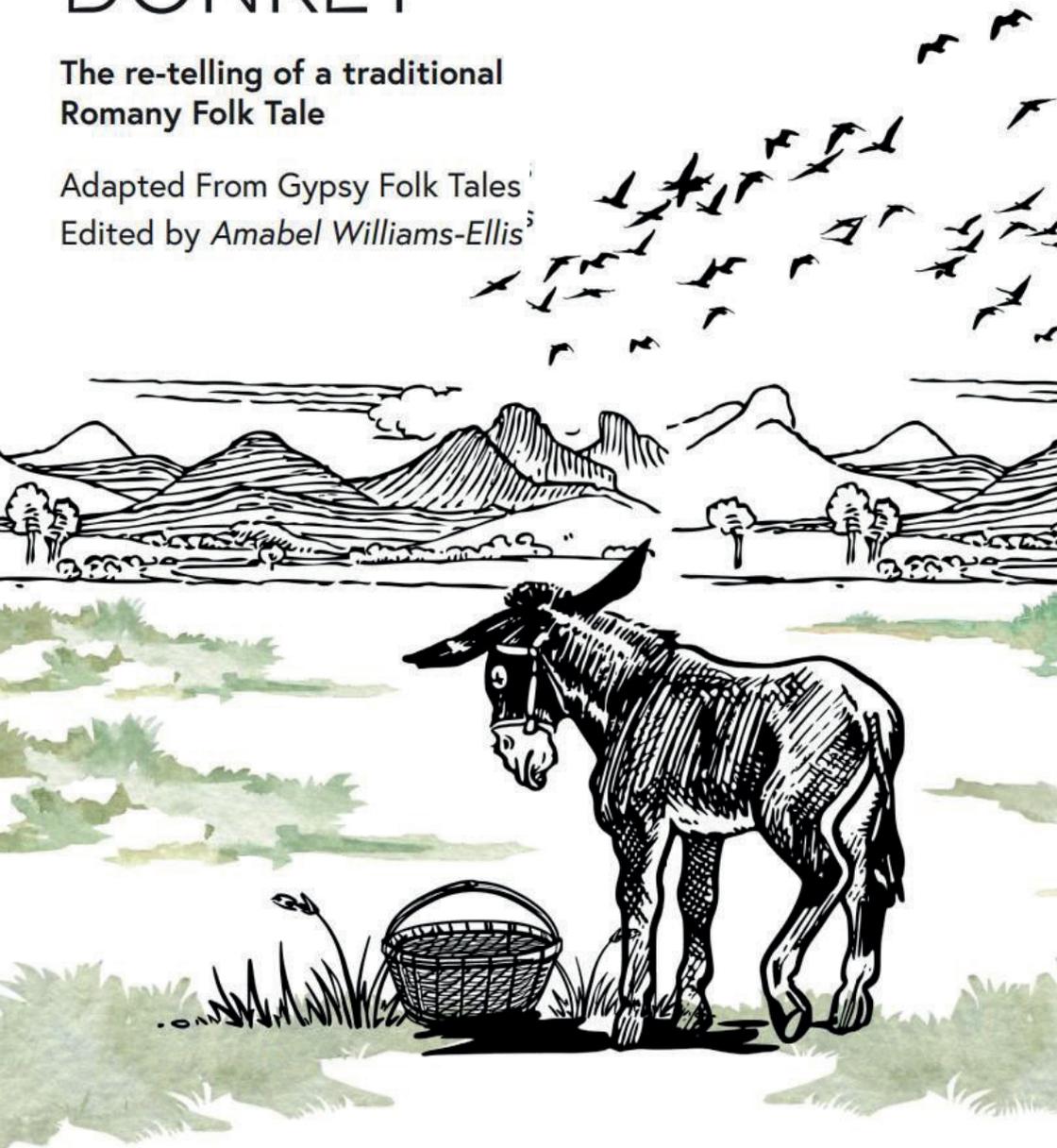


# THE BASKET-MAKER'S DONKEY

The re-telling of a traditional  
Romany Folk Tale

Adapted From Gypsy Folk Tales  
Edited by *Amabel Williams-Ellis*



# Basket Maker's Donkey Introduction

At ROMLIT we don't create stories for our project participants. Instead, our participants create and re-tell their own stories. This unconventional approach allows for schools, children at the early years stage, and their parents/carers to become themselves storytellers and authors.

The story you're about to read, the Basket Maker's Donkey, is a traditional and much-loved Romani story, which has been shared for hundreds of years around the yog (fire), in caravans, houses and anywhere where people of Romani heritage took it. As a new research project working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to develop early years literacies, we are proud to share the version of the story you are holding in your hands. Our ambition is to make new and old Romani stories a literacy and cultural staple in every school and household in the country.

This book could not have been made possible without the help of dedicated and inspiring members of staff at Mulbarton Primary School, Norfolk. Special thanks to Kirsty Savory Deputy Head, Nousheene Laniado, Forest school teacher, Sarah Stone, Teaching Assistant and Rob Goldspink, Caretaker. Many thanks to all Romani parents/carers and children, as well as a team of exceptional ROMLIT researchers, namely Rebecca McWherter, Katy Boswell, Karen Fairfax-Cholmeley and Dr Clare Meade.

Our gratitude goes to all of them for gifting us the gift of this new version of the Basket Maker's Donkey and to you for reading it - and believing in the power of stories.

*Dr Spyros Themelis, ROMLIT project leader  
School of Education and Lifelong Learning  
University of East Anglia*

ROMLIT is a research project based at the University of East Anglia.  
It is funded by the Joyce Morris Legacy Fund.  
Its aim is to develop early years literacies through Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage.



## Foreword

When a colleague from the ROMLIT team shared with me Gypsy Folk Tales, edited by Amabel Williams-Ellis I was delighted to see that such an important part of my culture – oral storytelling – had been recorded in a book. The symbols and motifs in folk tales communicate important aspects of the cultures and contexts from which they have arisen.

As I read the collection of folk tales, I felt a deep sense of pride and connection to my culture, and I was compelled to share this experience with others. We chose the Basket Maker's Donkey because it communicates messages of sustainability, relationship with animals, the land and entrepreneurship – all of which are inherent to Romany culture. We used the story within a day of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller cultural celebration at Mulbarton Primary School's wonderful Forest School. The children were invited to listen to the story around the campfire and engaged in a diverse range of dynamic literacy activities where they were able to explore, connect with and share their rich cultural heritage.

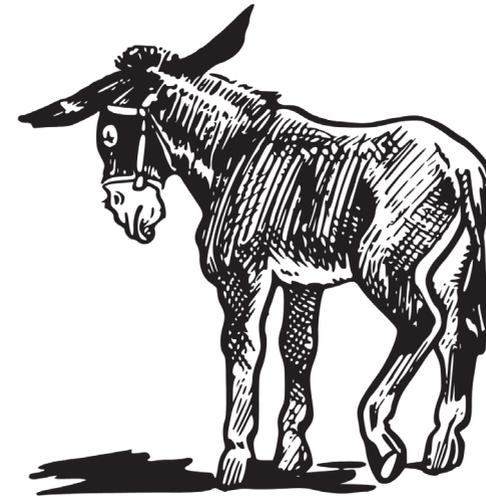
Integrating children's cultural heritage into their educational experiences in this way creates a perfect opportunity to improve educational outcomes while promoting inclusion.

I hope that you will enjoy exploring this story as much as we did.

*Rebecca McWherter,  
ROMLIT Associate Researcher.*



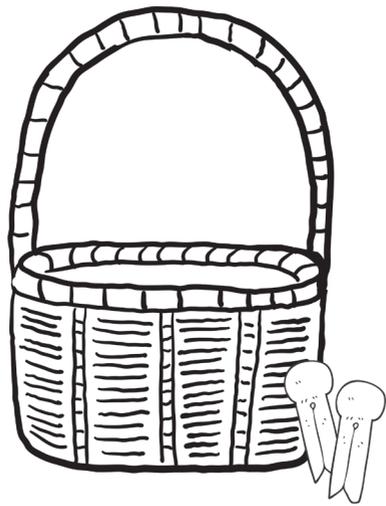
Once upon a time, when the most part of Gypsies used to travel with pack-donkeys, there was an old man and he had kept the same donkey for years and years, and as he'd had it for so long it was a great pet of his. The donkey had worked hard with the Gypsies, and he was very well-loved.





Well, one day this man was at home, making a basket or two for his wife to take around with her when she was selling at the market. This was mostly what his occupation was - basket making, though sometimes he'd also cut a few pegs.

Well, as I was saying, this old man was at home one day, busying himself weaving a basket. And the donkey was with him just as it often was. Only instead of carrying all the man's belongings and working hard with the man, like he usually did, the donkey looked very tired and fragile.



In that moment, a mischievous gust of wind swirled through the field. The gust blew so hard that it split the donkey in half.





When the old man saw what had happened, he was beside himself, him being so fond of the donkey, and not having another to take his bits of things about. 'What can I do?' he says, 'what can I do?' An' the tears were rolling down his face.

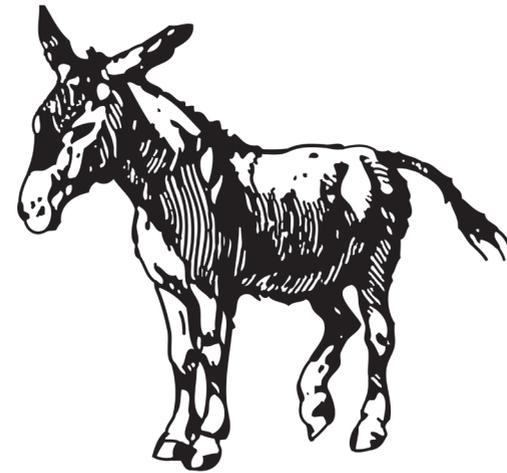
'Oh, whatever can I do?' he says. Then he thinks to himself of the willow withies he has for the basket making, and he runs and fetches an armful. And he stands the two halves of the donkey up, and he fits the one to the other, and binds the two halves together with the willow withies.



4



Then he goes and gets some clay, and he daubs it all along the joining, fixing the two halves together. 'There now,' he says, 'I reckon I've made a good job of that'. For the two halves of the donkey grew together again an' he had many a year's service out of it after that. In fact, it lasted him his life.



5





What is more, the willow withies took root and grew as well. So, ever after, whenever he wanted to make a basket, he didn't have to go searching for withies; he always had a stock ready to hand.



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