

***Vasilisa the Brave: An Encounter with the Archetypal Wild Feminine***

**Shannon Yockey**

**Friday, April 17, 2026**

**3:15 p.m. – 6:45 p.m.**

**&**

**Saturday, April, 18, 2026**

**8:45 a.m. – 4:15 p.m.**



*“When Yaga gives Vasilisa a lighted skull, she is giving her an old woman icon, an ‘ancestral knower’ to carry with her for life. She is initiating her into a matrilineal legacy of knowing.”*

— Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, p. 106

When Vasilisa is cast into the dark forest, she crosses into liminal space—beyond ego consciousness, beyond the known. Here, she must rely on an ancient wisdom passed down by her dying mother, contained in a small doll: a symbol of intuition and inner guidance. With the doll as her only companion, she faces impossible tasks and confronts the fearsome Baba Yaga, who guards the fire Vasilisa needs for survival and devours those who fail.

To endure, Vasilisa must learn the wild, mysterious language of the earth, embodied by the archetypal feminine. She is asked to wait, to listen, and to sacrifice without falling into despair. Through these trials, she is initiated—transformed—by the deep wisdom of the shadow. Fairy tales carry a sense of wonder, mystery, and magic. They guide us through symbolic stories that help illuminate inner struggles and point toward healing of our instinctual nature. They invite connection with intuition and shadow, allowing us to rediscover hidden strengths.

This tale reflects the psychological tasks required for inner initiation. The work of reclaiming what has been rejected or buried within us is echoed in Vasilisa’s journey. She shows us how to

approach what has been exiled in order to reconnect with soul, intuition, and the fierce, nourishing presence of the dark earth mother.

Participants will engage in creative and imaginal processes—including Sandplay, personal reflection, and group dialogue—to nourish their inner guidance and explore the sacred path of initiation.

**Participants will:**

1. Understand the symbolic structure of the Vasilisa tale as a psychological initiation process.
2. Recognize the necessary attitude when confronted with shadow aspects.
3. Explore the archetype of the wild feminine and its relevance to personal transformation and intuitive development.
4. Identify and engage with exiled or shadow aspects of the self through active imagination and symbolic play.
5. Cultivate wonder and delight through practices that nurture intuition, resilience, and soulful presence in personal and clinical settings.

**Required Reading:**

*(PDFs will be provided for the Estés & Mitchell readings)*

Estés, C. P. (1992). *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. Ballantine Books. **Read Chapter 3, “Nosing Out the Facts: The Retrieval of Intuition as Initiation,” pp. 74–114.**

Jung, C. G. (1969). *Collected works Vol. 9i: The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Princeton University Press.

von Franz, M.-L. (1995). *Shadow and evil in fairy tales* (Revised ed.). C. G. Jung Foundation Books Series. Shambhala. (Original work published 1974) **Read Chapter 1, “The Concept of Shadow.”**

**Suggested Reading:**

Ugrešić, D. (2007). *Baba Yaga laid an egg*. Canongate.

Mitchell, M. (2010). Learning about ourselves through fairy tales: Their psychological value. *Psychological Perspectives*, 53, 264–279. (article will be provided)