

## The Power of Storytelling in Our Lives



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From ancient to modern times, humanity has used storytelling as a tool to pass on values, legacy, advice, personal experience, and cultural heritage. Storytelling plays a dominant role in human lives. As human beings, and as the best creation of God Almighty, we are endowed with the gift of language to articulate our emotions. Before the modern age, through face-to-face oral presentations, we could only convey our stories to those around us. But now, with advancements in science and technology, we can reach out to a great number of listeners around the globe. As social animals, it is natural for us to share our stories with others.

### Oral Storytelling

Oral storytelling has been an effective form of communication used by prophets, philosophers, sages, rulers, parents, teachers, etc. Ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates (470-399BC), Plato (428-348BC), Aristotle (384-322BC) and many others used the storytelling method in conveying their lessons to their disciples. Through storytelling, we build a special bond with our audience. In the field of education, storytelling technique is not only effective at the preschool level but also at the university level. A well-articulated story creates an everlasting impact and imprint in the hearts and minds of the students, especially when the teacher relates the subject matter that revolves around human emotions like; happiness, sadness, anger, frustration, etc.

Young or adults, we all love to narrate or listen to stories. Unlike adult learners, children attending schools are mainly told of stories that have a happy ending. As fun lovers, even most of their favourite fairytale stories end with the phrase ‘happy ever after.’ Children in remote parts of the world are told stories that give hope, motivation and promise that they too can be successful and have the amenities of life if they put in hard work. Storytelling also opens up an opportunity for children to experience a new world. Through the stories narrated to them, they gain new ideas and information. Childhood which comes with a lot of innocence and inquisitiveness, should not be told of stories that can intimidate, scare and make them feel sad. It is a bad idea to narrate stories of demons and evil spirits as a mechanism to force them to go to bed early.

### **Story Telling in the Qur’an**

In the sacred texts of most religions of the world, we can find stories conveyed to the followers. For instance, in the Qur’an, we can find stories of many prophets. The Qur’an mentions some of the prophets’ stories in the passing, while a few others are recurring ones. Among the oft-repeated stories of the Qur’an are those of Prophet Musa (AS), ISA (AS), Ibrahim (AS), Nuh (AS), Dawood (AS) Sulaiman (AS) and a few others. Overall, the Qur’an mentions 25 prophets by their names, while according to a Hadith of the Prophet (SAW), a total of 124 thousand prophets and messengers were sent to guide humanity. Very particularly, the story of Prophet Yusuf (AS) is special in the sense that it is the only story that has been narrated in chronological order from childhood to adult matured life. When analyzed from another angle, Surah Yusuf relates to its readers, subjects like childhood rivalry, a father’s biased love toward a particular child, envy, deceit, conspiracy, seduction, dream interpretation, one man’s economic acumen, the triumph of truth over falsehood, etc. Besides that, the Qur’an also narrates the stories of righteous servants of God like Khidr and Dhul-Qarnayn, the Dwellers of the Cave, Maryam (AS), Asiah, the wife of the Pharaoh, Bilqis the Queen of Sheba, Luqman the man of wisdom and a few others. By and large, storytelling in the Qur’an departs to the one who gets acquainted with it, ethical mannerisms, human nature, evil desires, transgression and consequences faced by the bygone generation of people, what it means to be a human, etc.

### **Storytelling from the Islamic Perspective**

From the early days of the advent of Islam till today in the digital era, storytelling still has its relevance as a main medium through which religious propagation has been carried out. Stories of great prophets as mentioned above, Islamic warriors, righteous caliphs who came after Prophet Muhammad (SAW), meritorious conduct of the Prophet’s companions, biographies of religious

scholars, medieval poets, reformers, philosophers, scientists and many others are all narrated orally face-to-face or through social media.

### **The Role of Literature in the Human Life**

Etymologically, the word literature returns to its Latin origin which carries the meaning ‘the use of letters.’ Later when the word evolved, a more elaborate meaning to literature was added. One of those meanings was, ‘written works used to transmit culture’. Besides written words, and stories transmitted through oral tradition, visual literature like drama, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, songs and journalism are all classified as literature.

As human lives are larger than money and social status, we need words to express our thoughts and feelings about being human. Since words have meanings, being well-acquainted with literature, provides us a wonderful opportunity to enrich ourselves with new vocabulary. Besides that, literature also shares the experiences of those who have lived before us, enhances our sympathy and empathy for others, and finally it ameliorates our communication and social skills. To Aristotle, literature is the art of imitation. It imitates the real-life situations of people. Literature can create powerful emotional experiences when the reader or audience comes in contact with such imitations.

Reading literature on other countries and cultures can broaden our horizons of thinking, and at the same time, it can help us to remove the racial prejudice we have against others. In a way, reading biographical and autobiographical works of great personalities and good leaders of the world can inspire us to be good too. Literature that presents to us the pain and sufferings of those Indigenous, oppressed and marginalized communities of the world can be soul-enriching to the readers to be more caring, sharing and loving towards those less fortunate in their lives. Since personality is a thing that grows and develops as time passes, it is good for us to be constantly engaged with good books. By doing so, it will strengthen our individuality.

At this juncture in discussing the impact of good literature, we would like to share two of Frank Kafka’s (1883-1924) famous quotes which say:

“I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound or stab us. If the book we’re reading doesn’t wake us up with a blow to the head, what are we reading for? So that it will make us happy, as you write? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need books that affect us like a disaster, that

grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. That is my belief.”

“Many a book is like a key to unknown chambers within the castle of one’s own self.”

### **Parents Role in Storytelling**

Traditionally, people of all communities living in whatever part of the world, take great responsibility in educating their children through storytelling. Since children love listening to stories, parents should not only relate their stories to themselves but also those of their ancestors, tribes, national heroes, etc. Stories heard during childhood will have a long-lasting positive impact on the children’s minds. Children who are educated through stories narrated by their parents will have a special bond and respect for their parents. In many instances, such parents are seen as their children’s role models.

Besides making oral presentations, parents can also make available in the common area of their homes some beneficial literature through which their children could learn good values that can be useful to them later on in their lives as grownups.

### **Honour Shown to Men of Literature**

Those engaged in the writing profession should be duly honoured for their contribution to the nation and world at large. There is an old saying that says, ‘A book is like a trusted friend’ as the printed words in it do not change over time. Governments around the world should organize book fairs and book launches to honour writers. Book reviews done orally by avid readers in many ways can help to promote the creative and good work of the authors.

No matter how advanced our lives become with the growth of modern technology, stories still hold a special position in our lives. Since we all grew up listening to stories, and there is a story within ourselves, whatever position and economic status we enjoy, we will always feel thrilled hearing or reading stories.

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