

A telling tale

Storytelling is a part of life all around the world although it is a stronger tradition in those cultures where the spoken word is more important than the written one, for example, the Aborigines of Australia and Native North American tribes such as the Cherokee. Stories, such as myths and legends, fairy tales and fables, have historically been passed down from one generation to the next.

Although storytelling is a form of entertainment, it is not just that. It can also be an important way to pass on the history of a community or an individual. Among Aborigines, storytelling is used to educate children and teach them about culture, history, beliefs as well as other aspects relating to the traditional way of life. The right way to live and behave, as well as ceremonies, are all taught through stories and for Aborigines, storytelling is as an important part of each day as is eating a meal.

The Métis people of Canada use stories in a very similar way but also use them to remind others of their duties. Stories are used not only to give messages about the environment but also to teach the lessons of life. Through stories, the young gain a sense of identity and learn about their family, community, ancestors and important tribal leaders of the past.

Traditionally, storytellers have been parents, elders or teachers, and the stories told have had a variety of functions. Stories may make you laugh, cry or even frighten you and not all stories end well. Particular stories may be told at different times too. Among the Métis, for example, people tell stories whilst working, around the campfire, at special occasions and social events. At social events, for example, competitions for the most imaginative story often take place and sometimes storytellers have to pick words from a bag and create a story using them.

Generally speaking, stories have traditionally been used within a community. However, this is now changing. These days, storytelling is being used to inform the wider world about the history and culture of different communities. People who migrate to other parts of the world, for example, are taking their stories with them and in this sense storytelling not only serves to remind them of their cultural roots but also becomes a means of communication with the new host nation. Stories now give people the chance to share their personal experiences with others and can even be used to push for political change. Today's storytellers are the young and the old, and their audience is not just their community but also the rest of the world.

1 Read the article and decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

- 1 Storytelling has greater importance in cultures which use writing more than speech. T/F
- 2 Aboriginal children are taught about their traditional way of life through stories. T/F
- 3 The telling of a story is as much of a daily ritual as eating is for the Métis. T/F
- 4 Stories can be told for different reasons and they don't always have happy endings. T/F
- 5 Storytellers are always older members of the community which is their audience. T/F

2 Match the meanings below to the following words from the text.

behave entertainment function identity remind pass down tradition

- 1 the purpose of something _____
- 2 to do or say things in a particular way _____
- 3 to make someone remember something they must do _____
- 4 to give or teach something to people who are born after you _____
- 5 something that people have done for a long time and continue to do _____
- 6 things such as television, films and shows that people like to watch or listen to for fun _____
- 7 the qualities that a person or a group of people have that make them different from other people _____

3 Complete the gaps in the questions with the correct form of a word from exercise 3 above. When you have finished, ask your partner the questions.

- 1 Are you forgetful? Do people often have to _____ you to do things?
- 2 What forms of _____ are popular among young people in your country these days?
- 3 Do children in your culture generally _____ well in public? What happens if they don't?
- 4 What types of things are generally _____ from generation to generation in your family?
- 5 What _____ are important to you and your family?
- 6 Is your cultural _____ important to you? Why/why not?
- 7 Do you think that storytelling has a more important _____ than television in today's world? Why/why not?

4 Sometimes a word refers back to something earlier in the text. What do the following underlined words refer to in the text?

- 1 ... in those cultures where the spoken word is more important than the written one
- 2 Stories have historically been passed down from one generation to the next.
- 3 Although storytelling is a form of entertainment, it is not just that.
- 4 The Métis people of Canada use stories in a very similar way but also use them to remind others of their duties
- 5 Generally speaking, stories have traditionally been used within a community. However, this is now changing.

5 Which word from each group has a different sound?

- 1 /ɪ/ tradition life history different live
- 2 /e/ storytelling generation ceremonies persenal them
- 3 /dʒ/ legund changing gain Aborigine generally
- 4 /z/ those tribes times words events

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- What stories are important in your culture and why?
- When are stories told in your culture and who are they told to?
- Do you have a favourite story? Tell your partner(s) a little about it.
- What makes a good storyteller in your opinion?
- In the future, what role do you think storytelling will have in your culture?

Glossary

ancestor (*noun*) - a person in your family who lived a very long time ago

aspect (*noun*) - one of the separate parts of something

audience (*noun*) - the people who watch or listen to a performance

duty (*noun*) - something you should do because it is right or expected of you

gain (*verb*) - to get something that is important, useful or valuable

generation (*noun*) - all the people who are about the same age

imaginative (*adj*) - having the ability to come up with ideas

inform (*verb*) - to formally tell someone something

legend (*noun*) - an old well-known story about people who lived in the past, which may not be true

myth (*noun*) - an old story about gods, heroes and magic

pass on (*phrasal verb*) - to give someone something you have received, e.g. information

push for (*phrasal verb*) - encourage or try to obtain

tribe (*noun*) - a group of people with the same language and customs who live in the same area