

## Human Survival with Storytelling

Morals and lessons of faith have predominantly come from storytelling passed on since the dawn of time. Children are exposed to lessons and through storytelling, with lessons embedded in fairy tales long before they can even understand them fully. Religious doctrine is filled with stories that teach values to believers. Long ago, stories were passed on solely by word of mouth. From ancient media like hieroglyphics, scrolls or scriptures compiled by tribe leaders, prophets or scholars, stories were then passed on to the masses. It is still the storyteller who holds the basic responsibility of passing on moral behavior and co-operation. Storytelling is the basis for passing on underlying meanings meant to drive society forward. It is vital to examine how storytelling has contributed a moral compass to society throughout time. Stories teach the lessons on the human condition. While history books can explain the past, storytelling has contributed an essential role in how humans learn to co-exist from ancient civilizations to today, whether through religious doctrine or children's literature, and examining the impact of storytelling on societies will prove that storytelling is essential for survival.

History books are filled with facts yet teach very little about morals and values. Today, those lessons are left to families and religion through storytelling. Even before religion, however, storytelling promoted moral behavior to hunters among societies. Dr. Andrea Migliano, researcher from the University College London's Department of Anthropology and co-author of "Cooperation and the Evolution of Hunter-gatherer Storytelling" found that hunters and gatherers in the Philippines 35,000 years ago used stories to promote co-operative behavior. Pre-dating similar teachings by religious groups today, "stories were essential in promoting egalitarian values long before similar mechanisms evolved in larger agricultural societies, such

as moralizing high-gods common in post-agricultural populations” (663). Morals and values were taught in this way, and stories also attempted to resolve the unexplainable, like natural phenomena in the sky. “The story of the moon and the sun arguing over who should illuminate the sky on Earth was resolved by them agreeing to split the duty... this taught sexual equality as well as co-operation” (Migliano et al. 667). In “The History of Storytelling”, presented by TEDx, Nilanjana Roy takes an interesting look at why people read and need storytelling. Ms. Roy believes humans need storytelling to stay alive, and she explains how tribes for centuries have passed on these stories and the lessons they carry (00:00:29-00:01:01). The research uncovered how much influence on morals storytelling had even before the advent of modern religion.

Religion can be said to impose a foundation of moral and ethical value systems on families today. There are many different ways to teach a lesson, and it is interesting to see the ways different religions teach similar values using stories based on their own prophets. The scriptures are meant to both teach morality-based lessons and also pass on faith-based beliefs with the use of storytelling. For over 2000 years, religion has emphasized character and has encouraged followers to adopt moral qualities in their lives. In the Quran, there are mentions of numerous moral values, and both new and old testaments are filled with lessons of morality and the human condition. “The human heart, while capable of great love and compassion, can also be treacherous and desperate” (*Old Testament*, Jeremiah 17:9). These lessons have become the moral basis for families raised on such doctrines.

The re-telling of history can be a good way to learn lessons from the mistakes made in the past, but the fantastical tales passed through generations are what leave the biggest impressions, especially on children. Even though the intensity or severity of detail in a story might change over time, the values taught are crucial to the existence of humanity. Storyteller

Diane Ferlatte shows us that storytelling is very much based on the way a story is told. She is a master at keeping an audience of children engaged and her elaborate techniques in the telling of Brer Rabbit's mischief was crucial to teach the children the ultimate lessons against lying and deception. The character of Brer Rabbit itself, passed down by enslaved Negroes in the United States, was created specifically to connect with black families and was much more successful in bringing optimism than any history book ever could be with children (00:00:00-00:01:25). The story of "Little Red Riding Hood" also, no matter whether told with sexual undertones or as rite of passage, has consistently kept the obligation to morality at its core. In a *National Geographic* article, "What Wide Origins You Have," Rachel Hartigan Shea writes, "ultimately, the predator is metaphorical... the stories are really about how people aren't always who they seem to be, which is a really important lesson in life" (12). This is central in the argument about how storytelling emphasizes morality and thus is far more important in the teachings passed on through generations than the most detailed of history books.

Stories can be told with poetry, literature, television, books, live music, videos and more. Whether stories are meant to instill fear or joy, to the human condition they offer optimism and faith through the moral standards they provide. True morality stories are about what the reader learns from what is being told, and these essential lessons must be learned well enough to eventually pass them on to the next generation. Whether through the lessons hunters passed to each other tens of thousands of years ago, with the use of religion's oldest and most important scriptures, or simply through the fairy tales people pass on to their children, storytelling is the essential foundation which steers humanity to explain the human condition. Stories give humans a reason to believe because they instill hope, which is ultimately what humans require to live.

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