Art of Storytelling through “Illustrations”

Bindulika Sharma
Associate Professor (Applied Art), Department of Art Education, Faculty of Fine Arts, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi- 110025

Area of the Study -
Children (Age group): 3 to 8 years
Period: Modern Times
Experimental Area: Zonal division (Urban and Rural)

“Visual storytelling utilizes language and art to pass on the essence of who we are”
--Debbie Millman

INTRODUCTION

People were telling stories to one another, long before written language developed. People gathered to praise their heroes, to share his experiences, to exchange their sorrows and joys. Probably out of this, the wonder of speaking aloud about things or folk talks grew in to stories that were kept alive by poet-storytellers who wove them into songs and chants. Storytelling also helps making its listeners sensitive, sympathetic and enthusiastic reacting towards sharing the experiences of the storyteller, with an added dimension. Much later many of these songs and stories were collected and written down. Hence we may say that no true folktale is the creation of any one person, and none of these tales had just one author.

Particularly with children, there seems to be an inborn love of stories in child’s mind, and one of the most familiar and pleasing requests of children is to be told yet another interesting story. Right from our toddler days, we humans love listening to stories of the known and the unknown, from all sources. Fascinating stories from fables and fairy-tales, moral stories, short stories, mythological stories, animal stories or adventure stories, they all stand very appealing for ours little learners. Sharing a story book with captivating colourful illustration with them brings an enjoyable time of benefits for both the parent and the child.

The child shares a bonding experience with their parent and receives comfort just before it is time to start their reading experience themselves. Meanwhile, the adult as parents or teachers are also provided with the opportunity to bond with their children through stories telling that a child will never like to forget. Reading a story and connecting them well with images entertain a great way to teach a child valuable lessons and morals they should live by in most informal ways.
STORIES FULL OF MAGNIFICENT IMAGES

Children’s picture books can be a cognitively accessible source of high quality learning material for young children. From the world of fantastical castles, snowy mountains, ocean, islands and deep forests, a treasury of enchanting folklores, legends, fables and fairy stories full of magnificent images of giants and dwarfs, witches and princesses, beasts and cunning children or the addition of special characters with winged or fish tails, all hold a timeless magic for centuries. Regards to them, the philosopher ‘John Locke’ who first seems to have advocated targeting children as a special audience in his book, ‘Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693)’, suggested that when a child begins to read, an easy pleasant book like Aesop’s Fables or Reynard the Fox, with pictures if possible, should be put into his hands.’

As we understand, ‘fairy tale’ which is usually a fanciful and fictional story, including heroic deeds of mystical and magical creatures. The illustration work plays a greater role to bring all those stories alive in these books especially intended for the youngest readers. To these tales that pleasingly beginning with “once upon a time,” illustrations adorned with miracle of fantastic grace and wit, clarifies an imagined path towards an eternal “ever after” happy ending story line. These ravishingly beautiful images transform the story to stay in children’s memory for life thereafter. A child identifies the central character of the story to reflect their own self. Few examples of this may include Snow White, Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, Tarzan or Aladdin or even the, slow and study, ‘Tortoise’ who finally wins the race.

Folklore probably is the oldest sources of stories with creative nursery rhymes, myths, epics, legends, fables, songs, and ballads (a poem that is meant to be sung). They have been passed down by storytellers for thousands, of years to enlighten and entertain generations of listeners, young and old. As, mentioned by Greek historian ‘Herodotus’ that “Aesop, the fable writer” was believed to be a slave and storyteller who lived in Ancient Greece from 620-560 BC. Aesop’s fables and the Indian traditional stories of Panchatantra or Hitopadesha (collection of Sanskrit short stories in prose and verse) tales are short stories that have the priceless treasure of morality and knowledge or the Buddhist Jataka Tales, have about a dozen tales in common, although differing in detail.

Recalling stories which became popular among children written as early as about in 15th Century, for example, the tales of ‘Robin Hood’ (1450). Though, ‘Robin Hood’ at that time, was not written with children in mind, but children have been seen fascinated by these stories for centuries. In 1658 Jan Ámos Komenský published the illustrated informational book ‘Orbis Pictus’ or ‘Orbis Sensualium Pictus’ (The Visible World in Pictures) was something of a children’s encyclopaedia, written by Czech educator ‘Comenius’. It was probably the French author ‘Charles Perrault’ (1628-1703) who laid the foundations for the fairy tale. His works are derived from pre-existing folk tales.

A Little Pretty Pocket-Book intended for the Amusement and Instruction of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly with Two Letters from ‘Jack the Giant Killer’ is the title of a 1744 children's book by British publisher, ‘John Newbery’. It is generally considered the first children's book, and consists of simple rhymes for each of the letters of the ‘alphabet’. Since then the appearance of intricate beautiful and admirable illustrations like William Blake's ‘Songs of Innocence’ (1789), ‘The Butterfly's Ball’ (1807) illustrated by William Mulready came in to being.

Illustrations by Anne Anderson – “Grimm's Fairy Tales” (London and Glasgow 1922)

Among the most well-known storytellers of European folk, were ‘Jacob Ludwig Carol Grimm’ (1785-1863) and ‘Wilhelm Carl Grimm’ (1786-1859), universally known as ‘the brothers Grimm.’ They were German academics, linguists, cultural researchers, and authors who together collected folklore. Their ambition was to collect traditional tales in order to preserve Germany's heritage. From the land of fantastical castles, vast lakes and deep forests, the Brothers Grimm collected a treasury of enchanting folk and fairy stories full of giants and dwarfs, witches and princesses, magical beasts and cunning children. They created classics such as The ‘Frog-Prince’, ‘Hansel and Gretel’, ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ ‘Rapunzel’, ‘Old Sultan’, ‘Tom thumb’ and ‘The Elves and the Shoemaker’, all hold a timeless magic which has capture the fascinated attention to captivate children for centuries. There first collection of German fairy tales was titled as ‘Children’s and Household Tales’ published in 1812. This collection is commonly known today as ‘Grimm's Fairy Tales’.

Over the course in the shift from the oral tradition to the printed books faced many modifications and revisions. Grimm brothers' goal of preserving and shaping the tales and tradition, keeping their roots in previously written sources, also led to popularized such stories as "Cinderella", ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, 'Sleeping Beauty', or 'Snow White". They gained reputation for collecting tales from mythology, biblical stories and from peasants, middle-class or aristocratic social backgrounds that they reshaped. Grimm’s collection, has become a valuable source for researchers studying the educational psychology since its beginning.

The set model of stories were willingly followed, later by the process of editing included re-composing, adding dialogues, modifying the plots and incorporating psychological motifs to the tales in a stylistically similar manner. Over the years, Wilhelm worked extensively on the prose, expanded and added detail to the stories, to the point that
many grew to be twice the length as in the earliest published editions. Some changes were made in light of unfavourable reviews, particularly from those who objected that not all the tales were suitable for children because of scenes of violence and sexuality. Yet when, they didn't include any pictures, they weren't particularly successful in the being a focus of interest for children's books.

But soon, the brothers realized that the visual effects, demonstrate further expressing the characters, the places unknown, and the fanciful situations, related to verbal and spoken words. They invited well-known Artists such ‘Arthur Rackham’, ‘Walter Crane’, ‘Edmund Dulac’, ‘George Cruikshank’, their own younger brother ‘Ludwig Emil Grimm’ and many more to illustrate their works. Thereafter, tales came printed with enchanting and attractive illustrations valuing and reflecting the inherent cultural qualities of the stories. By the 1870, the tales had increased greatly in popularity, to the point they were added to the teaching curriculum in Prussia the bible context of literary history, socialism and psychological elements often along philosophical theories of ‘Sigmund Freud’ and ‘Carl Jung’.

Another great storyteller and great spinner of fairy tales named ‘Hans Christian Andersen’ (1805 – 1875) who in lived in Denmark. On whose birthday ‘April 2’, we celebrate ‘International Children’s Book Day’ every year. Though, he was a Danish author, poet, writer of plays and novels. Yet, Andersen brought children literary genre to a new level by writing a vast number of fairy tales or "fantastic tales that were both bold and original. During his lifetime he was acclaimed for having delighted children worldwide, through his popularity of his fairy tales that have been translated into more than 125 languages. His stories were readily accessible to children, presenting lessons of virtue. His most popular tales including ‘The Little Mermaid’ (1836), ‘The Emperor’s New 09 Clothes’ (1837), ‘The Ugly Duckling’ (1844) and ‘The Snow queen’ (1845), have inspired motion pictures, plays, ballets, and animated films.

ACKNOWLEDGING ‘STORYTELLING’

Henceforth the above cited information tells in brief, how ‘Storytelling’ becomes an ‘Art’, and especially when the listeners are the curious little children. Yet, to get the most out of a bedtime story, it is important to pick a theme the child could appreciate and enjoy. Content is important, and of course the visual interpretation must appeal to the potential audience. Language should also be vivid and be suited to the listening audience as well as to the add interest to story mood, at this stage, our child understands simple but complete sentences. It’s never too early to begin reading aloud. You can start when your child is born. Infants learn the sounds, rhythms, and patterns of language as they sit on our lap, listening to our voice, watching our face and expression. Bedtime stories can have the picture version of many themes. The chosen story should be rich with dialogues and pictures among them the most popular themes are animals, fairy tales from different origins of the world, and especially in India, the tales of Panchatantra, stories of little lord Krishna, Ganesha, Hanumana, or other heroic Raja & Rani ki Kahani (stories) are being the most loved ones.

Here, we may also collect books in your own mother-tongue, and then later on that language that we wish to introduce our little ones at their early age. As stories books are also a joyful introduction, for our children with their own roots, culture and literature. Story books not only improves observing and reading skills, but gives children a chance to learn how their favourite characters deal with feelings, problems, and life. The research say practice of Storytelling sessions has been effective to help children think and talk about their fears, worries, and accomplishments. This also invites opportunities for open discussion with our child, relating to their own experiences, overviews, and comments.

Researchers ‘Susan Hall’ and ‘Louisa Moats’, authors of ‘Straight Talk About Reading: How Parents Can Make a Difference During the Early Years’, found that Children desires for pleasurable and engaging books, further they listed six ways that reading aloud benefits children:
BENEFITS OF READING ALOUD ‘STORYBOOK’

Pictures/illustrations have been adopted as an important means, in storytelling; first, the teacher reads the story aloud and simultaneously shows the pictures to children so that they could memorize better the sequence of events and to stimulate comprehension. *Images in Storytelling improve the creative and observational skills such as identification, prediction, sequencing, concentrate on story structure and recall. Storytelling includes visualization (looking at images) and observing body gestures.*

Moreover, Children really enjoy hearing their parents use different voices for each character. They also like to participate in the story by speaking for one character, including repeated phrases throughout each book. As an adult we must pursue to make reading a fun-experience. The goal is, after all, to create lifelong readers, if we do it more often, our child would increase their skills and grow into a confident reader. We may keep in mind the following 4 tips as we read to dramatize our storytelling—

- **Innovation** – Employ a unique or creative use of language, sound, or body language. Creatively present the sequence of events. Employ dialogue for characters to make them believable to the listener.
- **Voice Mechanics** – speak with an appropriate volume for the children to hear. Use a non-monotonous (Dull, flat, tedious or repetitious, that lacks in variety and interest) vocal expression to clarify the meaning of the text. Speak loudly or silently or whisper when you need to, make onomatopoeic sounds (words that sound like the objects they mean, convey or imitate as example- Zip, Buzz, Hiss, Snap, Crackle or Pop!). Differentiate your natural voice from character voices. One must try to be a little bit of an actor and introduce all sorts of emotions present in the story, occasionally making sounds that reveal fear, happiness, sadness and similar.
- **Body talk** – Expressively use non-verbal communication to clarify the meaning of the text, make gestures, include vivid facial expressions. When you are telling a story mime and follow your words with actions (knock on the door, walk around the room, “go to sleep” and other actions depending on what you're saying).
‘Pictures’ or ‘Illustrations’ have been adopted as an important means, in storytelling; first, the teacher reads the story aloud and simultaneously shows the pictures to children so that they could memorize better the sequence of events and to stimulate comprehension. Images in Storytelling improve the creative and observational skills such as identification, prediction, sequencing, concentrate on story structure and recall. Storytelling includes visualization (looking at images) and observing body gestures.

*Hence, we can understand and justify that, “the Art of storytelling”, focuses greatly on to bring concentration of our little learners to its highest. In my next article “LEARNING THROUGH ILLUSTRATIVE STORY-TELLING”, we would discuss, how abounding in action, these illustrative stories from mythology, folktale, and legends are capable of keeping the listeners spellbound. And how Illustrative narrative descriptions, helps to let the learning subject breath, making them more enjoyable and much more fascinating.*

**REFERENCES**

[5]. ( 2009)