

World Folktales and Fables: Effective Teaching Tools to Educate and Entertain Children

By Anneke Forzani

Children love folktales and fables. With their simple characters and settings, as well as an enticing conflict early in the story, folktales immediately grab a reader's attention. Recall *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, in which all three goats need to get to the other side of the bridge for food, but a hungry troll stands in their way. The stories develop quickly, and often obstacles seem insurmountable before, in the end, everything is resolved to our satisfaction. Good triumphs over evil.

The repetition and rhythm we see in stories such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *The Little Red Hen and the Grains of Wheat*, also are very appealing to children. And, of course, everyone loves when humor and cunning are used to outsmart an adversary.

Reading world folktales and fables is not only a wonderful way to entertain and bond with children, it is also an effective way to educate them. The stories in classic folklore offer both social lessons as well as an opportunity to teach about cultures and languages.

Folktales provide an excellent way to teach kids about the consequences of good and bad behavior, the importance of cooperation, and the rewards of courage and ingenuity. In one of my favorite stories, *The Giant Turnip* (an adaptation of the Russian story *The Enormous Turnip*), a class grows a huge turnip and works together to figure out how to pull it out of the ground. The story helps young children grasp the benefits of community and working together.

Folktales also offer a great entry point for teaching children about other cultures. For instance, the fable *Dragon's Tears* is a wonderful starting point to explore Chinese Culture. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* can be used to begin teaching and learning about Arabic culture.

Bilingual editions of these traditional stories allow the parent or teacher to expose children not only to a different culture, but also to another language. I like to use Language Lizard's bilingual version of the Indian folktale *Buri and the Marrow* (in which Buri wears an Indian sari) to expose my children to traditional Indian stories and foreign language scripts. The audio CD even lets them hear the story in Bengali and other foreign languages.

Folktales and fables have survived the test of time for a reason. So pick up a story, sit down with a child, and enjoy!

Anneke Forzani is President and Founder of Language Lizard, LLC. Language Lizard offers a complimentary e-newsletter for parents and teachers interested in exposing children to other languages and cultures. The company also offers bilingual children's books in over 40 languages, including a wide range of folktales and fables from around the world.

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