

Moonlight Tales as Potential Tools for Behavioural Moulding: Cases of Five Selected Moonlight Tales

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Abstract

This article examined the usefulness of moonlight stories or tales as powerful tools in character moulding of the African Children. Five different moonlight tales were sampled and told and the lessons derived highlighted. The article concludes that moonlight storytelling, like other unwritten oral traditions in Africa has faded away, especially in African cities where the parents have no time to sit down their children and mould their characters through story telling. The article recommends that parents should be re-orientated on moonlight storytelling and encouraged to tell stories to their children against all odds. It also recommends the inclusion of moonlight story telling into the school curricula in African Schools. Finally, storytelling on radio and television to children is also recommended.

Keywords

Stories, Character, Moonlight, Children and Moulding

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1. Introduction

Moonlight folktales are powerful tools to educate, entertain and occupied children in the past. A folktale is an indigenous traditional story very familiar through telling over the years. Normally, there are numerous moral lessons to pick from folktales (Word Press, 2013). These folktales are usually told in the nights after the children have taken their supper. The children would sit on a mat and an elderly person, usually grown up woman would sit in their midst to tell the stories for the night. (See figure 1). The light from the radiant moon usually added beauty to the scene of the storytelling.

Children were always happy each time the stories were told. Hence, little children always looked forward with enthusiasm, the night fall for each day. There were lots of moral lessons to learn from these folktales and, therefore, should be part of the family culture whereby parents can use stories to teach their children discipline and morals of life (Word Press, 2013)

However, the culture of storytelling is gradually fading away in our society especially in the urban centres where parents are being occupied with works and running of life. Such parents left their children to the mercy of modern communication gadgets.

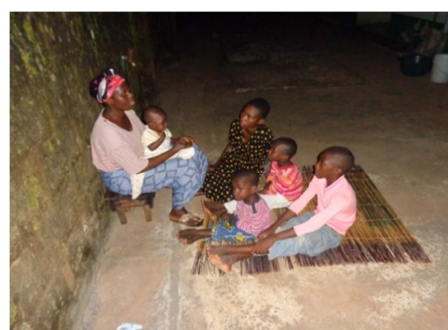


Figure 1. A Woman Telling Moonlight Story to Her Children at Oguntedo Village Ado-Odo/ Ota Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Source: Researchers' Survey, October 7th, 2014.

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The only places where moonlight folktales are still being told are the villages in the interior parts of the rural areas.

This article is written, therefore, to resuscitate the culture of storytelling in the moonlight as a potential tool for character moulding among the children in our society. Such culture, according to Word Press (2013), needs to be revived by any means possible because children enjoy story telling. This is, of course, what this article attempted to do.

2. Methodology Applied

The research design implemented in this study is descriptive research because it describes the events of storytelling. Under descriptive study, a researcher describes vividly groups, activities, situations, event or phenomena of interest with a strong focus on structure, attitudes or behaviour (Adler and Clark, 1999; Schutt 2004). This article focused on the events of storytelling and the attitudes of the children who were the listeners. Case study method was implemented because the study was a qualitative analysis which used story or oral documentary information (Goode and Hatt, 1981).

The stories were sampled out of the numerous available stories, using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used because we have the judgment beforehand that those stories would facilitate this study. Purposive sampling was used because this study was a special study (Neuman, 2003). For the analyses of the data, content analysis method was used, being a qualitative research.

3. Telling the Sampled Moonlight Tales

This section deals with the telling of the sampled stories used in this study. Each story or tale was presented as a case study. We have five cases (five tales) in all. Lessons derived were written at the end of each tale. The lessons derived are the morals expected to be learnt from each story. They served as tools to mould the characters of the children so that they would be better equipped to be good citizens of the society. Such morals teach conformity and discourage the children from being deviants to the norms of the society.

3.1. Case Study I

The Tortoise and His Keg of Wisdom

(No Human Being Has the Prerogative of Wisdom)

In those days the Tortoise was noted for his wisdom, which he used in a variety of ways – to deceive people, to gain an edge over others, and for many other things; positive or negative.

Therefore this animal arrogated to himself the reservation of wisdom. One day, it got to his head to do a thing which he believed would deprive other people access to wisdom. What did he do? He put all the wisdom in a gourd. He decided to keep this gourd on a palm tree. He woke up one day, hung the gourd of wisdom on his neck and rested it on his chest. Getting to where a palm tree is, he started climbing.

He attempted to climb, but as he did, he fell back. He tried again many times but failed as many times as his attempt to climb. He was in this situation, when a young boy, passing by, saw him. The boy watched the Tortoise as he was trying but failing. Then the boy spoke.

The boy: Tortoise, what are you trying to do?

Tortoise: I want to climb this palm tree

Then the boy made a suggestion

The boy: Remove the gourd and hang it on your neck and let it rest on your back.

The Tortoise looked at the boy. He hesitated, still looking at the boy.

“Remove it and let it rest on your back”, the boy said again.

Hesitatingly, the Tortoise agreed.

“Now try to climb again”, the boy commanded him.

The Tortoise moved to the tree. He attempted to climb again and he found it easy to climb, without any stress, and was able to climb the palm tree.

(Adapted from Ojo, 2008)

Lessons

The lessons derived from the above story are:

- (1) It teaches the children that nobody can be a monopoly of wisdom. A person who claims to be the wisest person on the earth is the most fool of all the people.
- (2) The story teaches that we should not underrate the wisdoms of others, even the young people. The young people can assist the elderly ones in the society with their wisdoms too.

3.2. Study II

Tortoise and the Dog – A WHY STORY

Very long time ago, Tortoise and Dog were intimate friends. They were so close that there was nothing the Dog would not give Tortoise, on demand. There was something else; they were two of a kind – while Tortoise was a lazy being, the Dog was good at stealing.

In the course of their friendship, Tortoise discovered that Dog looked well – fed, and sought to know the source of his well-

being. Dog revealed the secret, and what was it? Tortoise also found out that Dog always ate pounded yam three times daily, with chicken meat to take it down his stomach. “What is the secret?” asked the Tortoise, and he was sure that the Dog was neither a farmer nor did he have a poultry. The Dog did not even have fowls he was rearing at his backyard.

The Dog told Tortoise of the secret after assurance had been given that he (Tortoise) would not let out the trust reposed in him. He told Tortoise that he stole the yams from a farmer’s farm, and he promised to take Tortoise also on his next adventure. That night Tortoise ate and overate in Dog’s house and even packed the rest home.

The following day, Tortoise arrived early at Dog’s house and they set off together. Before they got to the targeted farm, Dog warned Tortoise and told him that he should carry few yams that would be enough for him and the Tortoise agreed. But when they got to the farm, Dog took a few yams and was ready to go. But he had to wait for Tortoise, who uprooted many yams, even more than he could carry. When he had satisfied his lustful desires, he attempted to carry his yams, but they were too many for him. He, therefore, begged Dog to help him but dog turned down the request. Tortoise raised a song meant to threaten Dog should he fail to help.

Aja, Aja o ran mi leru..... Jalankatoofe (2ce)

Dog, Dog come and help me “ “ 2ce

Bo o ba ran mi leru, ma ke so loko “ “

If you do not help, I will call the farmer “ “

Boloko de o, ma gbe o de “ “

When the farmer comes, I will tie you down“ “

Aja o Aja o ran mi leru“ “

Oh Dog! Oh Dog, help with the burden“ “

The song, notwithstanding, Dog remained unyielding, because he knew the implication of waiting to help Tortoise – they would both be arrested. So Dog left the place quickly and went home. Meanwhile, Tortoise struggled on to carry all the yams. He was still there when the farmer came and accused Tortoise of stealing.

But instead of owning up to the crime, Tortoise played a fast one on the farmer. He told the farmer that it was someone else that stole the yam and that if the farmer would let him go home with the stolen yam, he would lead him to the thief. The farmer consented, and even helped in carrying the yams to Tortoise house.

The King sent for Dog to appear in the palace. But he feigned serious illness. Before leaving for the palace, he was dressed in such a way that actually portrayed him as sick of fever. Then, he put two unboiled eggs at the corners of his mouth.

Tortoise did all the talking; accusing and putting all the blames of stealing on Dog. The farmer was asked to say his own, but he only confirmed all that Tortoise had said.

When asked why he did all that he had been accused of doing, the Dog denied any knowledge of such things, saying that he had been sick for many days. He then broke each of the eggs with his teeth and vomited the eggs. Seeing this, The King was convinced that it might have been a case of mistaken identity.

So, the Dog was discharged and acquitted. The farmer was advised to take the yams and go home. The King admonished him to find means of protecting his farms from thieves.

Therefore, the farmer thought of what to do - and what did he do? He looked for snares and traps and set them at the boundaries of the farm, so that should anyone attempt to break into the farms, He or She would be caught in the snares or the traps.

And so, from then on, farmers have learnt to set snares or traps at the boundaries of their farms to check not only human beings but also ravaging animals.

(Adapted from Ojo, 2008)

Lessons

The lessons derived from above story are:

- (1) The story teaches that people should not be covetous or greedy.
- (2) You should not consent with criminals to commit crime. The criminals may find ways of escape why those who followed them may be arrested and dealt with according to the law. People should, therefore, stay away from bad company.
- (3) It teaches people to always protect their belongings against intruders or thieves. It encourages provision of adequate security to property.

3.3. Case Study III

Wisdom Is More Desirable than Power – Adapted from Akan tale of Ananse (the spider) a Moonlight tale (Told Orally) – A True Life Story.

The Encounter between the Spider and the Tsetse fly

Children have you ever seen a spider?

Yees we have seen it before it is found everywhere.

Good. Have you seen a tsetse fly before?

(silence prevailed)

Oh it seems none of you know this one, because it is not as common as the spider. It is a flying insect that can bite people.

Children, you may not know much about the character of the spider unlike the

Tortoise which you have heard about. I will tell you about the spider:

In Ghana, the spider is always in the different stories told. In that country, the name given to it is “Ananse”. The spider that we see everywhere weaves webs in the corners of houses, and one can see the spider in the web moving to and fro like someone who is moving to and fro the house it has built.

Children, in that country, the spider is presented in tales as a clever and crafty being that weaves the webs around his victims so as to get what he intends to get from them. This “Ananse” is so popular in Ghanaian tales that a writer wrote a play using the “Ananse” (the father) and Anansewa (Daughter) as major characters (Sutherland, 1980)

In that play, Ananse uses his daughter, Anansewa as an avenue through which he gathered a lot of wealth by playing tricks on those who want to marry the daughter. He “weaved his web” around them craftily to realize his goal of taking their money to enrich himself. My dear children, that was in a story from that book. But today’s story is also about the spider. However, it is a real life story of Mr. Spider, which is actually true that the spider is a wise creature. Listen to the real story as I saw it myself. One afternoon, a spider was at the corner of its web, at rest. Suddenly a Tsetse fly flew into the web, and it got stuck. It struggled and shook the web. The spider watched from its corner. Then it started weaving, graphically to and fro, and as it weaved, the ferocious fly kept struggling to set itself free from the prison. The more the fly struggled, the more enmeshed it got, because the weaver did not stop weaving until it was sure that the fly had been perfectly secured for it in the web.

A child: Why did the spider kill the fly?

Story teller: Oh, to eat it. That is how a spider gets its food. You can see that like the Ananse I told you about which manipulated his victims to get them to do what he wanted, the spider on the ceiling, that afternoon, used the web to prepare the fly for food which it ate. So you can see that though the fly was strong and powerful, the weak but wise spider got rid of it.

Lesson

This story shows that having strength is not enough, wisdom is more desirable. The fly in this story, was strong but the spider used its “craft” (skill) to get rid of it.

3.4. Case Study IV

Tortoise and the Monkey – (A Why Story?)

(When a word of prayer is said it is always good to say Amen

to it)

Have you ever wondered why the Monkey always says Amen, Amen etc? Once upon a time, the Tortoise, who was known to his friend as bad mannered, planned to visit his in-laws, and wanted some of his friends to go with him. (Though, he had estranged himself from them, because of his bad attitudes). He once again invited these friends; Deer, Rat, Monkey and Antelope. He urged them to accompany him to the in-laws, and promised to take good care of them. Though these friends knew that Tortoise was not as good as he promised, they chose to go with him, because of the food they thought would be available for them at the occasion.

The Monkey, however, voiced his disagreement and warned the others not to go with him. The Tortoise afterwards succeeded in convincing these other friends. It, however turned out as the Monkey warned, as these friends came back home famished. Having achieved his aim at his in-laws house, the Tortoise, who had vowed to deal with Monkey, turned his attention on Monkey. He went to Monkey’s house and, pretending to be friendly still, said.

Tortoise: please say Amen to this prayer: whatever we know nothing about May God not let us suffer for it. The Monkey did not respond to Tortoise’s prayer.

Therefore Tortoise went to the market and bought honey. With the honey, he prepared bean cakes He put them in his bag and headed for Lion’s house. Lion was surprised to see him, and he asked him why. In response, Tortoise told him he had good news for him. Having said that, he brought one of the bean cakes out of his bag, and took a bite at it. Curious, the Lion asked him what it was. Then he told him it was Monkey’s faeces. He gave him more of it to further whet his appetite. In his curiosity, Monkey wanted to know more about it, Tortoise advised him to look for Monkey, stretch up his two hands and continuously hit him in the stomach to make Monkey produce its faeces. Lion looked for Monkey, got him and tried all that Tortoise advised, even almost sniffing life out of Monkey – but what Monkey gave out was not the desired sweet and delicious faeces promised by Tortoise. After Monkey finally escaped from the grip of Lion, he came across Tortoise a few days later. Tortoise repeated his prayers, and this time, Monkey actually turned the response to a song – Amen, Amen, Amen.....

And so till this day, Monkey is still responding to Tortoise prayer; Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen.

(Adapted from Ojo, 2008)

Lesson

(1) People should always heed to warning and advice from others. Otherwise, they would fall into troubles.

- (2) People should not be arrogant. Monkey suffered for his arrogance in this story.

3.5. Case Study

The Falcon and the Branch

(Sometimes Things Don't Just Happen – Unless You Prompt them to Happen)

A King once received a gift of two magnificent falcons – they were beautiful. The King gave the two birds to his head falconer to train. It was, however, discovered by the head falconer that only one of the two falcons was flying, even soaring high in the sky. But the other one remained on the branch of a tree, still. The King felt it was a matter of healing the perching falcon, so he sent for his healers and sorcerers to look into the case, but no one could make any headway by prompting the bird to fly. After all said and done, but to no success, the King sent for a farmer, who, when he came, was able to make the bird fly. Asked how he performed the magic the farmer said: “It was very easy, your highness, I simply cut the branch where the bird was sitting.

4. Comments and Lessons

Most of us have the potential to fly, but because we seem comfortable with our condition, we do not see any need to fly. But let something happen to make our condition look a little un-comfortable, for us, we are not likely to remain the same – most of the time “our things” don’t just happen until we get a prompt to make them happen. A young man who enjoys being helped in all he did may not learn on his own until that source is either removed or cut off or terminated. In the Bible – the Apostles of our Lord felt comfortable staying back in Jerusalem had persecution not allowed by God to scatter them, they would have remained there, leaving evangelism to suffer. This short story is about awakening. We all need to be awakened, prompted, tried etc – for our good – though, it may be painful. For that bird, it was without any doubt strange and unexpected, but when it happened, it discovered itself and what it was capable of doing.

(Adapted from Chanchani, 2014).

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Critical examination of the tales shows that they were powerful tools in moulding the characters of the children that are the target audience.

The overall lesson in the first story (Case 1) was to mould the character of the children on wisdom. The children should not think that they can claim the monopoly of wisdom, claiming

the monopoly of wisdom amounts to arrogance. Nobody can lay claim to all the wisdom in this world. There would always be people wiser than one.

The second story (case II) teaches moral to children in area of covetousness. Many children that are covetous should learn lesson from this tale. Covetousness may lead people into troubles in life. Secondly, the story is also expected to mould the character of the children on the company they keep. Children are not expected to keep bad company that may eventually land them in troubles. Children should not collide with bad company to commit crime or deviate from the norms of the society. Finally, the story is expected to mould the character of the children on being security conscious. Children should always protect and guide their property against intruders, jealously.

The third moonlight story (Case III) talked about wisdom and strength. The tale is expected to teach the children that to acquire wisdom is more profitable than acquiring strength or power. The story would mould the character of the children on relying on wisdom to do things in life rather than using power or strength. A man who uses power would be easily captured by man who uses wisdom.

The fourth moonlight tale (Case IV) discussed in this text is expected to mould the character of the children on listening to or heeding warning from others. Children who did not heed advice or warning would easily fall the prey of worldly troubles. Secondly, people should not be arrogant like the monkey in this tale. Children should always be conscious of the things happening around them and apply wisdom accordingly to deal with them.

Finally, the fifth tales (Case V) would mould the character of the children in area of being self reliance. Children should not always rely on people for their living. Children should inculcate the idea of being self dependent and self reliant.

In conclusion, it can be identified in this text that moonlight tales can be of help to the adults in moulding the behaviours or characters of their children. Moonlight tales formed part of the unwritten traditions of the African people. The unwritten traditions, however, are far less widely known and appreciated (Finnegan, 1982). Moonlight tales were part of unwritten traditions not widely known and appreciated, especially in the modern cities of Most African countries. However, such moonlight tales should be resuscitated to assist the parents in socializing their children and moulding their characters or behaviours towards conformity in the society.

This article recommends, therefore, the re-orientation of the parents, especially, those living in the modern cities with their children, on the traditional values of moonlight story telling. Although, the life in the cities may not create time for

such parents but avenues should be created by the parents to gather their children together to tell stories or tales to those children, to mould them in ways that they would conform to the norms, laws and values of the society.

Moonlight story telling should also form part of the school curricula in African countries. Moonlight story telling is part of the African Heritage that should not be discarded with. The over westernization of our school curricula should be looked into. Part of the school curricula should be Africanized.

Lastly, programmes on moonlight story telling on radio and television should be further encouraged and the same thing should be supported by the government and the individuals in the society. We should bear it in mind that that is part of the heritage we should leave behind for our children, when we the parents have gone to the great beyond.

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