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### Once upon a story-time

Catherine Rhea Roy



*The Hindu* Story teller Beatriz telling stories to children. Photo: G.P. Sampath Kumar.

*PEOPLE* Beatriz and Enrique from Spain tell CATHERINE RHEA ROY how seriously storytelling is being taken in their country

You are a grown up and much too old to enjoy story-time, but the job demands you sit cross-legged on the floor, fighting a cramp and watch a Spanish lady prance around you and narrate the story of a whimsical prince. You are not too old anymore and wish you could have someone at your bedside every night and rock you to sleep as they begin, “Once upon a time...”

Brought in from Spain by Kathalaya Trust, an organisation that specialises and teaches the art of story telling, story tellers Beatriz and Enrique were performing an exclusive at Easylib ([www.easylib.com](http://www.easylib.com)), as a part of the library's literary initiative. The two are members of the International Storytelling Network and on their first visit to India.

The two have authored several books and while Beatriz is a flamenco dancer, Enrique also works as a professor of creative writing. “The foundation of story-telling is the same as creative writing, you need to believe in your story when you write it, similar belief is needed when you tell a story,” says Enrique who then paraphrases Oscar Wilde, “To write a good story you first need to have a good story. You need to know not just how to write but how to write a story and lastly you need to have a desire to write it. You must want to write it.”

Both of them have written for children and Beatriz agrees that the writing and storytelling can be complementary, “Being a good storyteller helped me write my stories but you need to know the narrative techniques of storytelling in order to pen it down in an interesting way for children to read.”

Enrique who has years of pedagogical experience in the subject says, “Knowing the techniques of writing and the varied components like view points of the story, setting of the tale, building up the characters and working with conflicts in the stories can help to both narrate and write the story better.”

Storytelling is fast becoming more than just a teaching experiment, but an accepted tool for teaching and teachers and can be measured by the phenomenal progress children make. Enrique says, “It is a great way to help improve their vocabulary and language, but it also develops their listening skills and their imagination.”

Beatriz who works with child development in the areas of toddlers and babies says, “Storytelling helps in the development of the brain specifically the neurons. It also helps with bonding emotionally with parents, teachers and peers, which is very essential at that age.”

The Spanish storytellers are rather popular back home in Spain, and Beatriz who also studies theatre has her own television programme for children. “Storytelling is part of the ongoing library activities and is included in educational programs in schools for babies and toddlers. But unlike Kathalaya in India, it is not part of the weekly storytelling sessions in school programs. Through the International Storytelling Network formed amongst countries

around the world, the awareness for storytelling is growing and Spain now has more than 920 storytellers working in 46 countries around the world,” she explains.

India is also a part of this network represented by Geeta Ramanujan, the Executive Director of the Kathalaya Trust. While the two were in the city they also conducted workshops where Beatriz noticed that the attendees were very open minded and receptive to the whole concept. Enrique continues, “The children were very receptive to Spanish stories and they participated very eagerly as they sang along and clapped together. And at the workshop, the participants were very extremely sensitive and sensible about integrating storytelling into education.”

Beatriz feels that any added skill like dance and music can add value to the performance “Fusion between different arts like dance with storytelling or any other skill like music is the future, if you want to go ahead with storytelling as a performance art.”

Keywords: [Childrens' literature](#), [Story telling](#), [Workshop](#)

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