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To tell a story well

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The Hindu Spanish storyteller Beatriz. Photo: A. Shrikumar

A session of story telling can improve your diction and vocabulary

Hands moved, legs danced, mouths sang and the eyes spoke in unison. Hundreds of kids sat on the floor with rapt attention and repeated the actions and expressions. Drama and cacophony marked the story telling session at Mahatma School. “Stories for long had captured everyone's interest and now, it has evolved much. You can tell, dance, write or mime a story” says Geeta Ramanujan, Executive Director, Kathalaya Trust, Bangalore.

Beatriz Montero and Enrique Paez from Spain are two other story tellers who tagged along with Geeta on their first visit to India. Beatriz is a Flamenco dancer while Enrique is a writer and Professor too. “We are part of the International Story Telling Network which has 490 members from 15 countries. The network has marked June 21 as the World story telling Day” says Beatriz, enacting the Spanish story of the ‘Whimsical Prince’ for the students. “It is a wonderful experience being in India and knowing about the stories here. Every country has different stories and tales”

“Even regions differ in their stories. Once when Kathalaya visited the Santali tribes in Orissa, we were surprised to know that the fox is depicted as the friendliest animal in their folk tales. Whereas, ‘cunning fox’ is what we have heard” says Geeta. “Stories also tell about the belief of the place and people.” Beatriz and Geeta believe in enriching story telling by exchanging stories from different parts of the world. They are also coming up with a bilingual book together, titled ‘Two World’ that will contain 10 stories each from Spain and India. “It will have illustrations and also guide sheet for teachers on how to present them in the class. The target audiences are children below eight years” says, Geeta.

‘The secrets of story telling’ is another book by Beatriz in Spanish and set to be translated in English. “Story telling must start from early childhood so that it makes the child more receptive. In Spain, children are more adults but Indian kids are more participative and innocent” feels Beatriz. She also runs a recorded story telling programme on TV for kids in Spain.

“Writing and story telling are interlinked. There are many researches going on story telling and the ways to tap its benefits. Only if one is able to nicely narrate a story, he/she will be able to write well” says Enrique. He has penned

over 50 books. “To become a good writer, one should read and write regularly. Diary writing is a great way to become a writer and reading a page or two on an everyday basis will help a lot” he says, “After my first book, I revised it 29 times and even now I end up revising seven to eight times. Before starting to write, you should have the characters, setting, plot and course of the story and the mode of narration ready.”

Though vocal sounds, facial expressions and body language sumit up , sometimes, props are also used to make the session lively. And on the relevance of story telling for higher schools students, Geeta says, “There are schools which have taken the sessions to Class XII also.” But Beatriz says that performances are more for adults in Spain. Likewise, while most of the Western countries also record and digitalize story telling, Geeta feels, direct contact with the audience is necessary for complete impact. “Too much of digitalizing makes story telling lose its charm” she says.

Kathalaya has introduced weekly story telling periods in schools across Bangalore. “Story telling was very much a part of Indian tradition. But these days, even the grandparents are busy watching TV and stories have taken a back seat. We at Kathalaya, experiment and chart out new ways of including story telling in the curriculum” says Geeta, “We go on a contract with schools and even give training to teachers on how to integrate concepts and stories. Many schools have successfully adopted story telling as a medium for science, history and even mathematics.”

Apart from this, Kathalaya also conducts shadow play workshops in various institutions. “Stories improve the vocabulary, diction and listening capacity among students. There is good demand for Indian stories and story tellers in other countries. Many European schools take up story telling as part of value education and cultural base programmes” says Geeta.

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