



## ABOUT HOOPOE TALES

**These stories show us what we share with these cultures and what we can learn from each other.**

### CULTURAL CONTEXT

Hoopoe tales come from a rich tradition of storytelling in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Middle East. For more than a thousand years, by campfire and candlelight, people have told these stories to their children, not only to entertain them, but also to help young people understand their world. Schools for young children were rare, but storytelling was not. Education came from stories.

Idries Shah, the author, was an Afghan who spent 30 years of his life collecting, translating, and selecting these stories for a Western audience. They show us what we share and what we can learn from each other. They help children understand human nature. They encourage qualities such as self-reliance, the ability to overcome

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**“Shah’s versatile and multilayered tales provoke fresh insight and more flexible thought in children.”**

*Bookbird: A Journal of International Children’s Literature*

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fears caused by things children do not as yet understand, peaceful negotiation rather than violent confrontation, and much else.

In presenting these stories to children, you can help them learn a little about these cultures that might, at first, seem strange and unusual. They may even be thought of in a negative way due to ignorance or the very sad recent world events.

The characters are shown in dress that is common in this part of the world. Women usually wear long, flowing garments and cover their heads with scarves or veils (historically this was as a mark of respect). Men and boys wear baggy trousers and long, loose shirts and vests, along with distinctive hats or turbans to protect them from sand and wind.

The illustrations include other aspects of these cultures: ornaments, wall hangings, and furniture that are often copied from Persian miniatures, or

beautiful multi-colored mosaic tiles found on mosque walls throughout the Islamic world. Minarets, flat- or dome-roofed houses, wells, alleyways, open markets and stores, and, of course, animals are used to illustrate these magical stories.

### MORE THAN ENTERTAINING

According to their stage of cognitive development, children take what they can from each tale. At first, they may respond only to one character or one event in a story, or they may understand only the most obvious meaning, but they will grasp a little more each time they hear a story. Bit by bit, they will find more meanings, concepts and insights in these stories.

Through repeated exposure to these tales, children learn to understand their lives and reflect on how people think and act in various situations. These tales help children learn to distinguish effective from ineffective patterns of thought and action.

In many ways these tales serve as mirrors. Identifying with characters in a story, we and our children become spectators of our own thinking and behaving.

### WHY READ TO OUR CHILDREN?

“Reading aloud” involves sitting with our children so that they can see the words and pictures as the adult reads from the book. When we read to children, we help them develop important communication and cognitive skills.

These stories captivate children and help develop their attention capacity. They also build linguistic fluency and competence, especially when children know the stories so well that they join in telling them. Because the language of stories is somewhat different from everyday language, a child’s language is refined and enriched by listening to stories. With stories as models, children learn to order their thoughts and to express themselves in meaningful and engaging ways.

When listening and speaking abilities are nurtured with stories early on, almost all children learn to read easily and naturally. They readily absorb the vocabulary, syntax, concepts, narrative structures, patterns of events, and images together with the emotional overtones of the language used in the tales.

When they are read to, children not only hear the story, they also observe the act of reading. The adult can help the child understand where the text begins on each page, can point to individual words, and can invite the child to read along when the child seems ready. In this way, children gradually learn that the written word reflects spoken language, and that a book has unique meaning and impact. They also pick up positive attitudes of the adult reader who enjoys books and loves reading.

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As they begin to read independently, children's oral language strengths help them decode text, predict events, and acquire a sense of story — an intuitive sense of what a story is and what to expect of various kinds of stories.

These skills, developed and honed with many stories throughout the childhood years, allow children to make an easy transition to understanding and appreciating the world of adult literature—the novels, short stories, biographies, and other works that enrich our lives.

## TIPS FOR PRESENTING STORIES

Here are some tips for making the experience enjoyable and memorable for children:

- Make sure you are well rested and looking forward to story time. Do your best to put aside the many distractions of daily life so as to give the child and the story your full attention.
- Sit in a comfortable place with the child near you, allowing you to have good eye contact. Your physical presence is an important part of the whole experience for the child. The more comfortable and cozy the child feels with you, the more impact the story is likely to have.

- Read or tell the story at a relaxed, deliberate pace. Remember that children can't process information as rapidly as adults. When you slow down a bit, you'll help the child follow and comprehend the story more easily.

- Remember that children very much enjoy hearing the same story more than once. Repetition allows a child to become familiar with a story, to understand it more fully, to reflect on it long after story time is over, and to internalize many aspects of the story.

Some children like to hear the same story day after day for weeks, and this amount of repetition can be very beneficial. Other children like to hear the same story once or twice on one occasion, then again after several weeks or months.

- When a story is very familiar, invite the child to join in the telling, saying favorite lines with you. This practice enhances children's language development and their sense of confidence in using language.

- Make the book easily available for older children to read independently.

## LEARNING STRATEGIES

First, it's important to recognize that children who simply listen to a story repeatedly absorb language and concepts naturally, and, in the case of stories such as these, they also develop cognitive skills.

The strategies suggested in this manual can further strengthen children's natural learning process. We offer different ways to interact with and reflect on the stories and suggest activities that maintain children's contact with each tale in enjoyable ways. This gives them more time to develop their understanding and to find further meaning and value in the stories.

There are a number of enjoyable activities to do with children after the reading of a story. Here are some of the more typical and useful follow-up activities:

**Discuss.** Perhaps the simplest activity you can do with a child after finishing a story is to invite his or her reactions and comments and to share your own. Discussion will allow the child to express whatever thoughts may have arisen while listening

and to ask questions about the characters and events.

If a child doesn't talk spontaneously about the story, questions like these may help get a discussion going:

*What was the most important part of the story to you?*

*Why was that part especially meaningful to you?*

*Which character did you like the most? The least? Why?*

*Do you think the ending was a good one? Why?*

**Draw.** Have children tell what parts of the story they most liked and describe how they visualized the characters and events. Then have them draw, with crayon or paint, what they visualized. They will enjoy talking about their pictures and comparing them with the book's illustrations.

**Dramatize.** Invite children to act out a scene or two from the story. A child may take on the persona of different characters with each playacting. If several children have heard the story together, they may want to use simple props and scenery and put on short plays.

**Dictate or Write.** In a special story notebook, have children dictate or write a brief summary of the story and perhaps a comment about it. Pictures can be drawn to go with the summaries if the child enjoys drawing. A story notebook can serve as a reading journal that you and the child review, just for fun, from time to time.

**Retell.** If children enjoy the story, read it several times over the course of a week or more until they are very familiar with the sequence of events and can retell the story to family or friends. You can provide opportunities for them to retell it to other classrooms or in their community. You can also discuss ways to make their telling interesting and effective.

## STORY PLANS

These plans will give you ideas of how you may use the books with one or more children, either at home or in a classroom. The activities are based on teachers' and parents' experience in sharing good literature with children.

The intent is to give children an enjoyable experience with the stories and help them realize that this literature can help them understand themselves and others.

Most children will be entertained the first time they hear a story and will develop a deeper understanding only after the story has a chance to "sink in." For that reason, we recommend reading a story several times over the course of weeks or months, each time giving the child a chance to respond to the story and to discuss different meanings he or she may find in it.

Each time you read the story, you may wish to ask different questions and do different activities, so a variety is provided here from which you may select. Of course you may have other questions or activities and we encourage you to use these, too.

**Next are some activities you can use while reading this Teaching-Story by Idries Shah with your children.**



## STORY:

# The Old Woman and the Eagle

## STORY SUMMARY

In this amusing story, an old woman encounters an eagle for the first time. Perplexed by its unfamiliar appearance, she decides to change it to suit her own ideas of what a bird should look like. Her efforts mirror a common pattern of human thought: altering the unfamiliar to make it acceptable.

## BEFORE READING

This story, with its unexpected twists, invites speculation at turning points, an activity that improves children's thinking and comprehension of the story. To get children started in making predictions when they hear the story for the first time, read the title, show them the jacket illustrations and ask:

*"What do you think is going to happen to the eagle in this story? Why do you think so?"*

*"What do you think is going to happen to the old woman in this story? Why do you think so?"*

*"Let's read the story and find out more about the old woman and the eagle and what happens to them."*

## DURING READING

Invite additional speculation during the story by asking for additional predictions at turning points. It's not important for children to guess correctly what actually happens. Predicting outcomes helps children think more carefully about the characters and events of the story even when the predictions turn out to be incorrect. Help children enjoy making predictions by accepting all responses and encouraging the children to give their reasons for thinking as they do. Here are some suggestions for places to stop and invite predictions:

The story begins: "Once upon a time, when cups were plates and when knives grew in the ground..."

*What kind of a time is this?*

*Is this like our time?*

*Is this world like our world? Why do you think so?*

The eagle is flying and decides to stop for a rest ("One day an eagle was flying high in the sky and decided to stop for a rest. He swooped down and landed..."):

*Where do you think he lands? Why do you think so?*

The old woman is looking at the eagle and she says his beak is bent and his claws are too long and his feathers are all messed up. ("And look at the feathers on top of your head! They are all messed up and need to be brushed down. Pigeons have nice, smooth feathers on their heads.")

*What do you think is going to happen next? Why do you think that?*

The old woman tells the eagle that he now looks much more like a pigeon, but the eagle doesn't feel any better. ("But the eagle didn't feel any better. In fact, he felt quite sad.")

*What do you think is going to happen next? Why do you think so?*

The first eagle tells the new eagle what the woman has done and the new eagle tells the first eagle that the old woman must be very silly. ("'She must be a very foolish old woman, indeed,' said the new eagle.")

*What do you think will happen next? Why do you think so?*

## AFTER READING

### Questions for reflection:

Invite reflection by discussing one or more of the questions below, which explore some of the different elements of the story and what we can learn and understand from them:

*What is your favorite part of the story? Why is it your favorite?*

*What is the most important part of the story? Why is that part especially important?*

*What does this story make you think about?*

This tale is often told orally and has been written without illustrations.

*Do the illustrations help the story or not?  
How so?*

The old woman thinks the eagle is a pigeon because she had never seen an eagle before. ("She figured he was a pigeon, you see, because, although she had never seen an eagle, she had seen lots of pigeons.")

*Why has the old woman seen lots of pigeons?  
Why hasn't she seen an eagle before?*

*Have you ever come across something you have never seen before? What was it? Can you remember what you thought or felt when you first saw it? What did you say or do? Do you think the old woman would have said or done the same thing? Why do you think so?*

("I am not a pigeon at all," said the eagle, drawing himself to his full height. "Nonsense!" said the old woman. "I've lived more years than you've got feathers in your wings, and I know a pigeon when I see one.")

*Why doesn't the Old Woman believe the eagle? Do you think she should? Why? Would you believe the eagle? Why or why not?*

The old woman changes the eagle. ("And before the eagle could reply, she got hold of him and carried him into the house. She took her clippers and trimmed his claws until they were quite short. She pulled on his beak until it was quite straight. And she brushed down the lovely tuft of feathers on top of his head until it was quite flat.")

*Was this a good idea? Why or why not?  
How did the eagle feel? Why did he feel that way?*

*Have you ever had an experience in which you felt like the old woman?*

*Have you tried to change someone or something else?*

*What happened and what did you do? How did you feel? What did you think?*

*Have you ever had an experience in which you felt like the new eagle? What happened to you and what did you do? How did you feel? What did you think?*

When the old woman lets him go, the first eagle

flies to the top of a tree, and then another eagle comes along. ("Well, well," said the new bird. "Aren't you a funny looking eagle!")

"Well, at least you know that I am an eagle," said the first eagle. "Thank goodness for that.")

The new eagle fixes what the old woman has done to the first eagle. ("And with that he took a brush from under his wing, and brushed the first eagle's feathers back into a tuft. And with his claws he bent the eagle's beak down until it was nicely rounded once again.")

*How does the first eagle feel now?  
Why do you think this?*

*Have you ever had an experience in which you felt like the new eagle?  
What happened to you and what did you do?*

*Are pigeons the same as eagles? How are they the same? How are they different? Is one better than the other? Why do you think so? Where can you find information about pigeons and eagles?*

The new eagle says, "But remember, there are a lot of silly people in the world who think that pigeons are eagles, and that eagles are pigeons, or that all sorts of things are other things. And when they are silly like that, they do very foolish things."

*Do you think some people are silly or foolish all the time?*

*How do you know when someone is foolish?*

*Have you ever met a foolish person?  
Describe what happened? Why did you think they were silly?*

*Have you ever been foolish? What happened? Did you know you were foolish? If not, how did you find out? How did you feel?*

*Is there anything wrong with being foolish?  
If so, what?*

*How could the old woman be less foolish?*

The eagles decide to keep away from the foolish old woman and others like her.

*Is this a good idea? Why do you think so?  
Is there anything else the eagles could do?*

*If you meet a foolish person, what can you do? Do you think it is always possible to*

**Invite reflection by discussing some of these questions**

*stay away from silly people? Why do you think that? What if you couldn't keep away from a foolish person? What else could you do?*

*Who has learned the most in this story? Why do you think so? What are some of the things they have learned? What are some things you have learned from this tale?*

The tale ends. (“And so everyone lived happily ever after.”)

*What do you think happens to the old woman? to the first eagle? to the new eagle?*

*Is this a true story? How do you know? Is there anything true about it? If so, what?*

*What questions do you have about the story?*

*Can you think of anything we have missed, in thinking about this tale?*

## ACTIVITIES

- **Retell the tale:** Have children retell the story.
- **Reflective writing:** Have children write their thoughts on this tale in a reflection journal or a reading log. They might also write summaries of the story and take notes on what they like about the tale. Each time they read or hear this story, they may wish to add any new understanding about the story, illustrations, themselves or others.
- **Other perspectives:** Have children rewrite, retell or draw this story from the old woman's point of view.
- **Other genres:** Have children rewrite this story as a newspaper or magazine article or draw it as a cartoon.

Have them create a newspaper ad for a movie called “The Old Woman and the Eagle.”

- **Research “silliness”:** As children what the words “silly” and “foolish” mean? Are they the same thing? Have them look up the words in the dictionary or ask an adult to look them up. Do these words explain how the old woman thinks and acts?

Have children look for articles in newspapers, magazines or on the internet that tell of silly people or of people who behave like the old woman in the story. Have them share these with their class-

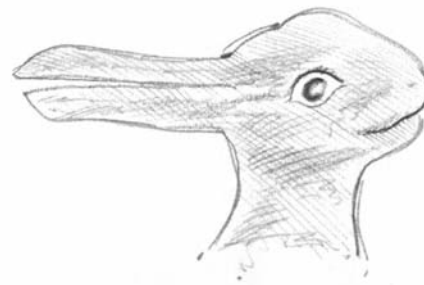
mates or family. Ask the children to say how these stories help explain how the old woman thinks and acts.

Read other stories and books about silly people and fools. Many cultures have collections of these tales: *The Fools of Chelm* (Jewish), *Land of Fools* or *Mulla Nasrudin* (Afghan; see page 10), *Til Eulenspiegel* (Dutch). Ask the children to how the characters are like the old woman. Talk about other kinds of silliness and how these stories help explain how the old woman thinks and acts.

- **Visual exercises:**

### Visual Quiz (part 1)

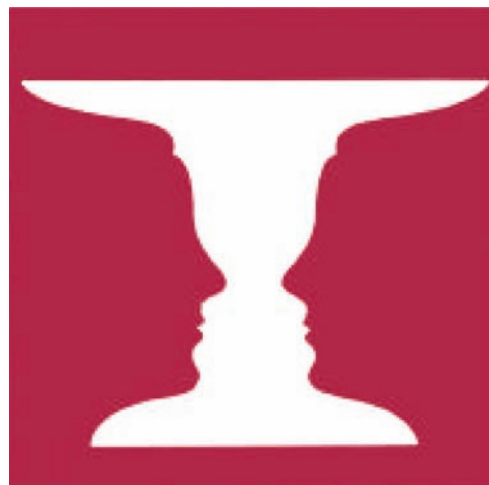
This exercise will let children experience what it is like to be influenced by context: you are told something and you see it. Ask the children to look at this picture and read the caption. When everyone has seen the picture, turn the page over to see “Visual quiz, part 2.”



*The duck was very surprised when he saw ...*

### Visual Mystery #1

This exercise shows how an image can be seen in two different ways. Invite children to look at the following picture. Ask them what they see:



## Visual Quiz (part 2)

(Start this exercise on the previous page.)



*...a rabbit!*

## Visual Mystery #2

This exercise shows how, once we see a meaningful pattern in a seemingly random collection of dots, it's almost impossible to go back to seeing just the random pattern again. Show children the picture below. Ask them to tell you what they see.

Ask the children, "At first it seems to be a random collection of dots and spots, doesn't it?"

Ask them if they can see a picture of anything. What?

Then say, "Now go back and see only dots and spots." (This is almost impossible to do!)

## OTHER IDEAS

- Have children draw their favorite part of this story.
- Have children draw an eagle and a pigeon. Invite them to compare and contrast them.
- Draw or sculpt where pigeons and eagles live. Or create a zoo exhibit for each. Compare.
- Design a restaurant for pigeons and a restaurant for eagles. Create menus for each. Compare.
- Find pictures of the flags of the world. What kinds of birds are on these flags? Are there more eagles or pigeons? Why?
- Have children compare and contrast the first eagle and the old woman, or the first eagle and the new eagle.
- If children like this story, have them learn to tell it and perform it for students in other classes or for parents.
- Have children write a play, or create a puppet play, from this story and perform it.
- Have children draw a picture, or make a clay or papier-mâché version of the eagle and his transformation.
- Have children find some Central Asian or Middle Eastern music that they like and create a dance or interpretational version of the story.





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**NOTES:** Use this area to keep notes about the children's reaction to the story or notes to yourself about reading or telling the story.

## OTHER HOOPOE STORIES BY IDRIES SHAH

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### THE BOY WITHOUT A NAME

A boy is born and, just as his parents are about to name him, a wise man appears. He tells them that their son is very, very important and that one day he will give the boy something marvelous. Until then they must be very careful not to name him. As the boy grows up, "Nameless" wants more and more to have a name of his own. He asks his friend to help him, and together the boys find the wise man. The wise man gives Nameless his very own name and lets each of the boys pick their very own dream. Among the many insights which this story introduces is the idea that it takes patience and resolve to achieve one's goals in life.

### THE CLEVER BOY AND THE TERRIBLE, DANGEROUS ANIMAL

Townpeople are terrified of something unfamiliar that they have concluded is a terrible, dangerous animal. A boy, visiting from a neighboring village, helps them overcome their fears by teaching them what the object really is — a melon. In an amusing way, this story illustrates how irrational fears based on ignorance can grow. Becoming familiar with this idea can help children deal more easily with similar fears of their own.

### THE FARMER'S WIFE

A farmer's wife is picking apples. When one falls into a hole in the ground, she tries to retrieve it in a way that becomes ever more complicated and hilarious and, in the end, turns out to be completely unnecessary. Or was it? For some this story mirrors the very common human tendencies of looking for solutions to problems in all the wrong places and of exerting efforts that, though great, are essentially useless. To others this story shows how the world is interconnected, and how it is often necessary both to work hard to find a solution and to understand that the best solution may not be the direct one.

### FATIMA THE SPINNER AND THE TENT

Fatima's life is beset with what seem to be disasters. Her journey leads her from Morocco to the Mediterranean, Egypt, Turkey and, finally, to China. It is in China that she realizes that what seemed at the time to be really unfortunate events were an integral part of her eventual fulfillment. This Teaching-Story is well known in Greek folklore, but this version is attributed to the Sheikh Mohamad Jamaludin of Adrianople (modern-day Edirne) in Turkey, who died in 1750.

### THE LION WHO SAW HIMSELF IN THE WATER

A lion makes the other animals afraid because of the way he talks. He doesn't understand their reaction to him but is himself afraid when he goes to a watering hole for a drink. He sees his own reflection in the water and thinks that there is another lion in the pond. When he, at last, understands that the other lion is only his own reflection, he is no longer afraid. For children, this story gently explores how fears can arise in the mind and how they can be overcome with more information and experience.

### THE MAGIC HORSE

This is the story of two princes. Prince Hoshiyar gains rank and fortune by supervising the construction of huge metallic fishes that perform wondrous tasks and bring riches to the people of his land. His brother, Prince Tambal, is interested only in a wooden horse that he obtains from a humble carpenter. The horse is a magical one, and it carries the rider, if he is sincere, to his heart's desire.

### THE MAN AND THE FOX

A man tricks a young fox into believing that he will give him a chicken. The fox gets trapped, but through ingenuity and perseverance he manages to escape. This story of the young fox can inspire children to face challenges, to overcome and, sometimes, to make use of obstacles in their path to solve problems.

### THE MAN WITH BAD MANNERS

This is an amusing Teaching-Story about a badly behaved man. A young boy initiates a plan to change his behavior and, with the help of all of the villagers, succeeds. The story will bring laughter to young children and, at the same time, teach them valuable lessons about conflict resolution, initiative, and cooperation.

### NEEM THE HALF-BOY

To help the queen, who longs for a son, the fairies consult a wise man, who gives specific instructions. Because the queen follows them only halfway, she gives birth to a half-boy, whom she names Neem. To help Neem become whole, the fairies again consult the wise man, who says that Neem must obtain a special medicine from a dragon's cave. Neem overcomes his fears and obtains the medicine by making a bargain with the dragon that, besides helping himself, also helps the dragon and the people who have been frightened by the dragon. This unusual and memorable tale about an incomplete boy will fascinate young readers and will encourage them to think about what it means to be a "complete person." That Neem is able to make himself complete by an act of cleverness, negotiation and compromise teaches children more than the expected, usual lesson of bravery.

### THE SILLY CHICKEN

A chicken, having learned to speak, proclaims that a disaster is about to happen. Highly anxious, the townspeople run frantically to escape. When nothing happens, they find out that the chicken didn't know what it was talking about. At first they are angry, then amused at how easily they were fooled. In the end they laugh at the chicken because, as they now assume, this chicken — and all other chickens — are simply silly. In an entertaining way, this story illustrates what can happen when people do not think critically about what they hear.