



to accompany

THE BIRD'S RELATIVE*

written by Idries Shah

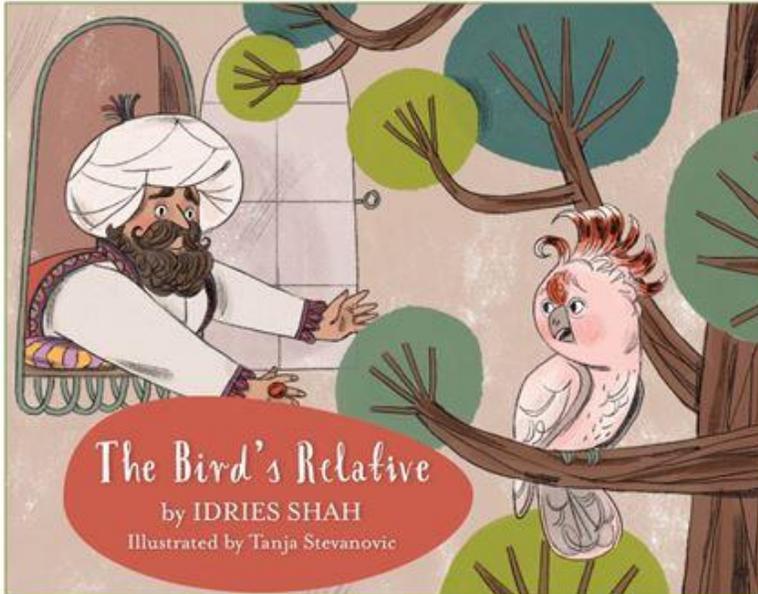
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“These Teaching-Stories can be experienced on many levels. A child may simply enjoy hearing them; an adult may analyze them in a more sophisticated way. Both may eventually benefit from the lessons within.”

Lynn Neary “All Things Considered,” NPR News, Washington



This manual accompanies one title in our series of illustrated tales from the rich storytelling tradition of Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East. These stories have been told to countless children for more than a thousand years. Parents and teachers can use these universal tales not only to delight and entertain, but also to develop language and thinking abilities in the young. At the same time, these stories will encourage in children a love of good literature that can affect them positively throughout their lives.

In this ancient tradition, stories are told to young and old alike. A story can help children deal with difficult situations and give them something to hold onto. It can, at the same time, stimulate a deeper understanding in adults. While reading and discussing these tales with children, you, too, may find yourself thinking and perceiving in new ways. A wealth of learning awaits us all in these traditional tales.

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ABOUT HOOPOE TALES

These stories reveal universal traits of humanity and what we can learn from each other.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

These stories 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 the 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 how we are alike 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 irrational fears caused by things children do not as yet understand, peaceful negotiation rather than violent confrontation, and much else.

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

Bookbird: A Journal of International Children’s Literature

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 way events from the region are presented in the news.

Some of 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 may include other aspects of these cultures: ornaments, wall hangings, and furniture that are often copied from Persian miniatures or from 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 appear in the illustrations of these magical stories.

This story is set in ancient Central Asia, on the seas, and in the forests and jungles of far-off lands. The illustrations portray clothes, as well as many details of the ornaments, and furnishings that are still in use today in these parts of the world.

MORE THAN ENTERTAINING

According to children’s stage of cognitive development, they 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 one 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 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 and lead them to understand themselves better.

In many ways these tales serve as mirrors. Identifying with characters in a story, readers and listeners become spectators of their own thinking and behaving.

WHY READ TO CHILDREN?

“Reading aloud” involves sitting with children so that they can see the words and pictures as the adult reads from the book. Reading aloud to children helps them develop important communication and cognitive skills as well as enjoy and learn from the story itself.

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.

When they are read to, children not only hear the story, they also observe the act of reading.

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 other distractions so as to give the event your full attention.
- Sit in a comfortable place with the child or children near you, allowing you to have good eye contact. Your physical presence is an important part of the whole experience. The more comfortable and cozy the experience, 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. Slowing down a bit helps children follow and comprehend the story more easily.

- Remember that children very much enjoy hearing the same story more than once. Repetition allows them 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, children like 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 children after finishing a story is to invite their reactions and comments and to share your own. Discussion will allow the children to express whatever thoughts may have arisen while listening and to ask questions about the characters and events.

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. A prepared script is available on our website (**hoopoebooks.com**) for those who would prefer to provide that to children.

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 and then draw a picture to accompany the writing. A story notebook can serve as a reading journal to be reviewed and discussed and that you and the child can 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 others and 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 children a chance to respond to the story and to discuss different meanings they 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 story plans you can use while reading *The Bird's Relative* by Idries Shah.



STORY:

THE BIRD'S RELATIVE

STORY SUMMARY

In this teaching-story, a wealthy merchant's most favorite possession is a beautiful bird. The caged bird is unhappy, but the merchant can't bear to set it free. The bird finds a way, though, and the merchant discovers that animals are sometimes better at learning by example than humans.

BEFORE READING

This story lends itself to speculating at turning points, an engaging activity that improves children's thinking and comprehension of the story. To orient children to predicting outcomes, show the cover, read the title, and ask:

*What do you think will happen in this story?
Why do you think so?*

Accept and discuss any ideas offered, then say:

Let's read and find out more.

DURING READING

As you read this story for the first time, invite further speculation by asking for additional predictions at turning points. It's not important for children to guess 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 reasons for thinking as they do. Here are some suggestions for places to stop and invite predictions:

The story begins with a wealthy merchant showing guests his most favorite possession, a beautiful and intelligent cockatoo. One day, the man is about ready to embark on an overseas trip to the bird's homeland and asks if he can bring something back for the bird. After reading *In this upcoming voyage I will be visiting your homeland. Is there anything that I can bring back for you?* pause and ask:

What do you think the bird will ask the man to bring him? Why do you think so?

When the bird asks for his freedom, the man refuses. The bird then asks the man to go to the jungle where he had been captured and tell his relatives what has happened to him, and the man agrees. When the man comes to the exact place

where he had captured his bird, he shouts out that his bird is now his very favorite possession. After reading *Friends! I have come to inform you that a relative of yours, a fine-looking cockatoo, now lives with me and is my very favorite possession,* pause and ask:

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

At this point, a bird exactly like the man's favorite bird falls to the ground at the man's feet. The man desperately tries to revive the bird but cannot do so. After reading this part of the story, pause and ask:

What do you think the man will do next? Why do you think so?

The man sets sail back to his homeland and explains to his pet bird that when he told the relatives about him, one of his relatives fell to the ground, lifeless. He describes how he had attempted to revive the bird but was unsuccessful. After reading this part of the story, pause and ask:

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

Upon hearing about his relative, the pet bird immediately falls to the ground in the same way. The merchant does all he can to revive his pet, but he cannot do so. After reading this part of the story, pause and ask:

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

Let's finish reading the story to find out what happens.

AFTER READING

Questions for reflection:

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

What is the most important part of the story to you?

Why is that part especially important to you?

What questions do you have about this story?

Children may connect with the story of the bird and how his relative helped him by demonstrating how to free himself. You can help

children make these connections with questions such as these:

People sometimes say that actions speak louder than words, meaning that what people do is sometimes more important than what they say. Do you think that has anything to do with this story?

What will you remember most about the story of the pet bird and his relative?

Does this story remind you of any other stories you have heard or read? How are those stories like this one?

ACTIVITIES

Do one or more of these activities to enhance the experience of the story and give children a chance to express themselves.

- If children enjoy the story, read it several times over the course of a week or more. Hearing the story again will help familiarize children with the situation portrayed in the tale.
- Have children draw and color their favorite scene from the story. Encourage them to write or tell about what they drew and why. They can put their work in a folder in which they can keep other drawings and reflections on stories you read aloud. Or they can draw and comment in a special story notebook.

Reflective Writing: Have children write, or dictate if they cannot 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.

Retell the Tale: Have children retell the story. If they enjoy drawing, they can draw scenes from the story on sturdy cards. Shuffle the cards, and have the children put them in order, according to the sequence of events. Then have the children retell the story, using the pictures as prompts.

Other Genres:

Have children:

- Create an ad for a movie called “The Bird’s Relative: How Actions Can Sometimes Mean More Than Words.”
- Design another cover for this book. Compare their cover with others in the class or at home. You may wish to discuss similarities, differ-

ences, what they included, what they left out and why they did so.

- Draw this story as a cartoon.

OTHER IDEAS

- When children hear the story of how a bird sent a message by his actions, the children may want to explore this idea. Introduce the concept of *pantomime* and demonstrate how pantomime can be used to get ideas across without using words. Have children form groups, pantomime to each other, and guess the meanings they are trying to convey.

- Children may want to play a game of “Charades,” where they act out titles of books they have read in class. Give each group a different title, and tell them they can only use actions, not words.

- If children like this story, have them learn to tell it and perform it for students in other classes or for parents and other family members.

- Have children write a play, or create a puppet play, from this story and perform it.

- Have children find some music that they like and create a dance or interpretational version of the story.

- Have them make a list of how many ways people could tell a story, including ways with actions, words, signs, art and music.

- Make a field trip to an animal sanctuary, a zoo, or a petting farm to observe animals in captivity. The children can then write in their journals about what they learned on the field trip. If a field trip is not possible, watch a show on animals in zoos.

- Help the children learn about the different ways people communicate with each other. They may discuss how people could communicate if they didn’t speak a certain language, or couldn’t speak at all. Invite someone into the classroom who can demonstrate ASL (American Sign Language).

- Have the children look at the illustrations in the book and compare and contrast people, clothing, and settings. Have them discuss how these people are alike and how they are different. Ask them *How do they differ from you?* and *How are they similar to you?*

- Invite children to read another Idries Shah story, *The Farmer’s Wife*, on how a woman asks the characters in the story to do actions to help her solve a problem. Have them compare that story with *The Bird’s Relative* and discuss how they are the same and how they are different.

- Look through the library to find other books and stories on different ways of communicating and read them to the children. Ask them to compare those stories with the communication used by the birds in *The Bird's Relative*.

- Help children find books at the library that will demonstrate actions speaking louder than words.

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.

Teaching-Stories for Children by Idries Shah

THE BOY WITHOUT A NAME

A boy is born and, just as his parents are about to name him, a wise man tells them that their son is 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 to have a name of his own. The wise man gives Nameless his very own name and his 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 helps them overcome their fears by teaching them what the object really is. 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. This story mirrors the very common human tendencies of looking for solutions to problems in all the wrong places.

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.

THE LION WHO SAW HIMSELF IN THE WATER

A lion makes the other animals afraid because of the way he talks. 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 Hoshyar 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 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 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 OLD WOMAN AND THE EAGLE

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.

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, but eventually they find out that the chicken didn't know what it was talking about. At first they are angry, but 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.

Other Stories by Idries Shah from Hoopoe Books and Kashfi's Children

OINKINK

In this teaching-story a man greedily hopes to have the skills and senses of a different animal. He visits zoos and observes animals in the cities and forests around him trying to decide which animal to become. He seeks advice far and wide from all sorts of people, but nothing works. Eventually, he is so impatient to have his wish granted that he finds himself limiting his abilities rather than enhancing them.

THE SPOILED BOY WITH THE TERRIBLY DRY THROAT

In this teaching-story, a very spoiled boy awakes in the morning with an awful feeling of dryness in his throat. One by one, servants, doctors, and medical students try various remedies that only complicate the situation and make the condition worse, ignoring what readers will see as the obvious solution. A lowly cook provides advice, and how that advice is handled by the other characters will amuse children and reveal the value of practical experience.

For more information, see:

HoopoeBooks.com
KashfisChildren.org