

'THERE ARE PLENTY OF OBJECTS IN A MUSEUM BUT STORY TELLING IS RARE'

Kanika Mondal

Abstract

The presentation emphasizes the importance of storytelling as a mode of learning in museums and examines its impact on children. Against the backdrop of the concept and history of story-telling, it explains how this age old art can be incorporated effectively in museums to contribute to overall development of children. To illustrate this, teaching examples of artifacts representing different time periods, themes and mediums housed in Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara, are included. These examples vividly demonstrate how different stories can be used effectively to engage children emotionally and intellectually. Further, the learning outcomes from storytelling are discussed in the context of Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives to comprehend how stories can contribute to different levels of thinking in children.

What is a story?

A story is a narrative or an account of event or series of events either real or fictitious. It is often a blend of facts, legends, myths, beliefs, feelings and emotions. The essential elements of a story include:

- A plot (storyline)
- Characters (real or imaginary)
- A narrative point of view (the perspective through which the story is communicated)

What is story telling?

Communication of events or happenings, real or imaginary using words, sounds, gestures and expressions.

What are the different types of stories?

- **Fiction:** Non-factual descriptions based upon the imaginations of the author
In museums: Fable, fairy tales, folklore, historical fiction, legend, mythology and science fiction

- **Non-fiction:** Factual description of real things, events or happenings

In museums: Biography/ autobiography, narrative nonfiction, textbook (based on school's curriculum)

Examples from Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery:



1. Krishna Swallowing the Forest Fire
Bhagvata-purana; maratha; nagpur; c. 1775-1800
Gouache On Paper; 36.0x12.0 Cms
Story type: Fiction (Mythological)

The painting, an illustration of the Bhagvata-Purana, narrates the episode of davanalapan, Krishna swallowing the forest fire. The story narrates an incident when on a hot summer afternoon, Krishna accompanied by other cowherds, had gone to the forest when a fire broke out. Krishna swallowed the fire and saved all his friends from being engulfed by it.



2. Bhairava
Gujarat, Ladol; 11th Century
Stone; 112.0x31.0x6.5 cms
Story type: Fiction (Mythological)

Bhairava, one of the incarnations of Shiva was cursed to live the life of a mendicant for cutting off Brahma's head until he was forgiven by Vishnu. To seek forgiveness, hungry Bhairava also killed Vishnu's gatekeeper for denying entry into Vishnu's home. As a result, his head was also chopped off and was told to survive on his own blood. But eventually, he received forgiveness from Vishnu after he visited Varanasi to expiate his sins and thus succeeded in appeasing the Lord.



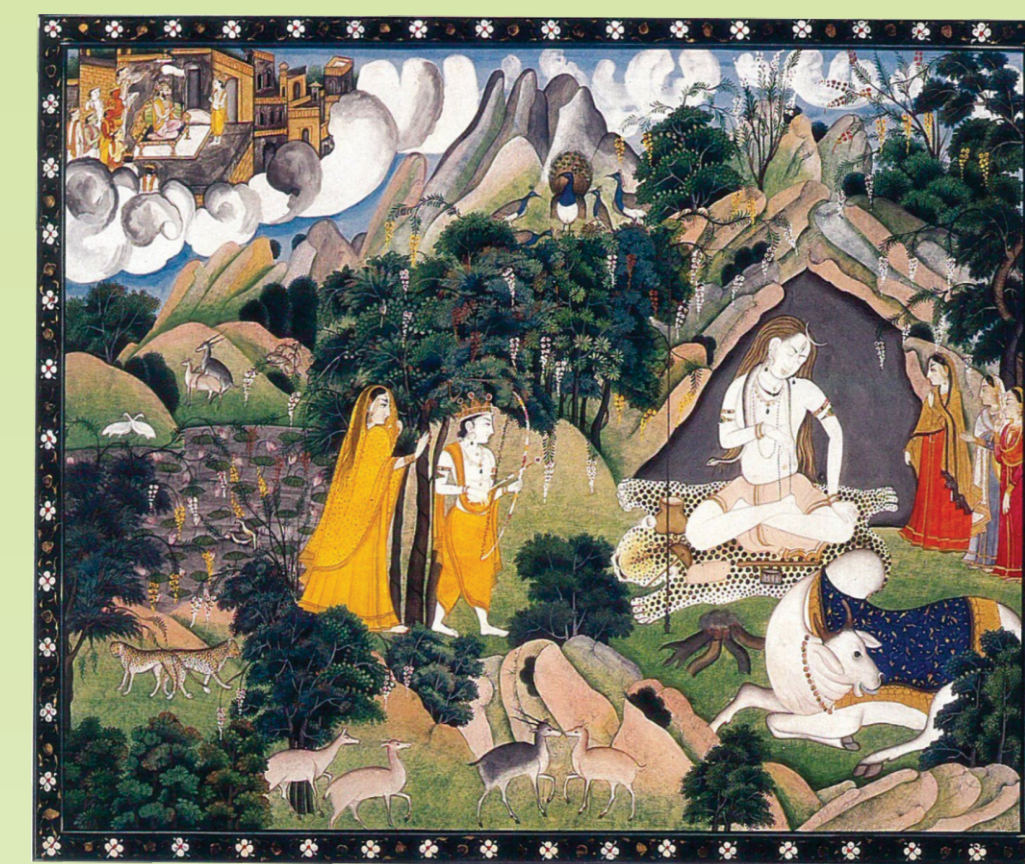
3. Dana lila (pichhvais)
Rajasthan; Kishengarh; c. 1770
Gouche on cloth; 193.0x137 cms
Story type: Fiction (Mythological)

The pichhvais are large decorative temple hangings which serve as backdrop for temples of Shrinathji, a form of Lord Krishna. These paintings represented the mood of a particular season or the festival being celebrated.

The image in this particular pichhvai displays the festival of Dana-Ekadshi, and commemorates the day when Krishna demanded a toll (dana) of curds, milk and butter from the milk-maids.

4. Kama Shoots an Arrow at Shiva
Shiv Purana; Pahari; Kangra; C.1815
Gouache On Paper; 28.0x36.0 Cms
Story type- Fiction (Mythological)

The story narrates an incident from the Shiva Purana, when creatures from the Earth visit Lord Indra to save them from the plight of demon Taraka who had created havoc on Earth. Indra requested Kama, the lord of love to awaken Lord Shiva from his meditation as only a son born to him could kill the demon. Kama spun his magical spell and the effect is seen on all the creatures, animate or inanimate, surrendering themselves to the overpowering yearning for love. The trees are shown bent down to the creepers, animals sought with their mates, lotus blossoms burst into bloom and the whole world takes on a wondrous beauty.



Tradition of story telling:

- An ancient art that predates writing
- Earliest evidences- Cave drawings, ancient scriptures, manuscripts (Altamira: image)
- Began with the purpose of entertaining the audience
- Became an aid in learning of moral values, mythology, traditions, languages, culture, history and about life and environment.
- Advent of technology improved impact

Why storytelling in museums?

Stories by themselves are interesting and storytelling has far reaching effects on its audience. Different stories can have different purposes but in general, :

- Aids in disseminating knowledge about museum's collection
- Presents ideas and thoughts in a delightful way
- Important means of tapping and holding the attention of listeners
- Connects people, fostering bonds between storyteller and listeners
- Contributes to overall development of children:
 - Stirs up emotions, imaginations, creativity and expressions
 - Gain vocabulary, ideas and pronunciation
 - Improves upon their thought processes, listening skills, communication skills and concentration span
 - Promotes historical awareness and understanding
 - Boosts up their curiosity to learn about the outer world
 - Creates positive attitudes towards stories and books and helps in improving reading skills

How to make stories engaging?

Story telling as a practice has existed since ages. It has helped in transferring of knowledge and experience from one generation to the other. But if used strategically, it can pass on wealth of knowledge encompassed in our museums. Below is a list of tips which can help in improving the impact of stories:

- Know the story well
- Selected the story that suits the age and interest of audience
- Use simple language
- Message to be conveyed should be clear
- Practice several times before actual session
- Use appropriate tone, voice and intersperse with proper gesture
- Questioning can be used as an important tool to know the impact
- If possible, use multimedia to prolong attention
- Present things in a convincing manner

Outcomes of Storytelling and Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives:

The learning outcomes from storytelling are many and can be studied in the context of Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of learning objectives:

| Bloom's Objectives | Underlying Concept | Activities | | Outcomes of Storytelling |
|--------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | | During Story telling | Follow-up | |
| Knowledge | Observe, recall and remember | Listening Paying attention Remembering the story | Name the characters and main events Identify the characters or pictures in the work of art (painting) | Gain of information: - Vocabulary and its related concepts - Pronunciation - Identification vocabulary |
| Comprehension | Grasp, understand, and translate meaning | Recollect facts | Find main ideas in the story Restate the events in your own words Locate places on a map Compare any two characters | Interpret information by comparing and contrasting, and showing relationships |
| Application | Use information in a different context | Encouraging questions | Reconstruct the story in the contemporary times Write a poem or draw an event from the story Enact a play | Encourages imaginative and creative thinking |
| Analysis | Break information into parts to understand it | Discussions | Classify the characters based on their characteristics Suggest an anticlimax Prepare a flow chart of events Analyze the work of art in terms of: - lines - colors - texture - human forms etc. | Analyze evidences, find reasons and show relationships Improves understanding Clarifies and reinforces concepts |
| Synthesis | Use old ideas to create new ones; in-depth criticism | --- | Create a story on a new work of art | Promotes abstract thinking |
| Evaluation | Compare, discriminate and assess | --- | Critically assess the events and justify your answer | Learn to use a criteria and judge Develops logical and rational thinking Share personal views |

Acknowledgements: The author is extremely grateful to Prof. Sunjay Jain (Ph.D Guide), Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts; Head, Dept. of Museology, for his guidance in the creation of poster; and to Mr. Harshad Rohit, Photographer, Dept. of Museology, for assisting in designing the poster.