

الحكواتية Hakawati

- 1 Everyone loves to hear a good story which is why story telling is one of the world's oldest and most popular art forms. For as long as there has been language, man has probably sat around a fire and told stories about adventures, bravery, ambition, love, wisdom and strange events. Stories are not only a way to entertain, but also a way to pass down history and teach **morals** -advice on how to live a good life. Stories and storytellers have been found in every culture around the world and in the Arab world these storytellers were called hakawati (الحكواتية).
- 2 The origins of the word hakawati comes from the terms "hekaye" which means story and "**haki**" which means to talk. In a time before television, people would sit around sometimes in a coffee shop or sometimes around a fire and listen to stories told by the hakawati. In addition, many people could not read and even fewer could afford books, so the only way a person could learn these stories was to hear them from a hakawati. Through the stories of the hakawati, people could imagine themselves in a far off land or fighting in famous battles. The stories of the hakawati offered an escape from their monotonous (having a tiring uninteresting sameness) and difficult lives.
- 3 The hakawati would often describe the lives of famous people such as Antar, the heroic warrior-poet or Baybars the First, a sultan who ruled Egypt and Syria in the thirteenth century. Sometimes they would tell folk tales too, of which the most famous collection of folk tales from this part of the world is *The Thousand and One Nights*, also called *The Arabian Nights*. Of course the best hakawati could not only tell existing stories, but they could also compose their own original stories also. This ability to entertain as well as teach gave the hakawati great influence in the community. It is said that at times, if a problem arose in the community for which no solution was found, a Hakawati would tell stories suggesting solutions.
- 4 With the coming of the modern world and its technology, hakawati was being pushed aside by television, movies and the internet. Fewer and fewer people were telling the old stories. Some people feared that the wonderful history and stories of the hakawati would be lost forever. However, since the Lebanese-American writer, Rabih Alameddine wrote his book *The Hakawati* (published in the US in 2008) which was a popular book around the world, this rich Arabic tradition of storytelling has drawn great interest globally.
- 5 In 2010 there was indication that hakawati was starting to become more popular in the UAE when Ahmad Yousef, an artist, actor and hakawati storyteller, performed live shows to packed audiences in Abu Dhabi. Ahmed Yousef works for the IT department for the Sharjah government. In his free time Yousef likes to act and is a part of the Sharjah National Theater. Yousef loves acting and the theater and wanted to do something that would add to the culture of UAE, so he started hakawati storytelling.

- 6 Yousef feels the time has come for the art of storytelling to become more popular again. "Storytellers have always been a part of the Arabian spirit and have been very popular with people," says Yousef. "In fact it was said that after the ruler of the country it was the storyteller who occupied the second most important position as telling a story involved communicating with the **masses**, in other words common people. Kings, too, depended on storytellers to spread their message. When I discovered the storyteller in me I immediately began doing small projects like reading out stories to children in malls. The children I realized were hungry for good **tales** - stories." The realization pushed Yousef to do more research for his art. "The richest source for me was the Holy Quran, which has many fables that people know and yet want to hear over and over again." Yousef believes "the Quran is a priceless source of allegorical tales that are simple, yet engaging, and talk of simple gem-like truths of life such as the success of good over evil, the importance of being humble and helping the poor, among many other timeless truths."
- 7 Not content with telling existing tales drawn from the past, Yousef has started composing his own stories from history. Last year, he wrote Al Jawhara, a tale set in the history of the UAE in 1509 during the invasion by the Portuguese General Alfonso De Albuquerque. The story about the destruction caused by the invasion was narrated by him along with about 25 other artists from the Al Thiqah Club for the Handicapped from Sharjah.
- 8 Hakawati is not only a way to be entertained but it is a way for us to remember our past and to stay in touch with our customs and traditions. Hakawati also teaches us moral lessons that can help guide us in our lives. Let us hope that there will be more people like Ahmad Yousef who will continue this wonderful tradition of storytelling.



Questions

Short Answer


1. What is one of the world's oldest and most popular art form? _____
2. What is name for a storyteller in the Arab world? _____
3. What does the term "hekaye" mean? _____
4. Give the name of the collection of folk tales that the hakawati would often tell?

5. With the coming of television and the internet, what did some people fear would happen to stories of the hakawati? _____
6. Who wrote the book *The Hakawati*? _____
7. What did Ahmad Yousef start to add to the culture of the UAE?

8. Who did kings depend on to spread their messages to the masses? _____
9. From what source does Yousef get his ideas for his stories? _____
10. What story did Yousef compose last year? _____

True, False, Not Given:

1. _____ Stories only entertain us.
2. _____ Storytellers have only been found in a few cultures.
3. _____ In the past, only a few people could read.
4. _____ Baybar the First was a good sultan of Egypt.
5. _____ A hakawati had little influence in a community.
6. _____ Yousef works for Sharjah National Theater.
7. _____ Yousef believes that storytelling will become more popular again.
8. _____ The Portuguese were defeated when they invaded the UAE in 1509.
9. _____ Hakawati teaches moral lessons.

A woman wearing a blue and yellow patterned headscarf and a matching patterned dress is looking down at an open book she is holding in her hands. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Vocabulary in Context: Write the meaning of the word as given in the text.

1. morals (paragraph 1) _____
2. “haki” (paragraph 2) _____
3. monotonous (paragraph 2) _____
4. masses (paragraph 6) _____
5. tales (paragraph 6) _____

Pronoun Reference: Write what the pronoun refers to in the blank.

1. their (paragraph 2) _____
2. they (paragraph 3) _____
3. he (paragraph 5) _____
4. I (paragraph 6) _____
5. Him (paragraph 7) _____

Topics: Write the number of the paragraph that goes with the topic.

1. _____ Kind of stories the Hakawati would tell.
2. _____ Introduction of Ahmed Yousef.
3. _____ Why storytelling is becoming more popular.
4. _____ Yousef’s compositions.
5. _____ Why the hakawati were important in the past.