

The Breadwinner: Fable Writing Assignment



Afghan Tradition of Storytelling

The ancient art of storytelling has thrived in Afghan culture and society for centuries through music and spoken art forms. These stories and fables are a way to pass down knowledge and history from one generation to the next, while also imparting cultural beliefs and values. They have also served to captivate audiences and entertain Afghans through the ages. They continue to do so even today.

Fables help people (especially children):

- Learn a moral lesson
- Understand and appreciate tradition, history and culture
- Model character traits
- Explore new ways of seeing the world
- Discover a love of stories

Read the following example of a fable:

“My Strongest Friend”

Long ago in the jungles of Afghanistan, big strong Lion was asleep under the shade of a tree. Little Mouse came out of his home in the tree and wanted to play. Mouse ran up and down Lion’s neck and playfully tapped his back.

Lion awoke and roared. He picked Mouse up in one hand.

“I’m going to eat you!” he roared. Lion opened his mouth to swallow Mouse whole.

“Please do not eat me! I am kind and may help you one day!” begged Mouse in a squeaky voice.

Lion laughed “You’re just a mouse! You’re tiny! You could never be of help to me.”

Lion was laughing so hard that he dropped Mouse and gave him the chance to run away.

Many years passed and Lion found himself under a similar tree, taking a nap. Only this time, there were hunters nearby who had come to trap him! They threw a net over Lion. He roared and roared because he was trapped but he could not escape.

Mouse heard the roars and recognized them.

Late that night, while the hunters were sleeping, Mouse quietly chewed threw the rope and freed Lion.

Lion and Mouse became very good friends after that.

From then on, Lion called the Mouse “My strongest friend.”

How to Create a Fable in the Afghan Tradition of Storytelling

Part 1: Think about the moral of the story that you want to tell. This moral should become clear at the end of the story. Here are some examples of “the moral of the story”:

- Slow and steady wins the race.
- Be truthful.
- Don’t judge others by their appearances (which was used in *My Strongest Friend*)
- Weaknesses can be your strengths in disguise.

Part 2: How many characters will you need? What will each character symbolize? These characters should be animals or objects that act like humans. By making characters human-like, but different from humans, we are able to understand biases and shortcomings more easily than if the characters are human. We are also able to remember the lesson more clearly and apply the learning in our own lives.

For example, to explain the moral of “don’t judge others by their appearances” in *My Strongest Friend*, the author chose a character that symbolized strength (Lion) and a character that symbolized weakness (Mouse).

Part 3: Think about at least two scenes in which the characters interact. The contrast in the two scenes will demonstrate the moral of the story.

- a. In the first one, show the logical or obvious outcome in the situation. For example, it is obvious that Lion is the strong one while Mouse is the meek one who needs help.
- b. But in the second scene, present a problem or conflict that shows a role reversal, as in this example where Mouse is strong and brave in order to save Lion who is helpless.

Part 4: Add a few details like where and when the story takes place, and what the characters are doing that helps set up the first interaction with each other. Keep the overall story short, as that is one of the key elements of a fable.

Assignment

Now it’s your turn to write a fable in the Afghan tradition. What will be the moral of your story and which characters will you choose to share the lesson?