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Chukualuka Akoni

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**EDUCATIVE AND ENTERTAINING TENDECIES
OF UKWUANI FOLKTALES**

Chukualuka Akoni

Department of Theatre Arts, Delta State University, Abraka
chukualuka.akoni@delsu.edu.ng

Ogochuku Anigala

Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University, Abraka
anigala.ogochuku@delsu.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Folktales have been shared in every society to educate, entertain and preserve culture. It plays an invaluable role along with other cultural norms in bringing people together and ensuring exchange and understanding between them. However ukwuani folktales have not garnered attention from oral literature scholars. This paper opens us up to the possibilities that Ukwuani folktales can be educative as well as edifying. The folktales selected for this research were obtained from an elder in the Ukwuani Community of Delta State, Nigeria. The researcher transcribed them for analysis. It has been said that the best form of learning is through informal means and folktale is a product of that, for this reason the Social Learning theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for this research. The findings of this paper reveals that ukwuani folktales serve a dual purpose - Didacticism and Entertainment- to the betterment of its community.

INTRODUCTION

Folktales have enthralled people for centuries. They were an essential source of entertainment for peasants and princes alike in days of yore and still serve the same purpose today. Folktales also serve an additional purpose, that is, to tell us about the way life was for the common man. History books are filled with the names and dates and events which molded our world. It is folklore, however, which recalls the hopes, fears, dreams and details of everyday lives. It can be defined as a tale or legend originating and traditional among a people or folk, especially one forming part of the oral tradition of the people, any belief or story passed on traditionally, especially one considered to be false or based on superstition. It can also be a story originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word of mouth. Some of these themes and function of folktale include: entertainment, to enjoy oneself, creating a sense of achievement, making people laugh. Part of social education. Many folktales contain a moral, or lesson, that comes at the end of the story. These tales are designed to sugar-coat tough life lessons and give listeners pointers on how to behave.

Tales by moonlight or folktales continue to captivate people today for many reasons, they tell us our history, and they describe where we live, what our values are and ultimately who we are. Children listen to folktales without prejudice. They don't care whether the story is from the

Grimm tradition, from Africa or from the western hemisphere. They seem to be able to separate fact from fantasy, for the most part, and hear the underlying message of the story. It is for this reason that I have decided to look at the educative and entertainment tendencies of Ukwuani folktales.

In Ruth Finnegan's 'How Oral is Oral Literature' she posits, resting on the contribution of Wilfred Whitley to the development of literature in Africa, that 'literature is inevitable oral where all literary production, performance, and consumption indeed all communication is fully oral and there is a total absence of literacy' (1974:52). As folktales are firstly oral, for various reasons it is being documented, it has its aesthetics and styles steeped in the cultural traditions of its people. This study aims to show the educative and entertainment tendencies of Ukwuani folktales. The specific objective is to show the importance of the study of Ukwuani folktales to the progress of a Nigerian society. The theoretical framework for this study is social learning theory. Social learning theory combines cognitive learning theory which Posits that learning is influenced by psychological factors, and behavioral learning theory, which assumes that learning is based on responses to environmental stimuli. Psychologist Abert Bandura integrated these two theories in an approach called social learning theory, and identified four requirements for learning, observation, retention, reproduction and motivation. This theory has to do with the fact that it's what you see that you imitate and for a growing child, it's what they see that attracts them, so when folktales are told and performed for them it stays with them, along the line, they try to emulate the hero of that tale.

This paper supports strongly the use of Ukwuani folktale to educate and entertain Nigerian children and youths so as to inculcate traditional values – which I refer to as ethnic core values – in them. This inculcation can be achieved through the performance and teaching of folklore at home and in the classroom. I consider folklore an indispensable source of educational material for the child. It promotes inter-personal relationship between the learner and the teacher or performer.

Educative and Entertaining Tendencies of Ukwuani Folktales

Storytelling is universal – every society has upheld this pastime since ancient times. Folktales are seen as oral tales that can be told to children as well as adults. In every Nigerian ethnic culture, folktales were valued and are still valued. Many people, especially people of my generation and the generations before mine, were fed on folktales while they were growing up. This practice has drastically changed and many young people are ignorant of the folktales their people used to instruct and entertain children in the past. In those good old days, there were numerous didactic tale's adults – especially mothers, fathers, uncles and aunties – told and re-told their children and wards, by day or by night, in the moonlight. Many of us can recall a good number of such stories; a few of them will be used for illustration in this paper.

The three stories selected for this paper has been transcribed for better and clearer understanding and they are the rabbit and the lion, the tortoise and the dog and the wide road.

Rabbit and Lion (Elunke Ni Eduke)

Rabbit and Lion had a long-standing friendship, but neither had visited the other's house yet. They had been used to meeting in the normal course of their perambulations. On one of such occasions, the Lion decided to invite his friend to visit him at his house in the next village. At once, clever Rabbit turned the tables on Lion by suggesting that he should visit him first, thereby shifting the obligation to his friend who complied according to the rules of hospitality, and a time was duly set for three days hence.

Rabbit's family were well-versed in the rules of hospitality pertaining to receiving a visitor. The resourceful Rabbit had made sure of this preparation and allotted different tasks to members of his family so that everyone knew clearly what to do on the visitor's arrival and departure. Lion's prospective visit would be a test to prove their ability to receive a visitor according to Rabbit's instructions.

Lion, the king of beasts, duly arrived at Rabbit's house and was very well received by Rabbit and his family. Rabbit's youngest son spread a tiger's skin at the seat of honour and with all due respect invited the king to occupy this position.

Rabbit's youngest daughter rushed into the house with an oku (a big handmade pipe used by villagers) and tobacco which she put beside the visitor. The first daughter also ran into the house with a jug of manyanku (alcoholic beverage made of honey) and respectfully standing on her knees, started to serve her father. Rabbit's nephew then came into the house and, standing in front of the king, bowed and clapped his hands to indicate that it was time to start narrating the elenjini (news of the journey). His first son went to the kid's pen and killed one of them to serve a proper meal for the visitor. Rabbit's wife busied herself in the kitchen to prepare the meal she had planned for the occasion.

Rabbit and his visitor engaged in elenjini, smoked oku and drank manyanku. Then the visitor was ushered into the Olile or special house to partake of pounded yam (the typical main meal of the Ukwuani people) consisting of meat of kid with delicious kandwanga (spiced sauce). After lunch the visitor came back to the place of honour and found a beautiful cikanga (mat) laid out for him to rest.

The king was thoroughly impressed with Rabbit's well-organised hospitality. During the visit Rabbit never uttered a word of instruction to his family. Sometimes a simple look was enough for the family to understand that something was required for the visitor's convenience. The next day, on conclusion of the visit, Lion and Rabbit fixed the day on which Rabbit would return the visit. The king was very happy with the reception and bid his hosts a grateful farewell.

After two weeks, on Saturday morning Rabbit was ready to visit his friend Lion. On being welcomed into Lion's abode he noticed with some misgiving that his host's house was dirty and disordered. The Lion family was unable to come to greet the visitor. His eldest son was sleeping near the place of honour. His eldest daughter was eating, and his wife was sitting near the kitchen looking at them without showing any interest. After several hours the visitor had yet to be served anything. When Rabbit asked for a glass of water, Lion's first daughter came with a dirty glass and gave it to the visitor carelessly as if to a person of no consequence.

The reason for this was that the king never spent time to instruct his family in the polite procedures of receiving visitors. Conscious of the result of his past neglect, therefore Lion became

nervous and frustrated: he started to attack his family. He broke his first son's leg, threw a spear at his wife, and so on. Rabbit immediately broke off the visit and went back home to avoid the embarrassment of witnessing his friend's disgrace.

The Tortoise and the Dog (Ọkpala -ọsa ni ekite.)

Once upon a time there was an arrogant dog who loved to boast about his speed in front of the other animals. I have never been beaten when I put forth all my speed. I challenge anyone here to race me, said the dog to the other animals. I accept your challenge answered the tortoise. The other animals laughed. It was announced throughout the jungle. There is a rumble in the jungle! Join us for the great race between the tortoise and the dog on the next market day, it is going to be wild.

All animals were surprised that the tortoise took up the challenge, he was known to be a very slow animal. However a day was fixed for the great race and all animals looked forward to it. On the day of the race, no animal went to the market and no one went hunting. All animals gathered together excited to watch the race between the tortoise and the dog. Both animals were ready, each of them felt confident and everyone wondered why the tortoise was so confident since they felt he was no match for the dog.

Meanwhile before the race the tortoise had a meeting with his fellow tortoise and told them of his plan. He told them to place themselves at strategic places, so that when its time they would know when to come out and continue the race and they did without the knowledge of others. The elephant started them off when he blew his big whistle and the sound range across the entire jungle. Every ear were alert, every eyes were fixed on the two competitors. Who will win the greatest animal race in history?

The dog darted out almost out of sight at once, but soon stopped. In order to show that the tortoise was no match for him and should not have accepted his challenge in the first instance, he lay down to have a nap. When the dog woke up he discovered that tortoise was ahead of him, he was surprised but he didn't mind because he knew he was faster than tortoise, and due to that pride after he passed tortoise again he lay down to nap again. Tortoise kept on passing him until it was close to the finish line and since he didn't see tortoise anywhere he went to sleep again. Slowly but surely the tortoise went on, he had a goal and he had a focus and did not look back. When the dog woke up he saw the tortoise at the finish line. He jumped up and tried to catch up with him but it was too late. The deed had been done.

To the amazement of all the animals, the tortoise had crossed the finished line. It was unbelievable. The dog was humbled. He had no choice but to congratulate the tortoise and accept him as the winner. All the animals learnt a very important lesson from tortoise. Slow and steady wins the race.

The Wide Road (Ezuku shani esha)

A farmer lived in a very small village with his wife and son. The son had seven dogs which he trained and were his best friends, each time he plays his flute the dogs always come running to him. He goes to the farm everyday so that his family can have food to eat. One day he decided to

take his family with him to the farm, when they got to the cross road, one road was wide and the other was narrow, the farmer took the narrow road. His son asked him if the other path doesn't lead to the farm, the man replied and said it does and that in fact that is the shortest and fastest path to the farm but on no account should the boy ever use that path and the boy said okay.

Soon after, the boy started accompanying his father to the farm and they always take the narrow path, and each time they did that, the boy was always puzzled about it and since his father told him not to take it, the matter was still on the boys mind. One day after the boy and his father were through with their activities for the day, they went home and on getting to the house the father realised that he forgot his cutlass and hoe in the farm so he asked his son to go and get them back. The son went to get the cutlass and hoe back, when he was going to the farm, the boy passed the narrow road, after he picked up what his father forgot, he discovered that it was already late and so as to get home faster, he decided to pass the wide road. When he was going the road was so smooth and there were no obstacle, so he started wondering why his father asked him not to pass here if there was nothing wrong with the road. When the boy got to the middle of the road he saw an old woman sitting on her head asking for help to put the head back on her neck, the boy helped her and as soon as she had her head placed in the right way, she started chasing the boy and the boy ran back to the farm and climbed a tree.

The old woman started using her teeth to chop the tree, the boy was scared, and so he decided to play his flute to call his dogs...

Where are my dogs, my hunter's dogs?

My precious dogs, where are my dogs

Let the listener's come to me, where are my dogs

He kept on playing and playing, his dogs heard the sound of the flute and started coming to meet him. They were racing *krupende krupende krupende*, all in a haste to meet their master. The old woman was still chopping the tree, the faster she used her teeth, the faster the boy played the flute, and the faster the dogs kept running towards the sound of the flute. When it was remaining small for the tree to fall down so the old woman can eat the boy, the dogs jumped on the old woman's body and started biting her, and eventually killed the old woman. That was how the boy was saved, and he went home with his dogs safe and sound.

This folktale is used to enlighten children and youths that each person's actions has consequence, so it is therefore left to us to choose whether we listen to the instruction given to us or we go against it, but whichever we choose, we should be able to defend it. But instructions given must be clear because children are curious and inquisitive, they would want to find out various things at times. One thing that is common in Africa is that adults/parents tell children not to do things without the complete instruction, because of this there is the tendency to disobey not because they disregard their parents/adult but because of curiosity. That also doesn't justify the disobedience of children. Also this folktale stresses the fact that obedience is better than sacrifice and disobedience has a grave consequence.

An important educational aspect of oral narratives is their contributions towards molding and preparing children for their future social roles. As Degh Lipman puts it, "We know what our stories mean when it comes time for us to use them". Whereas a child who learns by rigid formulas may feel stranded and helpless as historical and social situations change (which, of course, they always do), children who have been educated by folklore feel empowered by the sense of their

traditional wisdom as a tool for their own use, to interpret and use as they see fit. Time and again, members of societies where oral tradition predominates have expressed to anthropologists their conviction that it is an affront to a child's integrity to educate him or her with orders or "one right way" of doing things. To educate a child in this way rather than with stories is also considered not to be pragmatic.

With its delight, folklore entrances us into exploring our own creative possibilities and conceptual flexibility, and helps us attend to and retain the information it imparts to us. As entertainment, it best serves its function of binding together the members of a community; being fun is part and parcel of the sense, in many communities, of folklore as a gift from one generation to another. The humour and the entertainment in folklore also help us deal with personal and social crises in a way that gives us perspective on them without emotional distance: helps us to manage them, even while we also face, confront, and transform them.

CONCLUSION

A time cannot be remembered when one hasn't been interested in Ukwuani folktales. As with other children, we were an avid consumer of these folktales and never missed an opportunity to experience a new tale or story. Even when one was growing up, there was a time eating dinner on time was the num most evenings so that one would be able to listen to the folktales told outside the house, under the moon, with different siblings sitting down in different corners. This was part of a daily ritual growing up. Due to this, our interest in this area originates from a long held appreciation for folktales and is intertwined with several other aspects of one's personal and academic life, it is not surprising that it bears a certain level of complexity. Not only does it have an impact on many aspects of who people think they are, and reflections on childhood memories, but also the assumptions and self-image that shape who they are now. Through story we find a means of dealing with the endless stream of questions and ponderings that have always been a part of our human nature. Ukwuani Folktales interest me primarily, because these stories are among the oldest accounts shared in the oral tradition. They were a source of entertainment growing up, and they were also used as a means of educating us in terms of knowing what is right and wrong, and that our actions have consequences.

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