**[Building bridges](https://www.dawn.com/news/1786868/building-bridges)**

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ORAL storytelling is an ancient art form and has been a powerful tool in education since time immemorial. The first schools were built on the foundation of telling moral stories, thinking about life, and discussing problems of society. Later, as stories were transcribed, formal brick-and-mortar schools continued with this tradition. From Socrates to Aristotle, the art of storytelling led to intense discussions and deeper thought into life’s existential problems.

Today, storytelling remains an indelible gateway to learning and can be used across all curriculum subjects. From sparking imagination and creativity to feisty discussions and critical thinking, storytelling can bring books to life, building bridges for key learning from textbooks. A story of volcanoes and their formation or the cause of earthquakes can help students retain important information if packaged as a well-narrated story, linking the topics to experiences in daily life, and supported by visuals.

In math, many concepts become clearer if narrated as a story. In science it can be used alongside experiments to start with a prediction of what will happen, structure thought processes, and summarise the findings at the end. In social studies, stories about our nation’s history and culture, its movers and shakers and its struggles can instil a spirit of patriotism.

Not only can teachers use storytelling to build bridges between students and curricula, they can also help develop language skills along the way. Students love telling stories and discussions in class that enable them to practise speaking skills that help them develop confidence.

Storytelling has a powerful role in learning.

Contemporary pedagogy lays emphasis on reflection in class — teaching students to think about what they have learnt and be able to recap it for others is a gateway to effective takeaways in every lesson. A teacher described this as her ‘signature style’ — calling on students to ‘tell us a story about what they had learnt in that lesson’. She asserts that it encouraged many shy students to speak up. She says it makes her students think about learning more consciously and run the key points in their minds as they tell their stories.

Another teacher uses visuals to trigger engaging discussions in class. She refers to the old adage ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’, to validate her strategy. Books have many lovely pictures that can be used to get children talking and practise those necessary language skills. As students build stories, they learn grammar through usage, develop verbal fluency, intonation and voice modulation.

Besides, storytelling has a powerful role in teaching positive social values and breaking destructive norms such as gender biases and stereotypes. Stories of heroism have long captured audiences and inspired motivation and action. Themes in many textbooks teach social and ethical values which are more palatable for students when they are packaged as stories. A book remains only a book until a great teacher uses storytelling skills to help students access learning.

Digital storytelling is the most recent form of learning and is fast evolving into a massively popular form of learning. Stories across multi-media are so compelling that it is becoming increasingly hard to distinguish between authentic and fake news. It is this very aspect of storytelling that can be leveraged in curriculum delivery to package content in a compelling and accessible way for learners. The popularity of memes is rooted in their capacity to relay a story packed with information in a succinct visual.

For educators looking for active participation in class, with a boost of creativity and for those who wish to see students engaging with subject content for longer periods of time, the art of storytelling may be worth tapping into. Stories are not only entertaining for students, but also fun for teachers as they take away some of the burden of the traditional explanation.

Stories draw natural connections between events or concepts and human experience and students often find themselves relating more easily to text and to each other through shared narratives. In fact, research shows that using storytelling as a teaching tool can help build a sense of community and belonging in the classroom.

The human species makes connections through stories. Stories help learners retain information and can be a great memory aid for subjects that require facts and figures to be learnt. Stories can also simplify the most complicated concepts. From classrooms to corporations, stories carry powerful messages and make an indelible impact.

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