

The arabian nights: saving lives through stories essay sample

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Storytelling is a great teaching tool that has been used since the beginning of time. Oral tradition has been constantly used in many cultures and society in order to tell a story that consists of a moral that helps an individual learn about certain life lessons. These stories are passed down to them so they can be retold to their future generations. Although story telling has declined during this time period, the novel, *The Arabian Nights*, is a great example of how story telling has saved someone's life.

The Arabian Nights consists of many stories and tales that the main character Shahrazad tells King Shahrayar throughout 1, 001 nights in order to survive execution in the morning and to avoid having other woman in the kingdom executed as well. Her stories capture King Shahrayar's attention every night and leave him burning with curiosity as to how the story will end. In my opinion, being able to capture the King's attention and connecting his life experiences to the experiences of the character throughout her stories is what helps Shahrazad save innocent lives, including her own life, from being executed.

Shahrazad's stories help save lives because many of her stories are built around the idea of irrational decisions and forgiveness. In *The Arabian Nights*, we witness that King Shahrayar and his younger brother King Shahzaman are betrayed by their wives and make irrational decisions to kill them. However, King Shahrayar also makes another decision in which he vows to marry a woman every night, take her virginity and have her executed in the morning because he believes all women will betray him at one point if he lets them live. In order to save lives, Shahrazad incorporated King Shahrayar's own life

experience into her story to teach him that irrational decisions lead to many consequences that will have an impact on the person who made that decision. She also uses many other ways in her stories to remove the King's attention from killing innocent women and from killing her.

In one of the stories called The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon, Shahrazad tells a tale within the story which is called The Tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban. The story is about King Yunan who makes an irrational decision towards his sage Duban based on what his selfish and greedy vizier tells him about the sage, who has cured him of Leprosy. Since the vizier is afraid that sage Duban will replace him because he is being appreciated by the King, he manipulates King Yunan into thinking that the sage is here to destroy him and kill him by persuading him through storytelling. This leads to King Yunan making an irrational decision by not sparing the sage's life. The sage as well tricks the King into poisoning himself through a book that has been poisoned by him because the King does not spare him, even though he has done a great deed for the king. Before the life is drained out of the sage, he recites the following verse: For long they rules us arbitrarily,

But suddenly vanished their power rule.

Had they been just, they would have happily

Lived, but they oppressed, and punishing fate

Afflicter them with ruin deservedly,

And on the morrow the world taunted them,

" 'Tis tit for tat; blame not just destiny." (The Arabian Nights 47) This quote has a very strong meaning to it. It represents the truth about irrational

decisions, and how it can have a negative impact on you, especially when you do not act just. After making irrational decision, a person must face consequences, but if a just decision was made, they would have lived happily. Including stories about irrationality, in my opinion, help save lives of other women and Shahrazad because she creates a sense of familiarity in the stories that connect to the irrational decision King Shahrayar makes regarding his wife and the women in his kingdom. This is helping King Shahrayar realize that his decision of marrying a new woman every night and killing them in the morning will eventually cause big issues for him.

Many of Shahrazad's stories are built around the idea of forgiveness and kindness. These stories help save lives of other women because it is trying to persuade King Shahrayar that mercy and kindness is the right way to treat people. Within a story called The Story of the Merchant and the Demon, one of the tales that speak about forgiveness is The Second Old Man's Tale, in which there are three brothers who live and travel together. Two of the brothers get jealous of the success and happiness the third brother receives (who is the second old man telling the tale.) Regardless of two of his brothers turning against him, even when he has helped them out through tough times, the old man begs his she-demon wife not to kill them. He states that "[...] The proverb advises ' Be kind to those who hurt you' [...]" (29) Both of his brothers are then turned to dogs as a punishment, but he still cares for them for ten years, and is travelling again to have his brother turned back into humans. Being able to forgive is what Shahrazad is trying to persuade King Shahrayar to do.

Even with the tale of The First Old Man's Tale within that same story, although the first old man's wife turned his mistress and his son into animals, and had his mistress slaughtered, he took care of his wife day and night, even after she has been turned into a deer. He did not take revenge on his wife by slaughtering her as well. These story hints to King Shahrayar that no matter how hurt you have been from your wife's betrayal, you must be kind and caring of others, even when you are punishing them. You must forgive and be rational of the decisions you make in your life in order to continue living a prosperous life without any consequences coming your way in the future. Revenge is not always the answer.

Another way that Shahrazad's stories help save lives in my opinion is by presenting to King Shahrayar that every woman's life matter because her life is a story as well. In a tale called The Tale of the Enchanted King, the story is focused on a King's wife who betrays her husband for a black slave for pleasure and love she does not receive from her husband. After putting her husband to sleep, she says " Go to sleep, and may you never rise again. By God your sight disgusts me and your company bores me." (57) This dialogue shows that she does not receive enough attention from the King, rather receives attention and love from her lover. The King, once he finds out, makes an irrational decision by slitting the black slave's throat but is able to control his anger and not punish his wife. His irrational decision causes her pain, as we see in these verses she says when she is in mourning towards her black lover: When I see your distress,

It pains me, as you see
And when I see you not,
It pains me, as you see.
O speak to me, my life,
My master, talk to me. (59)

By presenting the women's side of the story and her pain, it creates a sense of why King Shahrayar's wife may have cheated on him, and presents to King Shahrayar that his wife may have cheated on him because of his lack of presence in his wife's life. Shahrazad telling a tale about women help save lives by creating sympathy towards the women to prove to King Shahrayar that not all women betray their husbands for no reason, but have their own needs that need to be met, and they have no other choice but to find other ways to have their needs met. She is also trying to prove to King Shahrayar that a woman's life is as important as of a man's, and her needs have to be met as well.

As I continue to read on the stories in The Arabian Nights, I find one story very fascinating that is the biggest factor to the contribution of how the stories are helping Shahrazad save lives. In one of the stories called The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies, Shahrazad grabs King Shahrayar's attention by using sensual and sexual details. This story contains many objects that are appealing to a person's senses. During the beginning of the story, every detail is about the three ladies, and about all the purchases the first lady does throughout the market with the porter. While describing the first lady, it shows us that Shahrazad is using sensual and sexual details to

remove the King's attention from killing women and investing that attention into her stories.

As the story begins and the porter encounters this lady, it says: She wore a Mosul cloak, a silk veil, a fine kerchief embroidered with gold and a pair of leggings tied with fluttering laces. When she lifted her veil, she revealed a pair of beautiful dark eyes graced with long lashes and a tender expression, like those celebrated by the poets. Then with a soft voice and sweet tone, she said to him [...] (66) In this quote, Shahrazad appeals to his sight and his hearing. By giving such a detailed account of a female, she also appeals to his sexual side which arouses the King and draws his attention away from his original goal.

Being able to control King Shahrayar's attention, Shahrazad is able to play with his emotions and have full control over him by just using story telling. Within the same story mentioned above, Shahrazad gives a fully detailed account of the groceries that the first lady purchases. Describing in such details about her purchases helps appeal to the senses of the readers as well. For example, in the story Shahrazad states " She also bought Aleppo Jasmine and Damascus lilies, myrtle berries and mignonettes, daisies, and gillyflowers, lilies of the valley and narcissus and daffodils, violets, and anemones, as well as pomegranate blossoms." (66) This precisely detailed account helps the King visually vision these purchases and is a sense of pleasure to his senses. Being able to have such control over the King, Shahrazad is able to manipulate his emotions and save many lives from

being perished by his irrational decision he has made regarding the women of his kingdom.

Throughout the stories that Shahrazad presents to King Shahrayar, we see that she is able to have full control over him with her stories, which helps her save lives of the women in her kingdom. Reading these stories have helped me realized as well that storytelling can be a great way of persuasion. I've learned that storytelling can give you full control of how you present the stories and in which sense you are using the stories for. Some may use storytelling as a way of manipulation, while others use storytelling as a way of persuasion and in order to teach a moral lesson at the end of each story. Storytelling, in my opinion, should be used more often to help resolve many issues that are ongoing in a person's life. It can help in many ways in teaching them lifelong lessons or just entertaining a person with interesting stories. Shahrazad uses story telling in order to save lives, and I think we should be able to use storytelling to save lives as well, whether it is to save a person emotionally as she has saved King Shahrayar, or save a person physically, as she does when she saves the women of her kingdom.

Bibliography

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