

**Stories to Light our Way:
Journey to the World of Good**

Vol. 1

Ralph Singh

**Pre-K and Elementary School Study Guide
to Accompany Audio CD**

Stories have always bonded people together. Whether told at bedtime, around a campfire, or holiday table, they pass something of positive value from generation to generation around the world. Somehow in today's rush, we have lost that important connection. May this collection be a small effort to repair that link, and bring hope for a future of peace. R.S.

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Vol. 1
Pre-K and Elementary School Study Guide
to Accompany CD
(Rev. ed. 5-6-2010)

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Contents (tracks on audio CD)

Introduction

We are all fellow travelers, young and old alike, on the path of how to be good. Each story is like a journey. They can carry us to far away places, places where special people live and special things happen. But the most special place is in our hearts. And when we connect with the light in our hearts we can learn how to brighten our whole world and make our world the most special place.

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* original stories

Nurturing an Ideal Citizen of the State of Virtue: A pre-K through 12 and Adult Education Approach

Children's characters are influenced, if not informed, by the stories they hear; whether these be from the media, their parents, teachers, preachers, or friends.

If we introduce stories from a variety of traditions as a way of teaching how different cultures and traditions around the world transmit values to their children, we will also reinforce positive values in our children, nurturing that inner voice of good; will foster a more compassionate, inclusive, pluralistic society; and will achieve "social cohesion."

Stories have always been the means of inculcating wisdom. Further, there is nothing divisive about a story. They are universal and timeless. Everyone can learn something from a story. And everyone can express his or her own opinions of what the story means to them.

And, if one measure of character is the student's commitment to serving others, then these and other wisdom stories become the input to inspire and reinforce the caring and compassion we hope will be the foundation of such lifelong service learning projects.

Let us start nurturing our ideal citizens and feeding that inner voice of good.

Background

I have been pondering the question of what I term "wisdom vs. knowledge" in education for most of my 60 plus years. Personally, after completing what to many might have seemed a wonderful education, I felt I still lacked the wisdom to apply my skills and so set out on a classic quest for wisdom.

In the early 90's, after many years of working to develop programs that either broadened students' experiences or helped overcome the negative impact of drugs and alcohol, I was invited to be part of the Central New York Education Consortium task force on Values in Public Education. Out of this effort grew a program that I had the privilege of naming: the "Schools of Character Project."

We were searching for answers. We have created a materially rich society, but one in which our children are increasingly "spiritually poor." The drugs and the constant quest for more material things, are only a symptom of the inner emptiness. In order for character to take root, it needs the fertile soil of inner strength. Values have to be internalized. They need a spiritual framework on which to grow. But how in a secular society can we provide this link?

In response, I developed a course, "Exploring Spirituality," that I taught for secondary school and adults. In each section, I told stories. When the class's eyes lit up, I realized that the stories were the key. The wisdom stories we learn at our grandparents' feet, around a holiday table, or within our own traditions, actually become invalid the minute a child walks into school. Since they no longer hear them, the stories fade and children lose this all important grounding. By bringing teaching stories back into school, a child can hear a story told from his own tradition. It affirms his or her identity, and it informs other children about that child's background.

Can we introduce wisdom stories from the world's traditions in pre-school and elementary school that will teach or reinforce core values and familiarize students with different cultures, that then become the foundation of "wisdom-based" learning and critical thinking as they grow in middle and high school? If so, we would begin to see a change in character and the beginning of some consistency of values in public life. The enclosed audio CD provides an equally important tool for both teachers and parents to play the stories for the children.

Stories have the power to once again create a positive narrative for our children and our world. I am convinced that this can and will work to restore a common ethos in schools and communities which will then foster a compassionate and responsible, fully engaged citizen of a pluralistic, civil society.

I invite you to join me in this exciting journey.
Ralph Singh
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Suggestions for using this guide

While the audio CD provides the opportunity for you to have a guest storyteller in class at any time, (and a tool for parents to use at home) I know you will want to craft the discussions to meet your particular needs. Following each story, I've given an essential question and added some additional sample questions which focus on the meaning of the story. This will help develop and test a child's listening skills and provide what I call a foundation of wisdom for higher level critical thinking. I've also included a brief background statement on the source and the context of each story. Here are a few general questions and activities which you may find useful depending on the age of the children.

Some general questions:

Who are the characters you met? Which character did you like and why?
What sights and colors did you see? What sounds did you hear?
What does this story teach you? How does this story make you feel?
What will you tell your sisters and brothers or parents about this story?
Can you think of other similar stories from your tradition?

Focused activity

Create a two-panel booklet. Have the children draw a picture of the main element of the story. Then on the facing page, write (or dictate to you) just a sentence about the main meaning. This could then be printed as a booklet for the class and also posted on our website.

Sample Projects for the children:

Make a skit using characters in the story: Which characters and which scenes would you use?
Draw or paint some scenes from the story. What colors would you use?
Compose music: What music would you play in the background; what song would you sing?
Write their own version of the story: What would you name this story?

**Please feel free to send me comments or suggestions and check our website for updates
www.exploringspirituality.org**

The Kingdom of How to be Good

A story of changing yourself and the world

Once upon a time, in a place far away, there was a great king who wanted to teach the people how to be good. He ruled over a vast kingdom, so vast that people used to say that it stretched even beyond where the eye could see.

All kinds of people and animals lived in his kingdom. And they each had their own ways of doing things. That was fine with the king. He loved to see all the special gifts everyone had. But there was **one problem**: Everyone wanted to convince the others that his way was right. They split up into groups and quarreled with anyone who was from a different group. Each had their own colors and shapes, and those who had a lot didn't like those who had a little. The children were constantly arguing, even fighting with each other over the littlest things. And just things they were. One wanted Two's toy. Three wanted Four's sneakers. It made them jealous. Even if One had a lot, he still wanted more. He was greedy. And if he didn't get his way, he would start yelling or crying, kicking and screaming. When they grew up, they began to fight and to even hurt each other.

So the king decided on a plan. He would build a special place in his kingdom and send the children there to learn to behave better. It would be a beautiful place, with everything that a child could ever need.

And there would be only one rule. They would have to learn to be good and live together in peace. The plants in this place had beautiful flowers. But if any child got angry at another, the flowers wouldn't bloom. The trees offered delicious fruit. But if anyone tried to take more than their share, the fruit would dry up. The lakes and rivers provided wonderfully clear water. But if someone started fighting with another, the water would become dirty and not allow people to drink. So the children had to practice being good. It took some time but slowly, instead of fighting, they started to share. Instead of arguing, they started to be patient. And they learned to live together in peace.

Back at the palace, the king was overjoyed. It was time for the children to return. But the children were so happy that they didn't want to leave the special place with the clear water and delicious fruit. Besides, their parents were still fighting and arguing. So the king convinced the children that if they came back and shared what they had learned, everyone would live in peace. And he promised them a big celebration. One by one, the children returned. Wherever they went, people began to change. By continuing to share their love and friendship, and just by being good, everyone, even the adults, stopped fighting and learned how to be good.

There was great joy in the kingdom, and, true to his promise, the King held the best celebration ever. And that is how the land became known as "The Kingdom of How to be Good."

Thoughts

And so my fellow travelers, you can change the world – by changing yourself.

Essential Question:

Think about what it means to be good and what you can do to help make your class, your family, and your world a better place.

Sample Questions

Why did the king make a special place for the children?

Why were the people fighting?

What were the children doing wrong?

Sample Applications

What do we mean by good?

Let's think of ways we can be good.

What makes a person good?

How can we make our "kingdom" good, too?

Background

This is one of Ralph Singh's original stories meant to encourage all children to continue their journey to make this world a place of peace.