

This activity was designed and implemented by Kleio Kouki during her teaching practice in 2024 in the 1st Experimental Junior High School of Maroussi

Tell me a story!

Oral tradition and storytelling

1. Check out the article below. The paragraphs have been mixed up. Place the numbers 1-6 next to the correct paragraphs, so that the article makes sense:

The lasting power of oral traditions

Modern generations are now realising that the immediacy and intimacy of live storytelling cannot be captured by technology.

- ☐ **A.** Adding to that, there's a similarity of intent within oral traditions around the world. In American Indian traditions, a story has at least two purposes. The first is to entertain, ensuring it will be heard. This requires awareness and knowledge of the audience – an awareness lacking in any form of recording. Secondly, a story must convey a lesson, one directly appropriate to the needs of the listener.
- ☐ **B.** At the end of the day, as Chan K'in said [one] night in Naha, it is all related. The great trees are connected to the distant stars. We humans are part of a circle. If we imagine that we are more important than all other beings, we may be inviting disaster. If we imagine that technology can take the place of the living human presence experienced through oral tradition, then we diminish ourselves and forget the true power of stories.
- ☐ **C.** But oral traditions have not disappeared. Their settings may change, but their power and use remain. The image of an oral telling may be caught on paper, film or in digital format, but recordings are not the word shared live. The presence of teller and audience, and the immediacy of the moment are not fully captured by any form of technology. Unlike the insect frozen in amber, a told story is alive. It always changes from one telling to the next depending on the voice and mood of the storyteller, the place of its telling, the response of the audience. The story breathes with the teller's breath.

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☐ **D.** Looking into oral tradition's benefits, this is not to say that technology and the oral tradition are separated by a deep divide. Technology is neither good nor bad. It just depends on who's using it and how it's used. Humans have employed technology to hold on to stories for as long as we've had speech. Early on we carved shapes into wood or stone to create mnemonic devices. Now we have books and digital recorders.

☐ **E.** Are oral traditions still relevant? Are they slowly being replaced with technology? Questions about the relevance and persistence of oral traditions are not new. In the late 19th century, trained ethnologists – not just white men and women, but also educated members of indigenous communities – began writing down "vanishing" oral traditions. In the early 20th century, further native stories were captured by wire recorders, then movie cameras. Books and recordings, they assumed, were destined to take the place of storytellers.

☐ **F.** And so today, many traditional storytellers around the world refer back to books where ancestral wisdom was recorded. They listen to recordings – often in indigenous languages no longer widely spoken. We've passed through a century during which many indigenous languages were wiped out or pushed to the brink of extinction. A new generation of storytellers is bridging the gap between the decades when their elders were forbidden to speak anything but a European tongue and the present by listening to those old recordings and restoring almost forgotten tongues to everyday use.

From: The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 29 July 2010, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jul/29/lasting-power-oral-tradition.

- 2.** According to the text, oral stories have similar **purposes** among many cultures. What are they?

- 3.** The text mentions some **positive qualities** of oral traditions. Can you identify them in the text? Can you think of any **additional** ones yourself?

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4. The article mentions so many oral tradition benefits. Could you think of any **restrictions** in oral storytelling?

5. With all the information you have gathered from the text, what do you think about the storyteller's role? What would they have to focus on and consider, when retelling a story? Do you think it is an easy or difficult task? Consider the quotes below for your answers:

The story being told in an oral retelling will not be the same one told the last or the next time; it will be created by the teller and listeners involved in that particular telling on that particular day. This means that it can be a spontaneous event as well as

Listening to others as they are telling stories can be really useful; what kinds of gestures do they make; how do they interact with the audience throughout the retelling; what kinds of facial expressions do they use; how do they shape the story?

 Now let ME tell YOU a story:

Listen to the story about *Oisín and the land of eternal youth*, and imagine yourself as a storyteller, hoping to pass it on to other people. What would you focus on and what would you (perhaps) omit from the story? How would you justify those decisions? Try it out, by retelling the story in the class.