

Importance of Teaching Literature to Kids by Parents: A Critical Perspective

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is extremely important to understand the definition and benefits of literature for us before we start teaching or encouraging our young ones to read literature. As far as the definition of literature is concerned it has always been a difficult task to define it because art cannot be defined in a complete way easily. The following opinions of scholars of literature seem relevant:

Literature is a good foundation of pleasure, enjoyment, acquiring experience and learning the secrets in life and it offers readers the prospective to get away from the dilemma of daily life. It has the influence to rouse thoughts in readers' mind. It has the power to pass on a wide variety of experiences to readers. Literature's ability to capture the imagination and depict the lives of others also increases readers' ability to sympathize with others. A study published in the journal *Science* found that readers of literary fiction confirmed an increased ability to understand other people's thoughts and emotions. Literature helps develop critical-thinking skills. The reading and discussion of literature compel readers to make reasonable judgments about character motivations, causes, effects, critical analysis of plot etc.

2. ALBERT EINSTEIN SAID, "IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE."

Good literature inspires children to correct sentence patterns, standard story structures, and varied word usage. It provides a language model for those who hear and read it. Listening to stories provides opportunities for honing listening skills, and discussion allows children to express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions. When students read literature, they are practising their comprehension strategies in meaningful situations. It helps children deal with their problems. By finding out about the problems of others through books, children receive insights into dealing with their own problems. Multicultural literature helps readers value people from different places, time, viewpoints, races, ethnic groups, and cultures. Besides, it improves reading ability and attitudes. "It helps establish career concepts. For children who have limited knowledge of occupations, literature expands their ideas for potential careers (Harkins, 2001)."

Literature through different stories, novels, dramas and poems is a key to building our character and makes us what we are today. It provides us a way to live as a social being. We must know that kids, who are at their formative years, need to be educated with proper values to make them healthy for family, society, nation and mankind as well.

Unfortunately, parents want their children become economically sound by hook or crook. They want to see them as successful businessmen or professionals in the fields of technology, medicine, management, law and so on. There is a craze of medical and engineering today among students and parents. Very few of us want our children equipped with moral, social or cultural values which in the true sense can make their lives meaningful and successful eventually. They focus only on Science, Mathematics and such other career oriented subjects. They scarcely acquaint their children with the literature of any language. After all, literature of any language gives the same message.

Through this research and findings it will clear that if children become especially what their parents or they themselves want, they may remain aloof of the ethics afterward. They may not have the values of society or mankind. Earning money becomes the sole goal. It is seen some doctors in hospitals exploit patients and their attendants. They are in heinous habit of selling the organs of patients. Some exploit the attendants even after the death of the patients for the sake of money. They have no feelings at all for anybody. A patient becomes a commodity for them.

3. LET'S READ THE FOLLOWING NEWS EXCERPT REPORTED IN BANGOR DAILY NEWS ON MAY 12, 1998

“NEW DELHI, India- After luring dozens of poor Indians with promises of cash and jobs, three leading transplant surgeons robbed them of their kidneys and sold the organs to the rich clients, authorities said on Monday.”

Case of Dr L H Hiranandani hospital, Mumbai

Here a question may be raised “Why does this happen?” And the only answer is the lack of ethics or moral values that their parents might have given in their childhood constantly. Even the ideas of corruption and misbehaviour with others are the root causes of the feeble upbringing. They must think money is not everything.

Gradually, people are becoming unsocial these days. They don't like even to attend the wedding and funeral ceremonies. They don't have any interest in their social or national affairs. Shamefully, the new generation is forgetting even their national anthem, heroes and songs. It is thinkable why the people of the old time were more social and religious. This research finds the truth. It was just because of the habit of listening to stories from their elders and having interest in literature in the form of scriptures. They used to apply that understanding in their practical and day to day life.

Late Indian President and Bharat Ratan **Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** who was popularly known as the “Missile Man of India” for his contributions to the development of “Agni” and “Prithvi” strategic ballistic missiles and he was a major force behind the country's Pokharan II nuclear tests. He drew inspiration from birds, trees and the sea in his childhood, and learnt life lessons from his father, mother and Ahmad Jalalluddin, this boy soon matured into an inquisitive person with determined spirit and steadfast faith in God. He was the youngest child of a Muslim boatman and became the bestselling author of a number of books. Some of his famous books are as follows:

- Wings of Fire
- 2020 - A Vision for the New Millennium
- Envisioning an Empowered Nation
- Ignited Minds
- My Journey
- Developments in Fluid Mechanics and Space Technology
- The Luminous Sparks
- The Life Tree
- Mission India
- Children Ask Kalam
- Guiding Souls
- Inspiring Thoughts

Once, Priyanka Joshi interviewed Dr Abdul Kalam and her story just came out in “Little India”- the largest publication for Indians in America. Dr. Kalam sat down for the interview with Little India during a recent visit to the University of Washington's South Asian Center in Seattle. The following is an excerpt of the interview in which he focused on the influence of literature in his life:

Priyanka Joshi: What was your immediate reaction when “Agni” and “Prithvi” missiles were successful?

Dr Kalam: I was right there and witnessed the whole thing. Courage is a key. My message, especially to young people is to have courage to think differently, courage to invent, to travel the unexplored path, courage to discover the impossible and to conquer the problems and succeed. These are great qualities that they must work towards. This is my message to the young people.

Priyanka Joshi: And who taught you this message?

Dr Kalam: Myself. I had to learn this myself. Literature also influenced me deeply. In India, we have a famous book called, Thirukkul, written 2,200 years ago. I'll quote a couplet: "If your thoughts are high, definitely you're going to work for your aim, definitely you will succeed. But conversely, if you don't have an aim, don't have high thoughts, how can you aim at success?" My second favorite book is "Light From Many Lamps", by (Lillian Eichler) Watson. And the third book that I love is **Empire of the Mind**. These three books have made my life.

The following are some other famous people of the world who loved literature a lot and inspired others to read it:

- **Barack Obama** a Nobel Prize laureate and the President of the USA is clearly an avid reader and literature has massively influenced his politics. He talks about books at the drop of a hat, is frequently seen with a book in his hand and, of course, has penned two worldwide bestsellers himself. He has won Grammys for the audio versions of both his books: 1. Dreams from My Father 2. The Audacity of Hope

In May 2008, he was photographed carrying Fareed Zakaria's *The Post-American World* as he walked across the tarmac at an airport in Bozeman, Montana. The book outlines America's declining influence in international politics – was he formulating policies for dealing with rising powers like China, India and Brazil?

He mentioned Morrison's *Song of Solomon* many times during his Democratic and Presidential campaigns in 2008, including in an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine where he listed Shakespeare and Ernest Hemingway's **For Whom The Bell Tolls** as key influences.

- **Jack Dorsey**, co-founder of Twitter and CEO of the mobile payments company **Square**, bestows every new employee with a copy of his favorite read, "**The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right**" by Dr. Atul Gawande. Dorsey says this collection of true stories about how simple "no-brainer" checklists can save time, money, and lives is his "**success metric**."

Let's have a look on the habit of a father who related stories to his four years old daughter giving a moral lesson keeping in mind its impact on her personality afterward. (In the story "**Should Wizard Hit Mommy**"—By John Updike an American novelist, poet, short story writer and literary critic)

"In the evenings and for Saturday naps Jack told his daughter Jo a story out of his head. This custom began two years before when she was only two. In the story that he was telling her had a small creature named Roger Skunk. He smelt so bad that all his friend creatures hated his company. In fact, with the Skunk's disgrace, Jack recalled his own humiliation as a child. Once the wizard granted Roger Skunk his wish and soon he started to smell like roses. Consequently, he got his friends back and they played together. In the evening when he went to his home his mother smelt him awful. She lost her temper and took him back to the wizard and hit the wizard on his head for the change. She didn't want to lose the identity of the family. Here, Jo became unhappy and called his mother stupid. But morally her father corrected her defending the mother. He argued that the little Skunk loved his mother more than he loved all other little animals and believed that his mummy was right."

The story is supposed to deliver a specific message to the daughter, namely that parents know what is best for their children because parents love their children the most. One should not look for instant solutions to the problems in life; one should wait patiently for acceptance from friends. Through the story, evidently Jack reiterated the fact that parents know what is best for their children and advocates unquestioning obedience in the children.

It must be noted that the moral issues need to be addressed by developing a better understanding of children who are growing up, and then treating them accordingly, appreciating their points of view and then gently explaining what the deficiencies might be. It could also be about parents becoming like children themselves while conversing with their children, sharing their children's perspective, looking through their eyes, and appreciating and encouraging divergent thinking in them.

Parents are the first teachers. It is truly said: “First impression is the last impression”. The impressions gained in childhood are very difficult to erase and if moral values are infused in his mind in childhood, he will always remain attached to them. It mustn't be ignored that the impact of parents on the child is higher than teachers. It must be noted that a child remains at school hardly for 6 hours a day. The rest 18 hours are spent with parents. Parents must know the following scientific fact which has been adapted from Wikipedia:

“Promoting child development through parental training, among other factors, promotes excellent rates of child development. Parents play a large role in a child's life, socialization, and development. Having parents can add stability to the child's life and therefore encourage healthy development. Another influential factor in a child's development is the quality of their care..... The optimal development of children is considered vital to society and so it is important to understand the social, cognitive, emotional, and educational development of children.”

Therefore, the parents have to play a big role for the true development of the growing up children. They should inculcate the habit of learning literature in them for the scope of a healthy personality. Finally, this research paper emphasizes on the need of developing this habit from the very early stage of a child.

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Syed Firoz Ahmad, born on 15th February 1986 at Darbhanga in Bihar of India, was brought up and educated in his home town itself. He is a PGT and Head of the Department of English at Woodbine Modern School, Darbhanga which is a very renowned school affiliated to the CBSE, Delhi up to 10+2 level. He has a teaching experience of more than 15 years. Besides teaching, he has a keen interest in research and development. He has taken part in several National and International seminars. He has composed a number of inspiring poems. He has taught almost 10,000 students in his career so far. He is loved and revered by everyone at school and in society as well.