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The Use of Folk Tales in the Algerian School Textbook:
The Fifth-Grade Arabic Language Textbook

Abstract

Folk heritage represents the story and collective memory of a nation. Whether tangible or intangible, it is a vivid reflection of cultural existence and interaction, mirroring the individual's reality within society. With respect to stories, poetry, drawings, songs, or other forms of human expression and social coexistence, such heritage could not have been transmitted from one generation to the next except through its custodians, either in written form or orally. This article explores the presence of one aspect of Algerian folk heritage in a type of educational publication designed for nurturing young learners: the Arabic language school textbook. The study focuses on selected primary school textbooks as a model for applied research, adopting a descriptive–analytical approach to address the following central question: How has the folk tale been employed in Arabic textbooks for the primary education stage? The main questions arising from this inquiry concern the texts incorporated into the schoolbook and their potential to foster and strengthen cultural identity in today's children, who will one day proudly and confidently carry forward the culture of their nation.

Keywords: *folk heritage, educational folk tale, schoolbook, identity and belonging, educational and linguistic value, oral and written comprehension*

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Əlcəzair məktəblərində xalq nağıllarından istifadə:
V sinif ərəb dili dərsliyinin nümunəsində

Xülasə

Xalq irsi bir millətin hekayəsini və kollektiv yaddaşını təmsil edir. Maddi və ya qeyri-maddi olmasından asılı olmayaraq, bu, mədəni varlığın və qarşılıqlı təsirin canlı əksidir, fərdin cəmiyyətdəki reallığını əks etdirir. Hekayələrə, şeirlərə, rəsmlərə, mahnılara və ya insan ifadəsinin və sosial birgəyaşayışın digər formalarına gəldikdə, bu cür irs bir nəsildən digərinə yalnız yazılı və ya şifahi şəkildə qəyyumları vasitəsilə ötürülə bilərdi.

Bu məqalədə Əlcəzair xalq irsinin bir aspektinin gənc tələbələri yetişdirmək üçün hazırlanmış bir təhsil nəşrində – ərəb dili məktəb dərsliyində – mövcudluğu araşdırılır. Tədqiqat tətbiqi tədqiqatlar üçün model kimi seçilmiş ibtidai məktəb dərsliklərinə diqqət yetirir və aşağıdakı mərkəzi sualı cavablandırmaq üçün təsviri-analitik yanaşma tətbiq edir: Xalq nağılı ibtidai təhsil mərhələsi üçün ərəb dili dərsliyində necə istifadə olunub?

Bu sorğudan irəli gələn əsas suallar məktəb kitabına daxil edilmiş mətnlər və onların bir gün millətinin mədəniyyətini qürurla və inamla irəli aparacaq bugünkü uşaqlarda mədəni kimliyi inkişaf etdirmək və gücləndirmək potensialı ilə bağlıdır.

Açar sözlər: *xalq irsi, maarifləndirici xalq nağılı, məktəb kitabı, kimlik və mənsubiyyət, təhsil və dil dəyəri, şifahi və yazılı anlama*

Introduction

The notions associated with the essence of culture are manifold, each emerging from distinct intellectual traditions and specialised perspectives. Edward Burnett Tylor defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, and custom," embodying the very essence of belonging to one community rather than another. From a philosophical standpoint, culture is regarded as the cultivation of taste, critical faculties, art, morals, and all individual capacities that contribute to the intellectual, spiritual, and practical development of society. This view is reinforced by philosophical dictionaries, which affirm that the distinctiveness of societies is accompanied by the evolution of their cultures, asserting: "Each generation has its culture, drawn from the past and enriched by contributions in the present; it is the hallmark of human societies" (al-Yāfiʿī, ʿAbd Allāh, 1999).

Research

The multiplicity and complexity of the concept of culture necessitate its specification and clear delineation. Popular culture, therefore, encompasses the meanings of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and various forms of learning across different sciences. It is practised by all social groups and classes, regardless of their cultural levels or academic attainment. In this sense, it represents a historical continuum of civilisations that have left their imprint on the geographical expansion of these societies, harmonising with the diversity of cultural expressions prevalent in different eras. An illustrative example is Algerian culture, which has assimilated numerous civilisations and cultural influences that passed through Algeria in successive historical periods, leaving their mark on various social and cultural manifestations. The Arab presence, which is deeply rooted and firmly established, has imparted its distinctive character to both Algeria's tangible and intangible heritage. This represents a form of communication and integration among cultures, producing a unique harmony and synthesis embodied in Algerian culture (Boudina & Mohamed, 2019).

1. The Folk Tale and the Folk Story

The folk tale and the folk story are significant models and essential vehicles for transmitting a community's culture from one generation to the next. They reflect values, customs, and traditions, providing a concise representation of popular culture. Through their engaging and captivating style, they convey "a people's past, present, and future, serving as a hallmark of each society and the identity that distinguishes it from others". Although modern research attributes the formal documentation of folk stories to the works of the Brothers Grimm, it is equally important to recognise the contributions of Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimah*. He drew attention to the vernacular literature of his era, including *muwashshaḥāt* and *zajal* poetry, which flourished in Andalusia, and he preserved excerpts from popular epics such as the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*.

Among the earliest Arab scholars to engage in this field and collect folk tales are Muḥammad al-ʿĪd al-Ṭanṭāwī, Ilyās ibn Baqṭar al-Suyūṭī, and Fuʾād Ḥasanīn ʿAyyād, who recorded examples of Egyptian folk tales, some written in Egyptian vernacular and others later rendered into Classical Arabic. In Algeria, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Būrāyū is regarded as one of the most prominent scholars and researchers of popular folklore, particularly in documenting oral narratives, with a notable focus on folk tales and stories (Bouraoui & Abdelhamid, n.d.).

3. Types of Folk Tales

There have been numerous classifications of folk tales on the basis of their nature, function, or role. The Finnish scholar Antti Aarne, in his *Type Index of Folk Tales* (1910), identified 2,411 distinct types of folk tales. Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed a classification grounded in the social and moral value conveyed by the tale. He observed, "What may serve as the subject of a mythological tale for one people may constitute the subject of a heroic tale for another." Lévi-Strauss emphasised that moral values derive their meaning and significance from the cultural and educational context of each society (Chnoufa, Najia, & Hani, Abdelatif, 2021).

Another notable classification is that proposed by Roseline Laila Quraish, who categorised folk stories into two main types: long folk stories and short folk stories. Examples of long folk stories

include heroic tales and fairy tales. In contrast, short folk stories include entertaining tales, stories aimed at alleviating psychological repression, and purposeful stories (or, in Quraish's terms, "meaningful stories"). The following schematic diagram illustrates Roseline Quraish's classification of folk stories:

Figure 1: Classification of Folk Stories According to Roseline Quraish
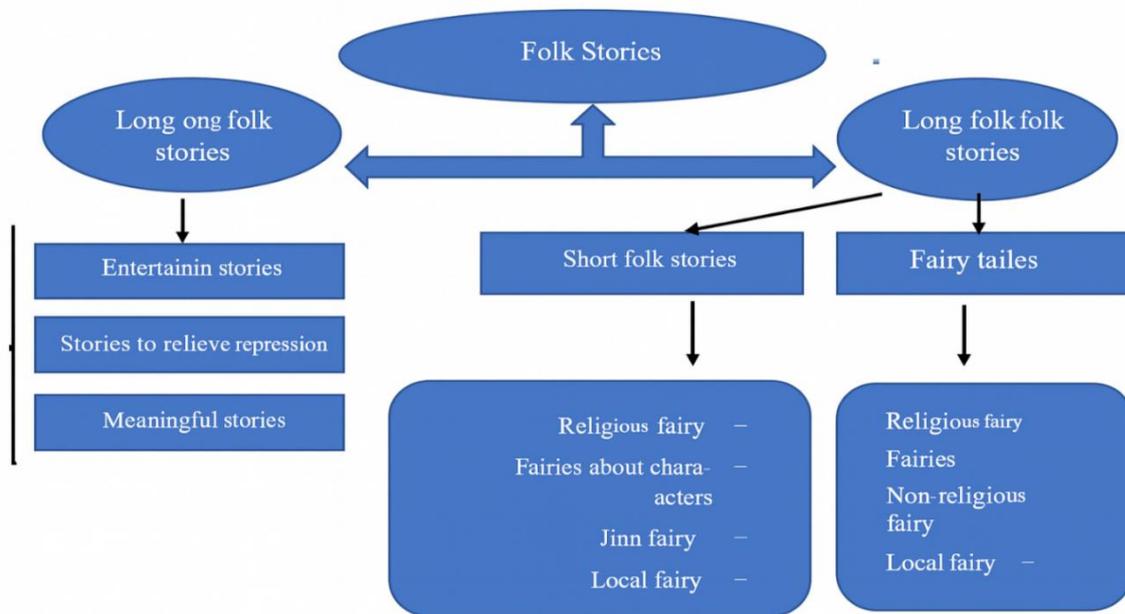
Quraish's classification does not deviate significantly from that adopted by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Būrāyū, who categorised folk stories into three main types: heroic tales, folk tales, and fairy tales. These are outlined as follows (Ibn Khaldūn & Abd al-Raḥmān, 2001):

Figure 2: Classification of folk theories according to ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Būrāyū
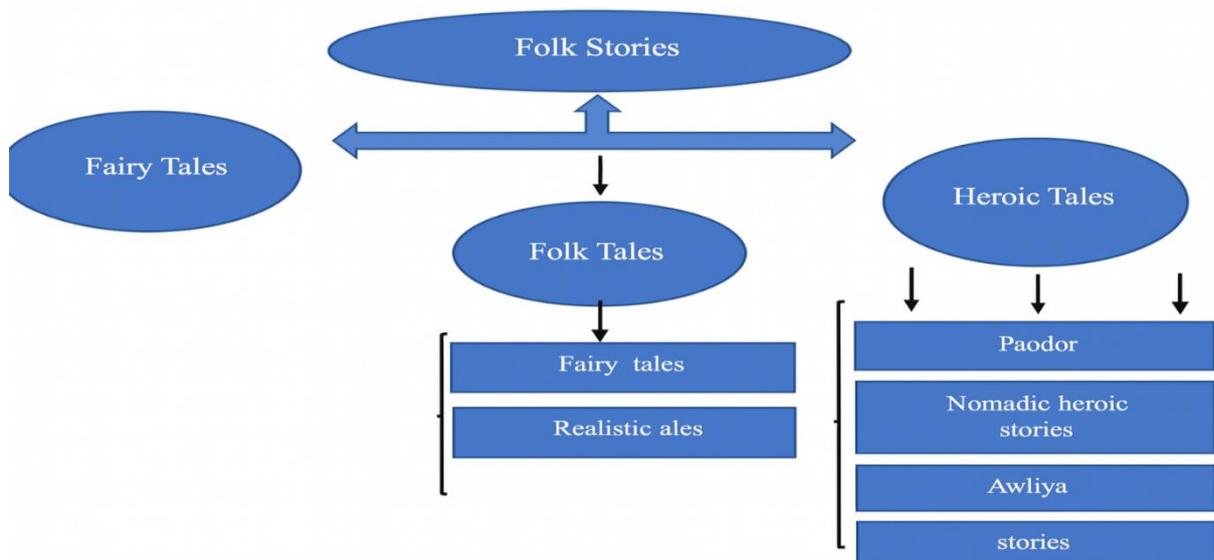
Fairy tales include all narratives that do not correspond to reality, such as stories of jinn, magic, and ogres, intended to entertain, thrive, and convey lessons through imaginative and fantastical depictions far removed from fact.

Despite the significance of these studies, the contributions of authors such as al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, al-Ṭayyib al-ʿAqbi, Ḥassān Ḥumaym, Muḥammad Dīb, and Aḥmad ibn Qāsī, among others, cannot be overlooked. They documented Algerian folk tales and transmitted them to future generations in engaging and educational ways.

Notably, most folk tales were initially conveyed in local dialects, with some later recorded in books and educational media in Arabic and other languages. Among the well-known stories in popular Algerian culture are *The King and the Clever One*, which illustrates wit and resourcefulness. Other tales recount the exploits of popular heroes such as ʿAlī ibn Zayd and Shaykh Bū ʿAmāmah. In addition, there are folk stories aimed at children and designed to teach values and morals entertainively and engagingly, such as *Ḥamdān and the Monster* and *The Wise Donkey*, which emphasise the importance of wisdom and sound reasoning. Most of these stories feature imaginative characters and educational scenarios tailored to the age and interests of their readers or listeners (Lévi-Strauss & Claude, 1973).

4. Concept of the Educational Text

The concept of the educational text is closely tied to the educational aims and objectives it seeks to achieve. Thus, establishing a comprehensive and precise definition of this term requires reliance on the criteria used to determine whether a text is educational or otherwise. In this context, al-Yāfiʿī states, "An educational text must be constructed on foundations that are consistent with the learner's educational stage". Thus, the educational text may be defined as a purposeful type of text in terms of content, built upon deliberate criteria and selected with the intention of fulfilling pedagogical aims and supporting the acquisition of the desired educational competencies at a specific stage of learning. Among the criteria emphasised by al-Yāfiʿī is the selection of vocabulary appropriate to a given educational level, which contributes to the classification and identification of educational texts (Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 1983).

5. Methodological Framework and Corpus Analysis

5.1 Methodological Framework

This study focused on the following central research question: *How have folk tales been employed in Arabic language textbooks for the fifth year of primary education?* To explore this question and its subquestions, a descriptive-analytical study of the textbook texts was undertaken. The texts were classified according to their nature, and the findings of this descriptive analysis were examined in light of previous research and the fundamental reference framework adopted in the development of educational curricula in Algeria.

5.2 The Fifth-Year Arabic Language Textbook for Primary Education

The fifth-year Arabic language textbook represents a synthesis of prior learning and serves as an evaluative stage of all that pupils have acquired over the preceding four years. As stated in the authors' preface:

"You have already travelled a considerable distance in acquiring knowledge and language skills and have gained a fair share of Arabic during the first and second cycles of primary education. You are now in the third cycle, where you will gain mastery over the Arabic language, both orally and in writing, expanding your culture and enriching your knowledge across other subjects."

The authors emphasise that the four language skills were developed during the first and second cycles. The fifth year, representing the third cycle, focuses on consolidating and strengthening these achievements. It also functions as a summative evaluation of a stage of learning during which pupils acquire proficiency in listening, reading, and expression, as well as knowledge of Arabic grammar, which they are trained to apply in their oral and written compositions (Merah, Nour el Houda, & Mihoubi, Ismail, 2019).

This highlights that the Arabic language instruction across the three cycles is characterised by coherence in achieving learning objectives and in guiding pupils' progression from a basic

understanding of knowledge to more advanced levels. This is achieved through the application of specific pedagogical approaches:

"...observation, inquiry, investigation, and focus, so that when you embark on expression and creativity, you possess a complete mastery of both form and meaning, and your oral and written expression becomes harmonious and integrated".

The textbook is divided into eight units, each containing texts that address social, scientific, and cultural themes with clear educational purposes. According to its authors, the selection of texts was guided by the following principles (Mersli, Masʿūda, & Sharīf, Suʿād, 2019):

➢ Choosing purposeful and meaningful texts.

➢ Emphasising moral and educational values by selecting constructive themes aimed at shaping pupils' character, improving behaviour, and fostering confidence, determination, and knowledge.

➢ Broadening pupils' intellectual horizons and nurturing their curiosity about the merits and advancements of science.

➢ Development of a spirit of citizenship and pride in national identity.

➢ Refining pupils' aesthetic taste, stimulating their imagination, and strengthening their perceptions and emotional engagement with various issues.

5.3 Classification of Texts in the Textbooks

The textbook comprises eight units, each of which contains three texts unified under a single theme. The following table presents the names of the themes and the titles of the texts included (Quraish, Roslin Laila, 1974):

**Table 1. Contents of the Units of the Arabic Language Textbook,
Year 5 of Primary Education.**

Unit	Theme	Texts
1	Human Values	*School Companions The School Cooperative The Path to Happiness*
2	Social Life and Services	*Among the Noblest Professions*: *Sincerity in Work, The Profession of Tomorrow*
3	National Identity	*Taqfarinas Speaks*: *We Are All Children of One Nation, A Precious Land*
4	Sustainable Development	*The Secret of Life When Waste Becomes Wealth The Harvest, the Dog, and the Piece of Bread*
5	Health and Nutrition	*The Valley of Life No Entry The Best Doctors: Vegetable and Fruit Juice*
6	The World of Science and Discoveries	*A Remarkable Genius*: *The Story of Penicillin, The Mischievous Robot*
7	Stories and Folk Tales	*ʿIzza and Maʿzūza Juḥā and the Sultan A Friend's Loyalty*
8	Travels and Journeys	*A Journey to ʿAyn al-Ṣafraʾ The Story of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*

The texts can be reclassified according to the nature of their contents as follows:

Table 2. Classification of the Texts by the Nature of Their Contents

| Nature of the Texts	Titles of the Texts	Total
Social/Realistic	*School Companions*; *The School Cooperative*; *The Path to Happiness*; *Among the Noblest Professions*; *Sincerity in Work*; *The Profession of Tomorrow*; *We Are All Children of One Nation*; *A Precious Land*; *A Journey to ʿAyn al-Ṣafraʾ*	09
Scientific	*The Secret of Life*; *When Waste Becomes Wealth*; *The Valley of Life*;	06

	No Entry; *The Best Doctors: Vegetable and Fruit Juice*; *The Story of Penicillin*	
Myth/Fantasy	*The Harvest, the Dog, and the Piece of Bread*; *The Mischievous Robot*; *ʿIzza and Maʿzūza*; *Juḥā and the Sultan*; *A Friend's Loyalty*; *The Story of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*	06
Historical	*Taqfarinas Speaks*: *A Remarkable Genius*	02

The table shows that most of the texts address social reality and events that pupils may encounter wholly or in part in their lives. It should be noted, however, that most of these texts are stories inspired by novels, short stories, and social articles published in national newspapers; they are not necessarily factual, but they approach reality as closely as possible. To clarify this judgment in greater detail, we present the following proportional table (Sedira & Siham, 2018):

Table 3. Proportion of the Use of Creative and Imaginative Texts in the Textbooks

Nature of the Texts	Proportion of Realistic Narrative		Proportion of Mixed/Imaginary Narrative		Total Proportion	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**%**	**Number**
Social	09	100	00	00	39.13	00
Scientific	06	100	00	00	26.08	00
Myth/Fantasy	01	16.66	05	83.33	4.34	21.73
Historical	01	50	01	50	4.34	4.34
Total	**17**		**06**		**73.89**	**26.07**
					23	**100**

Figure 3: Proportions of the use of realistic narratives
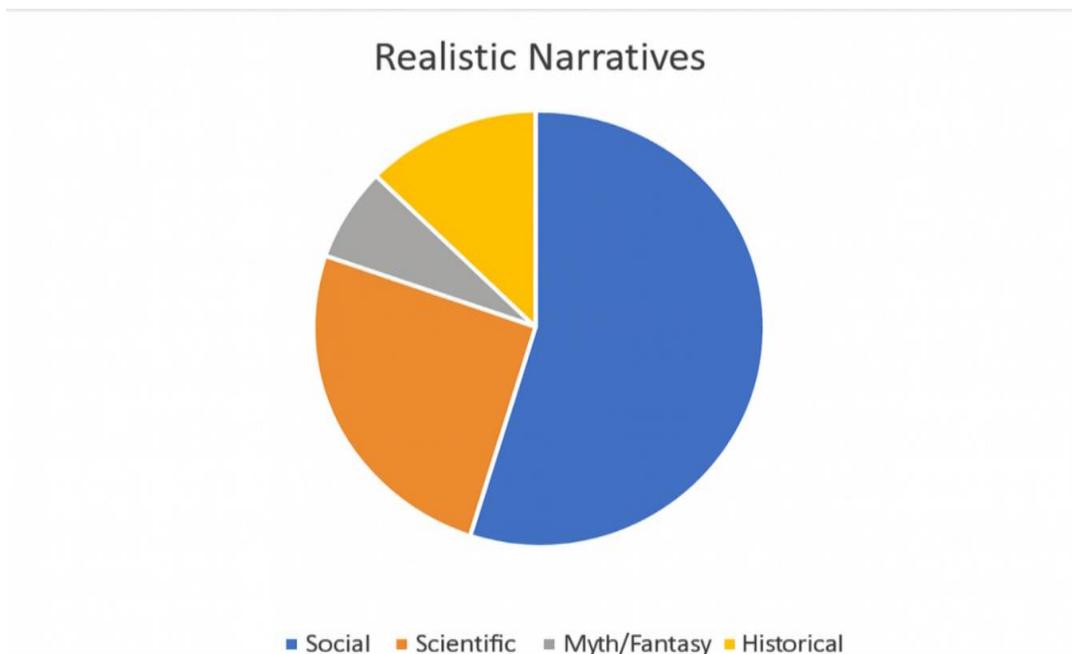
The percentages recorded above and illustrated in the pie chart demonstrate the significant dominance of social texts over other types. This prominence can likely be attributed to the closeness of their themes to pupils' lived experiences within their families. These texts serve as abstractions and simplified depictions of real-life experiences.

The second category of texts with substantial representation is scientific and knowledge-based content, whereas historical and imaginative narratives occupy a more balanced yet minimal proportion of the classification (Wādih & ʿĀʾisha, 2017).

One conclusion that can be drawn from this classification is that historical and imaginative stories are often brought closer to pupils' understanding by incorporating realistic elements. This approach encourages pupils to engage with the stories naturally, accepting them as plausible.

For example, story *A Friend's Loyalty* recounts the friendship of two boys from different social backgrounds. Their lives take divergent turns; one becomes wealthy, while the other falls into poverty and is abandoned by his friends. The impoverished boy later sought help from his former companion, who refused direct assistance but instead provided him with the means to rebuild his life and achieve success. Once he regains stability, he expresses his disappointment through two lines of verse, to which his friend replies, revealing that he was the one who had secretly supported him. The story concludes with their friendship being restored. The straightforward, realistic narrative style makes the lesson both transparent and accessible.

A similar approach is evident in the *Taqfarinas Speaks*. Although this text recounts the life of a historical and heroic figure, it is presented in a fictional, dialogue-based format between the protagonist and a young girl, Warda, who listens intently as he recounts his heroism and resistance against invaders in the struggle for national liberation. This narrative framework effectively conveys historical truths in an engaging, relatable manner, enabling pupils to imagine themselves within the story and grasp its meanings with ease (Wizārat al-Tarbiyya al-Waṭaniyya, 2019; 2023/2024).

Conclusion

Through the content of this article, we sought to examine the integration of folk tales into school textbooks, selecting a fifth-year primary textbook as a case study. This choice is significant, as this stage serves as an evaluative checkpoint for the knowledge and skills acquired during the first and second cycles of primary education. The study yielded the following findings:

➢ The Arabic language textbook for the fifth year of primary school relies on educational texts that address environments familiar to the child, reflecting lived experiences and serving as a foundation for linguistic and cognitive development.

➢ From the perspective of inherited storytelling traditions and cultural heritage, authentic folk tales are mainly absent from the textbook; rarely is a folk story presented in its original form.

➢ The educational text differs in purpose from literary and artistic texts, which are designed to entertain or inspire. As a result, adapting a folk tale into an educational text requires significant changes, including simplifying the language, carefully selecting vocabulary, clarifying knowledge-related content, omitting passages or events that may confuse pupils, and modifying the narrative style to match their comprehension abilities.

➢ Folk tales are diverse in purpose and structure and often lack thematic unity. This makes their inclusion in textbooks challenging, as it demands careful guidance of the narrative to meet educational objectives and precise editing to preserve their popular identity. Many tales lost cultural significance when transcribed into Classical Arabic, which erased local linguistic and cultural features.

➢ Preserving folk tales requires maintaining their linguistic identity, as they constitute the lexicon and cultural record of nations.

➢ The use of folk tales in education is feasible and widely practiced, given that primary-level pupils are naturally drawn to listen to stories rather than engaging in abstract concepts. When truths are presented through imaginative, artistic narratives, they become more meaningful and memorable, fostering deeper comprehension and acceptance.

Recommendations:

➢ Respecting the identity and preserving the aesthetic quality of folk tales by maintaining the original language and vocabulary in which they were transmitted.

➢ The incorporation of folk tales into school textbooks is both necessary and essential if we seek to raise a generation that preserves its values and history. For this reason, folk tales should be utilised

in their entirety, with their artistic and cultural elements and inherent values intact, without distortion or alteration, while still respecting educational considerations.

➢ Employing folk tales reinforces the concept of citizenship. It would therefore be preferable to present our history to future generations through this artistic model rather than restricting folk tales to fantastic narratives, such as those of *Lūnja bint al-Ghūl*. Folk tales also transmit stories of heroism and revolutionary figures.

It is important that we work on employing the concept of the educational folk tale, because we encounter it daily in our conversations through hints, examples, proverbs, and similes. This view is shared by many scholars such as Najia Chnoufa, Abdelatif Hani, and Mohamed Boudina. As this article comes to a close, it can be said that we owe much to our heritage; the wealth of what it has offered us is vast, yet we have not made the best use of it. What has been employed is very limited and must be further strengthened. The school textbook is the most suitable and appropriate medium for this approach. This article represents only a preliminary vision that I hope will be developed in the future through studies that give this issue its share of effective solutions and practical methods for integrating the folk narrative heritage into our textbooks and curricula.

In conclusion, we owe much to our cultural heritage, which offers a wealth of material that has yet to be fully and effectively utilised. What has been incorporated into our educational resources thus far remains minimal and must be strengthened. The school textbook stands out as the most appropriate and effective medium for this effort. This article is merely a preliminary vision that should, in the future, be supported by more extensive studies offering practical solutions and methodologies for successfully integrating narrative folk heritage into our textbooks and curricula.

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