

# Discussion: Moral Significance of Protagonist Survival in Keleketla, Makgamatha (1990) Folktales

Ramohlale M I<sup>1</sup>, Chauke OR<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2\*</sup>Department of Languages, University of Limpopo, Republic of South Africa  
<sup>2\*</sup>Email: [osborn.chauke@ul.ac.za](mailto:osborn.chauke@ul.ac.za), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7121-678x>

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>Qualitative research methodologies, including content analysis, desktop research, and cultural analysis, illuminate the moral significance of protagonist survival in African folktales like Keleketla and Makgamatha (1990). These narratives emphasise themes of good triumphing over evil and serve as moral compasses for children, encouraging them to emulate protagonists as role models. The first finding underscores how the survival of protagonists symbolizes the triumph of virtue and courage over adversity. Secondly, these folktales often depict the punishment of antagonists who perpetrate harm or injustice against the protagonist. This narrative device reinforces moral lessons where wrongdoing is met with consequences, highlighting the importance of ethical behavior and accountability. Thirdly, children are encouraged to emulate the bravery and determination exhibited by protagonists in these tales. By showcasing characters who navigate challenges with integrity and courage, folktales promote positive moral development and encourage young readers to embody similar virtues in their own lives. The first implication is that these folktales provide aspirational role models for children, promoting virtues of bravery, resilience, and justice. Secondly, by emphasizing the moral significance of protagonist survival, these folktales challenge harmful stereotypes and inspire positive social change within communities. They encourage critical reflection on societal norms and promote values that uphold justice, fairness, and moral integrity.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> folktales, African literature, moral significance, protagonist survival, role models, cultural values, societal norms, bravery, resilience, justice.</p>

## Introduction

African folktales serve as profound cultural artifacts that transmit essential values and moral lessons across generations. At the heart of these narratives lies the survival of protagonists, symbolising more than mere endurance but embodying the triumph of virtue and courage over adversity. In these tales, protagonists navigate perilous journeys and confront formidable antagonists, demonstrating qualities of bravery and resilience. Their survival signifies a moral victory, where righteousness prevails despite daunting odds. This thematic emphasis on overcoming evil underscores these tales' role as moral compasses, guiding children toward ethical behavior and moral integrity. As scholar Okpewho (1992) notes, African oral literature often employs such narratives to illustrate profound moral lessons and societal values. The tales frequently depict the consequences of wrongdoing, portraying antagonists who face retribution for perpetrating harm or injustice against the protagonist. This narrative device not only reinforces the moral lesson that actions have consequences but also encourages young audiences to internalise values of justice and accountability. Beyond moral instruction, protagonists in African folktales serve as aspirational figures. By embodying qualities such as bravery, resilience, and justice, these characters inspire children to emulate virtues essential for personal growth and societal harmony. Through identification with protagonists, young readers engage deeply with the narratives and absorb moral teachings that shape their ethical frameworks. Moreover, the survival of protagonists in these folktales holds broader implications for societal norms and cultural reflections. By celebrating justice, fairness, and moral integrity, these narratives challenge stereotypes

and advocate for positive social change within African communities. They promote critical reflection on prevailing norms and encourage values that foster inclusivity and communal well-being.

In conclusion, the moral significance of protagonist survival in African folktales underscores their enduring relevance as cultural artifacts. These narratives convey timeless lessons of virtue and courage, shaping moral consciousness and advocating for societal harmony. The survival and triumph of protagonists in these tales exemplify the transformative power of storytelling in transmitting cultural heritage and nurturing moral resilience among audiences of all ages.

### **Problem statement**

The problem statement revolves around the common perception that many oral traditional narrators and recipients regard African folktales merely as aesthetic stories, overlooking their deeper cultural and moral significance. Despite their rich tapestry of narratives and symbolism, these tales are often not fully appreciated for their capacity to impart essential values and societal norms. Instead, they are sometimes reduced to entertaining narratives without recognition of their potential to convey profound moral lessons and shape ethical frameworks within African communities. This oversight underscores a gap in understanding and appreciation, highlighting the need for deeper exploration and recognition of the cultural and moral values embedded within these oral traditions.

### **Literature Review**

African folktales represent a profound cultural legacy, serving as repositories of essential values and moral teachings that transcend generations. At their core, these narratives emphasize the survival of protagonists, which symbolizes not just endurance but the triumph of virtue and courage in the face of adversity. Through intricate storytelling, these tales guide listeners and readers toward ethical behavior and moral integrity by showcasing protagonists who navigate perilous journeys and confront formidable antagonists with bravery and resilience (Okpewho, 1992). The significance of protagonist survival extends beyond mere plot progression; it serves as a moral compass, illustrating the consequences of wrongdoing and reinforcing values of justice and accountability within African oral literature.

Okpewho (1992) argues that African folktales are instrumental in illustrating profound societal values and moral lessons. They often depict protagonists who, through their actions and decisions, embody virtues such as bravery, resilience, and justice. By identifying with these aspirational figures, children and young readers not only engage deeply with the narratives but also internalize the moral teachings embedded within them. This interaction fosters personal growth and contributes to societal harmony by promoting values that are essential for communal well-being.

Furthermore, the survival of protagonists in African folktales holds broader implications for societal norms and cultural reflections. These narratives celebrate themes of justice, fairness, and moral integrity, challenging stereotypes and advocating for positive social change within African communities. By encouraging critical reflection on prevailing norms, these tales promote inclusivity and contribute to shaping ethical frameworks that uphold communal values (Nwagbara, 2016). They serve as cultural touchstones that not only preserve heritage but also nurture moral resilience among audiences of all ages.

Nwagbara (2016) underscores the transformative power of African folktales in transmitting cultural heritage and promoting moral development. These narratives, often overlooked as mere entertainment, possess a depth that resonates with universal themes of virtue and courage. They inspire individuals to confront challenges with integrity and to uphold moral principles in their interactions within society. By celebrating the survival and triumph of protagonists, these tales affirm the enduring relevance of storytelling to impart cultural wisdom and foster resilience in the face of adversity.

In conclusion, African folktales stand as timeless cultural artifacts that convey profound moral lessons and societal values through the survival and triumph of their protagonists. By examining these narratives through a lens that acknowledges their moral and cultural significance, we deepen our understanding of their role in shaping ethical frameworks and promoting communal well-being. As such, these tales continue to resonate as vital tools for transmitting cultural heritage and nurturing moral resilience among diverse audiences.

### **Interpretation of Moral Values Theory**

Interpreting moral values within African folktales, such as folktales found in the folklore book, *Keleketla*, Makgamatha (1990), reveals their profound role as repositories of cultural wisdom and ethical guidance. These narratives transcend mere entertainment, serving as vehicles for transmitting essential values across generations and reinforcing communal norms through the survival and triumph of protagonists.

Central to the interpretation of moral values in African folktales is the depiction of protagonists who embody virtues such as courage, justice, and resilience. These characters navigate perilous journeys and confront formidable adversaries, demonstrating moral fortitude in their actions and decisions. As Asante (1995) argues, African oral traditions are rich with narratives that convey moral lessons and societal values, where the survival

of protagonists symbolizes the triumph of good over evil. This thematic emphasis not only engages audiences but also encourages them to internalize these values as guiding principles in their own lives.

Moreover, African folktales often employ a narrative structure where antagonists face consequences for their actions against the protagonist. This narrative device reinforces the moral lesson that actions have repercussions, promoting values of justice and accountability within the community (Ntuli, 2010). By depicting the moral outcomes of wrongdoing, these tales impart a sense of moral responsibility to listeners and readers, urging them to uphold ethical behavior and societal norms.

Furthermore, the interpretation of moral values in African folktales extends beyond individual virtues to encompass broader societal ideals. These narratives celebrate justice, fairness, and moral integrity as essential components of communal harmony. They challenge stereotypes and advocate for positive social change within African communities by promoting critical reflection on prevailing norms and encouraging values that foster inclusivity and communal well-being.

In conclusion, the interpretation of moral values in African folktales as espoused in *Keleketla*, Makgamatha (1990) underscores their significance as cultural artifacts that transmit timeless lessons of virtue and courage. By examining these narratives through the lens of moral interpretation, researchers gain insights into how these tales continue to shape ethical frameworks and promote societal harmony through their enduring cultural relevance.

### Research Methodology and Research Design

The research aimed to explore the socio-cultural significance of survival motifs in African folktales, utilizing a qualitative research methodology. This approach facilitated deep interaction with relevant tales from *Keleketla Makgamatha* (1990), allowing for nuanced insights into cultural narratives. For our research design, we adopted a case study approach informed by Jane Smith's framework (2015), which emphasizes the interpretative nature of qualitative research. This methodological choice positioned us as interpreters of cultural meanings, enabling a comprehensive analysis of survival themes across various folktales. Through this approach, we examined narrative structures, identified recurring motifs, and interpreted the socio-cultural implications of survival narratives within their contextual settings. The qualitative methodology provided flexibility to explore complex cultural phenomena and contributed to a deeper understanding of storytelling traditions in African cultures.

The combination of qualitative research methodology and Smith's case study framework enriched our exploration of survival motifs in African folktales, highlighting their cultural resilience and socio-cultural significance.

### Study site and sampling

The study occurred in the Ga-Mothapo royal family led by Kgošigadi Moremadi wa ga Mothapo (Her Majesty, Queen Moremadi) in Limpopo Province in the Capricorn South District over three months (the second term of the year). Out of 45 royal families in the province, we selected Bakgaga ba Ga-Mothapo for their respect and practice of African cultural activities including cultural games, initiation schools, and cultural competitions and festivities. To date, Bakgaga ba Ga-Mothapo is the only nationality that still uses African praise names daily as a means of address. These are names such as *Hlabirwa*, *Ngwato*, *Gobetse*, *Nape*, and *Mogošadi*. From the royal family, we included members of *Mantona a Mošate* (the queen's next of kin).

We further collected two folktales. The two folktales, *Ngwanamašila le Timamogolo* (Ngwanamašila and Timamogolo) and *Mapula le makgema* (Mapula and the Ogres) were sampled for analysis. The versions of same folktales collected from participants were compared to the same folktales contained in the poetry book *Keleketla* by Makgamatha (1990).

We gave participants a detailed explanation of the purpose and procedure of the study and sought their consent. We explained to them that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. We pledged our commitment to confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity to the participants as much as possible. Participants were then made to sign a consent form upon agreement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

### Data Collection

Following their agreement to participate in the study, we began to create a cordial atmosphere where we allowed them to tell us their folktale versions, compared to the versions collected from the poetry book how the protagonist survives, and most importantly the social significance of the survival. Data was constructed through three methods, semi-structured interviews, content, and cultural analysis.

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to open discussions with participants. We found the semi-structured interviews more appropriate to elicit their experiences about the cultural narrative of selected folktales and the social significance of their survival. This helped us to develop our theoretical understanding of what constituted relevant interpretations of moral values in African folktales.

The interview schedule constituted the three values of the Interpretation of Moral Values Theory: depiction of the protagonist, survival of the protagonist, and the socio-cultural significance of their survival. We asked about their narrative versions of the cultural folktales, how the protagonist character survives in their culturally narrated folktale like the ones in the poetry book, and lastly, their envisaged message conveyed by the survival of the protagonist character.

We scheduled our visit to participants during the second term, to coincide with the great cultural festivities, the initiation ceremonies. It is during this period that all members of the Bakgaga ba Ga-Mothapo community gather at the royal family and celebrate the arrival of the initiates. During this period participants are over-charged and will be ready to give their all. We planned to have four visits, the first visit was for the arrangements and the introduction of the study. The second visit was for the initial interviews. The third visit was used for feedback and debriefing. The fourth visit was used for further conversations and clarifications on areas that were not clear.

#### *Content analysis*

Content analysis was adopted as one of the methods of data collection to supplement the semi-structured interviews. The two folktales, Mapula le makgema (Mapula and the ogres) and Ngwanamašila le Timamogolo (Ngwanamašila and Timamogolo) were selected from the poetry book *Keleketla* by Makgamatha (1990). Each folktale will first be summarised, then analysed, and finally, the role and survival of the protagonist are clearly outlined, and its social significance examined.

#### *Cultural analysis*

Cultural analysis played a crucial role in establishing rapport with our participants. Before engaging with them, we took deliberate steps to understand their cultural norms and traditions. For instance, we learned that the Bakgaga ba Ga-Mothapo community appreciates being addressed by their praise names. Moreover, protocol required us to greet the queen first upon entering the royal kraal, stating the purpose of our visit before proceeding with interviews.

Another significant aspect of our cultural analysis involved recognizing how participants perceived the cultural significance of the survival of protagonists in their narratives. Understanding these cultural nuances not only facilitated smoother interactions but also enriched our interpretation of the stories shared with us.

## **Findings and Discussions**

From the analysis of both semi-structured interviews, content, and culture, we came up with three main findings, which we classified under three themes: i) summary of a folktale. ii), the depiction and survival of the protagonist in two folktales, and iii), the socio-cultural significance of protagonist survival in the two selected folktales.

### **Tselane le Timamogolo (Tselane and the Timamogolo the ogre)**

#### *Summary of folktale*

The narrative of the popular folktale Mapula and the Timamogolo the Ogre narrated in many languages and dialects, is about a young girl who refuses to relocate with her parents to a new village and remains in the village alone. Always her mother will sing for identification, and she will open. Timamogolo the ogre would imitate Tselane's mother and after several failed attempts, he finally succeeded after swallowing red hot iron. Timamogolo took Tselane to his place, and one day the ogre instructed his mother to shave Tselane with the intent to cut her throat and cook her. While Timamogolo was away hunting, his mother called Tselane for shaving. Because she knew the trick, she immediately suggested that she must shave the ogre's mother instead. She cut her head, cooked her wore her clothes, and pretended to be the ogre's mother. The ogres ate their mother thinking that they were eating Tselane, and the following day she ran home. Realising, the ogres chased her and every time she had to cross the river, she threw the ogre's mother's bones into the river to pass when the ogres fell into the river and drowned. Tselane arrived home safely, and her parents were very happy.

#### *Depiction and survival of the protagonist*

In many African folktales, the antagonist is usually an Ogre while the protagonist is mostly presented as a young girl (protagonist). In most cases, the young girl transgresses the interdiction of those in authority, her mother. On the other hand, the ogre is always around to hunt for mischievous young girls, he (the Ogre) usually succeeds just to catch the protagonist but fails at the end. In the Northern Sotho *dinonwane*, the ogre usually appears as a trickster who tries to imitate the traditional tricksters but lacks the cunning and intelligence necessary to play that role. The ogre is believed to be a human being turned animal, who has given up his intelligence and capacity for social interaction just because he has given in to unrestricted greed (Makgamatha 1991: 305). His actions make him to appear to be persistently trying to be readmitted into society. Often called Dimo, Lekgema, or Temankgolo in the Northern Sotho *dinonwane*, he is usually presented as a wicked monster who is ugly and fearful because he has only one eye and one big toe or lone leg which enables him to run very fast, who is huge and has a deep rough voice. He delights in hunting humans, whom he kills and cooks in a big pot. His victims are invariably young, inexperienced, and unprotected children, usually girls.

#### *The social significance of survival from participants*

Another dimension of African folktales is that the Ogre is always chasing young girls, why particularly young girls? And why the Ogre is always chasing the vulnerable young girls and not boys? The answer is then provided by makgamatha (1991), who asserted that the Ogre's ugliness, the size of his stomach, as well as his uncontrollable appetite for fat and tender young girls, make him an understandable cultural symbol; he may, for instance, represent rapists with their insatiable lust for young girls. As he represents the evil that lurks in society, one understands why his trickery is always accompanied by stupid concessions that make it fail. From this assertion, the deduction is that indeed the Ogre represents the mischievous rapists' individuals in the society. these individuals are wicked, and their behaviours must be exposed the young girls are taught to heed their mother's calls and devices to always stay next to them for protection. Through African oral narratives like folktales, children especially girls are educated to observe and identify any illicit move by ordinary male members of the society, nowadays even male next of kin. reports indicate that places where children feel safe are becoming fewer. There is little guarantee, if any, that they will find safety at home, at school or even at church!!! We have read reports of children being sexually violated by parents and other family members. These reports are a sad indictment on us all and should put any society that values its children to shame (South African Human Rights Commission, 2002).

The socio-cultural significance of the survival of the protagonist in the above folktale is to teach children who are mostly the listeners and beneficiaries of these cultural oral narratives, not to ever transgress any interdiction given to them by elderlies. In many African folktales, an interdiction is usually passed, usually by a senior member of the family or society. in most cases, the interdiction is violated or transgressed, and the young character is greatly punished. Although poetic justice prescribes rewarding the good and punishing the wicked, the morality of dinonwane often makes the offender suffer severely, but then allows him eventually to be rescued and restored (Makgamatha 1991: 10).

### **Mapula le Makgema (Mapula and the Ogres)**

#### *Summary of folktale*

The folktale Mapula la Makgema (Mapula and the Ogres) is a narrative about a young girl, Mapula who went out with her friends into the bush to fetch some wild fruits. Mapula's mother passed an interdiction to the girls not to swear and insult any obstacle in the form of a stone on the way that might trip them or make them stumble. Out they went without any problems, but on their way back Mapula was tripped by a stone, and she swore and swore on it. All the other girls managed to pass but when it was Mapula's turn, the stone grew very big and blocked Mapula from passing. The other girls passed and went home leaving Mapula alone in the bush. the Ogres tried to catch Mapula, but she climbed the tree; the Ogres tried to cut the tree, but the bird came, sang reversed the cutting. The Ogres waited and slept under the tree until in the night Mapula slipped fell and was caught by the Ogres. They took her to where they stayed and stored her in the cave. While the Ogres were away to hunt for other victims, Mapula fried meat which attracted other Ogres. There was a fight between the Ogres that gave Mapula a chance to flee and was rescued by an eagle and arrived safely home.

#### *Depiction and survival of the protagonist*

In the above folktale, there is an interdiction, and usually, the transgression of the interdiction is followed by punishment. In all the folktales with an interdiction, usually, the main character transgresses it and is punished. Mapula is the only one blocked by the big rock because she transgressed the interdiction, not to swear at a stone that can trip her on the way.

Through thick and thin, Mapula survived through difficult situations, but was miraculously rescued through the magical singing of the bird and the eagle which carried her home.

#### *The social significance of survival from participants*

The folktale Mapula and the Ogres projects and reiterates the important social value that children must heed the advice of their parents, especially their mothers in the case of girls. This is because girls are mostly connected to their mothers. After all, they share almost all physical and emotional challenges. According to an article by ABC News (2006), mothers and daughters share a special bond with all their complex emotions, for example, anger, resentment, competitiveness, and love. Sometimes a mother may be the last person a daughter will want to see but she is still the first person she will call for advice. Second and most importantly, the folktale teaches children socially accepted morals of not swearing at people who wronged you or stepped over your toes. Every folktale, from its point of view, is a lesson. It may be of a principle of law, civilized manners as they understand them, or religious dogma. They give interpretations in line with everyday life. Folktales are reflections of the minds. They show aspects of culture of the society to those who show the least awareness of it. As a result, they are part and parcel of people's lives. Their value cannot be taken for granted. By ignoring their value, we are ignoring the complete expression of the feelings, ideas, and ambitions of the people concerned. They are pearls of wisdom handed down from generation to generation and will continue to be traditional pillars on which the community can lean (Mphasha, 2015).

The analysis of the folktales Tselane le Timamogolo (Tselane and the Timamogolo the Ogre) and Mapula le Makgema (Mapula and the Ogres) illuminates profound insights into the cultural richness, moral teachings, and societal dynamics embedded within African oral traditions. These narratives not only entertain but also serve as vital conduits for transmitting values, guiding behavior, and fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

Both tales follow a familiar structure where young female protagonists encounter supernatural challenges, typically embodied by ogres or monstrous beings. Central to their narratives is the defiance of interdictions or warnings set by elder figures, which inevitably leads to perilous situations. Yet, through ingenuity, courage, and sometimes with the assistance of magical creatures or unexpected allies, these heroines navigate their trials and emerge triumphant.

Tselane's story highlights the themes of disobedience, punishment, and eventual redemption. Her refusal to obey her mother's warnings about the ogre Timamogolo leads to her capture and imminent peril. However, through quick thinking and the clever reversal of roles with the ogre's mother, Tselane not only outwits her captors but also escapes and returns safely home. This narrative arc underscores the importance of respecting authority, the consequences of disobedience, and the triumph of resourcefulness over adversity.

Similarly, Mapula's tale underscores the consequences of transgressing societal norms and the transformative power of perseverance and respect for elders' guidance. Her disregard for her mother's prohibition against swearing at inanimate objects results in her isolation and capture by ogres. Despite facing imminent danger, Mapula's resourcefulness and the intervention of magical creatures ultimately secure her rescue and safe return home. This narrative reinforces the cultural values of respect, resilience, and the importance of heeding parental advice.

Beyond their narrative structures, these folktales carry significant socio-cultural implications. They serve as repositories of cultural knowledge, transmitting moral lessons and societal norms across generations. The prominence of young female protagonists confronting malevolent forces reflects deeper societal concerns about vulnerability and resilience, particularly among children. These stories not only impart survival strategies but also reinforce gender roles, familial bonds, and the importance of community protection.

Moreover, the endurance of these tales within oral traditions highlights their adaptive nature in responding to changing societal contexts while preserving traditional wisdom. They continue to resonate in contemporary settings, offering insights into navigating modern challenges while upholding timeless values of respect, integrity, and communal solidarity.

Critically engaging with these folktales invites deeper reflection on their multiple layers of meaning and their relevance in diverse cultural contexts. They prompt discussions on universal themes such as justice, morality, and the role of storytelling in shaping identity and community cohesion. By studying and interpreting these narratives, we enrich our understanding of cultural diversity and resilience, bridging traditions with present realities.

Therefore, analysis of Tselane le Timamogolo and Mapula le Makgema underscores the enduring significance of African folktales as vehicles for cultural preservation, moral instruction, and societal reflection. These narratives not only entertain and educate but also inspire individuals to navigate life's challenges with courage, wisdom, and a profound sense of cultural heritage. As such, they remain invaluable treasures that continue to inform and enrich our collective understanding of human experience across generations.

## **Importance of Folktales for Children: Promoting Moral Values and Preserving Heritage**

### **Introduction**

Folktales have long been cherished as cultural treasures that not only entertain but also educate. For children, these stories serve a dual purpose: they impart valuable moral lessons and preserve the rich heritage of their communities. This discussion explores why folktales are crucial for children's development, focusing on their role in teaching moral values and safeguarding cultural heritage.

### **Teaching Moral Values**

One of the primary benefits of folktales for children is their ability to convey moral values in a compelling and accessible manner. Through characters and their adventures, these stories teach important lessons about honesty, courage, kindness, and perseverance. For example, in tales like Tselane le Timamogolo and Mapula le Makgema, protagonists demonstrate bravery and resourcefulness in overcoming challenges, illustrating to children the rewards of making good choices and facing difficulties with resilience.

Folktales often feature characters who encounter moral dilemmas or face consequences for their actions, providing children with valuable insights into ethical decision-making. By engaging with these narratives, children learn not only to distinguish between right and wrong but also to empathize with others and consider the broader impact of their choices.

### **Preserving Cultural Heritage**

Beyond moral education, folktales play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage. These stories are repositories of traditions, beliefs, and wisdom passed down through generations. They reflect the values, customs, and societal norms of diverse cultures, offering children a window into the rich tapestry of human experience across different times and places.

Through folktales, children connect with their cultural roots and develop a sense of identity and belonging within their community. They learn about the histories, heroes, and legends that shape their cultural heritage, fostering pride in their cultural identity. For example, African folktales often incorporate elements of oral

tradition, showcasing the importance of storytelling as a means of transmitting knowledge and preserving cultural practices.

### Sparking Imagination and Creativity

In addition to their educational value, folktales ignite children's imagination and creativity. These stories often feature fantastical elements such as talking animals, magical objects, and epic quests, creating vibrant worlds that captivate young minds. By immersing themselves in these imaginative realms, children expand their creativity and develop critical thinking skills as they analyze story plots, characters, and themes.

Furthermore, folktales encourage children to think outside the box and explore alternative perspectives. They challenge children to consider different ways of solving problems and navigating challenges, fostering a sense of curiosity and exploration.

folktales hold a special place in children's literature and cultural heritage. They serve as powerful vehicles for teaching moral values, preserving cultural identity, and sparking creativity. By engaging with these stories, children not only learn important life lessons but also develop a deeper appreciation for their own cultural heritage and the diversity of human experiences worldwide. Embracing folktales as integral parts of childhood education ensures that these timeless treasures continue to inspire and enrich generations to come

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