

Anthropomorphism As An Art of Storytelling: Exploring Aesthetics and Ethical Implications in Children's Literature

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Abstract

Animals are extremely important to children's books. Among other narrative functions, animals serve as essential metaphors for understanding the human animal. They provide emotional comfort, stimulate imagination, and offer a safe space for exploring complex themes, all of which contribute to children's emotional and cognitive development. Beyond their psychological appeal, animal characters in children's literature also offer significant educational value. This paper explores the aesthetics and ethical implications of anthropomorphism in Children's Literature. Anthropomorphism is transmitted in kids through storytelling and then in the form of print media. It enhances the cognitive skills in children. The concept can be used in many ways to inculcate moral lessons in children. It teaches how to look at life. Kids learn to deal with their emotions. The paper analyses the stories of Panchatantra and Aesop's Fables and the concept of Anthropomorphism and how it is used in children's stories to understand and give a persona to the creatures who live alongside humans.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, aesthetics, cognitive development, Children's Literature, srorytelling, psychological appeal

Children's love for stories is never-ending. Storytelling is a dominant tool in a child's development. It can be used in many ways in Children's Literature. Storytelling enhances cognitive skills through which a child learns to cope with the situation. Listening to stories increases their curiosity and they discover new things. While listening to the stories, they slip into the imaginary world where they are their heroes. They love seeing animals, fairies, unusual characters, personified objects, kings, queens, etc. It triggers their ability to question things. It improves their vocabulary and communicative skills. They learn to be patient while listening to the stories. Stories help them express their emotions. Children visualize the characters from stories which stimulates their imagination. Most importantly, kids are exposed to the newest ideas as it enriches their emotional intelligence. Stories arouse our ability to imagine. They help comprehend the framing of the world.

We continue to make various changes in our own stories. One of the effective techniques of storytelling is Anthropomorphism. The concept of anthropomorphism refers to assigning human traits to animals. It is not only confined to talking, but also involves behaving like humans, living in houses like them, singing, walking, cooking, and doing everything a human can easily do daily. In addition, these animals are shown dealing with daily life issues just like humans do. Children's books open windows for children to improve their imagination and blossom their vocabulary.

Talking about the history of anthropomorphism, it has its roots in ancient storytelling and art. The oldest known example of anthropomorphic art is the Lowenmensch figurine, a sculpture of a human figure with the head of a lion, which is around 35,000–40,000 years old. The word “Anthropomorphism” is derived from a Greek word, “Anthropomorphous” which means “having Human form or qualities”. Anthropomorphism can be traced back over 30,000 years ago to sculptures involving human-animal figures. Many ancient myths also involved deities that had human emotions, appearances, and behavioral traits. Take the Greek God Zeus as an example; he is depicted in many sculptures and statues as an attractive human man. Some of the myths involving Zeus describe him as having affairs with women and jealousy towards his wife Hera, both of which are imperfect human traits that were constructed to make him seem more human-like. This is just one of the many early depictions of anthropomorphism (Protect the Harvest).

Traces of anthropomorphism can be found in ancient stories and Aesop's works. While not directly written for children, Aesop's fables are often cited as the first instance of animals appearing in stories for children. Aesop used animals to convey moral lessons in his parables. Cultural diversity can be a major factor through which Anthropomorphism develops in Children's Literature. Dealing with anthropomorphism is a psychological process. It facilitates a better understanding of life lessons through animals. It is deployed in Literature as a rhetorical tool through personification and metaphorical expressions. In children's literature, it is used as an attention grabber as a means of sustaining the interest of the young audience in exploring literary texts and giving moral instructions to children. As a linguistic device, it is a tool for scaffolding the cognitive and affective modes of young learners to enhance the visual and mental interpretation of the message being conveyed through the story. In effect, the process of anthropomorphic attribution passes through three stages starting with the author, to the subject of communication, and on to the readers. The process of interpretation is usually in this order (Helen, 49). There is no doubt that children love animals. They often want pets because pets allow them to feel clever, protective and nurturing. Very young children don't see animals as “other”, instead, they believe that animals have human characteristics. The appeal of animals as people can create a sense of emotional connection, making it easier to get involved in the story and remember it (Jia Liu). Sometimes authors use animal characters because they can convey ideas by analogy, ideas which have greater impact than if child characters are used. For example, *The Crocodile and the Dentist*, created by Taro Gomi, tells a story about a little crocodile who doesn't want to see a dentist but has to go, and the dentist is really nervous about seeing his patient because he is a crocodile. The crocodile here is the key to the story. He has all the emotion a child would have when he goes to the dentist, which resonates with young readers. For adults, however, a crocodile is a dangerous animal, which is why the dentist is as nervous as his patient. Finally, the crocodile goes through the horrible treatment, and all the tension turns into relief and laughter. The anthropomorphic format reassures children through humor, which might not have been possible if Taro Gomi used a child character (Jia Liu).

Human-like characters derived from non-human sources captivate audiences, making them more likely to connect with the story on an emotional level. This emotional investment can lead to a more profound and lasting impact on the reader, as the unique characters and their experiences are more easily remembered.

By masking real-world issues within the guise of non-human characters, you can address sensitive topics in an approachable and thought-provoking way. This technique can be especially effective in genres like satire, where the human-like qualities of animals or objects can reflect and critique human society. Anthropomorphism helps with portrayal of abstract concepts. Common themes and concepts that can be

illustrated by animals include moral or etiquette lessons, rules and order, government function, or religion. The author's use of animal societies helps readers apply these abstract topics in a way that is much easier to understand.

Children's literature offers a wealth of examples of Anthropomorphism. A.A. Milne's "Winnie-the-Pooh" series presents a lovable bear and his friends. Each embodies different aspects of human personality, from anxiety to exuberance. These stories utilize Anthropomorphism to explore friendships, fears, and childhood innocence through characters that resonate with readers of all ages (Andrea Feccomandi, bibisco).

Fables and myths from various cultures also employ Anthropomorphism to impart moral lessons and philosophical insights. Characters like Aesop's cunning fox or the shape shifting deities from ancient mythology use human attributes to embody virtues, vices, and the complexity of human behavior. These stories have endured through the ages, proving the timeless appeal of Anthropomorphism in literature (Andrea Feccomandi, bibisco).

Beginning with the animal fable of *The Monkey and the Crocodile* from *Panchatantra*, the illustration of a crying crocodile is filled with humor and quite dramatic. In it, the crocodile tries to play tricks on the monkey and plans to eat him. The crocodile sheds fake tears saying that his wife is ill and wants to meet you. The monkey agrees to visit the crocodile's wife and goes with him. While reaching the middle of the river, the crocodile tells the truth to monkey that he is going to kill him for his wife who wants him as her food. After hearing the truth from the crocodile, the witty monkey, instead of panicking, very smartly escapes from the crocodile saying that he has left his heart on the tree where he lives. The foolish crocodile gets trapped into the monkey's plan and takes him to the tree to take his heart along with him. The moral of the story says astute thinking and wisdom will always help us to solve problems. The monkey outsmarts the crocodile and saves his life through his quick presence of mind. On the contrary, the crocodile betrays the monkey. This story reflects the importance of expeditiously rendering the correct decision. Kids also get to learn that one should not cheat anyone. One should always stay calm in order to get out of the trouble. We can see that using the technique of anthropomorphism, children can learn various moral lessons from the story and incorporate in their lives. At times, young kids idolize themselves as the animal character shown in the story. They try to mimic them.

No wonder why we call Bandar Mama, Billi Mausi, Gau Mata etc, it is due to a cultural association with the sense of familiarity and playful behavior. In a way, it creates a sense of love for these animals and their surroundings. According to an article by *Times Now Navbharat*, the reason behind addressing the cat as Mausi is stated in ancient folklore. In earlier times, lions used to send their cubs to cats to learn hunting strategies. Cats feared the lions for being carnivorous. She taught everything to the cubs except for the skill of climbing a tree. In case lions try to attack her, she would easily escape by climbing a tree. We know that cats and lions belong to the same family. In this manner, the cat is known as the Maternal Aunt of the lion. Due to cultural diversity and time shifts, this folklore went through many variations, and today, the cat has become Billi Mausi for kids. Also, there are several nursery rhymes and poems for children addressing cats as mausi and being mischievous. Through these poems, they enjoy listening to cats' mischiefs and their nature.

In Hinduism, the Cow is addressed as Gau Mata. Cows are considered as being sacred. They are equal to Mother Earth and closely associated to motherhood as they represent fertility. They provide milk that nourishes the Earthly creatures. The Vedas prescribe three duties for humans towards the cow: serving the cow, worshipping the cow, and protecting the cow. Through stories, children are made to understand that

cows should be worshipped. Also, it creates a sense of empathy in children towards their mothers. They are taught to treat everyone with great respect through Anthropomorphism through such folklore. Kids learn about Kamdhenu from their elders through stories that it came out of Samudra Manthan and provided whatever the people wished for. On the contrary, Kamdhenu provided nothing to the greedy people. Hence, children get a lesson from this story that one should never be greedy for anything.

Storytelling assists a child to experience the world from different aspects, whereas anthropomorphism creates engagement or concentration among children. The combination of anthropomorphism and storytelling emphasizes the value of culture and identifies the nature of a person within the cultural context. As oral tradition and folktales are rich in tradition and ancient culture, it inculcates cultural values in children. It is evident that storytelling has transferred culture, and social behaviors to the children. The stories not only connect us to the past and express superstitious beliefs to recognize the reality but also improve a better knowledge of social surroundings. Reading stories helps us to empathize with others. Stories make sense of time, history, and life (Storytelling among Children: A Survey, Cynthia Rose).

These stories gave children a connection to their ancestors' knowledge and customs by adding creatures from their surroundings. This helped them feel rooted in their identity despite the influences of Westernization brought about by colonial education.

By utilizing animal characters to symbolize various society groups, animal tales frequently served as a sort of coded resistance against colonial oppression, enabling youngsters to critique power systems and social inequities without engaging in direct confrontation. The use of animal characters as allegories to represent the struggles and dynamics of their communities, along with the cultivation of a strong bond with their heritage through familiar imagery and oral storytelling traditions, made animal stories an effective tool for cultural preservation and a way to understand complex social issues through relatable narratives.

It is found that children do relate more to an animal, rather than other children, when reading a story. Using animals to teach children about the world so successfully shows an affinity between young children and animals that seems to work incredibly well. This could come from the fact children often have stuffed animals as “friends” from an early age, which allows them to see the animal as a being they can empathize with, and therefore learn from. In the Happy designer illustrated story “Go to Sleep”, children learn through the sheep characters about family relationships, counting and the importance of a night of rest. Because the animals aren't threatening or scary, children know to trust the character; they will also most likely be aware of the story of counting sheep before bed to get sleepy. In terms of emotions, when stories deal with emotions that children cannot yet comprehend, or recognize properly, an animal noise may actually help the child to understand which emotion is being dealt with; for example, a growl or a purr can show something that children will understand but perhaps not have the ability to articulate yet (Using animals in children's stories, Happy Designer).

Children do still see a distance between them and the animal, as they aren't of the same species. This is helpful when touching on difficult subjects, such as bullying, death or abuse. Having an animal they trust and recognize helping them through something can be a great way to approach tricky subjects. Situations such as the death of a pet can be a very tough one, as everyone will be grieving, so books like “Darcey Doggy” are a great way to help children cope with sad situations. Our own “Gillie Can” series features lots of ways children can learn to live everyday life, such as sharing, counting, baking and making. The animal friends are harmless, but still human enough to be identifiable (Using animals in children's stories, Happy Designer).

For lifelong lessons or tough subjects, an animal can be a great way of telling that story, or passing the message on. Just think of all the books you read as a child that stayed with you and featured animals. A child's development can be enriched with the magic of an animal story, and they're also great fun! Puppies, horses, cows, sheep; there are so many "cute" animals that can be used to tell a story that may otherwise struggle to capture the child's imagination.

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