

Lesson 2 Listening to the Voice of Art

Reading 1

What's behind Our Love of Stories?

While playing one day, a young boy accidentally kicks his ball over a fence towards a creepy, old house in the middle of an overgrown yard. He climbs over the fence, but he regrets his decision as soon as he sets foot on the property. That's because he sees an old man holding the ball. The man looks upset, but the trembling boy shyly asks for his ball back. The boy notices tears streaming down the man's face. The man takes a step toward the boy and ...

You're probably wondering: "What happens next?" This feeling of curiosity and anticipation that builds up in the reader or listener is at the core of good storytelling. Stories have been around for a long time, as demonstrated by 27,000-year-old cave paintings, and they are an essential tool for communication. Great stories take bits of information and weave them together in a unique and compelling way. Everyone loves a good story, whether it comes from a novel, a film, or a conversation with a friend. What makes a good story so engaging?

The Science behind Stories

Scientists have researched what happens when people hear stories that they feel deeply connected to. In one study, participants were made to listen to stories while their hormone levels were being examined by researchers. The researchers found a change in the level of oxytocin, a hormone related to trust and empathy that motivates cooperation with others. The participants' oxytocin levels increased when they heard these stories, and the researchers discovered that oxytocin was consistently released during character-driven parts of the stories. Furthermore, there was a strong link between the level of oxytocin and how willing the participants were to help others. For example, people are more likely to take action and give a donation to a charity when they hear a compelling story about those it supports, compared to when they are simply asked for money.

Research has also shown that your brain responds to a story as if you were actually experiencing it. If you underwent a brain scan while listening to an engaging story, it would show activity in the language processing areas of the brain as well as the sections that are stimulated when experiencing the events that the story describes. For instance, consider the sentence, "Running through the crowd, we heard a loud scream." Hearing this sentence would stimulate both the sensory and motor sections of your brain in addition to the language processing areas. In other words, when it comes to vividly described stories, your brain is made to react as if the events were really happening.

Stories as Messengers

When we are children, our personal experience is limited. Therefore, the many diverse environments explored in stories are highly entertaining to us. Yet stories are more than just entertainment. They can also convey a wide range of underlying themes and lessons. Interestingly, the very communication of these messages is one reason why we respond so strongly to stories.

Human beings are always seeking ways of connecting with one another, and by appealing to our emotions, stories enable us to communicate messages effectively. When a story's message gets through to us, we are reminded that the emotions we feel are shared by others. This helps us to feel empathy and a special sense of togetherness.

One example of a story with powerful underlying themes is the popular film *Frozen*. It may seem like just a fun story about a queen with magical powers. However, beneath the surface, it sends a message about the love of family and accepting oneself. People watching the film can relate to the struggles of the characters even though they do not have magical powers themselves. As a result, they can enjoy the film's explorations of family and individuality and gain wisdom from them.

Stories are an essential part of our lives. They allow us to take imaginative journeys to places that we might never visit in real life, and they also give us a chance to learn more about ourselves. Great stories have the power to change minds and win hearts. Let me tell you a story—you know you want to hear one.

Reading 2

Minhwa: Meet Korea's Folk Art

There are many famous artists who are known all around the world, such as Monet and Picasso. Most folk artists, on the other hand, are unknown, and their work is often seen as simple and irrelevant. However, folk art is important because it has a deep connection to the society that produced it. In Korea, folk art is known as minhwa.

Chaekgeori : Minhwa with Foreign Influences

Minhwa has existed for hundreds of years. In the late 18th century, during the Joseon Dynasty era, people began producing and selling minhwa on a large scale. At the same time, trade with other countries brought new goods and ideas to Korea. This led to an interesting theme in minhwa—chaekgeori .

Chaekgeori literally means "books and things."

Chaekgeori art was basically screen paintings of bookshelves.

Wealthy people at the time hired artists to create chaekgeori paintings specifically for them. Having expensive and exotic items on the shelves showed how rich they were. As international trade brought more foreign goods into Korea, these items began appearing in chaekgeori paintings. For example, you can often find unusual fruit, plants, vases, and other exotic objects in them. Another effect of Korea's globalization can be seen in the style of the paintings. Through Western techniques such as linear perspective and shading, the bookshelves and objects were made to appear highly realistic. In contrast, traditional Korean paintings before this time favored curving lines and empty spaces. These chaekgeori paintings illustrate the great changes that were happening in Korea at that time.

The Social Satire of Kkachi Horangi

Another popular minhwa theme was kkachi horangi, which can be translated as "magpie and tiger." Unlike chaekgeori paintings, these paintings were popular with common people. Both magpies and tigers were believed to bring good luck. Therefore, hanging these pictures in a home was thought to chase away evil. However, there was another purpose as well—humor.

In these paintings, the tiger positioned in the center of the canvas represents the upper class of Korean society. Although it generally takes up the most space as the main focus of the painting, the tiger usually sits in a strange position with a silly expression on its face. On the other hand, the magpie found on the edge of the canvas symbolizes the common people. In the paintings, it is much smaller than the tiger. However, it is looking down on the foolish tiger and making fun of it. When these paintings were made, Korean society was strictly divided by class. The common people may have been overlooked and powerless in everyday life, but kkachi horangi paintings gave them an opportunity to enjoy humorous criticism of the upper class.

These two popular minhwa themes show the true value of folk art. It is not merely something attractive to appreciate or enjoy. It allows us to look deeply into the culture, values, and beliefs of a society. If you keep this in mind, viewing minhwa—or any kind of folk art—can transform into a journey that allows you to experience a new world.