



HOPOE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN  
**MANUAL FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS**



to accompany

***The Magic Horse***

**by Idries Shah**

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“These teaching stories can be experienced on many levels. A child may simply enjoy hearing them; an adult may analyze them in a more sophisticated way. Both may eventually benefit from the lessons within.”

*Lynn Neary “All Things Considered,” NPR News, Washington*

This manual accompanies *The Magic Horse*, one title in our series of illustrated tales from the rich storytelling tradition of Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East. These stories have been told to countless children for more than a thousand years. Parents and teachers can use these ancient, universal tales not only to delight and entertain, but also to develop language and thinking abilities in the young. At the same time, these stories will encourage in children a love of good literature that can affect them positively throughout their lives.

In this ancient tradition, stories are told to young and old alike. A story can help children deal with difficult situations and give them something to hold onto. It can, at the same time, stimulate a deeper understanding in adults. While reading and discussing these tales with your children, you, too, may find yourself thinking and perceiving in new ways. A wealth of learning awaits us all in these old tales.

## HOOPOE TALES

**These stories show us what we share with these cultures  
and what we can learn from each other.**

### CULTURAL CONTEXT

These stories come from a rich tradition of storytelling in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Middle East. For more than a thousand years, by campfire and candlelight, people have told these stories to their children, not only to entertain them, but also to help young people understand their world. Schools for young children were rare, but storytelling was not. Education came from stories.

Idries Shah, the author, was an Afghan who spent 30 years of his life collecting, translating, and selecting these stories for a Western audience. They show us what we share and what we can learn from each other. They help children understand human nature. They encourage qualities such as self-reliance, the ability to overcome irrational

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**“Shah’s versatile and multilayered tales provoke fresh insight and more flexible thought in children.”**

*Bookbird*

*A Journal of International Children’s Literature*

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fears caused by things children do not as yet understand, peaceful negotiation rather than violent confrontation, and much else.

In presenting these stories to children, you can help them learn a little about these cultures that might, at first, seem strange and unusual. They may even be thought of in a negative way due to ignorance or the very sad recent world events.

The characters are shown in dress that is common in this part of the world. Women usually wear long, flowing garments and cover their heads with scarves or veils (historically this was as a mark of respect). Men and boys wear baggy trousers and long, loose shirts and vests, along with distinctive hats or turbans to protect them from sand and wind.

The illustrations include other aspects of these cultures: ornaments, wall hangings, and furniture that are often copied from Persian miniatures, or

beautiful multi-colored mosaic tiles found on mosque walls throughout the Islamic world. Minarets, flat- or dome-roofed houses, wells, alleyways, open markets and stores, and, of course, animals are used to illustrate these magical stories.

### MORE THAN ENTERTAINING

According to their stage of cognitive development, children take what they can from each tale. At first, they may respond only to one character or one event in a story, or they may understand only the most obvious meaning, but they will grasp a little more each time they hear a story. Bit by bit, they will find more meanings, concepts and insights in these stories.

Through repeated exposure to these tales, children learn to understand their lives and reflect on how people think and act in various situations. These tales help children learn to distinguish effective from ineffective patterns of thought and action.

In many ways these tales serve as mirrors. Identifying with characters in a story, we and our children become spectators of our own thinking and behaving.

### WHY READ TO OUR CHILDREN?

Stories captivate children and help them acquire important cognitive and communication skills.

Listening to stories helps develop attention capacity. As children become more and more attentive to stories, they readily absorb the vocabulary, syntax, concepts, narrative structures, patterns of events, and images together with the emotional overtones of the language used in the tales.

Because the language of stories is somewhat different from everyday language, a child’s language is refined and enriched by listening to them. With stories as models, children learn to order their thoughts and to express themselves in meaningful and engaging ways. Oral literature builds linguistic fluency and competence.

This cluster of oral language skills, developed and honed by many tales throughout their young lives, helps children decode text, predict events, and acquire a sense of story — an intuitive sense of what a story is and what to expect of various kinds of stories. Good oral language skills help almost all children read more easily, naturally, fluently, and with greater comprehension.

They also enable children to make an easy transition to understanding and appreciating the world of adult literature—the novels, short stories, biographies, and other works that enrich our lives.

The strategies suggested in this manual can help strengthen children’s natural learning processes. We offer different ways to interact with and reflect on the stories and suggest activities that maintain children’s contact with each tale in enjoyable ways. This gives them more time to develop their understanding. While reading and discussing the stories with children, you, too, may find that you are thinking and perceiving in new ways. A wealth of learning awaits us all in these old tales.

### **TIPS FOR PRESENTING STORIES**

Here are some tips for making the experience enjoyable and memorable for children:

- Make sure you are well rested and looking forward to story time. Do your best to put aside the many distractions of daily life so as to give the child and the story your full attention.
- Sit in a comfortable place with the child near you, allowing you to have good eye contact. Your physical presence is an important part of the whole experience for the child. The more comfortable and cozy the child feels with you, the more impact the story is likely to have.
- Read or tell the story at a relaxed, deliberate pace. Remember that children can’t process information as rapidly as adults. When you slow down a bit, you’ll help the child follow and comprehend the story more easily.
- Note that as you are reading, children not only hear the story, but also observe how you are reading. They also pick up the positive attitudes of the adult reader who enjoys books and loves reading.

- Remember that children very much enjoy hearing the same story more than once. Repetition allows a child to become familiar with a story, to understand it more fully, to reflect on it long after story time is over, and to internalize many aspects of the story.

Some children like to hear the same story day after day for weeks, and this amount of repetition can be very beneficial. Other children like to hear the same story once or twice on one occasion, then again after several weeks or months.

- When a story is very familiar, invite the child to join in the telling, saying favorite lines with you. This practice enhances children’s language development and their sense of confidence in using language.
- Make the book easily available for older children to read independently.

### **ENCOURAGE RESPONSE TO STORIES**

As we said earlier, listening to these ancient stories repeatedly and over time is important. Children work hard with the tale while listening and are intensely involved with it. This is not passive. So, not every reading has to be followed by "activities," but such opportunities for response are beneficial because they give children a chance to articulate what the story means to them. Expressing their own thoughts about a story will often enhance their understanding of it.

There are a number of enjoyable activities to do with children after the reading of a story. Here are some of the more typical and useful follow-up activities:

**Discuss.** Perhaps the simplest activity you can do with a child after finishing a story is to invite his or her reactions and comments and to share your own. Discussion will allow the child to express whatever thoughts may have arisen while listening and to ask questions about the characters and events.

If a child doesn’t talk spontaneously about the story, questions like these may help get a discussion going:

*What was the most important part of the story to you?*

*Why was that part especially meaningful to you?*

*Which character did you like the most? The least? Why?*

*Do you think the ending was a good one? Why?*

**Draw.** Have children tell what parts of the story they most liked and describe how they visualized the characters and events. Then have them draw or paint what they visualized. They will enjoy talking about their pictures and comparing them with the book's illustrations.

**Dramatize.** Invite children to act out a scene or two from the story. A child may take on the persona of different characters with each playacting. If several children have heard the story together, they may want to use simple props and scenery and put on short plays.

**Dictate or Write.** In a special story notebook, have children dictate, or write, a brief summary of the story and perhaps a comment about it. Pictures can be drawn to go with the summaries if the child enjoys drawing. A story notebook can serve as a reading journal that you and the child review, just for fun, from time to time.

**Retell.** If children enjoy the story, read it several times over the course of a week or more until they

are very familiar with the sequence of events and can retell the story to family or friends. You can provide opportunities for them to retell it to other classrooms or in their community. You can also discuss ways to make their telling interesting and effective.

## STORY PLANS

These plans will give you ideas of how you may use the books with one or more children, either at home or in a classroom. The activities are based on teachers' and parents' experience in sharing good literature with children.

The intent is to give children an enjoyable experience with the stories and help them realize that this literature can help them understand themselves and others.

Most children will be entertained the first time they hear a story and will develop a deeper understanding only after the story has a chance to "sink in." For that reason, we recommend reading a story several times over the course of weeks or months, each time giving the child a chance to respond to the story and to discuss different meanings he or she may find in it.

Each time you read the story, you may wish to ask different questions and do different activities, so a variety is provided here from which you may select. Of course you may have other questions or activities and we encourage you to use these, too.

## STORY:

# The Magic Horse

## STORY SUMMARY

This is the story of two princes and their destinies. Prince Hoshyar gains rank and fortune by supervising the construction of huge metallic fishes that perform wondrous tasks and bring riches to the people of his land. His brother, Prince Tambal, is interested only in a wooden horse that he obtains from a humble carpenter. The horse is a magical one that carries the rider, if he is sincere, to his heart's desire. One day Prince Tambal disappears on the magic horse and has many exciting adventures before he obtains his heart's desire and can return home.

## BEFORE READING

Invite readers to make predictions and speculations, an activity that will improve their thinking and comprehension of the story.

The following activities help focus the reader and stimulate thinking and comprehension of the tale. To get children focused, have them formulate questions that they think will be answered as they read the tale. You might show them how to do this by asking a question of your own. Some possible questions might be:

*In what way do you think this horse is magical? Why do you think so?*

*What do you think is going to happen in this story?*

*What role will the magic horse play?*

## DURING READING

This story, with its unexpected twists, invites speculation and questioning at turning points. This helps focus the reader and improves thinking and comprehension of the tale. As they read through the story, invite children to stop at turning points and note further thoughts, speculations, or questions.

It's not important for them to guess correctly what actually happens. Predicting outcomes helps children think more carefully about the characters and events of the story even when the predictions

turn out to be incorrect. Help them enjoy making predictions by accepting all responses and encouraging children to give reasons for thinking as they do. Asking questions and focusing the reader on the unusual developments improves concentration, thinking, and comprehension of the story. Here are some suggested turning points and questions:

**Page 5** - King Mumkin announces a contest of interesting and useful devices. ("Now there were two men of that country, an ironsmith and a woodworker, who were great rivals in most things."):

*Which of these two men, do you think, will win the contest? Why do you think so?*

**Page 12** - King Mumkin sends the woodcarver away to be tied to a tree and Prince Tambal asks to have the wooden horse. ("Such a silly thing is fit only for Tambal," murmured the chief minister at the king's elbow. 'It cannot compare to the wondrous fish.'... The woodcarver was taken away and Prince Tambal left the court carrying the magic horse."):

*What do you think will happen to Tambal? to the woodworker? Why do you think so?*

**Page 14** - When Tambal is speaking with his brother Hoshyar about the magic horse and the wondrous fish, Tambal wishes that he knew what was "working for the good of all" and thinks, "I would like to find my heart's desire.":

*What do you think will happen to him after he is carried away to a "far kingdom" ruled by a magician-king? Why do you think this?*

**Page 17** - When Tambal leaves the whirling palace, he eventually gets to King Kahana's apartment. ("When he got to the king's apartment, he hid behind some curtains and lay down to go to sleep."):

*What do you think will happen? Why do you think this?*

**Page 20** - Tambal manages to escape from the palace and decides to go home and get his father's help. But he becomes lost. ("Never was a man

worse equipped for such a journey. An alien traveling on foot, without any kind of provisions, facing pitiless heat, freezing nights, and sandstorms, he soon became hopelessly lost in the desert.”):

*What do you think will happen to him? What will he do? Why do you think this?*

**Page 22** - When he has been traveling for a while, he comes upon some strange fruits which he eats, and then he sleeps. He awakes to find himself covered in fur. (“‘Whether I live or die,’ he thought, ‘these fruits have ruined me. Even with the greatest army of all times, conquest will not help me. Nobody will marry me now, especially not Princess Precious Pearl. Even beasts would be terrified at the sight of me, and my heart’s desire would surely reject me.’ And he lost consciousness.”):

*What do you think will happen to Tambal next? Why?*

**Page 25** - When Tambal awakes, he sees a lamp enclosed in a brilliant star-like shape, carried by an old man. (“‘My son,’ said the man to Tambal, ‘you have been affected by the influences of this place. If I had not come along, you would have remained just another beast of this enchanted grove, for there are many more like you. But I can help you.’”):

*How do you think he is going to help Tambal? Why do you think that?*

**Page 27** - Tambal is put in the carriage and disguised as the prince and plans are made to have him marry Princess Precious Pearl. (“‘Tambal, biding his time and following his destiny, agreed to his own part in the masquerade.”):

*What do you think will happen next? Why do you think so?*

**Page 28** - With Jadugarzada under cover, Tambal and Princess Precious Pearl are married, although everyone thinks Tambal is Jadugarzada. The chief announces that they must return to their own kingdom. (“‘Tambal whispered to her, ‘Fear nothing. We must act as best we can, following our destiny. Agree to go, but say that you will not travel without the wooden horse.’”):

*What do you think will happen next? Why do you think so?*

## AFTER READING

### Questions for reflection:

Invite reflection by discussing one or more of these questions, which explore some of the different elements of the story and what we can learn and understand from them:

*What is the most important part of this tale to you? Why is that part especially important?*

*What does this story make you think about?*

*What questions do you have about the story?*

*King Mumkin is said to be an “enlightened” king. Do you think he is enlightened? Why or why not?*

*Why does the ironsmith work behind high walls, keeping his work secret? What does that tell you about him?*

*Why does the woodcarver go off to reflect before beginning his masterpiece? What does this tell you about the woodcarver?*

*The woodcarver and the ironsmith are two types of craftsmen. How are they different? How are they alike?*

*King Mumkin doesn’t think much of the wooden horse, but he admires the mechanical fish. Why do you think King Mumkin doesn’t admire the fish and the wooden horse equally?*

*Hoshyar and Tambal represent different characteristics in people. What characteristics do you think each of them exemplifies? Are there times when you are more like Hoshyar or Tambal? Why do you think so? When do these times occur? Do you know anyone who reminds you of Tambal, of Hoshyar? What do they do that reminds you of either of them?*

*Tambal says, “I wish I knew my ‘heart’s desire.’” How do you think one finds one’s heart’s desire?*

*What are your desires?*

*Do you know what your “heart’s desire” really is?*

*In ancient times, and even in some cultures today, a woman's husband was chosen for her by her family or by her father. Why do you think this practice exists? What are some of the benefits? What are some of the problems? What do you think of this practice? Why?*

*When Tambal leaves the Whirling Palace, there are so many exciting and new things to see that he doesn't get to the palace right away. Have you ever been distracted from an important task? Why do you think this happens?*

*How old do you think Tambal is? Why do you think that?*

*When Tambal sets off, after leaving the king's apartment, he wants to return home to get his father's help. But he meets with great obstacles and has to resolve his difficulties without his father's assistance. How do you think he feels? Do these events change Tambal? If so, how?*

*What do you think of Princess Precious Pearl? What do you think she represents in the story?*

*Who is the bearded man whom Tambal meets? What do you think he represents?*

*When King Mumkin is "gathered to his fathers," Prince Tambal becomes his successor. Is this the right choice? Why?*

*There are many magical elements in this tale. How do you feel about this? Why do you think you feel this way?*

*What is your favorite part of the story?*

*What is the most important part of this tale to you? Why is that especially important?*

*This tale is often told orally and has been written without illustrations. Do the illustrations throughout the book add to, or subtract from, the text? How so?*

*How might knowing this story help you in your own life? Do you think it could help you solve a problem? How?*

*What will you remember most about this story? Why? What makes something memorable?*

*The book is illustrated with geometric designs. Do you think they enhance the story? If not, why not? If so, how?*

*This story ends with:*

*"And this history is the origin of a strange saying current among the people of the land, yet whose beginnings have now been forgotten. The saying is, 'Those who want fish can achieve much through fish, and those who do not know their heart's desire, may first have to hear the story of the wooden horse.'"*

*What does this mean to you?*

*The Magic Horse lends itself to multiple interpretations and responses. It is designed to encourage you to think. It often has different meanings for different people and can also mean different things to you each time you read the story, depending on your own experiences and development. Can you think of anything we have missed in thinking about this tale?*

#### **Activities:**

- **What's In A Name?** The names of the characters in the story are Persian. Find out the meanings of the names and see whether or not you think they fit the characters. What does your name mean? Research the meaning and origin of your name. Do you think your name suits you? Explain how the meaning of your name does or does not fit you.
- **Characteristics of Characters:** Have children each make a grid, adding a name of a character each time one is introduced in the tale. Each time they come across an adjective describing that character, have them write it underneath the character's name. As specific events occur in the story, they can think of adjectives that describe the character's actions or behavior, and list them. At the end of the story, have them choose one character and tell or write about him/her using these adjectives.
- Have children compare and contrast Tambal and Hoshyar, or the ironsmith and the woodworker.
- Geometric design is very much a part of the Islamic art. If children like the artistic work in this tale, have them do some research on the artistic conventions of the Moslem world.

- Have them create a geometric design and use it to illustrate their favorite part of the story.
- If children like this story, have them learn to tell it and perform it for students in other classes or for parents.
- Have children write a play, or create a puppet play, from this story and perform it.
- Have children draw the magic horse or make, a clay or papier-mâché version of it.
- Have children draw their favorite part of this story.

- Have children find some Central Asian or Middle Eastern music that they like and create a dance or interpretational version of the story.
- Have children look for other stories that involve quests or journeys and compare and contrast them to *The Magic Horse*.

***Reflective Writing:***

Have children write their thoughts on this tale in a reflection journal or a reading log. They might also write summaries of the story and take notes on what they like about the tale.

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*NOTES: Use this area to keep notes about the children's reaction to the story or notes to yourself about reading or telling the story.*

## STORIES FOR CHILDREN BY IDRIES SHAH

### ***THE LION WHO SAW HIMSELF IN THE WATER***

A lion makes the other animals afraid because of the way he talks. He doesn't understand their reaction to him but is himself afraid when he goes to a watering hole for a drink. He sees his own reflection in the water and thinks that there is another lion in the pond. When he, at last, understands that the other lion is only his own reflection, he is no longer afraid. For children, this story gently explores how fears can arise in the mind and how they can be overcome with more information and experience.

### ***THE FARMER'S WIFE***

A farmer's wife is picking apples. When one falls into a hole in the ground, she tries to retrieve it in a way that becomes ever more complicated and hilarious and, in the end, turns out to be completely unnecessary. Or was it? For some this story mirrors the very common human tendencies of looking for solutions to problems in all the wrong places and of exerting efforts that, though great, are essentially useless. To others this story shows how the world is interconnected, and how it is often necessary both to work hard to find a solution and to understand that the best solution may not be the direct one.

### ***THE SILLY CHICKEN***

A chicken, having learned to speak, proclaims that a disaster is about to happen. Highly anxious, the townspeople run frantically to escape. When nothing happens, they find out that the chicken didn't know what it was talking about. At first they are angry, then amused at how easily they were fooled. In the end they laugh at the chicken because, as they now assume, this chicken—and all other chickens—are simply silly. In an entertaining way, this story illustrates what can happen when people do not think critically about what they hear.

### ***THE CLEVER BOY AND THE TERRIBLE, DANGEROUS ANIMAL***

Townspeople are terrified of something unfamiliar that they have concluded is a terrible, dangerous animal. A boy, visiting from a neighboring village, helps them overcome their fears by teaching them what the object really is—a melon. In an amusing way, this story illustrates how irrational fears based on ignorance can grow. Becoming familiar with this idea can help children deal more easily with similar fears of their own.

### ***THE OLD WOMAN AND THE EAGLE***

Superbly illustrated by Natasha Delmar, daughter of the celebrated classic Chinese painter Ng Yi-Ching, this story tells with gentle humor what happens when an old woman encounters an eagle for the first time. Perplexed by its unfamiliar appearance, she decides to change it to suit her own ideas of what a bird should look like. Her efforts — which, much to the

poor eagle's chagrin, include straightening its beak, trimming its claws and smoothing its feathers — mirror a common pattern of human thought: altering the unfamiliar to make it acceptable.

### ***THE BOY WITHOUT A NAME***

A boy is born and, just as his parents are about to name him, a wise man appears. He tells them that their son is very, very important and that one day he will give the boy something marvelous. Until then they must be very careful not to name him. As the boy grows up, "Nameless" wants more and more to have a name of his own. He asks his friend to help him, and together the boys find the wise man. The wise man gives Nameless his very own name and lets each of the boys pick their very own dream. Among the many insights which this story introduces is the idea that it takes patience and resolve to achieve one's goals in life.

### ***NEEM THE HALF-BOY***

To help the queen, who longs for a son, the fairies consult a wise man, who gives specific instructions. Because the queen follows them only halfway, she gives birth to a half-boy, whom she names Neem. To help Neem become whole, the fairies again consult the wise man, who says that Neem must obtain a special medicine from a dragon's cave. Neem overcomes his fears and obtains the medicine by making a bargain with the dragon that, besides helping himself, also helps the dragon and the people who have been frightened by the dragon. This unusual and memorable tale about an incomplete boy will fascinate young readers and will encourage them to think about what it means to be a "complete person." That Neem is able to make himself complete by an act of cleverness, negotiation and compromise teaches children more than the expected, usual lesson of bravery.

### **FOR OLDER CHILDREN: *THE MAGIC HORSE***

This is the story of two princes. Prince Hoshyar gains rank and fortune by supervising the construction of huge metallic fishes that perform wondrous tasks and bring riches to the people of his land. His brother, Prince Tambal, is interested only in a wooden horse that he obtains from a humble carpenter. The horse is a magical one, and it carries the rider, if he is sincere, to his heart's desire.

### ***WORLD TALES***

Collected from all over the world, these tales show how stories have traveled around the globe from ancient times to our own. Familiar tales recur in unfamiliar places: the story of Cinderella is found as a traditional tale among the Algonquin; the story of Aladdin is found in Wales. This collection of more than sixty tales includes many unusual stories that will be new for readers.

## **HOOPOE BOOKS MANUALS FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS**

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Did you find this manual helpful? Do you have any ideas to improve it? If so, please let us know.

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