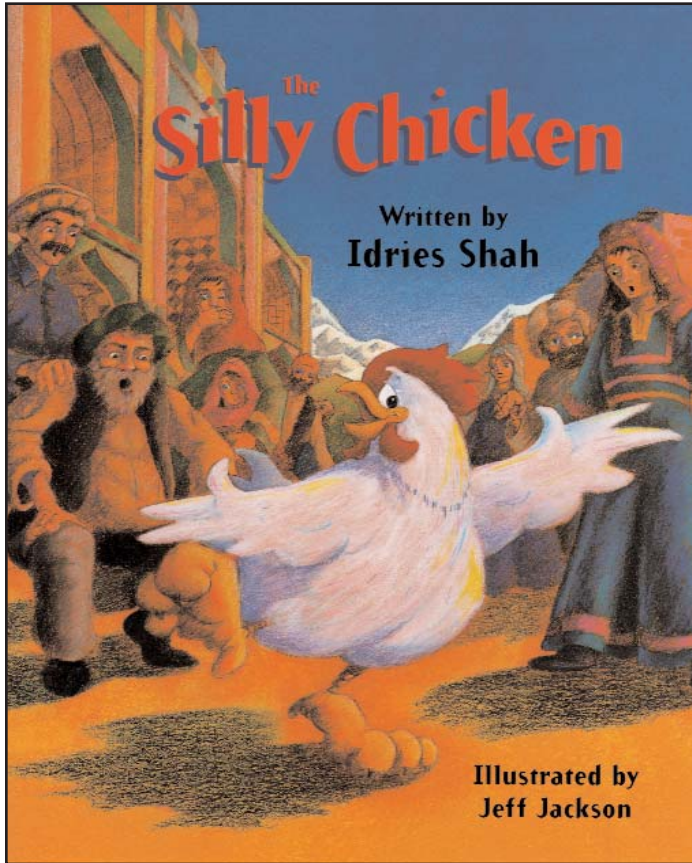




HOOPOE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN  
MANUAL FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS



to accompany  
**The Silly Chicken**  
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*

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This manual accompanies 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.

We hope you and your children enjoy them!

## 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

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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?

“Reading aloud” involves sitting with our children so that they can see the words and pictures as the adult reads from the book. When we read to children, we help them develop important communication and cognitive skills.

These stories captivate children and help develop their attention capacity. They also build linguistic fluency and competence, especially when children know the stories so well that they join in telling them. Because the language of stories is somewhat different from everyday language, a child’s language is refined and enriched by listening to stories. With stories as models, children learn to order their thoughts and to express themselves in meaningful and engaging ways.

When listening and speaking abilities are nurtured with stories early on, almost all children learn to read easily and naturally. 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.

When they are read to, children not only hear the story, they also observe the act of reading. The adult can help the child understand where the text begins on each page, can point to individual words, and can invite the child to read along when the child seems ready. In this way, children gradually learn that the written word reflects spoken language, and that a book has unique meaning and impact. They also pick up positive attitudes of the adult reader who enjoys books and loves reading.

As they begin to read independently, children's oral language strengths help them 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.

These skills, developed and honed with many stories throughout the childhood years, allow 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.

## 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.

- 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.

## LEARNING STRATEGIES

First, it's important to recognize that children who simply listen to a story repeatedly absorb language and concepts naturally, and, in the case of stories such as these, they also develop cognitive skills.

The strategies suggested in this manual can further strengthen children's natural learning process. 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 and to find further meaning and value in the stories.

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, with crayon 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.

**Next is some story activities you can use while reading this Hoopoe Teaching-Story by Idries Shah with your children.**



## STORY:

# The Silly Chicken

## STORY SUMMARY

A chicken is taught to speak by a clever man. It 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 pay no attention to the chicken at all 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.

## BEFORE READING

This story lends itself to speculating at turning points, an activity that improves children's thinking and comprehension of the story. To orient children to predicting outcomes, read the title and ask:

*What do you think might be silly about a chicken?*

*What might a silly chicken do?*

Accept and discuss any ideas offered, then say:

*Let's read and find out why people think this chicken is silly.*

## DURING READING

Invite additional speculation during the story by asking for additional predictions at turning points. It's not important for children 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 children enjoy making predictions by accepting all responses and encouraging the children to give their reasons for thinking as they do. Here are some suggestions for places to stop and invite predictions:

When the chicken, at last, learns to speak (“It took him quite a long time, but in the end, the chicken could speak perfectly well, just like you and me.”):

*What do you think the chicken will do now that it knows how to talk?*

*Why do you think so?*

When the people have run every which way and still cannot escape (“They ran in every possible direction. But they still couldn't get away from the earth.”):

*What do you think the people will do now?*

*Why do you think so?*

When the people are telling the chicken off for leading them astray (“You made us run in every possible direction! And all the while we thought you knew the earth was going to swallow us up!”):

*What do you think the chicken will say to the people?*

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

*Why was that part especially important?*

*What questions do you have about the story?*

*Do you think the clever man was wise to teach the chicken to talk?*

*Why do you think so?*

The townspeople, at first, became angry with the chicken when they realized they had become afraid and had run away for no reason. They felt foolish.

*Who do you think was responsible for their thinking and acting as they did?*

The townspeople said to the chicken, “You made us run!”

*Did the chicken really make them do it?*

The chicken pointed out that, “Only silly people would listen to a chicken in the first place.”

*Do you think the people were silly? Why?*

When the people first heard the chicken talk about the earth swallowing everyone up:

*How else could they have responded?*

In the end, the chicken was still talking, but the people had stopped paying any attention to it at all.

*Was that smart of them, or were they still being silly?*

At the end, the author says “everyone knows that chickens are silly.”

*Is that true? How do you know?*

*The chicken really didn't know what it was talking about. How can you tell when people don't really know what they are talking about?*

*Can people sometimes say silly things and sometimes say wise things? How can you tell the difference?*

*What can you do when you think someone doesn't know what he or she is talking about?*

*Do you know of any situations like the one in the story where people react to something they hear without really thinking about it?*

*This story has many different meanings. Can you think of any we've missed?*

## ACTIVITIES

Do one or more of these activities to enhance the experience of the story and give children the chance to express themselves:

- Have children draw, color or paint their favorite scene from the story.
- Encourage them to tell about what they drew and why.
- Make simple puppets to represent the chicken, the clever man who taught the chicken to talk, and a number of townspeople. (You can make two-dimensional forms from construction paper and paste them on sticks, or you may want to draw faces on old socks and decorate them with yarn and fabric.) Invite children to use the puppets to act out the story with you, then on their own.

- Cut simple chicken forms from white paper, using the cover illustration of the chicken as a model. On each chicken, use a black marker to print one word from the story that the children suggest. (Words might include *silly, chicken, language, alarmed, run, fields, woods, meadows, mountains.*) Have the children help tape the chickens to a bulletin board, and encourage them to read as many words as they can each day.

- Have the children make up sentences that use one, two or three of their selected words.

## OTHER IDEAS

- If children enjoy the story, read it several times over the course of a week or more. Encourage them to join in the telling, especially on those parts that involve highly predictable language, for instance, “They ran through the fields and into the woods and across the meadows . . . .”

- When you hear children accepting information uncritically about people or situations, remind them of how the townspeople believed the chicken without thinking.

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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.

### 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.

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

Townsppeople 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 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.

### FATIMA THE SPINNER AND THE TENT

Fatima’s life is beset with what seem to be disasters. Her journey leads her from Morocco to the Mediterranean, Egypt, Turkey and, finally, to China. It is in China that she realizes that what seemed at the time to be really unfortunate events were an integral part of her eventual fulfillment. This Teaching-Story is well known in Greek folklore, but this version is attributed to the Sheikh Mohamad Jamaludin of Adrianople (modern-day Edirne) in Turkey, who died in 1750.

### 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 MAN AND THE FOX

A man tricks a young fox into believing that he will give him a chicken. The fox gets trapped, but through ingenuity and perseverance he

manages to escape. This story of the young fox can inspire children to face challenges, to overcome and, sometimes, to make use of obstacles in their path to solve problems.

### THE MAN WITH BAD MANNERS

This is an amusing Teaching-Story about a badly behaved man. A young boy initiates a plan to change his behavior and, with the help of all of the villagers, succeeds. The story will bring laughter to young children and, at the same time, teach them valuable lessons about conflict resolution, initiative, and cooperation.

### 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.

### 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 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.

### FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

### THE MAGIC HORSE

This is the story of two princes. Prince Hoshiyar 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.

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## OTHER TITLES FOR OLDER READERS

**By Idries Shah:**

### 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.

### CARAVAN OF DREAMS

A colorful caravan of Eastern oral and written literature, this collection includes many well-known tales such as "The Story of Mushkil Gusha," "The Magic Horse," and "The Two Brothers."

### TALES OF THE DERVISHES

A mysterious chest is buried unopened. A wondrous caravan brings fortune to a simple cobbler. An outcast princess creates a new life in the wilderness. Some of the 78 tales in this remarkable book first appeared in print over a thousand years ago, others are medieval classics. Each has a special relevance for us today. Those who probe beyond the surface will find multiple meanings to challenge assumptions and foster new ways of thinking and perceiving.

### THE DERMIS PROBE

This collection of stories and anecdotes includes a contemporary version of the well-known classic tale, "The Blind Ones and the Elephant" immortalized in Rumi's Mathnavi over 800 years ago.

### THE SUBTLETIES OF THE INIMITABLE & THE EXPLOITS OF THE INCOMPARABLE MULLA NASRUDIN

The Mulla and his stories appear in literature and oral traditions from the Middle East to Greece, Russia, France, and China. Many nations claim Nasrudin as a native son, the Turks going so far as to exhibit a grave with his date of death as 386. But nobody really knows who he was or where he came from. According to a legend dating from at least the 13th century, Nasrudin was snatched as a schoolboy from the clutches of the "Old Villain" to carry through the ages the message of how to escape from rigid thinking habits. He was chosen because he could make people laugh, and humor has a way of slipping through the cracks.

### THE WORLD OF NASRUDIN

The fourth collection of Nasrudin stories which are not only studied for their humor alone, or for their hidden wisdom, but also help us understand our world and ourselves.

### AFGHAN CARAVAN

**Collected by Idries Shah, edited by Safia Shah**

This rich collection takes the reader on a spellbinding journey of adventure, tradition, and wisdom. Revealed is a magnificent culture, hidden from our history books, contributing to the human story in ways which most Westerners are never aware of. Contains a narrative from a Pathan princess, heroic war stories, tips on savvy carpet-buying, even the Great Pilau Recipe of Khalifa Ashpaz, master chef of the Hindu Kush, reportedly once served to 4,000 guests.

### THE MIDDLE EAST BEDSIDE BOOK

**Collected by Idries Shah, edited by Tahir Shah**

A collection of writings from past and present writers, observers, poets and travelers brings the color and spirit of this region to life. Dress, medicine, backgammon, psychology, politics, chess, attitudes about women, honor, music — even tooth-picks and tourists — are covered. A timely look at common threads linking Western culture with the Middle East.

**By Amina Shah:**

### TALES OF AFGHANISTAN

One of the great storytellers and folktale collectors of our time presents the traditional lore of her ancestral homeland in tales of adventure, enchantment, and the strange patterns of fate.

### TALES FROM THE BAZAARS

A treasury of traditional folklore gathered from Central Asia, India, Arabia, Europe and the Americas. Among them "The Fair Mohican," "The Meatball's Fate," and "The Girl with the Glass Heart."

### THE TALE OF FOUR DERVISHES

A story within a story within a story, told in true Arabian Nights fashion. After hearing this allegory, the great Nizamuddin Awliyya placed a benediction on the work. It is widely believed that those who hear it will be restored to health.

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

Sally Mallam, editor: [Mallysal@aol.com](mailto:Mallysal@aol.com)