

TEACHING FOLK TALES AND CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE BASED ON
THEIR GENRE CHARACTERISTICS

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Annotation: *This article explores the methodological principles of teaching Uzbek folk tales and children's folklore based on their genre characteristics. It emphasizes the structural, thematic, and functional features of these folklore types and their role in developing students' moral, linguistic, and creative competencies. The study highlights how genre-based instruction—supported by digital technologies and interactive learning methods—enhances students' understanding of national oral traditions and fosters cultural continuity in the context of modern education. The integration of artificial intelligence and multimedia tools is proposed as an innovative approach to making folklore studies more engaging, analytical, and interdisciplinary.*

Keywords: *folk tales, children's folklore, genre characteristics, digital education, oral tradition, cultural heritage, interactive learning*

The earliest examples of the art of words began to emerge with the very appearance of human speech. The term “ertak” (folk tale) appears in a mature form in Mahmud Koshgari's 11th-century work “Devonu lug'otit turk” and denotes the act of narrating an event orally. Although the term ertak is now accepted as a folkloristic concept, among Uzbeks in Surxondaryo, Samarkand, and Fergana it is often referred to as matal. In the regions around Bukhara and in bilingual (Uzbek–Tajik) communities, it is called ushuk. In Khorezm, the term varsaki is used, while in Tashkent and its surrounding areas, the word cho'pchak is common. Besides ertak, matal, and cho'pchak, other terms such as hikoya (story), afsona (legend), o'tirik (tall tale), and total also occur among Uzbeks. In Alisher Navoi's works, the word cho'rchak is used with meanings close to afsona, ertak, and masal, corresponding to cho'pchak.

The term cho'pchak originally carried meanings such as “to collect, tell, or seek short stories,” and for that reason, it was sometimes used in place of topishmoq (riddle). The folk tale is one of the oldest, most popular, and extensive genres of oral artistic creativity, equally appealing to both children and adults. Folk tales originated in ancient times, rooted in the mythological worldview, customs, and rituals of primitive ancestors. Generally, tales depict the everyday life of the people and their noblest human ideals through imaginative and fictional narratives.

Tales were traditionally performed by professional narrators. In earlier times, tales were told at specific times of the year by elderly, wise, and respected individuals who possessed storytelling talent. Such professional narrators were called ertakchi. The people

held storytelling in high regard, as reflected in the saying: “Ertak ermak emas, ertakchi og‘ziga kelganini demas” — “A tale is not mere entertainment, and a storyteller does not speak whatever comes to mind.”

An ertakchi would narrate either to an individual or to an entire audience, and this act of narration was essentially a form of performance. To capture the listeners’ attention, the storyteller would emotionally immerse themselves in the story, using voice modulation, facial expressions, and gestures (mimicry and pantomime) to enhance the tale’s mysterious atmosphere. The storyteller did not shout but alternated between whispering and raising their voice, using subtle tones and expressive eye movements. When imitating animal voices or depicting mythological beings, the storyteller ensured that their tone matched the characters — sometimes gentle, sometimes eerie. In this way, a single performer could bring an entire tale to life, filling it with emotional depth and excitement.

Because of these features, folk storytelling resembles a one-person theater, though it differs from formal stage performance in that it is free from decorations and theatrical attributes.

During the agrarian era, when farming dominated production, tales were usually told after the day’s work was done — during the autumn and winter evenings. These long storytelling nights became a special cultural tradition, often lasting from dusk until dawn. The people themselves emphasized this custom in the proverb: “Doston kunda aytiladi, ertak tunda” — “Epics are recited by day, tales are told by night.”

Even if a tale had reached its most exciting moment — the climax — the storyteller would stop at daybreak. This rule was followed especially in magical or fantastic tales. The belief was that the beings of darkness — divs, paris, ajinas (demons, fairies, and spirits) — might emerge into the world of light and harm humans, including the listeners. There was also a fear that the mystical nature of the tale would vanish or dissolve into material reality if continued into daylight. The dominance of darkness from dusk till dawn heightened the mysterious atmosphere of the tale, establishing the custom of telling tales at night.

Certain parts of tales were performed through dramatic action, and neglecting this element could diminish their artistic and aesthetic value. The performance of a folk tale could take one of three main forms:

- a) Theatrical form – with dramatized movements and dialogue;
- b) Declamatory form – with expressive recitation;
- c) Musical form – with rhythmic or melodic delivery.

These performance methods reflect the deep artistic culture and performative sophistication of the Uzbek oral storytelling tradition. In folk tales and their performances, numerous traditional expressions and fixed formulas are frequently encountered. These not only serve to captivate the reader or listener but also play an essential role in connecting events and creating a sense of continuity and rhythm. For

example: “There are forty rooms, do not enter the fortieth one,” “He swung his sword once, and it stretched forty gaz long,” “Now listen to the story from another side,” “The king’s anger flared, his poison came like that of a serpent,” “She has a mouth that can call the moon, eyes that can call the sun, and words sweeter than honey,” “When she drinks water, it can be seen through her throat; when she eats carrots, through her side,” “When she laughs, flowers scatter from her lips; when she walks, gold falls from her feet,” “They traveled and traveled, through mountains, deserts, and plains...” — all of these are examples of such traditional expressions.

The art of storytelling has its own taboos, prohibitions, and superstitions. For instance, while narrating a tale, the ertakchi (storyteller) would tightly close the door, light a fire in the hearth, and place near themselves sharp or bitter objects, as well as bread, water, or stones — believed to protect against evil spirits or bad luck.

In various regions of Uzbekistan, there once existed schools of storytelling, where master storytellers trained worthy apprentices. These mentors would familiarize their students with the subtle aspects of storytelling and teach them the secrets of performance — how to modulate the voice, use expressive gestures, and maintain the tale’s rhythm and mystery.

The epigraph, traditional introduction, and opening formulas of a tale serve as indicators of a storyteller’s skill. These openings, often crafted in saj’ (rhymed prose), add melody and charm to the tale and enhance its emotional impact.

Mahmud Koshgari, in his “Devonu lug‘otit turk”, noted that the word “etuk” signified “to convey or narrate something to a king for a purpose.” He stated that the term originates from the act of storytelling itself. The Uzbeks used the word ertak to describe recounting past events in detail. The ancient nature of the term is evident in its identical usage among Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen peoples.

In Uzbekistan, folk tales are extraordinarily diverse and widespread, to the extent that in different regions they have acquired various local names — such as shuk, ushuk, matal, cho‘pcha, or cho‘rchak. Based on themes, linguistic features, and plot structures, Uzbek folk tales are conventionally divided into three major types:

Animal Tales – stories featuring animals that reflect human behavior and moral lessons.

Magical (Fairy) Tales – narratives filled with fantasy, supernatural elements, and mythical beings.

Everyday (Domestic) Tales – realistic stories depicting daily life, wisdom, and humor.

In addition to these, there exist shorter tales aimed primarily at children — these form a distinct part of children’s folklore in terms of volume, theme, and purpose.

While legends and narratives generally do not require special preparation for performance, storytelling (ertak aytish) demands at least a degree of innate talent. However, the tradition of storytelling in Uzbek culture has always been distinguished by the unique charm and expressiveness of individual storytellers.

Renowned storytellers such as Zavonbibi Sarimsoqova from Kokand, Sharif Musayev from Tashkent, Mahfura Sobirova from Khorezm, Murodilla Ziyodov from Andijan, and Abdullakhoja from Namangan became famous within their regions for their remarkable performances.

Storytellers often conducted their performances under special conditions. Before beginning, they would place objects like salt, rue (isiriq), a comb, a broom, water, or bread in front of them — both as symbolic offerings and as visual props to enhance the story's atmosphere. These items were used during the performance to heighten the dramatic effect and engage the audience more deeply.

Interestingly, a storyteller's profession often influenced the content of their tales. For example, a seamstress storyteller might include needlework or craftsmanship motifs in her tales, while a mulla (religious scholar) storyteller might feature learned characters and themes related to knowledge. This suggests that storytellers not only entertained but also subtly promoted their crafts and professions through their art.

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