

Looking for Nifty Stories?

As a kid, I overheard my older brothers using the word "nifty" when referring to a cool car or a great suit of clothes. It was a word that meant a variety of things, all of them good and attractive. As time passed, I heard the word used in a wider range of conversations, including nifty evenings out, nifty concerts, and nifty songs. Later still, it cropped up in conversations about more "cultural" experiences: nifty books, nifty poems, and nifty stories. The word seemed allusively defined, yet attractively so. Still, I did not really define the word until I found myself using it to refer to the stories I tell to audiences and on recordings. Actually, I hit the books when a listener said my stories were nifty. The current Wiktionary defines the word as "good; a general term for anything that is good, useful or beneficial." A thesaurus gives synonyms such as "peachy, smashing, dandy, great, keen, and groovy," all of which strike me as exchanging one jargon term for another!"

What was my listener describing when he called my stories "nifty?" The stories I choose to tell are, indeed, particularly good and rather effective at making a point, a lesson, a message, a bit of perspective. You could say that my idea of nifty stories is stories that enlighten as well as entertain. There needs to be a message beyond a witty punch line.

Any story with a moral at the end sends the listener a clear message. It teaches using a concrete example. However, the lessons in many other stories may not be as obvious. The meaning is hidden in the actions of the characters. Listeners are left to figure out the message for themselves. And there may be a different message for each listener. Stories such as these are inclined to be more widely popular. Longer stories are likely to be more subtle in the lessons that result. One can learn many lessons from epic stories. Think of the difference between an Aesop fable and a tale from the Arabian Nights. Which one gives you more freedom to choose your own message? My personal penchant is for finding my own lessons when I listen to a story. The stories I chose for my Fables in Four Minutes and World Full of Stories CDs are good examples of nifty stories with subtle messages. Nifty stories are stories that teach. Nifty stories appeal to a broad audience. Nifty stories carry a message that applies to all people. Nifty stories are always stylish, regardless of the era that spawned them. Stories such as these hold the listeners attention long enough to send their message effectively. Nifty stories are a treasure!

About the Author

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