2012 International Children’s Book Day

Once upon a time, there was a story that the whole world told

Once upon a time, there was a story that the whole world told. In fact, it was not just one story but many, and they began to fill the world with tales of disobedient girls and seductive wolves, glass slippers and love-struck princes, clever cats and little tin soldiers, and friendly giants and chocolate factories. They filled the world with words, intelligence, images and extraordinary characters. They invited the world to laugh, to be amazed, to coexist. They gave it meaning. And ever since, these stories have continued to multiply, telling us a thousand and one times, "Once upon a time, there was a story that the whole world told..."

When we read, tell or listen to stories, we’re exercising our imagination, almost as if it needed training to stay in shape. One day, surely without us even knowing it, one of these stories will return to our lives, offering creative solutions to obstacles that we find along the way.

When we read, tell or listen to stories out loud, we're also continuing an ancient ritual that has played a fundamental role in the history of civilization: creating community. Cultures, past eras and generations come together around these stories to tell us that we are all one, the Japanese, Germans, and Mexicans; those that lived in the seventeenth century and us today, reading our stories on the
Internet; grandparents, parents and children. Stories fulfill all human beings in the same way because, despite our enormous differences, we are all, deep down, the stories' protagonists.

Unlike living organisms that are born, reproduce and die, stories, overflowing with fertility, can be immortal. Especially those in the popular tradition that are adaptable to the circumstances and context in which they are told and rewritten. They're stories that, when reproduced or heard, make us their co-authors.

And, once upon a time, there was also a country full of myths, stories and legends that were passed on for centuries, from mouth to mouth, sharing their idea of creation, relating their history, sharing their cultural wealth, sparking curiosity and bringing smiles to faces. It was also a country where very few citizens had access to books. But this history has already begun to change. Today, stories are reaching ever further corners of my country, Mexico. And, in finding their readers, these stories are fulfilling their role of creating community, creating family, and creating individuals that are more likely to find happiness.

Francisco Hinojosa