

Where Are We?

The nature and uses of stories



Once upon a time there were three people in a balloon, floating gracefully over the land.

One was a senior police officer. She had, she reckoned, seen pretty well everything. She felt she knew everything about humankind's crimes, cowardice and stupidity. This was nothing in human nature that could surprise her.

The second was a famous clinical psychologist. He knew intimately the inside of people's minds and hearts, everything that makes people tick.

The third was a small child.

As they journeyed high above the countryside in their balloon, they realised they had strayed from their intended route. They resolved therefore to bring the balloon down much closer to the land and to ask someone on the ground where they were.

The descended towards the land and saw someone beneath them in a field. 'Where are we?' shouted the police officer and the psychologist.

'You're in a balloon,' shouted back the person standing in the field.

The police officer and the psychologist looked at each other in amazement.

'What sort of a person could that be?' asked the one. 'Never, never in all my long experience of human nature,' said the other 'have I ever come across someone like that. What sort of a person could that be?'

'Well,' said the small child, 'I have actually met quite a lot of adults like that in the course of my short life. And I do know one thing. That person cannot be a storyteller.'

Oh?' said the other two. 'How can you tell that?'

'There are several reasons,' said the child. 'For one thing, what that person said was totally obvious to us and therefore totally boring and uninteresting, and totally useless.'

'Also, it contained no wisdom.'

'And third, there was no fun in it, no gladness, no joy, no hope.'

'Yes, definitely, that person cannot be a storyteller.'

Source: origin is by anonymous, but this version is adapted slightly from *Inside Stories: wisdom and hope for changing worlds* by Angela Wood and Robin Richardson, Trentham Books 1992, page *nine*.

