

Story Time at Hanwel: A Collection of Bed Time Stories for Children

Agaba Samuel Rujumba

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This is a one-of-a-kind compilation of moral tales for children of all ages and descriptions.

Agaba Samuel Rujumba's *Story Time at Hanwel* is a culturally diverse and uniquely global compilation of twenty-one moral tales. With biblical scripture as a foundation, vastly different stories share the notion that prayer has healing and transformative powers.

Using a variety of forms from allegory to fable, and including both cautionary tales and rags-to-riches stories, *Story Time at Hanwel* embraces African history and tradition in communities all over the world and throughout various periods in recent history. A wealthy Sudanese merchant caravans across the Sahara; a young boy in England is addicted to his smartphone and dreams of all the latest gadgets. Poignant scenes, often depicting cruel or harsh realities, are softly illustrated in pastel colors by Tukahirwa Noah.

Though the book is meant for young audiences and often directly addresses children in a conversational and straightforward tone, its themes and topics are often sensitive and may be best explored with an adult. Stories are set everywhere from the slums of Nairobi to Jerusalem's Western Wall, tackling heavy subject matter including war, bombs, death, hunger, stealing, lynching, and the persecution of twins in West Africa. Various historical atrocities, including the 1994 Rwandan civil war and genocide and the dangerous rule of Idi Amin, may prompt further exploration.

"Different Colours, Nice People," and "Be Kind to Refugees and Strangers in Your Community" are two chapters among many of particular contemporary global relevance that can be used as a springboard for further discussions. In the story "The Merchant of Sudan and His Dog," Abu severely beats then kills his faithful dog for barking. Although he later regrets it, the unexpected cruelty and accompanying picture may promote visions of conflict rather than sugarplums, making it a questionable choice for bedtime.

With Bible verses preceding each chapter and enmeshed in each story, Christian principles and doctrine are an integral piece of every tale. Chapters often end with advice, admonitions, questions, or exercises to further engage readers in Bible-study fashion, such as "Now children, ask your parents to read for you the verses below and write what you see as the character of Jesus Christ." Simple concepts of being "good" and "kind" are side by side with more complex ideologies such as the second coming of Christ, as in the stories "Joel: A Patient Boy" and "Jesus Christ, Our Advocate."

Using a casual and at times didactic tone, each chapter tells a complete story in three to five pages, typically involving a form of persecution or a tragedy to overcome, as when Facebook friends James from Tanzania and Tekele from Ethiopia survive a gang beating and go on to become missionaries in "Doing God's Will." The narration flows easily for reading quietly or aloud, and features boys, girls, men, and women of different ages and socioeconomic standing acting as heroes, villains, or both equally.

Story Time at Hanwel combines historical and current events with elements of faith and scripture, and is a one-of-a-kind compilation of moral tales for children of all ages and descriptions.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (September 13, 2016)

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