

For Immediate Release



And the stories unfold at the first festival of stories at AUB

Beirut, Lebanon- 13/12/2012 - 12-12-2012, a special date and a special day at AUB: With the collaboration of the British Council and the AUB English Department, Tariq Mehmood, novelist, filmmaker, storyteller, and English professor at AUB, organized a festival of stories under the title of “Something I Have to Tell You”.

At 10 a.m., the doors to the Assembly Hall opened up to embrace some of the best storytellers around.

About 700 school students walked in, filling the empty benches of the hall.

While waiting for the event to begin, the first story starts to unfold. Six- to twelve-year-old children invade the stage. Some sing, some others dance, and a few hop around as an eight-year-old grabs the “derbakeh” and with the beat, relates a story of Lebanese origins. Pointing at this child, Mehmood says, “We are all storytellers. It is part of our human nature. Each one of us has his/her own story to tell, so why do we always tend to look elsewhere. Folktales deal with the human spirit, and each and every country, even village has its own library.”

With the story of a rich Indian king, Mehmood launches the journey into imagination. The children immediately transport all the attendees into a lively world where fiction and reality mix and mingle.

Pete Kalu, a British award-winning playwright, novelist, and storyteller, continues the voyage. “Play has become a luxury nowadays,” he says. “We have to assure our kids that it is safe to play, for while doing so, they dream and create the best tales. There is no escape from technology, but children should find time to play to be able to relate their stories on Facebook and Twitter.” Putting his words into action, Kalu takes the stage and invites some children to play, and with “The Lion’s Soup,” an African folktale, students roar, huff, puff and travel through the African jungle.

Abdel Rahim Al Awji, internationally-renowned writer, actor and storyteller, brings back the travelers to the Arabian shores, and with his story of “King Seif and the Five Cursed Islands,” he addresses his young audience in their native language.

Al Awji incites the children to foreshadow his story’s events by asking them questions, for he believes that, “the problem with the stories of our times is that they are being delivered to kids in the form of news, thus the message is explicitly stated, and the child is not using his/her imagination nor his/her critical thinking anymore.”

And the story goes on.

Mehmood hops on the stage and directs the audience's attention to the main door of the majestic hall. A camel with huge red glasses walks in and heads toward the stage. Imagination at its best: Questions begin to pop up from all over the place, from every child. "Look a camel! A camel!" "What is this creature doing here?" "Why do you think they brought this camel here?" "What is going to happen next?" "Is it going to give us presents?" At that moment Mehmood announced, "The camel is going to tour the upper campus and tell stories to passersby, if you like to continue the journey you can join him, if not please before you leave help yourselves to the books we are offering at the door."

On her way out, Nour, 7, expresses her feelings, "It is true that we were intolerable, but AUB felt safe. We played; we screamed; we laughed, and we even transformed into different characters, and there was no one to tell us to remain silent or to remind us that we are nasty."

Hanna, another seven-year-old student, adds, "We really enjoyed listening to the stories."

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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