

What Makes Nifty Stories Nifty?

I grew up with the word "nifty" as a standard descriptor in my vocabulary. It alluded to the uniqueness and stylishness of the subject being described. As time passed, I heard the word used in a wider range of conversations, including nifty evenings out, nifty concerts, and nifty songs. Even later, the word took on a more cultured definition in reference to poems, books, and, of course, nifty stories.

Whenever I heard the word I assumed it meant something good, something attractive. However, it was only when I found myself using the word in my description of my own stories that I needed to define it. Actually, I hit the books when a listener said my stories were nifty. The Merriam/Webster Dictionary definition states: "very good, very attractive," etymology unknown, originally used in 1865. 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. I look for stories with certain underlying values that help the listener to set their internal compass when sailing through life.

Any story with a moral at the end sends the listener a clear message. It teaches by example. On the other hand, many stories are not so obvious in the lessons they offer. 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. The subtler lessons tend to come from longer tales. Epic stories have many layered lessons. Just compare a tale from the Arabian Nights to a fable by Aesop to see the difference. Which one appeals to you? 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 are memorable. 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 worth their weight in gold!

About the Author

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