

# Storytelling for Conviviality in Islamic Religious Education: The Case of Rūmī’s “Jackal who pretended to be a peacock”

*Rasool Akbari*

## *1. Storytelling in Islamic Religious Education*

In a broader spectrum, storytelling has been viewed as a significant method in Religious Education (hereafter referred to as RE) as it serves pedagogical functions more than merely articulating narratives. In the existing literature, stories have been perceived as valuable resources in RE classes for stimulating curiosity, promoting critical thinking,<sup>1</sup> and bolstering student engagement and motivation.<sup>2</sup> Storytelling helps not only to convey religious teachings and cultural heritage but also to promote moral virtues and interpersonal values. A “systematic review of the literature”<sup>3</sup> shows how storytelling in RE can engage learners both creatively and experientially and promote spiritual development as well as religious literacy. In addition to imparting knowledge on religious themes and values, stories have the cognitive as well as affective potential to offer meaning-based models for human action,<sup>4</sup> shape the learners’ moral imagination,<sup>5</sup> and not only encourage empathy but also provide alternative ways to better understand abstract or difficult to describe concepts.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, in the particular realm of Islamic Religious Education (hereafter referred to as IRE), some research has explored the pedagogical advantages of incorporating stories for Muslim learners. First, it is worth mentioning that the importance of stories and storytelling has been underlined in relation to the developments of Islamic tradition and Muslim cultural transfer in the classical period;<sup>7</sup> as philosophical pedagogy entangled with the employment of symbolic imagery in order to convey key intellectual concepts through the addition of a “dimension of depth” that facilitates “abstract language;”<sup>8</sup> and as a pedagogical instrument associated with ethical formation in Islamic philosophy and Sufism, in order to transfer virtue ethical, philosophical, and spiritual teachings.<sup>9</sup> Apart

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<sup>1</sup> See Chesnavage (2021), *Digital Stories for World Religions*, 644.

<sup>2</sup> See Aseery (2024), *Enhancing motivation in religious education*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Huth et al. (2021), *The use of story to teach religious education*, 253–272.

<sup>4</sup> See Schultz/Flasher (2011), *Ethics in illness narrative*, 394.

<sup>5</sup> See Ryan (2007), *Theorists in early religious education*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> See Arthur (1988), *Use of stories in Religious Education*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> See Schoeler (2020), *Divine Inspiration and Storytelling*, 98.

<sup>8</sup> Rustom (2020), *Storytelling as philosophical pedagogy*, 404.

<sup>9</sup> See Zargar (2017), *Polished mirror in Islamic philosophy*.

from such historical and spiritual or philosophical approaches, several studies, though somewhat limited, demonstrate that storytelling can be significantly effective in internalizing religious values and nurturing children's awareness of God, love for others, and moral character.<sup>10</sup> It has been argued that by incorporating storytelling techniques, educators can get the learners more engaged with the purpose to convey religious values<sup>11</sup> and make religious teachings more relatable and memorable.<sup>12</sup> From an educational psychology perspective, storytelling offers the potential to be an effective teaching method that "expresses the educational truths indirectly."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it has been shown how Muslim narratives can be employed in designing lessons for IRE classes that implement critical religious education.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, stories can help students understand the critical dynamics of faith and identity and enhance personal responsibility in their faith journey. It has been demonstrated that by integrating storytelling into the IRE curriculum, teachers can illustrate the need for believers to affirm and reconcile their faith. This approach has been contrasted in narrative-based IRE with a more liberal RE where he thinks cultural knowledge is often prioritized over faith understanding and interpretive approaches are utilized to explore religious stories through students' cultural experiences.

More specifically in the existing IRE literature, storytelling has been demonstrated to play a significant role in executing moral education for young children,<sup>15</sup> to promote moral consciousness and shape the learners' behavior and character.<sup>16</sup> The narrative method in IRE is particularly measured as effective in not only introducing values to children, but also creating space for them to exercise reasoning, enabling them to connect their own living experiences to the themed stories and to nourish their spiritual self.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the formation of children's religious character has been evidenced in classroom activities focusing on the stories of exemplars such as prophets.<sup>18</sup> It has been pointed out that narrative serves as a crucial pedagogical tool in the holistic development of children and adolescents, particularly in religious and moral education, socialization, and cultural integration.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, it is often contended that such educational tools can allow Muslim educators to develop dialogic pedagogies that foster transformative learning, enabling students to assimilate ethical principles into their everyday lives.<sup>20</sup> This brings us to one

<sup>10</sup> See Khasiroh (2022), *Internalization of Religious Values*, 133.

<sup>11</sup> See Misra et al. (2022), *Story Method in Islamic Education*, 87.

<sup>12</sup> See Al-Hawamleh (2019), *Storytelling promoting moral consciousness*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Alemi et al. (2020), *Social robotics in the Islamic world*, 2709.

<sup>14</sup> See Uçan (2019), *Pedagogy of Islamic religious education*.

<sup>15</sup> See Rahim/Rahiem (2012), *Stories as moral education*, 454.

<sup>16</sup> See Al-Hawamleh (2019), *Storytelling promoting moral consciousness*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> See Rahiem et al. (2020), *Storytelling for Moral Education*.

<sup>18</sup> See Fajri/Zakiyah (2022), *Storytelling of Prophet Ayub*, 192.

<sup>19</sup> See Okumuşlar (2006), *Effective storytelling in religious education*, 237.

<sup>20</sup> See Ahmed (2019), *Transformative Islamic dialogic pedagogy*, 647.

important point of discussion in addressing the utilization of storytelling in contemporary education; namely, the socio-ethical implications.

When it comes to narrativity in RE, at least two significant discursive challenges emerge: interpretation and application. These considerations to use stories in IRE classes are not merely of literary, rhetorical, or pedagogical nature, but also associated with the intellectual discourses, ideologies, and power relations. These discursive dynamics on the one hand shape different interpretations of narratives in various sociocultural fields, and on the other hand dictate divergent directions for their consumption or application in different RE settings. It can be argued that sufficient attention to such discursive power and intellectual structures that shape and direct the interpretation of narratives is inevitable when one aims to apply storytelling in Islamic instruction. This is because such structures profoundly influence which stories are selected and told, how they are told, and the values they are meant to impart. Discursive dynamics within religious, social, and educational contexts largely influence the authoritative voices that curate and transmit these narratives, often reflecting specific ideological, theological, and cultural agendas. Therefore, it is necessary to remember that (non)religious narratives, regardless of whatever thematic and/or pedagogical potential they possess, do not exist in a discursive vacuum. Narratives are embedded as such within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks for the construction of knowledge<sup>21</sup> that also affect their reception, internalization, and practice by learners. In IRE, while stories can play a crucial role in moral and spiritual development, attention to these discursive structures is essential to ensure that the educational practice of storytelling promotes genuine ethical reflection, critical thinking, and balanced perspectives among the Muslim learners.

On this basis, the question is how we can effectively acknowledge and critically examine these discursive concerns over the interpretation and application of narratives when approaching them for educational purposes, and how we can help educators who aim to employ storytelling as method and technique in IRE classes foster a more inclusive and equitable environment that allows for diverse interpretations to resonate with the lived experiences of all learners. In the pluralistic and learner-oriented atmosphere of contemporary RE, the open diversity and inclusive agency of learning communities cannot be underestimated. I argue that plurality of interpretation is not to be resolved, since it cannot be perceived as a problem per se, but acknowledged, heard, and endorsed. For this purpose, the teachers will need to have access to working models and be trained on how to handle “conflicting stories.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, such an inclusive approach to cultural and religious narrativity can relate better to the necessity of using storytelling in IRE in order to captivate and ignite

<sup>21</sup> See Berger/Luckmann (1966), *Social construction of reality*.

<sup>22</sup> Breidlid/Nicolaisen (1998), *Stories in religious education in Norway*, 75.

the learners' imagination and offer opportunities to them to engage with and develop spiritual, moral, and religious competencies, which can in turn open "doorways into the life-worlds of others."<sup>23</sup> This is particularly relevant given the increasingly pluralistic educational settings in our world today that have emerged as significant challenges for the homogeneity and continuity of IRE – at a variety of denominational and sociocultural levels of dissonance in both majority Muslim countries and diasporic communities.

It can be stated that since moral considerations are important in navigating interpersonal relationships,<sup>24</sup> attention to the "ethical" paradigm<sup>25</sup> of learning becomes a focal point for IRE in order to promote the practice of constructive relationships by Muslim learners. Therefore, in today's IRE we need to conceptualize principles and goals for the practice of religious instruction that can nurture character virtues and interpersonal competencies for the endorsement of inclusivity and diversity. This argument can be in line with Mezirow's notion of transformative learning,<sup>26</sup> where knowledge is about mutual agreement and is gained through critical self-reflection.

In response to the above-mentioned questions and gaps, the present article posits that by embedding "conviviality" as a foundational principle and aspirational goal in and for IRE, educators can create classes that are inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the diverse experiences of all students. This approach can ensure that the educational praxis of storytelling not only imparts moral and spiritual lessons, but also fosters a consensual learning community and offers the learners actual opportunities and safe space to practice constructive dialogue and exchange.

To examine this argument, the present article simulates the use of one sample story extracted from Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, titled "Jackal who pretended to be a peacock." In the mainstream of IRE, narrativity has predominantly focused on conventional samples of stories derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. These canonical texts provide foundational narratives that are essential for imparting the core teachings and values of Islam. However, there is a significant yet often overlooked aspect of Islamic cultural heritage that can greatly enrich the educational landscape: the non-canonical literature, especially that which has been developed by the intellectuals, mystics, and elites of both classical, medieval, and modern or contemporary Islam. The case study here from Rūmī (1207-1273) can demonstrate how stories might be used as didactic tools within the Islamic culture of RE. While assuming "conviviality" as the overarching principle and goal of its pedagogical model, the proposed storytelling sample here aims to enhance interpersonal virtue literacy, reasoning, and practice

<sup>23</sup> Grajczonek/Ryan (2009), *Children's literature in religion program*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> See Kanov et al. (2016), *Compassion in uncertainty*, 751.

<sup>25</sup> See Tuba Işık (2022), *Tugendethische Kultivierung des Selbst*.

<sup>26</sup> See Mezirow (2003), *Transformative learning as discourse*, 58.

among Muslim children. At the same time, the model attempts to be inclusive of denominational diversity and responsive to the needs of contemporary multicultural societies.

## *2. Narrative Conviviality in IRE: as Principle and as Goal*

In the context of Islamic education, there is a growing need for innovative approaches to teaching that address contemporary challenges and engage students effectively. The lack of new theoretical insights and critical perspectives in Muslim education has been highlighted as an issue that needs to be addressed.<sup>27</sup> In response to this requirement, the present article offers storytelling and conviviality as two critical insights to approach IRE today. Especially in the more conventional discourses of RE, at the intersection of narrativity and identity, it was believed that stories must help construct cultural identity. Today, if we acknowledge the pedagogical principle in RE to be the promotion of critical learning and the encouragement of students to question “the nature, content and purpose of their learning,”<sup>28</sup> then teaching religion through stories becomes pedagogically beneficial.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that narratives are not isolated cultural resources but are embedded within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks that impact how they are received and internalized by learners.

While the use of stories as a tool for teaching religion provides exciting possibilities for modern education, the discursive dynamics of interpreting and implementing stories must be considered.<sup>30</sup> For instance, in such diasporic settings as Europe, where Muslim learners are a minority, sociocultural plurality outside Muslim-majority geographies poses challenges for IRE. Although the significance of using Islamic children’s literature has been endorsed as a supplementary pedagogical tool in RE in the diaspora, it also functions as a mode of cultural negotiation highlighting the interpretative challenges in IRE: defensive-exclusive stances to narrative that urge the preservation of religious principles in response to sociocultural threats, and offensive-inclusive outlooks which embrace cultural flexibility through innovative formats like detective stories, sports narratives, and fables.<sup>31</sup> These dual dynamics of narrative as a mode of cultural negotiation illustrate the need for IRE to pay attention to complex interpretative landscapes, to navigate between maintaining tradition and

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<sup>27</sup> See Şahin (2018), *Critical issues in Islamic education*, 335.

<sup>28</sup> Freathy et al. (2017), *Pedagogical bricoleurs in religious education*, 425.

<sup>29</sup> See Krogstad (2024), *Teaching religious stories in Norway*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> See Stelzer (2016), *The ‘Hadith of Gabriel’*, 172.

<sup>31</sup> See Janson (2017), *Islamic Children’s Literature*.

promoting inclusivity, and to ensure that religious education is both supportive of core values and adaptable to diverse cultural contexts.

This can also underscore the importance of conviviality as an analytical concept for IRE. In more generic terms in humanities, conviviality has been conceived as “a deeper concern with the human condition and how we think about human modes of togetherness,” underlying the dynamics of “living-with-difference.”<sup>32</sup> In view of interpretation and implementation as the two problematic concerns about the utilization of storytelling, conviviality can be approached as a helpful analytical concept for understanding how more inclusive and equitable environments for IRE can be built. Hence, it is imperative to conceptualize conviviality as both a guiding principle and a goal, providing a framework that emphasizes mutual respect, inclusivity, and constructive dialogue within educational settings.

## 2.1 Conviviality as a principle in IRE

In countries like Germany, the increasing diversity introduces learners and educators to a broad spectrum of different Islamic interpretations, practices, and experiences, along with a variety of worldviews concerning religion, culture, and society at large.<sup>33</sup> While this exposure can enhance their understanding of Islam from a cross-cultural perspective, it also necessitates more inclusive methods for teaching Islam, as students come from varied sociocultural backgrounds, making it essential to focus on fostering constructive intercultural interactions.<sup>34</sup> Addressing these challenges, numerous studies highlight the role of religious education as a “valuable and rich resource” for developing qualities necessary for “global and responsible citizenship,” such as critical thinking, tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.<sup>35</sup> Advocates suggest that religious pedagogy should constructively and critically align with public principles like equality, liberty, rationality, and universality.<sup>36</sup>

In such a setting for IRE, conviviality as a principle can emphasize creating a learning environment that nurtures mutual respect, inclusivity, and constructive dialogue among students from diverse backgrounds. It can ensure that the classroom becomes a microcosm of a harmonious society where differences are acknowledged, communicated, and valued rather than ignored, suspended, or suppressed. By promoting mutual respect, conviviality helps students appreciate the diversity within their own religious tradition inter-denominationally, and

<sup>32</sup> Nowicka/Vertovec (2014), Comparing convivialities, 341.

<sup>33</sup> See Tiflati (2020), Islamic schooling in Quebec.

<sup>34</sup> See Saada/Magadlah (2021), Critical Islamic religious education, 206.

<sup>35</sup> Shanahan (2016), Does religious education matter?

<sup>36</sup> See Grümme (2015), Öffentliche Religionspädagogik.

also externally in the broader community of religions and worldviews. Moreover, constructive dialogue can be another critical element of conviviality in this regard. It encourages open communication and the exchange of ideas, which are essential for critical thinking and intellectual growth, as a means for learners to develop critical consciousness and engage actively with their world. In the context of IRE, constructive dialogue allows students to question and explore their beliefs and values in a safe and supportive environment. This not only deepens their understanding of Islamic teachings but also equips them with the skills to engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogues outside the classroom.

In addition, conviviality as a principle supports the pedagogical shift from rote memorization to critical learning and reflection. In IRE, this means moving beyond the mere transmission of religious knowledge to fostering a deeper, more reflective engagement with the material and the aesthetic. In diasporic settings, the principle of conviviality can help Muslim learners and educators address the challenges posed by sociocultural plurality. By fostering a classroom environment that respects and integrates intercultural dynamics in a convivial manner, educators can better support students in reconciling their religious identities with their multicultural realities.

Conviviality as principle can also involve balancing the preservation of religious traditions with the need for innovation in educational practices. Traditional forms of Islamic education often seem to emphasize rote learning and the transmission of established interpretations. While these conventional pedagogical methods have their place and significance for faith and community, the principle of conviviality can encourage educators to adopt more dynamic and flexible approaches that can engage students more effectively. Overall, these approaches not only make learning more engaging but also help students see the relevance of Islamic principles in their everyday lives.

Moreover, conviviality as a principle in IRE can support the pedagogical prioritization of ethical and holistic development of learners, to enable them to become members of the human community who can communicate with others peacefully despite differences. It can thus emphasize the formation of a well-rounded character, integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. This holistic approach is in line with the educational philosophies that advocate for the nurturing of the whole person. By fostering an environment of mutual respect, inclusivity, and constructive dialogue, conviviality helps students develop empathy, ethical reasoning, and a sense of social responsibility. These qualities are essential for navigating the complexities of modern life and contributing positively to society.

Hence, as a principle in IRE, conviviality shapes the general approach of pedagogy by fostering an environment where learners and educators can engage harmoniously and exchange constructively. This principle emphasizes the creation of a classroom atmosphere for IRE that encourages open dialogue, mutual

respect, and shared experiences, reflecting the communal aspects of Islamic teachings. In the present case, storytelling serves as an effective tool to promote this convivial atmosphere. In doing so, when educators employ storytelling, they not only impart religious knowledge but also create a shared space where students feel connected to their cultural and spiritual heritage, in light of their multiple commonalities and differences. By embedding conviviality as a core principle, IRE ensures that the learning process is interactive, inclusive, and reflective of the broader Islamic values of community and brotherhood. It can be argued that this principle promotes the idea that education in general and IRE in particular should be a collaborative and joyous journey, rather than a solitary or competitive endeavor. This transforms the educational experience into a collaborative activity, where both students and teachers contribute to a dynamic and supportive learning environment. In other words, conviviality as a principle encourages educators to adopt a more dialogical approach, where students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in building and renewing it critically. This aligns with the pedagogical strategies of dialogic teaching, where the focus is on building understanding through dialogue, questioning, and reflection. The principle of conviviality, hence, ensures that the classroom atmosphere is one where every voice, across and regardless of divergent denominational or religious and worldview lines, is heard, and every student feels valued, appreciated, and included. This approach not only enhances the learning experience in IRE but also instills a sense of belonging and community among students that can reflect the broader Islamic ethos of ummah, or global brotherhood.

Storytelling, as a pedagogical tool, is crucial in this context. By selecting narratives that resonate with students' lived experiences, educators can create opportunities for reflection on the moral and spiritual lessons these stories convey. This reflective process leads to a more meaningful internalization of Islamic values, as students connect these lessons to their own lives and contexts. In practical terms, implementing conviviality in IRE through storytelling means incorporating narratives from a variety of sources, including those that reflect different cultural and theological perspectives within Islam. This diversity in storytelling helps students see the multifaceted nature of their faith and its relevance in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, it encourages the development of critical thinking, tolerance, and mutual understanding, qualities essential for engaging with the world respectfully and constructively.

Overall, using storytelling within the framework of conviviality offers a transformative approach to IRE. It not only addresses contemporary educational challenges but also enhances the overall educational experience for Muslim learners, making them more aware, empathetic, and thoughtful individuals. This principle not only enriches students' understanding of Islamic teachings

but also prepares them to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with the diverse world around them.

## 2.2 Conviviality as a goal in IRE

As a goal, conviviality in IRE can signify a tangible and aspirational outcome that the educational process aims to achieve. This goal will preferably involve the cultivation of students who are not only knowledgeable about their Muslim faith but who also embody the spirit of conviviality in their daily lives; thereby contributing to a more harmonious and cohesive society, especially in a pluralistic diaspora context. This objective aligns with the broader Islamic goal of building a just society, for instance, in the Qur'anic Surah Al-Hadid: 25, and compassionate community, for instance, the Qur'anic Surah Al-Anbiya, Vers 107, where individuals live in harmony and support one another.

Achieving conviviality as a goal requires a deliberate and systematic approach to education. It can be argued here that storytelling plays a crucial role in this endeavor by providing concrete examples of how Islamic values can be lived out in practical ways. Both types of canonical narrative from the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, such as those highlighting the Prophet Muhammad's dealings with non-Muslims, his emphasis on social justice, and the importance of community welfare, or non-canonical stories such as tales from and by mystics, saints, and poets, etc. offer students valuable lessons in empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect. These stories are not merely to be heard and forgotten; rather, they should be integrated into the students' moral framework and guide their interactions with others. To implement conviviality as a goal, educators must go beyond mere storytelling. They should engage students in reflective discussions and activities that allow them to explore the various and divergent meanings and interpretations as well as different implications of these stories in contemporary contexts. For instance, role-playing scenarios based on historical or legendary narratives can help students understand and practice the values of cooperation and empathy. Group projects and community service initiatives inspired by the stories can also provide practical experiences in living out convivial values.

Furthermore, assessments and evaluations in such an educational model should not only measure cognitive understanding but also gauge the development of sensory as well as affective, convivial attitudes and behaviors. This could involve peer evaluations, self-reflections, and community feedback. By systematically integrating these elements into the curriculum, IRE educators can ensure that conviviality is not just an abstract principle but a lived reality for students. Therefore, in essence, setting conviviality as a goal in IRE means striving to develop individuals who are equipped to foster positive and

harmonious relationships within their communities. It aims to produce not only knowledgeable adherents of Islam but also active contributors to a peaceful and just society. This holistic approach ensures that the educational process is transformative, equipping students with the moral and social skills necessary to live out the values of their faith in a way that promotes communal well-being and harmony. In other words, a conviviality-oriented IRE will seek to unlock a new dimension to knowledge, i.e. one that may not engage the learners in new facts, but rather “open a depth of understanding to the situation.”<sup>37</sup> The learners can both relate to and identify with characters, events, and issues of the narratives involved in the IRE courses; and in the process, they “can learn a little more about themselves and their own life-worlds.”<sup>38</sup>

To better operationalize conviviality in IRE, educators need to be trained to recognize and critically engage with the power structures and intellectual discourses that shape the narratives they use. Professional development programs can equip teachers with the skills to analyze these narratives within their broader socio-political and cultural contexts, ensuring that they are not perpetuating any single ideological or cultural agenda. This critical awareness allows for a more balanced and reflective educational practice that genuinely promotes ethical reflection and critical thinking. Furthermore, integrating interdisciplinary methods can enhance the convivial approach to storytelling. For example, combining storytelling with other forms of artistic expression, such as visual arts and drama, can provide multiple avenues for students to engage with the material. This not only makes the learning experience more enriching but also accommodates diverse learning styles and interpretations.

### 3. *Storytelling Rūmī’s “Jackal who pretended to be a peacock”*

#### 3.1 Rūmī’s Mathnawī as a resource

The present article has advocated for a transformative approach to IRE by incorporating a story from non-canonical Muslim literature and implementing it into a conviviality-oriented pedagogy aimed for primary school children. One such rich and underexplored resource is the literary and intellectual legacy of the 13th-century Muslim sage Rūmī, particularly his work, the Mathnawī. Rūmī, revered as an “authoritative master of education”<sup>39</sup> offers profound contributions to ethical education and pedagogy of Islam. His Mathnawī, often termed “the Qur’an in Persian”<sup>40</sup> consists of six books of didactic poetry that

<sup>37</sup> Arthur (1988), Use of stories in Religious Education, 122.

<sup>38</sup> Grajczonek/Ryan (2009), Children’s literature in religion program, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Hokmabadi (2011), Strategies of Mowlana Rumi, 2180.

<sup>40</sup> Mojaddedi (2004), Introduction to The Masnavi.

embody Islamic theological, intellectual, moral, and spiritual teachings. These narratives, derived from Qur'anic, Hadith, and folk sources, are not only enjoyable for children but also align with various IRE curricula. Despite its potential, the Mathnawī has been predominantly appreciated for its poetic beauty, leaving a gap in recognizing its value in religious pedagogy. It is contended here that Mathnawī's nearly four hundred tales, rich in metaphors and themes such as faith, love, and virtuous living, are highly suitable for application in multicultural IRE contexts today, based on the principle and goal of conviviality.

This case study section explores how one sample Mathnawī story, "Jackal who pretended to be a peacock" extracted from Book Three (*Daftar-e Sevvom*, pers.) can contribute to IRE by examining its pedagogical potential for teaching Islamic and interpersonal virtues. The aim in this section is to demonstrate how such tales can be authentically integrated into IRE to address denominational and worldview diversity and the needs of global and local Muslim communities. In what follows, a sample lesson plan targeting primary school children is tailored for an IRE class.

### 3.2 A sample story and lesson plan

Here is the story through the translation of this article's author (with slight adaptations for contemporary language):<sup>41</sup>

Once, a jackal fell into a pot of paint. She lingered in the pot for a while. When she emerged, her skin had become colorful. She thought to herself, "I have become a peacock of paradise!" Her colorful fur was now vibrant and attractive. The sun made her colors even more dazzling. Seeing herself in green, red, turquoise, and yellow, she presented herself to the other jackals. They all said, "Oh jackal, what is this? Why do you have such a strange excitement in your head? You have distanced yourself from us out of joy. Where has this arrogance come from?" One jackal approached her and said, "Hey, what's going on? Have you made a pretension, or have you become overly cheerful? Have you made a trick to jump on the pulpit, to make people envy your boastful claims? You tried hard but didn't feel the warmth of it, so you brought shamelessness from pretension and disguise. The warmth is for the saints and prophets, while shamelessness is the refuge of every hypocrite. They draw people's attention towards themselves, pretending to be happy while deeply unhappy inside."

It is crucial to present the story as it originally appears in Rūmī's Mathnawī to preserve its rich cultural, theological, and moral heritage, ensuring that students connect with the authentic wisdom and teachings of the classical text of Islamic literature. However, to engage modern students effectively, it is equally important to adapt and enhance the story to align with their aesthetic tastes and contemporary sensibilities. This innovative approach can involve updating characters, incorporating relatable elements, and utilizing modern storytelling

<sup>41</sup> In order to break the typically patriarchal language, I have intentionally used the feminine pronouns here.

techniques, thus making the timeless virtues and messages more accessible and impactful for today's young learners while maintaining the essence of Rūmī's profound insights.

On this basis, it can be a good idea for the teacher to read the story in its original poetic Persian language form; or even ask one of the students, if possible, to read it if they are familiar with the language. This can be beneficial in creating awareness and curiosity among the learners toward diversity of language in the Muslim world.

Then, a modern and updated version of the story can be narrated. What follows is one suggestion. I have tried to make a recreation of the story by keeping the main theme but modifying the characters:

*Once upon a time, in a vibrant forest, there lived a group of animal friends: Jackal, Rabbit, Fox, Owl, and Squirrel. They played together, shared stories, and helped one another, creating a harmonious and happy community. One day, Jackal was exploring the forest and stumbled upon an old, abandoned house. Inside, he found a pot of colorful paint. Curious, he sniffed around and accidentally tipped the pot over, drenching himself in bright colors. When Jackal looked at his reflection in the pond, he saw a rainbow of greens, reds, blues, and yellows. "Wow! I look like a magnificent peacock!" he exclaimed. Feeling proud and excited, Jackal strutted back to his friends, eager to show off his new look. When Rabbit, Fox, Owl, and Squirrel saw him, they were amazed but also puzzled. "Jackal, what happened to you?" asked Rabbit with wide eyes. "I am no longer just a jackal," Jackal declared. "I am as beautiful as a peacock now!" Fox, known for his wisdom, approached Jackal. "Jackal, you may look different, but you are still our friend. Why are you acting so differently?" Jackal, basking in his newfound beauty, started to distance himself from his friends. He ignored their games and wouldn't join their daily gatherings. He felt superior and proud, thinking that his colorful fur made him better than everyone else. One evening, Owl, the wise elder of the forest, called a meeting. "Friends, we need to talk about our friend Jackal. He seems lost in his new appearance," Owl said. Squirrel, always playful but caring, suggested, "Let's remind Jackal what true friendship means. It's not about how we look, but how we treat each other." The next day, Rabbit, Fox, Owl, and Squirrel planned a special day. They invited Jackal to join them for a picnic. Reluctantly, Jackal agreed, still thinking he was the most magnificent of them all. At the picnic, Rabbit brought fresh carrots, Fox shared his wisdom stories, Owl brought delicious berries, and Squirrel entertained everyone with his acrobatics. They all laughed and enjoyed their time together. Despite his colorful fur, Jackal started to feel the warmth and love from his friends. Fox then spoke gently, "Jackal, remember the time you helped Rabbit build his burrow? Or when you played with Squirrel to cheer him up? Those moments made us friends, not the colors of our fur." Jackal looked around and realized the truth in Fox's words. He understood that his friends valued him for who he was, not for how he looked. Feeling a sense of shame but also gratitude, he said, "I'm sorry for acting this way. I let my appearance change how I behaved. Can you forgive me?" Rabbit, Fox, Owl, and Squirrel hugged Jackal. "Of course, we forgive you," they said. "Friendship is about being kind, helpful, and supportive, no matter how we look." From that day on, Jackal learned to value his friends and the true meaning of conviviality – living together in harmony, respecting each other, and fostering a community based on love and kindness.*

While this sample serves as a general pedagogical approach, it is crucial to adapt it accordingly for each individual story. The duration of the simulation is 60 minutes and targets Muslim learners of 7-10 years of age.

### 3.2.1 Title

Lesson Plan for Rūmī's Mathnawī Story "Jackal who pretended to be a peacock" for Primary School Learners

### 3.2.2 Objective

The objective of this pedagogical sample is to facilitate conviviality, i.e. by developing a learning environment that nurtures mutual respect, inclusivity, and constructive dialogue among Muslim primary school learners from diverse backgrounds within the context of IRE. This objective is sought after through the educational employment of Rūmī's Mathnawī story "Jackal who pretended to be a peacock." With a learner-oriented and dialogic approach, this pedagogy aims to help learners get literacy into such virtues as honesty, truthfulness, unity, friendship, empathy, communication, collaboration, and mutual understanding. Through this approach, learners will not only gain knowledge about these virtues but also be provided with practical ideas and experiences to apply them in real-life situations. The plan aims to promote conviviality by fostering understanding and interpretation of the story, improving literacy of interpersonal virtues, and providing opportunities for students to practice conviviality. The lesson will also focus on the aesthetic, dramatic, and artistic elements of the story to create a lively storytelling atmosphere.

### 3.2.3 Lesson Outline

#### 1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- a. Objective: To introduce students to the concept of conviviality and prepare them for the storytelling session.
- b. Activity: Begin with a brief discussion about the importance of community, friendship, and kindness in Islamic cultures. Use examples from the students' own experiences to make the concepts relatable.
- c. Discussion Questions:
  - i. What does being a good friend mean to you?
  - ii. How can we show kindness to others in our daily lives?

#### 2. Storytelling Session (15 minutes)

- a. Objective: To engage students with the story of "The Colorful Jackal" through expressive narration.
- b. Preparation: Create a warm, inviting atmosphere with comfortable seating arranged in a circle, dim lighting, and soft background music.
- c. Materials Needed: Illustrated book of the story, props (optional), audio-visual aids (optional).

- d. Narration: Read the story in its original poetic Persian language form, if possible, to expose students to linguistic diversity. Alternatively, ask a student familiar with Persian to read it. Then, narrate the modern, updated version of the story “The Colorful Jackal,” using expressive voice modulation, gestures, and props to bring the story to life. Emphasize the key moments and the emotions of the characters.
  - e. Focus Points:
    - i. Jackal’s transformation and subsequent behavior.
    - ii. The reaction and actions of Rabbit, Fox, Owl, and Squirrel.
    - iii. The resolution and return to conviviality.
3. *Discussion and Interpretation (10 minutes)*
- a. Objective: To encourage students to reflect on and interpret the story, focusing on the virtues of conviviality.
  - b. Activity: Facilitate a guided discussion with the students about the story.
  - c. Discussion Questions:
    - i. Why did Jackal change his behavior after falling into the paint?
    - ii. How did the other animals feel about Jackal’s new behavior?
    - iii. What did Jackal learn by the end of the story?
    - iv. How do the virtues of humility, friendship, and forgiveness appear in the story?
4. *Artistic Expression (15 minutes)*
- a. Objective: To allow students to creatively express their understanding of the story and its virtues.
  - b. Activity: Provide art supplies and ask students to draw or paint a scene from the story that they found most impactful. Alternatively, they can create a comic strip summarizing the story.
  - c. Materials Needed: Drawing paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils, paints.
  - d. Focus Points: Encourage students to use vibrant colors and details to depict the characters and key scenes, emphasizing the aesthetic elements of the story.
5. *Role-Playing and Practicing Conviviality (10 minutes)*
- a. Objective: To provide students with an opportunity to practice the virtues of conviviality through role-playing.
  - b. Activity: Organize a role-playing session where students act out scenes from the story.
  - c. Roles: Assign different roles to students (Jackal, Rabbit, Fox, Owl, Squirrel) and guide them in acting out key scenes.
  - d. Focus Points: Encourage students to express the emotions and virtues of the characters, particularly focusing on humility, empathy, friendship, and forgiveness.

6. *Conclusion and Reflection (5 minutes)*
  - a. Objective: To reinforce the lessons learned from the story and encourage students to apply them in their daily lives.
  - b. Activity: Conclude the lesson with a reflective discussion about the importance of conviviality in their own lives.
  - c. Discussion Questions:
    - i. How can we practice the virtues from the story in our classroom and at home?
    - ii. What did you enjoy most about today's lesson?
7. *Homework (Optional):*
  - a. Objective: To extend the learning experience beyond the classroom.
  - b. Activity: Ask students to write a short story or draw a comic strip about a time when they showed or experienced one of the virtues discussed.
  - c. Focus Points: Encourage creativity and personal reflection, reinforcing the lesson's objectives.

### 3.2.4 Further Considerations

To create a deeply impactful and memorable lesson, it is crucial to maintain a dynamic and interactive storytelling session. This can be achieved by using a variety of props, voice modulations, and expressive gestures to bring the story to life, captivating the students' attention and making the narrative more vivid and engaging. Inclusivity should be a cornerstone of the lesson plan, encouraging all students to actively participate in discussions, art activities, and role-playing exercises. This fosters a strong sense of community and belonging, ensuring that every student feels valued and included. Reflection is another key element; guiding students to think deeply about the virtues illustrated in the story and how they can be applied in their own lives promotes both intellectual and emotional engagement. This reflective process helps students internalize the lessons and develop a deeper understanding of the virtues being taught. Creativity should also be a major focus, emphasizing the artistic aspects of the story to stimulate students' imaginations and enhance their enjoyment. Encouraging creative expressions, such as drawing, painting, or creating comic strips, allows students to interpret the story in their own unique ways, further enriching their learning experience. By integrating these elements – engagement, inclusion, reflection, and creativity – IRE teachers can create a vibrant, interactive, and holistic educational environment that not only educates but also inspires students to live by the virtues they learn.

Incorporating various artistic tools and techniques is essential for fostering engagement and critical thinking in students. Teachers can enhance the lesson by employing dramatic voice modulation and gestures during the storytelling

session to make the narrative more compelling and capture students' attention. Using visual aids such as illustrated books or digital slides can provide a visual context, helping students better understand and visualize the story. Facilitating role-playing activities where students act out different parts of the story encourages them to empathize with the characters and internalize the virtues demonstrated. Additionally, encouraging students to express their understanding through drawing, painting, or creating comic strips allows them to creatively interpret the story and its lessons. Introducing the original Persian text of the story, if possible, can further promote awareness and curiosity about linguistic and cultural diversity within the Muslim world. Through these methods, teachers can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that promotes deeper understanding and critical reflection.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, integrating the rich literary and aesthetic legacy of Rūmī's Mathnawī into Islamic Religious Education provides a profound opportunity to cultivate virtue-ethical character among Muslim students and encourage them to promote convivial practices both within their own community and in the larger society. By leveraging storytelling as a powerful pedagogical tool, educators can foster a deep understanding of interpersonal virtues and promote conviviality within the classroom. Utilizing dramatic and artistic techniques enhances engagement and critical thinking, making the learning experience both enjoyable and meaningful. The incorporation of original texts and creative expressions encourages cultural awareness and appreciation for linguistic diversity, enriching students' educational journey. Ultimately, this approach not only aligns with the foundational principles of Islamic teachings but also addresses the evolving needs of contemporary society, preparing students to live harmoniously and ethically in a multicultural world.

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