

Flying with Paper Wings

On the importance of reading for children



By Ali Amiri
Staff writer

These days, in our digital age, it's almost impossible not to come across people on social media – or even in real life – who insist on their irrational, unsympathetic beliefs, totally ignoring the need for a common ground in order to achieve mutual understanding. These individuals generate false dichotomies or are rather stuck in them, failing to see the nuances in every debate.

When encountering such individuals with whom you can't have a fruitful conversation, there is a tendency to blame the educational institutions they attended. How-

ever, that is only partially the case. Higher education institutions may only indoctrinate their students and fail to provide them with the critical skills needed to properly examine ideas and situations. What instills such skills in people is the book: our "quietest and most constant of friends," as Charles William Eliot puts it.

For anyone invested in their country's growth and development, the presence of a thriving book market can reflect certain aspects of its development. A market like this indicates high literacy rates, a flourishing publishing industry, intellectual and cultural development, access to information, and freedom of expression.

However, for us Iranians who

are concerned about the future of our country, looking past its crisis-stricken book market is no easy task. High book prices and low circulation numbers are indicators of deep stagnation in this sector, with many regular book readers turning away. Many publishers do not reprint their valuable books and survive solely on their best-sellers, which, more often than not, are poor translations of best-sellers in English speaking countries.

Against this backdrop, which we must look past – because even in the darkest of times, there is hope – people like Esmail Azarnejad and Shermin Naderi are just two examples of torchbearers in our country, bringing books to children in underprivileged areas of two provinces: Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and Sistan and Baluchestan.

Not only should we not overlook their endeavors to build libraries and get children hooked on books,

but we should also laud their doings as the correct path towards sustainable growth. Without books, children are left with nothing to help their cognitive evolution. They cannot develop their mental faculties, and they are devoid of the chance to become social creatures with the powers of empathy and deduction.

It goes without saying that reading books plays a crucial role in fulfilling the higher social needs of children, as highlighted by Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Since storybooks often depict relatable characters, emotions, and relationships, they allow children to develop empathy and connect with others and, therefore, reading them promotes a sense of belonging and love among children. Through literature, children can explore diverse cultures, experiences, and perspectives, implanting them a sense of inclusion and understanding – something that would later on prevent them from being mindless trolls on social media.

Moreover, when children read stories featuring characters that overcome challenges or achieve personal growth, they can identify with these characters and feel inspired to overcome their own obstacles. This, in turn, contributes to children's self-esteem.

Exposure to a wide range of literature also enables children to develop their knowledge, vocabulary, and communication skills, which can boost their confidence and self-worth.

Books can be faithful companions of children in their journey towards self-actualization. They nurture their intellectual curiosi-

ty, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Books provide a gateway to new ideas, imagination, and self-expression. Through literature, children can explore their interests, discover their passions, and develop a love for lifelong learning.

As the beloved Dr. Seuss once put it, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

Reading books also facilitates the development of vital social skills in children. When children engage with stories, they encounter various social situations, conflicts, and resolutions. These revelations help them understand different perspectives, enhance their emotional intelligence, and develop problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, reading can encourage children to engage in discussions, share their thoughts, and learn how to communicate effectively with others.

If we take Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs to be true, books belong at the top of the pyramid and are great tools at our disposal for self-actualization. Without books, our lives would be empty, and we would have missed countless opportunities to imagine ourselves as other people and experience life through their eyes.

So, all in all, what we must remember is that although things may seem upsetting at the moment, thanks to the efforts of those good people who bring books to children, in time new generations of readers and writers will emerge. An intellectual vigor will once again prevail, shaping the social climate of our beloved country.



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NEWS IN BRIEF

Historical object unearthed at Sa'dabad



● ISNA

IRNA – A stone object resembling an ornamental water fountain with an unknown historical period was discovered at Tehran's Sa'dabad Cultural-Historical Complex.

The organizers of the complex announced that "on November 14, a number of employees, during their routine duties in one of the areas of the complex, noticed part of a stone artifact".

In the presence of all responsible personnel, the discovered historical artifact was carefully excavated and transferred to a secure area within the complex.

Experts at the Sa'dabad complex speculate that this newly discovered object, nearly one meter in height, may be specifically designed as a decorative water fountain.

However, further research is needed to recognize its historical use, as it has never been used and has been relocated to one of the side areas of the complex.

In the first phase, experts are carrying out laboratory studies on the stone material and examining the engraved patterns on the artifact.

A representative of Sa'dabad complex stated that the research will continue and additional updates will be announced.

Iran, Oman to hold visual art exhibition



MEHR – Iran and Oman will hold a joint online visual art exhibition titled 'Publication of The Work'. The exhibition, featuring artworks in seven different fields including painting, photography, calligraphy, digital art, sculpture, calligram, and tazhib (illumination), is scheduled to take place from November 18 to 25.

Organized by Aytist Art Group and Alrehyhan Institute of Oman, the exhibition will be curated by Aynaz Zarei.

Iranian artists such as Shirin Madani, Hossein Hakim, Sharzad Fazel, and Ali Fallah will be showcasing their works in this collaborative event.



Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's London show 'effectively cancelled' over supporting Palestinians

Chinese dissident and artist Ai Weiwei said his new exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in London has been cancelled after he posted comments on social media referencing the Israel Hamas war.

The show had been expected to open on Wednesday, November 15, Euronews reported.

The Chinese contemporary artist is well known for his political commentary and activism on human rights issues. He has been vocal in his support for the Palestinians.

In a since-deleted tweet, Ai reportedly wrote: "The sense of guilt around the persecution of the Jewish people has been, at times, transferred to offset the Arab world. Financially, culturally, and in terms of media influence, the Jewish community has had a significant presence in the United States."

The tweet continued: "The an-

nual \$3bn aid package to Israel has, for decades, been touted as one of the most valuable investments the United States has ever made. This partnership is often described as one of shared destiny."

In the wake of the tweet, a Lisson representative said the exhibition would not go on as planned.

"After extensive conversations with Ai Weiwei, following a comment he posted online, we together agreed that now is not the right time to present his new body of work," a gallery statement reads.

"There is no place for debate that can be characterized as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic at a time when all efforts should be on ending the tragic suffering in Israeli and Palestinian territories, as well as in communities internationally. Ai Weiwei is well-known for his support of

freedom of expression and for championing the oppressed, and we deeply respect and value our longstanding relationship with him."

In a statement of his own, Ai said that the show had been "effectively cancelled" by the gallery.

"In my opinion, all kinds of opinions can be expressed, even when they are not correct," he wrote. "Incorrect opinions should be especially encouraged. If free expression is limited to the same kind of opinions, it becomes an imprisonment of expression. Freedom of speech is about different voices, voices different from ours. Simply put, we have never lived in a society with freedom of expression but rather in a society where speech is not cherished; an individual's speech is not deemed important or acceptable by controllers of speech."



He continued: "The cancellation of an exhibition is not important at all because thousands and tens of thousands of exhibitions are still going on. Whether I exist or not is also not important because there would always be someone who wants to look for light and the joy that light brings to life, as people do not

like darkness."

Ai has previously addressed the conflict in his 2017 documentary 'Human Flow, about the global refugee crisis, which featured footage shot in Gaza.'

A representative for the artist said a further three exhibitions, in New York, Paris and Berlin, had also been called off.