

# Safeguarding Malay's Folktale Through Interactive Online Art Exhibition

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**Abstract:** Folktale is the oral tradition passed down from various generations through storytelling, writing, performing and visual presentation. It represents the culture and identity of a society. People in Malaysia recognize the value of folktales to convey messages in reprimands, advice, and satire. However, folktales are increasingly forgotten by today's generation. This descriptive study is based on 'Sang Kancil', a classic literary manuscript by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2015. This study focused on 'The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles' tale in the form of drawings. These were presented in the online art exhibition using the Artsteps application. The development of the online art exhibition was referred to Graham Wallas' Model of the Four Stages of Creativity which are (i) Preparation, (ii). Incubation, (iii) Illumination, and (iv) Verification. The use of the online art exhibition is a way to promote folktales using technology to entice the current generation towards the age-old heritage.

**Keywords:** Safeguarding, Folktale; Folklore; Drawing; Exhibition

## 1. Introduction

In every culture, folklore and folktale play an essential role. Both are passed down from one generation to another orally as an alternative medium to share the elements of morality, creativity, motivation and advice, which still need to be embedded in education. The main difference between folklore and folktale is that folklore refers to traditional beliefs and stories, and it usually encompasses various components ranging from cultural practices to material culture. In comparison, folktale relates to stories that have been passed down from the ancestors of a particular group to the younger generation. Therefore, folklore refers to the traditional beliefs and stories of society. These include folktales, myths, legends, fairy tales, beliefs, practices and superstitions (Thompson, 1977, p. 68-69). It can also be stated that the folklore of certain groups is constructed according to their culture. People understand the world around them through the use of folklore. The diversity of superstitions, stories, and beliefs all add to creating this cultural heritage.

Dundes (1980, p. 4-5) claimed that folklorists are a group of people who have physical, social and cultural identity distinguishable from other groups. Their identifiable physical characteristics

include: (1) the same skin colour and hair shape, (2) the same livelihood, (3) the same language, (4) and the same level of education and religion. But more importantly, they have a tradition, custom, and culture inherited from one generation to generation, or at least two generations where they can recognize shared features. Moreover, they are aware of their collective identity. So, 'folk' is synonym for collaboration, with the same physical or cultural characteristics and awareness of personality as a community unit.

Additionally, folklore and folktale are the oral traditions that reflect and represent the identity and worldview of a society. There are many forms of culture where members of the community could express their beliefs, e.g. folklore, vis-a-vis dance, music and stories. Folklore has existed since ancient times, ingrained with fantasy, magical powers, humour, legends and mystical elements. The local community influences the narrative and inherits from their past generations. In traditional Malay society, folklore and folktale have been created through oral stories of animal tales, epics, legends, and myths. The purpose is to entertain, educate and teach positive values in society. Among the most popular is the 'Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles' tale.

However, modern entertainment has resulted in folktales being forgotten especially amongst the younger generation. Therefore, this study aims to generate the story of the mousedeer in the form of drawings for an online art exhibition using the Artsteps application. It provides an alternative medium for the younger generation to learn the Malay folktales through Graham Wallas' Model of the Four Stages of Creativity. The online art exhibition is viewed in Education 4.0 as an essential driver for developing a dynamic human capital and economic ecosystem growth in response to the Fourth Industry Revolution (Tai & Omar, 2019).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Traditional Folklore**

According to Sulaiman (2011), oral tradition, culture and customs are messages or advice submitted by generations from one generation to the next. Reminders or advice are delivered in the form of speech, debate, singing, music and expression found in poetry, folklore, advice, ballads, songs or proverbs. In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) approved a conference entitled Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and adopted by 130 countries. This conference has identified five critical intangible cultural heritage elements: (i). oral traditions (ii). performing arts (iii). social, rituals and cultural practices, (iv). knowledge and techniques that emphasize the importance of natural and universal (v). craft/handicraft skill (UNESCO, 2016). The intangible heritage represents the diverse aspects of traditions and living expressions of the past, such as knowledge, the created products, talents and creativity, and the various social and natural contexts that ensure sustainability (Board of UNESCO Executive, 2001; UNESCO, 1989). One of the products of intangible inheritances is folklore, and its art symbolizes a community's cultural and social identity (Kurin, 2007; UNESCO, 1989). This 'creative dynamic' member states of UNESCO have sat out to safeguard. The convention for safeguarding the intangible heritage makes us all responsible for the continued viability of these cultural practices and expressions- to ensure that their practitioner can keep practising them and that future generations continue to be inspired by them. (Hafstein, 2018).

A folktale is a story that involves a person or animal learning or performing a valuable lesson of obeying or disobeying cultural rules or taboos. Folktale exists in the shape of a story that carries meaningful messages and embeds a cultural identity. The tale is fabricated and altered by crowds of people across a timeline of different generations. It also brings a distinctive style that applies to present and future individuals and occurrences (Lwin, 2015; Lwin, 2009; Porter, 2004). In Asian countries, the presentation of Folktale is performed from one place to another by a storyteller known as Tok Dalang, Tukang Karut, Tukang Canang and many more. Along with the performance, there will be dance, traditional instruments presentation and martial arts performance (Fytullah Hamzah, 2020).

Folktales, myths, beliefs, and legends need to be safeguarded in this digital age to avoid extinction due to globalization and commercial entertainment (Ihueze, 2015; Dorji, 2009). The rich values and lessons of life remain relevant in providing examples and guidance to the younger generations and should be continued and preserved. According to Fytullah (2020), today, children and

young adults are more familiar with European Folktales such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, Alice in the Wonderland or even Asian-inspired Folktale such as Mulan and Aladdin. However, Malaysia has many efforts to safeguard the Folktale in visual or digital form. Among them are movies, theatres, animations and illustrated storybooks. For examples, the Puteri Gunung Ledang movie directed by Saw Teong Hin in 2004, the Puteri Gunung Ledang theatre directed by Zahim Albakri in 2006, Hikayat Merong Maha Wangsa directed by Yusry KRU in 2011, Kancil Animation Series by Hassan Mutalib 1984-1987, Collection of Sang Kancil illustration storybooks by Rahimidin Zahari and Jaafar Taib published by Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia in 2016 and many more.

Conjointly, artists also play a role in executing mesmerizing artworks in the context of lifting the folklore as content and interpretation in the delivery purpose of the work. Artists have a close liaison with the community and a rationale, specific purpose, and direction for art-making. In understanding its goals, we also need to know the position and development of artists in society. Among them is emphasizing the development of individuals to create an innovative community and create something for the new and future generations. (Mohd Johari Abdul Hamid, 2007).

Some of the local practitioners in art use folklore to express their artwork. Be it in any form of art, here are some names, Nik Zainal Abidin Nik Salleh (Puja Pantai-Painting), Ismail Mustam (The Last Fight-Painting), Syed Ahmad Jamal (Semangat Ledang-Painting), Anuar Rashid (Hikayat Inderaputera- Painting) - all are in the collection of the National Art Gallery. Some other artists are Sharmiza Abu Hasan (The Covenant-Sculpture), Sanuri Zulkefli (Ghost on Behance- Drawing / Doodle) and Syed Thajudeen (Eternal Love between Hang Tuah and Puteri Gunung Ledang / Mural).

### **2.1.1 Graham Wallas's Four Stage of Creativity**

According to Graham Wallas (2014: 8-9), the four stages of creativity are preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. The preparation stage refers to how we prepare our brain to begin the journey towards creating a new thing creatively and excellently. In order to prepare our brains for creation, we seek to gather as much information as possible. On the other hand, methods of information gathering can be reading literature, experimentation and talking to people about aspects surrounding the potential creation. This stage aims to learn as much as possible to help us create that new thing.

He wrote about the incubation stage: the incubation stage means we have prepared our mind for creation by stopping all activities relating to the creation we had initially set our mind to do. (Wallas, 2014: 9-10). As artists, we can get to this stage by relaxing, sleeping, meditating, or even preparing to create something else. In the incubation stage, our bodies will have the chance to recharge themselves for the creation. "Voluntary abstention from conscious thought on any problem may take two forms; the period of abstention may be spent either in conscious mental work on other problems or in a relaxation from all conscious mental work. Therefore, the first kind of incubation economizes time and is often better" (2014: 9).

According to Wallas's Four Stage of Creativity Model, the illumination stage is when we will be out of the incubation stage and find the *aha* moment. We see the insights and catalyst to proceed with our creation at this stage. Meanwhile, the fourth stage is the verification stage which refers to our actions to improve the creation. We can perform verification with ourselves and others. When we find a point where we are not able to improve our creation without going to the preparation stage again, we reach a point where we can decide that our creation is complete.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Four Stage of Creativity Model**

This study correlates how artists can be included in promoting Folktales to youngsters by using Graham Wallas's Four Stage of Creativity Model (1926). A series of drawings were presented in an online exhibition for the final stage based on the Mousedeer Tale, a classic literary manuscript published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2015. The focus of the study is on The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles story. The online exhibition is structured according to creative development stages (i).

Preparation, (ii). Incubation, (iii). Illumination and (iv). Verification. The story is about an intelligent mousedeer who defeated a group of solid and vicious crocodiles in the river. This interactive art exhibition was developed in the Artsteps application. The application allows users to construct their own virtual gallery space or simply choose the designed gallery selections through the templates.

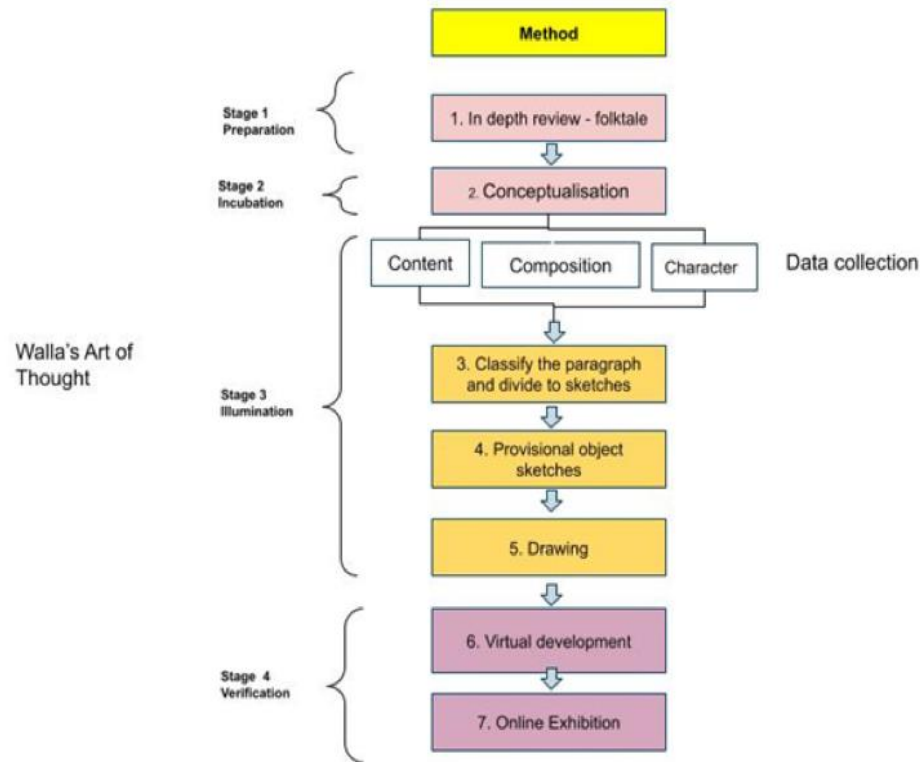


Fig. 1 Simplified research methodology flow chart

### 3.2. Four Incubation Process (Stage 1 & 2)

A thorough review of the story of The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles was made. Two main characters (mousedeer and crocodile) are identified and established in visual form. It is essential to have each character in different views to facilitate the following step. Sketches are generated to recognize an essential pose for the main characters to obtain a suitable composition for the final drawings. Plenty of sketches with various key poses were prepared to ease the following process. This approach can generate a compatible main character for the composition based on the storyline. Sketches are produced on A3-size drawing papers using drawing pens and acrylic.



**Fig. 2** Detail sketch ideation process on conceptualising subject character

### 3.3 Illumination Process (Stage 3)

The third stage embarked with the formation of sketches for compositions built upon the appropriate separation of The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles tale to enhance the appeal in the final drawing. All images to demonstrate the ambience of the tale was composed, such as trees, rose apples, a river, plants and a lot more. These images were interpreted through the storyline and the conversations between the mousedeer and crocodile. Elements and principles of art are used to visualize the composition. Most importantly, the compositions were understandable and answerable to the art fundamental.



**Fig. 3** Composing storyboard framing in accordance to painting balance and properties

Each characterizes specific paragraphs in The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles for these ideas and compositions. Placement of elements through observation and organization to communicate intention (Cohen & Anderson, 2012). Position and selection of the elements and principles of art were composed to make the drawing structure based on the tale. Ultimately the composition should possess visual impact and value to the viewer's intention and aesthetic objective to create the drawings. Besides that, 'the expression' is the elementary principle of character design used to develop two main characters. This element was used to give more impact to the drawings. Then from these ideas, ten (10) pieces of final line drawings were produced using pencil and charcoal. The line drawings were created on canvas with white emulsion and planned painted coffee dye. The coffee dye used to create a classic mood corresponded to the original manuscript.






### 3.4. Verification Process (Stage 4)

The final stage was to construct the virtual gallery on the Artsteps application. Artsteps is a browser-based platform that uses Unity tools to allow users to build and share their virtual environments. Features include The Ability to Design 3D Environments and integrate Digital Content, including images, audio, video, and 3D objects. The app provides a few existing galleries, but a particular one has been structured according to the suitability of this exhibition. After sketches, drawings are uploaded according to the storyline and the sequence paragraphs from The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles. Viewers can experience the interactive show by clicking on each drawing and being able to read the story. A guided tour had been set up to make sure viewers go through the informative exhibition effortlessly.

#### 4. Result and Conclusion

Analysed results are presented through categories of information via table below: -

**Table 1.** Analysed results according to narrated tale and remarks of composition and character

Drawing	Composition and Character
1	 <p>Image of a mousedeer in composition to visualize a quiet forest. A detailing with a fine drawing of the plant in the foreground and became sketchier and loose to the background created depth and perspective. The image of the mousedeer alone described its situation of roaming to find food.</p>
2	 <p>The image of the mousedeer is highlighted and at the center, gaining focus from the viewers. A few types of plants surround it, and each type is filled with detailing with texture to capture the viewer's eye.</p> <p>The smiling expression on the mousedeer's face described the emotion of relief to see there was some water to drink.</p>
2	 <p>The image shows rose apples, mousedeer and a river rendered on a white surface, giving the focus and importance to the composition. The repetition of leaves and water apples in different sizes created rhythm and harmony for the drawing.</p> <p>Mousedeer's eyes are wide open, and their face is smiling, creating the feeling of excitement to see the fruits.</p>
4	 <p>Two sections divided equally created balance in the composition. Moreover, the dense background has evoked the image of the mousedeer being bitten by a crocodile. At the same time, the crocodile image is also apparent, with white background showing the river's situation.</p> <p>The mousedeer's open wide eye showed that he was in pain and shocked.</p>
	 <p>The focus of this composition is the crocodile. Detailing with texture and lines on the crocodile skin emphasized the established eye catcher before the</p>



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**Drawing**

**Composition and Character**

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5

viewer looked at the rest of the composition. Different background colors of both characters play a role in designating priority in the composition.

A startled expression on the deer's face performed suspense and tension.

6



A few angles and sizes of crocodiles in this composition created movement. Repeated lines are spirally drawn to describe the darkness and deep river. Smile faces of crocodiles showed anxiousness about the offer from The Mousedeer.

7



Composition is from top view. Crocodiles repeatedly drawn described lines made by crocodiles in the river to allow mousedeer to do the counting. Image crocodiles have created rhythm in the composition to make viewers explore the drawing completely.

8



The focus of this drawing is the mousedeer and rose apples. Both images painted with white before detailed with line crosshatching made them outstanding. The rest of the composition had been left with the brush stroke of coffee dye before being detailed with texture and line of the leaves and plants created shallow space.

9



The round shape and repeated lines are drawn around it, giving a focus to the image of the crocodile. The background of the shape that has been coated white emphasizes the crocodile as the main character for this paragraph.

The crocodile's eye and wilted hand showed the disappointment and frustration.

10



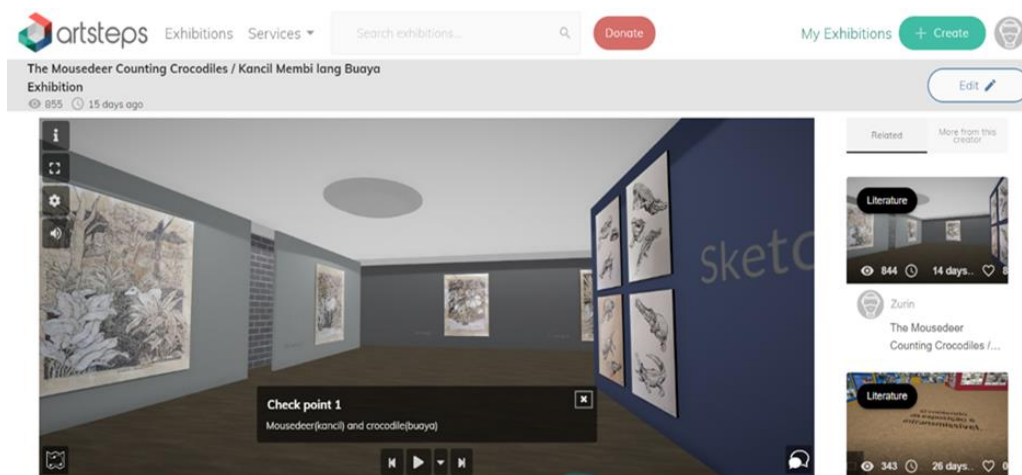
The focus of this composition is the mousedeer and crocodile. Both images are coated with white, emphasizing the main characters. Background rendered with lighter to darker tones represented depth and perspective in the forest. Detail rendered plants and leaves on the ground and the rose apple tree gave unity to the drawing.

**Drawing**

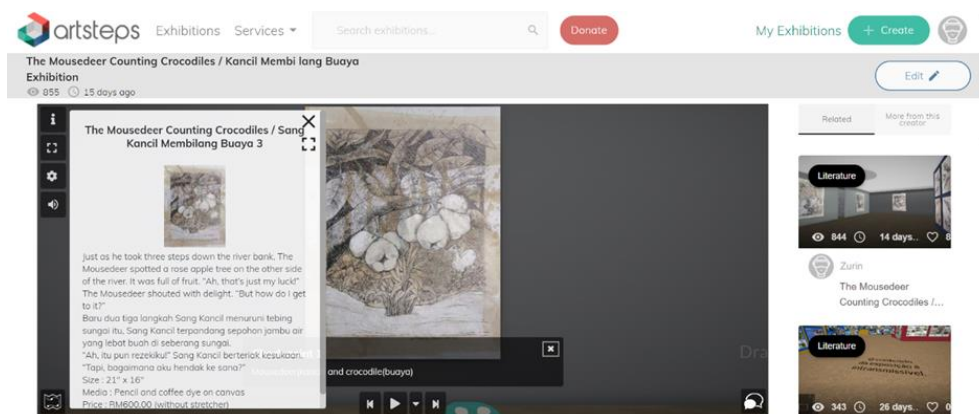
**Composition and Character**

The crocodile's expression, mainly shown in its eye, gave the viewers the feeling of unsure and confusion.

The analyzed data gathered is then presented as an online exhibition artwork to overview its reflection from the viewers. This online exhibition objective was to exhibit ten (10) pieces of drawings and sketches each. The tale is then uploaded and viewers can click on each drawing to read and understand the story. Viewers can appreciate the artworks and read and know the Folktale at the same presentation. Through Artsteps application, the exhibition could get viewers from all over the world without constraints. In 15 days, the exhibition accepted 853 viewers and it is hard to get this number of viewers for any physical exhibition in this country.



**Fig.4** Online exhibition platform through Artsteps application



**Fig. 5** Artsteps application enables pop out feature digital story telling in accordance to the drawing exhibited.

The number of viewers indicates that artists could exhibit their work more openly and friendly. Artsteps can effectively exhibit and deliver Folktale as a researcher and artist in an exhibition form. Figure 4 represents the Online exhibition platform through Artsteps application, highlighting the



number of viewers collectively within 15 days. This information keeps the artist updated on how frequently viewers pop on their gallery. While on the other hand, Artseps also provides the advantage for the viewers to read through the written story whenever they click on the image.

## 5. Conclusions

Folktales can be presented to society in artworks through any reachable platform for safeguarding intent. However, the stories' real meaning through detailed images represented in the study can be significant in capturing the 'Affective Values' in today's modern education strategy. It is necessary to have the concept approach of embedding cultural folklore and folktale through elements of morality, creativity, motivation and advice to our local context and beliefs. Referring to Wallas (1926) and executing the Model of the Four Stages of Creativity, this exhibition is constructed and designed to present Folktales differently. More efforts will be made to perform folktales in society, especially the youngsters. Through artworks, folktales can be appropriately presented on digital or online easy-access platforms to reach the youngsters' attention and interest, such as Tiktok, games, Instagram, Facebook, youtube and many more. Apart from safeguarding folktale, this exhibition also educates the viewers on the available lessons from The Mousedeer Counting Crocodiles tale, particularly at drawing number 10. This exhibition also meets the requirements of the components of Education 4.0, to the continued use of technology is deeply embedded with values and principles. Combining cultural and technological elements in the form of art exhibitions has given new exposure to viewers. This scene can be one of the ways to develop art education in our country. On the other hand, this study believed that presenting art through online exhibitions could be one of the aspects in specific education settings that favour design and interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches such as Problem Based Learning in STEAM education (Ahmad Dasuki, 2020). Because educators play a crucial role in preserving the sustainability of society, it is imperative to put into perspective the effort required when considering changes to our national education system and higher education curriculum. (Mohd Sufi Amin, 2022). Parallel to the quotes by George Couros: "Technology will never replace great teachers, but technology in the hands of great teachers is transformational". More serious consideration should be given to developing STEAM references. Additionally, it was stressed how important it is to conduct more STEAM research in order to add to the body of evidence and advance the field, particularly in the context of Malaysia (Siti Soraya, Siti Zuraida, Syamsul Nor Azlan, Nabilah, Nurshamshida & Sharipah Ruzaina, 2021).

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