

ta BOOM

BEHIND THE STORIES

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION TO
THE BOOKLET
2. THE PROTAGONISTS
OF THE STORIES

1. INTRODUCTION

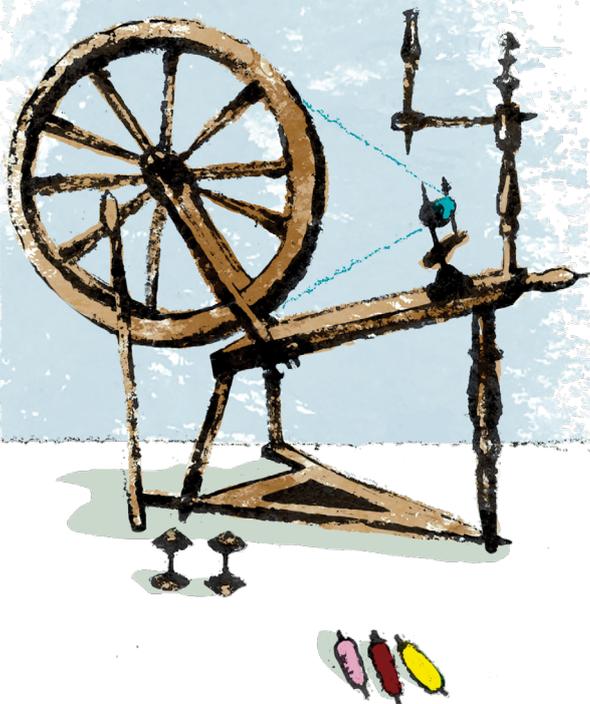
This booklet is a result of the work done by the young people and the youth workers, participants of the Erasmus+ KA2 project "Ta-Boom".

Through the activities the participants from Malta, Spain and Italy had the chance to familiarize and analyse stories - folk tales, legends, real cases - on taboos in their culture and in their society. Through non-formal education they have discussed about archetypes and hero-figures, bringing them to the conclusion that even if the stories come from different countries, they all have similarities. Our focus on folk tales, folk songs, proverbs, myths and legends was based on the fact that being these elements what each culture's heritage is made of - we believe they can support the individual to re-acknowledge and re-establish his belonging to his own or to a different culture.

We propose this collection of protagonists of the stories analysed as a tool for bringing people together, to reflect on the lessons learnt, to share another story of their own in which they can recognise similarities or differences, this way enriching our communities and connecting with each other.

We would like to give a special thank to the organisations RED INCOLA, PRISMS MALTA and FORME, the youth workers and the participants.

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2. THE PROTAGONISTS OF THE STORIES



COLAPESCE

Story: Colapesce

Origin: Sicily, Italy (folk tale)

Characteristics: Colapesce (originally called Nicola) was a boy from Messina, Sicily who has been transformed into a half boy-half fish creature, thanks to his mother's curse. His passion for the sea and its creatures caused him trouble, because his mother didn't accept that he was always under the water and was throwing the fish back into the sea; however, his transformation actually brought him closer to the world that he was so passionate about.

The story of Colapesce tells about a boy with a great love for his land, Sicily. He sacrifices himself for this love, submerging into the sea and taking the broken pillar - that should hold the island above water - on his shoulders.

As many heroes, Colapesce as well has to go through tests: the king of Sicily - a person in power - challenges him to bring back the treasures he threw into the water. Colapesce passes all the test; but when he comes back to the surface and tells about the three pillars under water (one destroyed by an underwater fire), the king doesn't believe him, and demands proof. To prove his word, Colapesce submerges again under the water and stays there forever. The legend tells that when there is an earthquake in Sicily, it is Colapesce who moves the pillar from one shoulder to the other; this explanation makes his character still present among the people of the island.



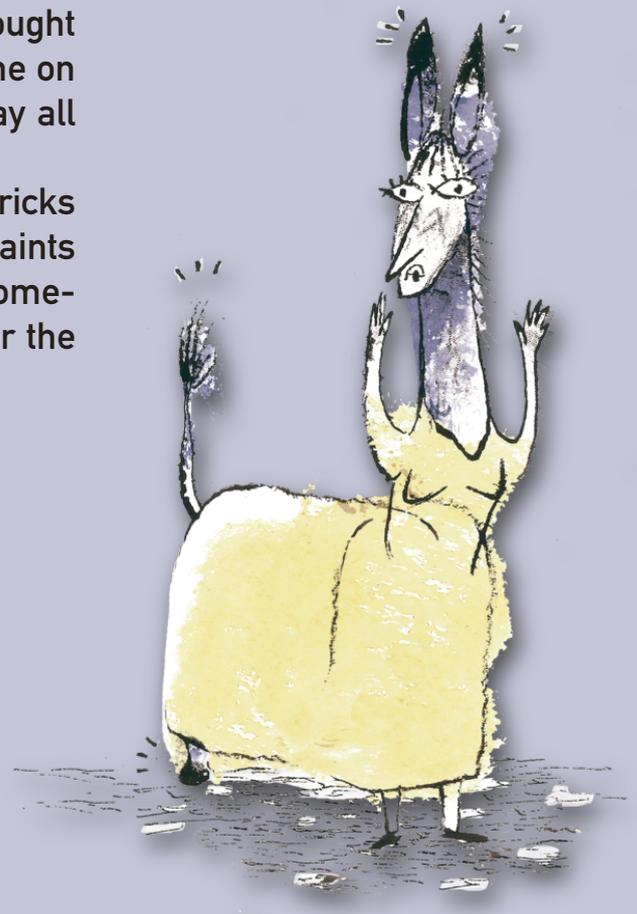
FARI

Story: Fari mbaam la (Fari is a donkey)

Origin: West-Africa (folk tale)

Characteristics: Fari, the queen of the donkeys had magic powers. She was able to transform herself into other living beings. To save herself and her herd from starvation, she transformed herself into a woman, and married the king of the land of N'Guer which was rich in everything; this way, through this sacrifice she made sure that none of her companionship would ever starve. However, she couldn't go against her real nature, and was missing being a donkey; to be herself again, she risked to be unveiled. Eventually she got caught together with her mates at one sunset when they took a bath in the river as donkeys. Her desire to be herself again brought her and her herd suffering, since from that time on donkeys owe humans with their work, to repay all the things they received while being women.

The character of Fari is of a great leader who tricks the men in order to save her mates. The story paints us how much it is difficult for someone to be someone else, to put on a mask and act in a role for the sake of the others.



ALI BABA

Story: Ali Baba and the 40 thieves
Origin: Syria (folk tale included in the One Thousand and One Nights)

Characteristics: Ali Baba is a woodcutter, married to a poor woman, while his brother is a rich man, from his marriage into a rich family. One day Ali Baba's life changes, when he discovers the treasures hidden in a cave by 40 thieves. He now has found his fortune, and can go through a transformation: becoming rich from poor. But there is a loss in Ali Baba's life: his brother gets killed by the thieves when they find him in the cave, trying to steal their gold. The death of his brother is the price for the action of Ali Baba. Now he has to find a resolution, and finds a way to steal back the body of his brother, and to give him a proper funeral. However, with this act, the thieves figure out that someone else also knows about their gold, so Ali Baba is in trouble again. Luckily, he has a faithful slave, Morgiana, who saves him several times when the thieves try to trick him and kill him. As reward, Ali Baba gives her freedom back and marries his son to her.



PRINCESS IN HUNTSMAN DISGUISE

Story: The twelve huntsmen

Origin: Germany

(from the collection of the Brothers Grimm)

Characteristics: The princess, who disguise herself as a huntsman in order to stay close to the prince she loves, is put to different tests by the prince to prove that she is a real huntsman. The protagonist needs to refuse and hide her true self and her true emotions, this way she can stay close to her desire, but at the same time, she can never really reach him. The disguise keeps her safe from risking to never see the prince again; she rather stays hidden because she doesn't feel the right to confront the prince with his choice. The prince in fact doesn't recognise her, and he never takes an act to find her true lover. Eventually the ring that the prince gave to the princess before being separated reveals her true self, and brings a happy ending to the story; but this only can happen in the most vulnerable moment of the princess when she cannot hold anymore the pain of the heartbreak. When her action – unconsciously – reflects her real emotions, the story finally gets to a solution.



NATHALIE WILLIAMS

Story: True story of Nathalie Williams

Origin: Malta

Characteristics: The story takes us back to October 2017. Nathalie was held captive in an underground cave without basic needs such as food. She was going through a separation process from her husband, Roddy, who domestically abused her by hitting her, raping her and taking money from her.

Her actions are effective to her being held captive in a cave, because she had an unconditional love for her children and her father and thus, she accepted to meet again with her husband once he asked her to do so because he threatened her that he would kill them and that terrified her.

The fact that the place chosen by the husband was near the sea could be purposely planned by him in order to be in isolation and away from people observing – maybe the intention after all was not to be seen! They argued and he pushed her into the sea and then, when he lifted her out, he pushed her to the cave. Metaphorically, the cave can represent solitude and a dark, tough episode in someone's life; a struggle to see light and therefore, to see hope.

Nathalie was raped again and was threatened. It is still an ongoing case however she expressed her fear of her husband using "violence against [her] once more." The fact that she started talking about her experience might be a hint of her will to start overcoming the trauma.

From this episode we learn that even though someone we love is in danger, we should ask for help rather than trying to solve the issue by ourselves especially if the situation is difficult and you have already experienced some type of abuse from this situation.



FASJAL

Story: *Bl-Irħis/Cheap* by Vincent Vella.

Origin: Malta

Characteristics: Fajsal was an illegal immigrant working for a Maltese industrial businessman who preferred employing these illegal immigrants rather than Maltese people due to a lower payment. Fajsal was aware that the boss did not really show much appreciation and hated paying them for their work. He was mainly concerned on getting the job done and increasing the number of men working for him. What might always have worried the boss was that by increasing more illegal immigrants, he would need to pay them all. And Fajsal was worried that on a particular pay day, the boss was happier and seemed in a good mood.

Fajsal, although being a hard worker, felt that his work was not being properly recognized and he felt used. But what might have hurt him most is that one other illegal immigrant like him, Kablan, helped the boss on how to find a way to avoid paying all his employees. Since Fajsal ran from the police, this can represent metaphorically that no matter how much they can contribute to society if it would be inclusive and fair, they somehow end up running away from their rights because of their fear and because of how society portrays them.



MR TONIN

Story: Xtara l-Ħut fil-Baħar/Bird in the Hand
is worth two in the Bush

Origin: Malta

Mr Tonin was well-known in his village and since he is retired, he has a lot of spare time which he tries to fill with simple hobbies particularly related to animals. He is seen as a very simple man especially when it comes to his thinking since sometimes, he acts more like a boy. He had his wife to support him always and people in general loved him. Until one fine day he got influenced to go into politics. Many of his supporters made him feel appreciated and happy of his achievements until actually realising that everyone was using him to gain free stuff or have some privileges but ended up not voting him and making fun of him. His simplistic nature did not allow him to notice that his friends were playing him, and this is what we in fact can learn from this situation. Metaphorically all this can represent that when someone has a dream and needs support, he or she can actually achieve it with the given support; thus we all need to help out each other to reach our potentials. If someone struggles with a situation, a career, a path in life, and asks for support, we need to be there and not try to diminish someone who did not find that situation easy going. All this would lead to much more inclusion.

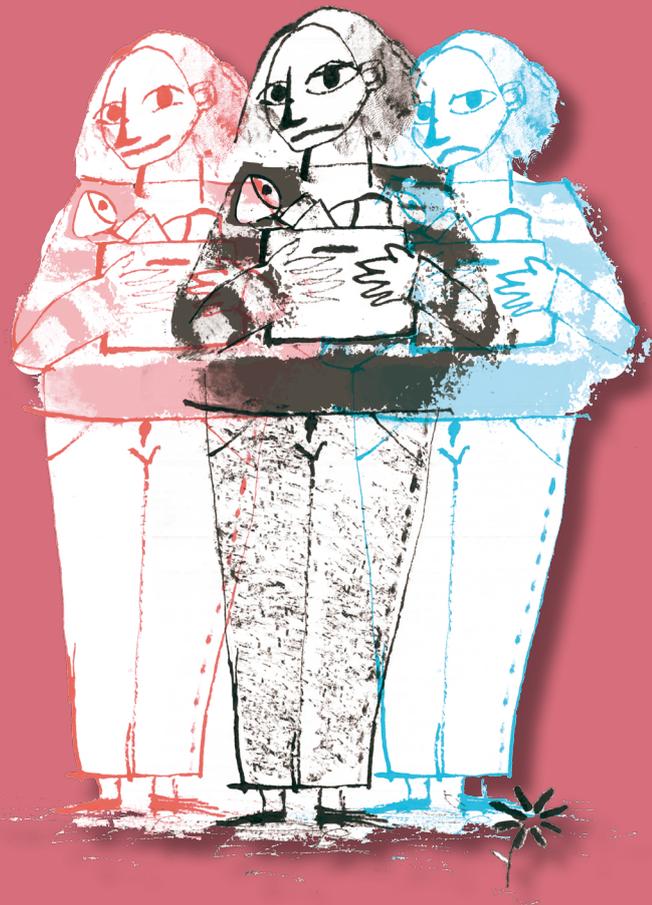


RINA BORG

Story: Fired for being Bipolar – based on a true story.
Origin: Malta

Rina Borg struggled with bipolar disorder for many years and reached a lot of low points in her life until her condition was stabilized. She was working as a receptionist but was fired as soon as her employer found out that she was bipolar through an awareness programme. She was interrogated about her disorder and asked why she did not tell him about it during the interview. Despite her psychiatrist letters that she was fit for work, she never got her job back. When she spent some time abroad, she noticed that people did not label her disorder and nobody felt the need to highlight it in her daily life. But as soon as she came back home, she felt frustrated that society's perspective on mental health was still a problem. Metaphorically this can represent that in one's brain, when a mental illness is affecting it, there is not enough energy for it to function as it should; there is negativity, there is numbness, there is close-mindedness. The fact that she went abroad represents the shift a person does once she/he goes for help – being therapy, medications or any type of support. Once there is sharing and supporting, it feels better.

Rina's character changed in a way that she accepted her disorder and was ready to talk about it and share her problems to increase awareness not only to those who might also suffer from mental health issues but also for society itself to stop being judgemental. We should learn to support those who might be passing through mental issues, tackling our own mental health and wellbeing and also accepting the given support as a need to tackle such an issue.



ESMERALDA

Story: El pañuelo. The handkerchief

Origin: Valladolid, Spain

Author: Paula Fontanillas Mate

Characteristics: Esmeralda is a teenager girl belonging to the gypsy ethnic group, very dependent from her family, with a very low autonomy, that falls in love of a boy, but her parents want to marry her with another one, and she does not dares to break the tradition. In a first moment, she challenges them and flees with her lover, but then the pressure makes her come back and she is not able of overcoming the humiliation. Esmeralda's character represents many of the girls and women who can not take decisions for themselves and who are forced to follow cultural and social traditions, otherwise they would be excluded from their community.

At one point, as the heros in the legends, she tries to challenge the status quo, but in her story she doesn't manage to find mentors or supporters, which pushes her back to the dynamics that she wanted to break.



CARMEN

Story: Por tu culpa. It is your fault
Origin: Valladolid, Spain
Author: Francisco Javier Angulo Murill

Characteristics: Carmen is a woman suffering mental illness (depression) reinforced with very low self esteem, mainly due to a difficult childhood. When she becomes a teenager she starts to have a more normalized life with a group of peers in which she feels well, but she hides and shames her illness (which also is still not well accepted at social level in many environment). She searches specialized support and thanks to it she finally overcomes her fear . Carmen is one of the protagonists who manages to overcome her difficulties, firstly by recognizing and acknowledging her situation, and then taking the courage to look for support. This makes her a hero-figure, since fighting off the feeling of shame, guilt and sense of non-belonging requires inner strength and a lot of courage.



AMANDA

Story: A long trip

Origin: Valladolid, Spain

Author: Victor Herrero De Pablos

Characteristics: Amanda is a manipulated woman, controlled by her husband who isolates her from her family and friends in order to have a bigger control on her. She lacks the power to take decisions for herself; she is deceived, living in an illusion, a life invented and controlled by her husband.

Amanda is a protagonist who is not yet aware of her situation, living in her comfort-zone, even if with her fundamental rights and freedom taken away. She represents women who are oppressed by someone else who, with the excuse of protecting them, takes full control over their life.



ANA

Story: In the nets

Origin: Valladolid, Spain

Author: Francisco Javier Angulo Murillo and Victor Herrero De Pablos

Characteristics: Ana is a teenage girl who, in the story, experiences her first sexual intercourse; however, her only recourse of information regards to sexuality and intimacy is from social media. She is a person who does not trust her reference adults, and who eventually searches for support from her group of peers .

At the beginning of the story she is in a situation in which she feels lost and that, eventually, could make her even more vulnerable. The taboo of sex and intimacy in her community and, in the educational system, doesn't allow her to take responsible and informed decisions for herself. She becomes a hermfigure when she sets up a support group with her friends; she wants to bring change not just for herself, but also for others who find themselves in the same situation.

