

# Storystarters

A twitter thread that unravelled.



# An Intro

Storystarters are cultural and evoke our imaginations. What started as a simple tweet has turned into a beautiful thread of stories.

Read below the various responses (with credits) from all parts of the world.

**Read the disclaimer before you start...**

# Caution!

I decided to collate all the threads into a resource for teachers and storytellers.

This is not directly for children, as none of these texts have been validated or the scripts translated.

We only have the tweeters confirming origins. There is no claim of verified authenticity.

It is arranged by continents / regions. But the languages do travel and hence will be spoken in other places.

Do not get in touch to make corrections! This is simply a joy of storytelling that got translated into a resource. There is no joy in criticism of the fun we had.

# ASIA

# Tamil - India

Like “ once upon a time “ in English, in Tamil we used to start stories with “in that only place...”

ஒரே ஒரு ஊரிலே

Check out

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBHuPk94kN8>

Chitra Soundar @csoundar

# Tamil, India

Tamil also uses “munna oru kAlattile”

Shrikaanth K Murthy @ShrikaanthK

# Rajasthan, India

In Kawaada story form it goes – “And that’s how the story unfolds.



Farmer Falgu @farmerfalgu



# Telugu, India

anagaa anagaa in Telugu translates to 'having been said and said and said', the reduplication indicates repetitive action. in fast speech the last vowel of the first word is shortened and it become 'anaganagaa'

Murlal @Imhesyk

# Hindi, India

Ek Din...

One day...

A. M. Dassu @a\_reflective

# Kannada, India

In Kannada it is ಒಂದಾನೊಂದು ಕಾಲದಲ್ಲಿ  
(ondaanondu kaaladalli), a long long time ago/  
once upon a time.

Ranjitha @ranjithaeurkar

Shrikaanth K Murthy @ShrikaanthK

# Badaga, India

In Badaga (an language spoken in the #Nilgiridistrict in Tamil Nadu. We don't have a script), it starts with "Onthu ooru thoge", which is similar to the Tamil version. Since our ancestors are thought to have migrated from #Karnataka I guess it must be the same in Kannada.

sandeep ramalingam @sanramalin

# Malayalam, India

In Malayalam we have "Oridathu, oridathu". Its concerned with space. It cannot be accurately translated into English but sounds more like "Once in a space (place)...".

In #malayalam, usually "pandu pandu" which is a reference to time, or "oridathu oridathu", which is a reference to space, in a place. #storystarters.

Lalitha Joseph @LalithaJoseph

Kramnath @kalramnath

# Gujrati, India

In Gujarati it is often 'Ek huto...' 'Once there was ...'

Divya Ghelani @DivyaGhelani

# Bengali

In Bengali it is 'Shey onek din ager kotha ...'  
which means 'once upon a time a long while  
ago...

Muneera Mun @mun\_artist

# Urdu

ایک دفعہ کا ذکر ہے ---

Urdu

Once upon a time

پرانے وقتوں کا ذکر ہے ---

Also Urdu

It happened long ago

کان یا ما کان ...

Arabic

It was or it wasn't

کان یا ما کان، لکن فی قدیم الزمان ...

Arabic

It was or it wasn't, but long ago ..

S @sk1897



# Sinhala, Sri Lanka

in Sinhala. එකමන් එක රටක, meaning 'In this one particular place (country)...'

Nizrana F @NizRite

# Philippines

In the Philippines it is "Noong unang panahon" ... I had never thought of it but roughly translated it means "In the first of times" ...

Candy Gourlay @candygourlay

# Japanese

The Japanese equivalent is 'mukashi mukashi' - which takes to 'in the past' or, when repeated takes on a 'long long time ago'

Japanese: 昔むかーし、ある所に。。。 Long, long ago, in a certain place...

Also in Japanese it's "昔々、あるところにおじいさんとおばあさんが住んでいました。", meaning "A long time ago, and old man and an old lady lived somewhere / in a given place"

Avery Udagawa @averyudagawa

Mio Debnam @dogini

So ein Durst @EasternSmooth

Marine @RinouMokao

# Thai

In Thai people certainly use กาลครั้งหนึ่ง (kan khrang nueng) which translates as 'in one period of time' (i.e. once upon a time),

Galla klung nung nan ma lawe (from translations of western stories)

Elli Woollard @Elli\_fant

Helen Moss @hmadventure

# Korean

“Long ago, when all the tigers smoked long pipes...”

We need to validate this with Korean language speakers.

Mairirua @bastinmairi

# Mongol

I have forgotten most of my Mongol, but one thing I do remember is that Mongolian stories should begin with Эрт урьдын цагт "long ago...".

Medieval Indonesia @siwaratrikalpa

# Mandarin Chinese

In Mandarin Chinese it's either "long ago" (从前 in Chinese) or a specific time like "once in Qin dynasty".

in Mandarin it's "从前从前" which translates to something like "long, long ago"

从前 (cong qian, pronounced "tzohng tzyan" in Mandarin Chinese), a phrase I take to mean "from the beginning" in literal translation.

ColdBrew @cold\_home\_brew

Ruo Ling Lu @ruolinglu

Hui Li @TheLunaticLi

# Cantonese

In Cantonese we say 好耐以前, just a long time ago

Alice chik @alicechik



# Indonesia

In Indonesia, "pada zaman dahulu kala", in an era a long time ago...

pada suatu hari  
zaman dahulu kala

Eve Shi @Eve\_Shi

Harlut @Harlut

# Bahasa Melayu

in Bahasa Melayu we use "pada suatu hari" ("one day"), or for stories with ancient/medieval settings, we use "pada zaman dahulu" ("in a past era").

Afiq Asri @heyafiqasri

# Malay folklore

Malay folklore:

"Pada suatu masa dahulu"

Which can be translated to "once upon a time"

Malay: Tersebutlah kisah... - A tale was related...

PrancingKittyAttacks! @thatprancingcat

Lutfi @lufi\_ha

# AFRICA

# Swahili

In swahili we start with "hapo zamani za kale" which translates to "long time ago"

In Swahili it's sth like, "Hapo zamani za kale, paliondokea chanjagaa,kajenga nyumba kaka, mwanangu mwana siki,kijino Kama tikiti.....I'm unsure of the translation except that it starts with long long time ago

Kenneth @kenntrics

Jerotich Kiprono @JerotichKiprono

# Hausa

In Hausa oral literature the storyteller goes:  
"Gatana gatana ku..."

And the listeners chorus: "Tazo mu jita".

In Hausa it's "ga ta nan, ga ta nan ku".  
Meaning "here it's, here it's for you!"

Africa Ukoh @Pensage

Hausa Language Hub @HausaTranslator

# Ashanti Tradition

Stories about Anansi in the Ashanti storytelling tradition always open, "We do not say, we do not say that what we are about to say is true. Let it go, let it go."

David Thomas Moore @dtmooreeditor

# Yoruba

It's in a form of Call & Response in #Yoruba. Storyteller speaks, listeners (typically children) respond:

Ní ọjọ kan

[Ọjọ kan kii tán l'áiyé]

Ní ìgbà kan (\*Once upon a time)

[Ìgbà kan nlọ, ìgbà kan nbọ; aiyé duro tíí láé]

The story proceeds from there on

Molara Wood @molarawood



# Kabyle

In Kabyle, it looks like “Yella yiwen zich”,  
meaning “there was a time long ago, there was  
a man...” #storystarters

Calvus Virginicus @virginicus

# Zulu

In one of the official South African languages  
IsiZulu, we have kwasuka sukela, which would  
roughly translate right in the beginning, so  
basically once upon a time

Chiharu-J @loli\_Studio

# EUROPE

# Portuguese

“Era uma vez” - There was a time ...

Hannah J W @hannahteach

# Greek

In Greek: "Μία φορά κι έναν καιρό" literally means "once and at a time" very similar to the English one. Similarly it's rarely used outside of fairytales.

I believe in Greek it's "mia fora ki enan kairo" which means something like "one time and one place" but is also sometimes translated as "once upon a time".

Loba @forevernope4

J @JLGLawStudent

# Dutch

There was, once...

Dutch: "Er was eens" - Once there was...

Or

"Heel lang geleden, in een land ver hier vandaan" -  
A very long time ago, in a land far from here...

Niki Haringsma @nikisketches

Suna Dasi @Suna\_Dasi

# Bulgarian

Bulgarian stories usually start with "имало едно време" (imalo edno vreme) which literally translates to "there once was..." and basically means "once upon a time, there was... "

Dykestra's Algorithm @orgouineateur

# French & Italian

In French it's « il était une fois » and in Italian « c'era una volta » which I've always thought of as 'there once was a time...' but it's the same as 'once upon a time' really.

Cate Hamilton @lomo\_linguist

'Il y était une fois' in French. There was a time, or Once upon a time.

Space\_bat\_angel\_dragon @breakfast\_lady

Tina Reynolds @tinamreynolds



# Basque

There are a few forms in Basque. Here are 2.

"Munduan anitz diren bezala bazen..." "As there are many others in the world, there was...". And my favourite "Landareak eta animaliak mintzo ziren garaian, baziren.." "At the time when plants and animals could speak, there was..."

Iurgi @iurgiurrutia

# Danish

In Danish it's: "Der var engang..." which directly translated is: "There was once..." but is often just translated as "Once upon a time."

Danish: at one time... Det var en gang...

H S Norup @HSNorup

Sidsel Pedersen @macthekat82

# Maltese, Malta

Maltese folktales often started with ‘This might have happened and it might have not...’

Saviour Pirotta @spirotta

# Finnish

In Finnish, a fairytale starts with: "Olipa kerran..." (There was, once...)

In Finnish we start with "Olipa kerran" which literally translates to "There was once". However, the standard way of saying it is shorter - "oli kerran". The -pa ending is the genre marker and adds a sort of "there once happened to be" element, to my ears at least.

Annlina Jokinen @AustinAni

Veera Mäkelä @wilthepony

# Iceland

Medieval Icelandic sagas tend to start "Maðr hét...", "[There was] a man called..."

Luke Nokkur @Luke\_J\_Murphy

# German

The German ones can vary but they also often start with "Es war einmal" (once there was...).

German is similar, "Es war einmal ..."

Julie Sullivan @Webwight

Rodger Kibble @rodgerkibble

# Swedish

Swedish uses "det var en gång" - which translates to something like "it once was" or "there once was". Ex: "there once was [a person]"

Sometimes it's expanded to "det var en gång för länge sedan" - which means "it/there once was, a long time ago", or "once, a long time ago".

In Swedish: "Det var en gång..."

= "Once, there was..." The longer version is "Det var en gång, för länge sedan, ..." = "There was once, long ago, ..."

"En gång" also means "a time" or "an event".

The phrase has a rhythmic feel in Swedish.

We can also simply say "En gång, (för länge sedan)..." = "Once, (long ago)..."

Anna Landin @AnnaLandin

Sonja Bergstrom @sonjaarts

# Hungarian

"Hol volt, hol nem volt, volt egyszer egy ..." – Hungarian, the rough translation would be something like "Now there was, now there wasn't, there was once a ...", and looking at the other comments it now feels really similar to the Farsi یکی بود یکی نبود

Ralesk @ralesk82



# Russian

In Russian: «Жили-были...», means “Lived-existed <lead characters>...”

“жили-были” (lived-existed/there were), there are also phrases “давным-давно” (long-long ago), next one is interesting “за тридевять земель” literal translation would be “beyond three-nine lands”, the three-nine word (тридевять) is impossible to translate literally, but the whole expression means ‘far away’ or ‘to distant lands’, the etymology of тридевять (three-nine) is the mathematical operation – exponentiation, so three-nine (тридевять) means ‘3 exponent 9’, which is a big number so it expresses the big distance. It is also used in another story starter “в тридевяти царстве, в тридесятом государстве жили были...” (in far away(three-nine) kingdom, in far away (three-ten) country there were....”, those “far away” words could also be replaced with the word “some” – “В некотором царстве, в некотором государстве жил-был...” (in some kingdom, in some country there was....).

t. @T21V2R1

gypsy princess @mecchisketchy

# Norwegian

«Once upon a time» translated to Norwegian is «Det var en gang»

In Norwegian you start with "det var en gang" meaning "there was a time when...". But some old stories can start with "I et sted østenfor sol og vestenfor måne" which means "In a place east of the sun and west of the moon"

Camilla Reberg @crfotografi

Inger Ellingsen @ingoflamingo

# Serbian

In this sense (and this sense only), Serbian storytelling is not much different from English, the usual opener 'Beše (or Bijaše) jednom...' can be translated as either 'There was once' or 'Once upon a time'

Serbian Fairy Tales @SerbianFairy

# Welsh, Wales

In Welsh we have "Unwaith" (once/one time/once upon a time) or we can use "unwaith, unwaith" which lends more of a fairytale air, or the simple "amser maith yn ôl" (a long time ago)

Norman Charles @Cyntefin

Ffi @supritiffion

# Irish

In Irish we said Fadó, fadó...long, long ago

In Irish, words are sometimes emphasised through repetition, so the usual Irish equivalent is "Fadó fadó" (literally 'long ago long ago').

Or bhí fear ann fadó is fadó a bhí. "There was a man long ago and long ago it was".

Mary Roche, @marygtroche

Jack Fennell @jfennellAuthor

Trevor Herbert @riadach

# Irish folklore

Collectors of Irish folklore in the 19th century often found stories started with 'Before you were born, and after the sun first shone...'

Pamela Hart @pamelahartbooks

# Scottish Gaelic

Many Scottish Gaelic tales begin “latha de na làithean” - day of the days.

James Beaton @jjb362

# Scots

In Scots they start with “Gaen the auld days...”

Meg Hill @Meishas\_mammy



# Irish Gaelic

As Gaeilge in Ireland Fado Fado nuair a bhiomar  
og - Ages and ages ago when we were all young

pamela mcqueen @pamelamcq

# Breton

Ur wech e oa pe ur wech ne oa ket  
There was once or once there wasn't

Brezhonadur @brezhonadur

# Czech

In Czech, we usually start a fairytale with the following: 'Bylo nebylo. Za devatero horami a devatero řekami... Byl jednou jeden král...' which quite literally means 'There was something and there wasn't. Beyond nine mountains and nine rivers...there lived a king...'

Katie Cox @coxy\_katie

# Croatian

Croatian: 1) Bilo jednom... / Once there was...;  
2) Nekoć davno... / Long time ago...; 3) Iza  
sedam mora i sedam gora... / Beyond seven seas  
and seven mountains...

Uros Zivanovic @UrosZx

# Spanish

In Spanish 'érase una vez' o 'había una vez', similar to 'there once was'

In Spanish we say Erase una vez which is basically your “once upon a time”

In Spanish it's "Érase una vez" which literally means "There was a time...".

Gabrielle Munoz @\_gabmunoz

Gonzo @MuscleYoda

Onani. @shiroiAnoKumo

# Polish

'Dawno, dawno temu' in Polish, meaning 'Long, long ago'.

In Polish it's "Beyond seven mountains, beyond seven forests" or "A long time ago, beyond seven mountains..."

In Polish, fairy-tales often start with the phrase “za górami, za lasami” (literally: beyond mountains, beyond forests) which is the equivalent of “in a land far away”.

Joanna Hardej @HardejJoanna

Anna Szydlik @CmaKsiazkowa

Anna Maria Tuckett @A\_CherryWriter

# Catalan

There are many, but now a days, "Fa molts i molts anys..." or "Hi havia una vegada..." are the most normal and common in Catalan.

The first would be "Many and many years ago" and the second "There was once..."

"Vet aquí que en aquell temps que les bèsties parlaven i les persones callaven...", That'd be like "See it here that in that time in which beasts spoke and people were silent..."

"Vet aquí que en aquell temps que els ocells tenien dents...", that translates as "See it here, that on that time in which birds had teeth..."

"Fa molts i molts anys, en un país molt llunyà...", That'd be "Many and many years ago, in a far away country..."

"Un conte us explicaré, tan bé com jo sabré; si l'escolteu el sentireu, qui no el sentirà no el sabrà...", "A tale I tell you, as well as I will know; if you listen to it you'll hear it, they who won't hear it won't know it..."

vet aquí que una vegada

@minara93 @nunubelle76

# Roman

Even the Ancient Roman story-starter 'olim' sounds like it is full of mystery!

I was struck by the way every reading of the Gospel in the traditional Roman liturgy is prefaced with 'In illo tempore...' (At that time...), which I think is deliberately in contrast to the temporal vagueness of many traditional story beginnings.

Joanna Hardej @hardejJoanna  
Tiro Typeworksn@TiroTypeworks



# Armenian

In Armenian it's:

«Կար ու չկար, \_\_\_\_\_ մը կար:»

There once was and there once wasn't, a \_\_\_\_\_  
there was.”

Hrant H Papazian @hhpapazian

# Latin

Very old Latin fairy tales begin with 'olim', an archaicism of 'ille', 'that (distant thing)', ie 'once...' Newer formal convention for things like scriptural or mythological passages have them begin 'in illo tempore', 'at that (faraway) time'.

Nearlynoon @nearlynoon

# Romanian

In Romanian my mother and grandmother would start stories with “A fost odată ca niciodată,” which roughly translates to “There was once a time like no other time.”

The older texts and novels, primarily aimed at children would always start with "O dată ca niciodată... " in romanian. Loosely meaning "a time not like anything else", "once like never before" #storystarters

In Romanian, it's roughly 'there once was, like there never was before' but it usually gets translated into 'once upon a time'. #storystarters

Romanian folktales usually start with "A fost odata ca niciodata" which means (if translated word for word) "it was a time like no other" or something of the sort.

Ioana Dragalin @ioanadragalin

European\_Goldfinch @Armathelia

Erika Kramarik @sketching\_eri

Ana Childe @anachilde

# English - Lancashire

Lancashire folk often start a topic with 'I say, I say' which comes from getting attention over mill noise.

Kev Mcveigh @kevmcveigh

# Old English

Old English "Hwaet" Usually translated as 'Lo!'  
Or 'behold!'

jamie lawes @mrlawes

# MIDDLE-EAST

# Bible Stories

“And it was after these things” which is used in bible stories...

Gonzo @MuscleYoda

# Arabic

In arabic:

كان يا ما كان، في قديم الزمان...

«He/She/It was (oh) what he/she/it was, during the ancient time,...»

Like

He was (oh) what he was, during the ancient time, a rightful king...

The «oh» is optional based on the intonation of «يا», if we are impressed or not.

Morel @Molarel\_



# Hebrew

Hebrew is "hayoh haya", which is a sort of doubling of "there was" used only for stories. Closest in English is "there once was".

in hebrew it's "היו היה פעם" which pretty much translates to "there was once"

Gili Bar-Hillel @gilibugg

Noga @yellowblulvendr

# Farsi

In Farsi we say "yeki bood, yeki nabood",  
meaning "one was, one wasn't!" یکی بود یکی نبود

Delaram Ghanimifard @dellygh

Homa jenabzadeh @Homajenabzadeh

# Turkish

In Turkish it is 'Bir varmış bir yokmuş...' means there once was, there once wasn't...)

In Turkish my grandpa always started with " Once upon a time, the griddle was in the straw, where fleas were barbers and camels were dealers while i was swinging my moms crib tıngır mıngır" all the old stories starts with this rhyme!

In Turkish its "Evvel zaman içinde, kalbur saman içinde; pireler berber, develer tellal iken, ben anamın beşiğini tıngır mıngır sallar iken.." also tıngır mıngır is just a sound reflection

Muneera Mun @mun\_artist

Beyzağağa @moshikiii

# CARIBBEAN

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# Creole

In the Caribbean (or my little part of it, at least), #storystarters tend to have audience participation. So the narrator will say in Creole "E dit kwik?" (I say creek) and the audience replies "kwak" (crack!).

Pardina @peggiesus

# AMERICAS

# Qubec, Canada

In French Québec, in the Joual & Maguoa dialects, one often warns of an impending anecdote with “M’a t’ conter une histoire,” or “M’a t’en conter une bonne.” “Gonna tell you a story”, & “I got a good one for ya”, respectively. Often said with a tilt of the head & a squint.

Milton W. Oldman @Misanthropod

# Aymara, Andes

in Aymara (Andean indigenous language), you often say 'nayra, nayra' which means long ago, long ago. nayra means the past but also eye or sight.

Andrea @mellowtrouble



# puerto rico

in puerto rico sometimes we'll say "había una vez, y dos son tres" which translates to "once upon a time, plus two (times) equals three (times)"

gabi, and a flower @shorttribwrites

Australia, NZ, Pacific Islands

# Tagalog

Isang araw, (Tagalog)= One day,....

Ancientlyric @ancientlyric

# Aboriginal

In a lot of aboriginal stories, they start “in the early days, of the Dreamtime” or “long long ago in the Dreamtime”.

Leisa Stewart-Sharpe @Leisa\_Stewart

# POPULAR CULTURE

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# Icelandic Popular culture

A friend's Icelandic dad from Tisdale, Saskatchewan, close to the bald prairie, always started his bedtime stories with, "In a land far away where the trees grow big and tall..."

Lorraine Graves @LGSentinel

# Star Wars fans said...

A long time ago, in a galaxy, far far away...

Dawn Finch @dawnafinch

# Terry Pratchet?

"As old as the hills, as old as the sea."

Alex Trotter @trotter\_alex



# American?

In America it's traditional to start a fairy tale with "We the People" ...

Jonathan Wight @schwa

# Shirley Jackson

All cat stories start with this statement: 'My mother, who was the first cat, told me...'

---Shirley Jackson

Dale Medley @DaleMedley3

# Mark Twain?

When I was a child I could remember everything whether it happened or not” #MarkTwain

Elaine Hutton @huttonEbutton

# Kansas, USA

In Kansas it's "There used to be this feller who lived down the road a ways" and ends with "but he got paroled and farms sorghum now".

The Last Raven @deathandraven

# Dutch Popular Culture

Dutch can jokingly say: "When the Florints (money) were still made of wood..."

Marisk @bymarisk

# Yorkshire Grandads

One of my favourite Yorkshire sayings is ‘... since God’s dog were a puppy’ normally talking about a place or a person like ‘Yer Grandad’s been goin there since God’s dog were a puppy’ and is usually the start of a story that may or may not be true 😂

The Storybook Café @storybookcafe

# Creative Anachronism

In the Society for Creative Anachronism, stories frequently open with "Before rocks were hard" or "When dirt was in beta-testing".

@udsd007

# English popular culture



© July 1948

The world famous author takes his typewriter out for the way first time and types out the immortal line "It was a dark and stormy night". First written by Edward Bulwer Lytton in his 1819 novel Paul Clifford, it was included in the world opening first issue. Charles Schulz's famous regularity received negative letters from publishers before becoming the basis of the television series.



# Storyteller's Start

“When the stars were young”

Dom Conlon @dom\_conlon

# Family tellers start...

Tradition in my family, not sure where it came from, is to start a story with “A long, long time ago, almost before the world began.....”

Carolyn Davies @Stitchandsow

# UNKNOWN ORIGINS

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# Unknown Origins

‘Long, long ago, beyond seven mountains,  
beyond seven forests...’

Agatha Zielinska @AlZielinska

# Unknown

“Hadis hang diriwayat...”

Eva Dingustick @TriggerMeEva

# Unknown Origin

my mum used to start her stories "in a time so long ago only the trees remember"

Technoglyf @technoglyf

# American? English? Popular culture!

Hold my beer...

Brian Voss @remloveremlife

# Unknown Origin

Many moons ago...

Jamel.Carly @jamelcarly



# Unknown Origin

Long before there was me and you...

Ashraf Taraky @taraky\_a



Christina @Chrikaru

**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO  
CONTRIBUTED AND SPREAD THE  
WORD...**

## **CHITRA SOUNДАР**

[WWW.CHITRASOUNДАР.COM](http://www.chitrasoundar.com)

@CSOUNДАР

AUTHOR, STORYTELLER, TWITTERATI



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