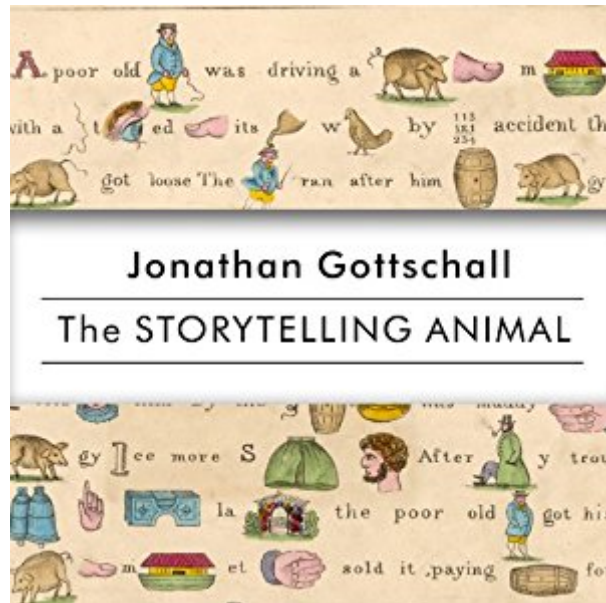


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# The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human



## Synopsis

Humans live in landscapes of make-believe. We spin fantasies. We devour novels, films, and plays. Even sporting events and criminal trials unfold as narratives. Yet the world of story has long remained an undiscovered and unmapped country. It's easy to say that humans are "wired" for story, but why? In this delightful and original book, Jonathan Gottschall offers the first unified theory of storytelling. He argues that stories help us navigate life's complex social problems - just as flight simulators prepare pilots for difficult situations. Storytelling has evolved, like other behaviors, to ensure our survival. Drawing on the latest research in neuroscience, psychology, and evolutionary biology, Gottschall tells us what it means to be a storytelling animal. Did you know that the more absorbed you are in a story, the more it changes your behavior? That all children act out the same kinds of stories, whether they grow up in a slum or a suburb? That people who read more fiction are more empathetic? Of course, our story instinct has a darker side. It makes us vulnerable to conspiracy theories, advertisements, and narratives about ourselves that are more "truthy" than true. National myths can also be terribly dangerous: Hitler's ambitions were partly fueled by a story. But as Gottschall shows in this remarkable book, stories can also change the world for the better. Most successful stories are moral - they teach us how to live, whether explicitly or implicitly, and bind us together around common values. We know we are master shapers of story. The Storytelling Animal finally reveals how stories shape us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

First, the short version: Excellent book on the power of story. Fascinating and insightful, a must read if you have any interest at all in the subject matter. One of the best books I have read in a long time . . . fresh, original, and enlightening. Now the long version: *The Storytelling Animal* is a fascinating account of the power of story. The author has included many original anecdotes and drawn from hundreds of sources to create a compelling account of how stories make us human. Each chapter covers a different aspect of this strange phenomenon, from dreams to memoirs to the future of storytelling.\* *The Witchery of Story*: This chapter covers the power of story throughout history, geography, and our daily life. The quote that begins the chapter is one of my favorites: "Lord! When you sell a man a book you don't sell him just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue - you sell him a whole new life. Love and friendship and humour and ships at sea by night - there's all heaven and earth in a book, in a real book I mean." Christopher Morley, *Parnassus on Wheels*.\* *The Riddle of Fiction*: Why do we need story? What drives us, what sense does it make? While I did not agree with everything the author concludes here, the theories he presents are insightful. The account he gives of children and the pretend play they engage in is well worth reading, one of my favorite parts of the book. *Hell Is Story-Friendly*: Why do we crave stories with trouble in them? "Stories the world over are almost always about people (or personified animals) with problems. The people want something badly - to survive, to win the girl or the boy, to find a lost child. But big obstacles loom between the protagonists and what they want."

Much of this 200 page book I found interesting and, in some cases, fascinating. However, there were parts where I simply lost interest, thinking that Jonathan Gottschall didn't need to go into as much detail. I also found the photographs annoying in places. They are poorly done, even iconic ones, and often there on a page without comment. There is another issue I have will I will address later. For me the book confirms what I have long suspected: all of us live much of our lives in the land of fantasy but we seldom talk about it, probably believing that others will think one is crazy to admit that truth. But I readily admit it. I go to sleep telling stories. When I walk I tell stories. We all tell stories when we are engaged in sex. And don't deny it! The opening chapter, "The Witchery of Story" is a great way to get started into this book. That may sound like a rather obvious thing to write, but in this case it is especially true. We don't want to live the lives of those who inhabit the pages of stories do we? But fiction would not sell if it told of our ordinary lives. Right? The author sets this up well. I think "The Riddle of Fiction," the second chapter is excellent with one very important exception. The author makes an assumption which apparently Vivian Paley, the author of "Boys and Girls" also made in her so-called research: that all boys gravitate toward play that involves guns and

the like whereas all girls gravitate toward dolls, etc. That is just so not so! And I, as a gay man, ought to know. Maybe he meant to say--but he didn't--that a majority do. But I sought any opportunities I could to play with my sister's dolls, leaving my toy guns to gather dust.

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