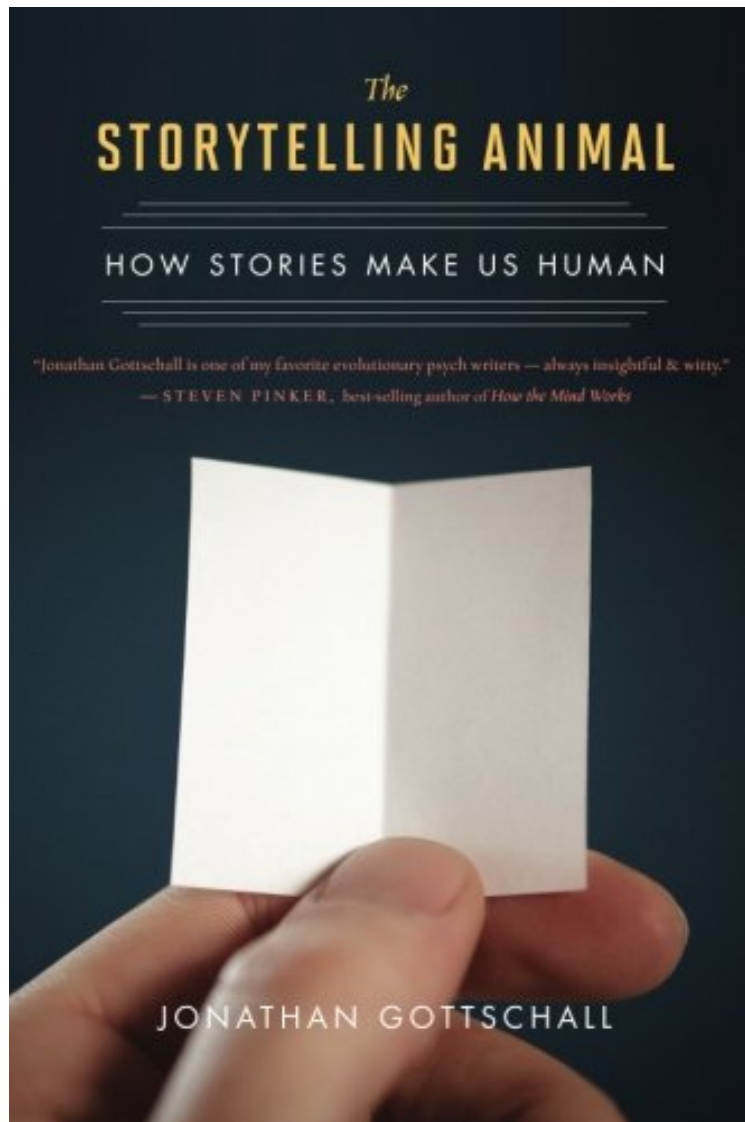


[Free] The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human

## The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human

*Jonathan Gottschall*

*ebooks | Download PDF | \*ePub | DOC | audiobook*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#21957 in Books Mariner Books 2013-04-23 2013-04-23 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.25 x .74 x 5.501, .48 #File Name: 0544002342272 pages | File size: 17.Mb

**Jonathan Gottschall : The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Solid ReadBy Richard B. SchwartzThis is, essentially, a solid read. It is what one of my editors called "a good book", not a conclusive study, not a magisterial investigation, not an encyclopedic guide. It looks at the importance of storytelling and the ways in which storytelling helps to define humanity itself. This it does quite well. It examines the world of storytelling, the reasons for the violence and conflict

therein, the fact that stories may be 'extreme' but still have conventional lessons at their core, and so on. The book looks at the future of storytelling and draws on interesting literary and personal examples. The book is filled with illustrations, many of them quite effective, and it is filled with anecdotes, many of which are engaging and compelling. At first I thought that this would be, first and foremost, a contribution to the literature/evolutionary science literature--the kind of work done by Brian Boyd, Lisa Zunshine, Joseph Carroll, et al. The author does move in that circle, and there are touches of such material here and there, but the overall focus of the book is far broader and the book's tone is very traditional, in the sense of a relaxed voice speaking to general readers. There are endnotes referring to passages in the book, but no footnotes per se. While informed by scholarship, this is not a scholarly book per se. The book makes use of much 'scientific' material, examining, e.g., the many explanations for the existence and nature of dreams. It does not draw conclusions, however, but rather offers the reader a sample of current thought. Modest in its dimensions, I was surprised, e.g., that it did not consider some of the work of cognitive scientists, e.g. Daniel Willingham's discussions of the functions of memory and of the importance of stories for the brain--challenging enough to ward off boredom but not so challenging (like abstraction, e.g.) as to force the brain to labor. Using a measure like Goldilocks', stories are 'just right' for the brain. One of the striking aspects of the book is that it utilizes contemporary materials to essentially confirm the traditional lessons of literary history. Aristotle's model for narrative arcs is shown to be rock-solid, as is Horace's belief that literary art at its best both teaches and pleases. One specific example: the author discusses the manner in which fMRI research demonstrates that readers/listeners/watchers share the emotions of the characters whose stories they are consuming. When the characters undergo certain experiences and emotions, comparable parts of the audience's brains light up. Thus, stories engender empathy, big time. Samuel Johnson, of course, made this point very explicitly, arguing that the novel was a very dangerous form because of the degrees of empathy that it engendered. It could change readers in dramatic ways, for good or ill. Another example: leaning on Pinker and an evolutionary orientation, the author argues that literary materials can equip us for living by building up in our brains a set of experiences/examples that can help us navigate the seas and shoals of real life. Kenneth Burke made that point in a celebrated essay ('Literature as Equipment for Living') in 1938. Bottom line: this is a delightful book that explores the nature and importance of storytelling. It is accessible to general readers and the kind of book that nearly every thoughtful person could enjoy. It does not represent a series of scholarly breakthroughs, though it brings interesting material to bear on old issues (with fairly predictable conclusions). Its secular/skeptical approach to religious stories will be offputting to readers of faith, but that represents a small segment of the book's general argument. It does not make use of upper-paleolithic cave paintings in the way that it might. Since these are the first 'art', art from prehistory, one might ask why its representations of animals are so dazzling, its representations of humans so primitive (when such images exist at all). There is no narrative there, to speak of, but rather rapt attention to the stark beauty of the animal subjects. Why? Does a kind of pure mimesis precede narrative art by thousands of years? 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Power of Story By Paige R. Penland I read this treatise on the power of story from a marketing perspective, but it offers interesting insight into what it means to be human, cognizant, compelling, and compelled. Storytelling is almost a hashtagged buzzword at this point, but it goes a lot deeper than any corporate storytelling tome, into the history and psychology of the art. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Highly recommended By Barry McKenna Our narrative needs and experience are receiving more and more recognition, from Alisdair MacIntyre, who used, some years before, this book's very same title in a description of our narrative needs and experiences. I believe it was in "After Virtue," but maybe it was another of his. I comment about MacIntyre because it was his emphasis on our needs and experiences as "storytelling animals" that stimulated me to delve further into the subject which I had already become interested in, hearing from one colleague about how more and more professors are encouraging their students to use personal narrative in their writings and dissertations. Another acquaintance, ten years ago, wrote a book (not carried by ) focusing on primary education and the benefits of encouraging narrative. Jonathan Gottschall's contribution here is varied and just deep enough to keep the "story" moving along (although there are notes in the back, if you're someone like me who can't resist to "see" exactly what the author is referring to. I don't agree with all of the theories which his arguments are based upon, but I doubt that I'll find a better work in this smaller volume. I still have to read my purchase of Brian Boyd's "On the Origin of Stories." It may have been my purchase of Mara Beller's "Quantum Dialogue: The Making of a Revolution" which prompted my further exploration and purchases on our narrative needs and behaviors. Beller intrigued me (I have not read it yet) with her argument that it was as much the narratives which accompanied the "Copenhagen interpretation" that accounted for its success, in addition to its theoretical content. This "narrative" issue/potential which we apparently immerse ourselves in almost totally and naturally (read Gottschall's arguments) can be both a welcome incentive to explore some particular subject more deeply, as well as a tool of "marketing" and "propaganda." Awareness is "all."

A New York Times Editor's Choice

.com Jonathan Gottschall on The Storytelling Animal What is the storytelling animal? Only humans tell stories. Story sets us apart. For humans, story is like gravity: a field of force that surrounds us and influences all of our movements.

But, like gravity, story is so omnipresent that we are hardly aware of how it shapes our lives. I wanted to know what science could tell us about humanity's strange, ardent love affair with story. What inspired you to write this book? I was speeding down the highway on a gorgeous autumn day, cheerfully spinning through the FM dial, and a country music song came on. My normal response to this sort of catastrophe is to turn the channel as quickly as possible. But that day, for some reason, I decided to listen. In "Stealing Cinderella," Chuck Wicks sings about a young man asking for his sweetheart's hand in marriage. The girl's father makes the young man wait in the living room, where he notices photos of his sweetheart as a child, "She was playing Cinderella/ She was riding her first bike/ Bouncing on the bed and looking for a pillow fight/ Running through the sprinkler/ With a big popsicle grin/ Dancing with her dad, looking up at him. . ." And the young man suddenly realizes that he is taking something precious from the father: he is stealing Cinderella. Before the song was over I was crying so hard that I had to pull off the road. I sat there for a long time feeling sad about my own daughters growing up to abandon me. But I was also marveling at how quickly Wicks's small, musical story had melted me into sheer helplessness. I wrote the book partly in an effort to understand what happened to me that day. But don't you worry that science could explain away the magic of story? I get this question a lot. The answer is "No! A thousand times, no!" Science adds to wonder; it doesn't dissolve it. Scientists almost always report that the more they discover about their subject, the more lovely and mysterious it becomes. That's certainly what I found in my own research. The whole experience left me in awe of our species--of this truly odd primate that places story (and other forms of art) at the very center of its existence. Children come up a lot in this book, including your own children. . . Yes, I spent a lot of time observing my two daughters (in this I took my cue from Darwin, who was a doting father, but not shy about collecting observational data on his large brood). I got lucky. My girls happened to be 4 and 7 during the main period that I was working on my book. This is the golden period of children's pretend play. And I was able to observe them spontaneously creating these fantastic wonder-worlds, with these elaborate and dangerous plots. I noticed that my girls spent almost all of their awake time in various kinds of make-believe. And I was invited to enter those worlds myself, to play the roles of princes and Ken dolls and monsters. I learned a lot about the nature of story from my girls. Story and other forms of art are often seen as products of culture. But this perspective is one-sided. Story blooms naturally in a child--it is as effortless and reflexive as breathing. Are dreams a form of storytelling? Yes, they are. Dreams are, like children's make-believe, a natural and reflexive form of storytelling. Researchers conventionally define dreams as "intense sensorimotor hallucinations with a narrative structure." Dreams are, in effect, night stories: they focus on a protagonist--usually the dreamer--who struggles to achieve desires. Researchers can't even talk about dreams without dragging in the basic vocabulary of English 101: plot, theme, character, scene, setting, point of view, perspective. The most conservative estimates suggest that we dream in a vivid, story-like way for more than six solid years out of a seventy-year lifespan. So dreams are definitely part of the evolutionary riddle of storytelling. What is the future of story? In the digital age, people are reading less fiction, but this is because they've found new ways to jam extra story into their lives--on average we watch five hours of TV per day, listen to hours of songs, and spend more and more time playing story-centric video games. I think we are seeing, in video games, the birth of what will become the 21st century's dominant form of storytelling. The fantasy lands of online games like World of Warcraft attract tens of millions of players, who spend an average of 2030 hours per week adventuring in interactive story. Players describe the experience of these games as "being inside a novel as it is being written." In upcoming decades, as computing power increases exponentially, these virtual worlds are going to become so attractive that we will be increasingly reluctant to unplug. So the real danger isn't that story will disappear from our lives. It is that story will take them over completely. A jaunty and insightful new book...[that] celebrate[s] our compulsion to storify everything around us. (New York Times Sunday Book ,Editor's Choice)