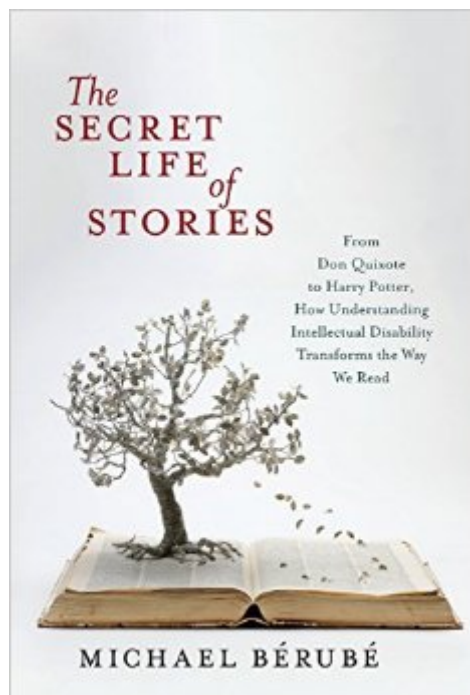


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The Secret Life Of Stories: From Don Quixote To Harry Potter, How Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms The Way We Read



Synopsis

Narrative informs everything we think, do, plan, remember, and imagine. We tell stories and we listen to stories, gauging their "well-formedness" within a couple of years of learning to walk and talk. Some argue that the capacity to understand narrative is innate to our species; others claim that while that might be so, the invention of writing then re-wired our brains. In *The Secret Life of Stories*, Michael Bérubé tells a dramatically different tale, in a compelling account of how an understanding of intellectual disability can transform our understanding of narrative. Instead of focusing on characters with disabilities, he shows how ideas about intellectual disability inform an astonishingly wide array of narrative strategies, providing a new and startling way of thinking through questions of time, self-reflexivity, and motive in the experience of reading. Interweaving his own stories with readings of such texts as Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip*, Bérubé puts his theory into practice, stretching the purview of the study of literature and the role of disability studies within it. Armed only with the tools of close reading, Bérubé demonstrates the immensely generative possibilities in the ways disability is deployed within fiction, finding in them powerful meditations on what it means to be a social being, a sentient creature with an awareness of mortality and causality and sentience itself. Persuasive and witty, Michael Bérubé engages Harry Potter fans and scholars of literature alike. For all readers, *The Secret Life of Stories* will fundamentally change the way we think about the way we read.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of the rewards of committing to read and review two or three new nonfiction books a week is that it forces me to expand my range. There is a continual flow of books I would not normally consider buying or reading. Whole categories of them. But my reading has led to all kinds of discoveries for me, and some of them light a fire for more. Here for example is a totally engaging book that demonstrates the very real power of the disabled (both physically and intellectually), both as characters in fiction and in their appreciation and interpretation of it. It's an approach that has its own universe of scholarship, and this particular book is an intriguing eye opener of an introduction to its massive scope. The Secret Life of Stories has just three chapters: Motive, Time, and Self-Awareness. Each looks at an aspect of fiction from two angles: how a disabled character affects the work, and how a disabled reader or character sees that work. In particular, Self-Awareness is a fractal, recursive vortex of possibilities, as BÃ©rubÃ© examines how disabled characters do or do not, can or can not see themselves in their own narrative. He perceives that writers use the disabled to expand literary possibilities by an order of magnitude. Normal rules don't apply to the disabled. Relationships go off the track and don't ever have to come to a stop. The disabled's special powers and deep and different perceptions, free the author to go way outside the box of standard narrative. In examples from Don Quixote and Robinson Crusoe to Martian Time-Slip and the cult films Galaxy Quest and Memento, mind twisting events all start with the disabled. BÃ©rubÃ© has a nice, light touch.

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