

**Why stories enchant the brain.
The splendors and miseries of an extraordinary human ability**

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Humans are distinguished from other animals by their pervasive ability to tell stories. In this talk, I take a persuasive (rather than informational) perspective on human communication and argue that humans invented stories to enhance their persuasive abilities in communication. My idea is that the persuasive power of stories depends in large part on the ability of stories to enchant the brain. From an evolutionary point of view, the ability to communicate by telling stories is the evolutionary product of the ability to think in narrative form: humans were able to think in narrative form long before they were able to tell others the stories of their own thoughts. The ability to represent reality in story form depends primarily on the processing systems that make up our narrative brains: cognitive systems that enable humans to project themselves into time, space, and the minds of others. The human brain is greedy for stories because stories are its natural way of representing reality and the experience of reality. This is the reason for the extraordinary persuasive power of stories. In addition to the undoubted positive effects of such power, the ability to persuade others is also the inherent limit of stories; the line between persuasion and manipulation is blurred. However, since it is precisely what makes stories positive that also makes them negative, the study of human storytelling is an important key to the study of techniques for defending against the malicious use of such a persuasive strategy.