



# Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life

By Jerome Bruner

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Stories pervade our daily lives, from human interest news items, to a business strategy described to a colleague, to daydreams between chores. Stories are what we use to make sense of the world. But how does this work?

In *Making Stories*, the eminent psychologist Jerome Bruner examines this pervasive human habit and suggests new and deeper ways to think about how we use stories to make sense of lives and the great moral and psychological problems that animate them. Looking at legal cases and autobiography as well as literature, Bruner warns us not to be seduced by overly tidy stories and shows how doubt and double meaning can lie beneath the most seemingly simple case.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Scientific discoveries regarding the functions of the brain have led some to question whether it might eventually be possible to substitute technical explanations for the stories and narratives that have traditionally been used to understand experience. Contrary to that view, and to the opinions he expressed in his 1962 book *On Knowing*, psychologist Bruner argues here that storytelling has an essential importance that cannot be replaced by science. While his conclusion may be valid, Bruner only weakly attempts to support his new point of view in this brief but rambling and disjointed essay. Beginning with a meandering discussion of the practical value of story through numerous literary references from Aristotle to Proust, Bruner offers a portrait of the historical function of narrative that speaks to the basic similarity of literature and science, i.e., that through the depiction of imagined worlds, stories like scientific hypotheses help people adapt to unexpected events. Bruner then considers the place of narrative in law and the "construction" of the self, ultimately suggesting that stories cannot be replaced by scientific explanation because stories are essential to our capacity to truly understand one another. Bruner cites the evidence that physicians who fail to listen to their patients' stories often fail to provide the correct treatment, despite knowing all the relevant medical facts. Regrettably, Bruner does not explain why this is the case i.e., why physicians cannot simply ignore their patients' narratives. Written for a general audience, this book takes on an inherently interesting subject, but lacks the care and focus its treatment requires.

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### **Review**

The best books have the capacity to change lives, sometimes by the sheer force of ideas communicated with felicity and grace. Bruner's short, compelling work *Making Stories* is just such a book. Bruner [makes] sharply visible what otherwise could be only indistinctly felt. He trains his searchlight on the complex and diverse uses not only of the conventional, easily recognized stories of myth and literature, but also of obscure stories, those found...buried within our culture, our institutions and ourselves. (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*)

### **About the Author**

Jerome Bruner is University Professor at New York University.

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