



# The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, How Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way We Read

*Michael Bérubé*

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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.

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