

(Nawaz, n.d.)



# The Psychology Behind Storytelling

Stephanie Russak



(361 about books, n.d.)



Let's start with a story!



“You know the words  
‘Once Upon a Time’  
make you listen, there’s a reason.”

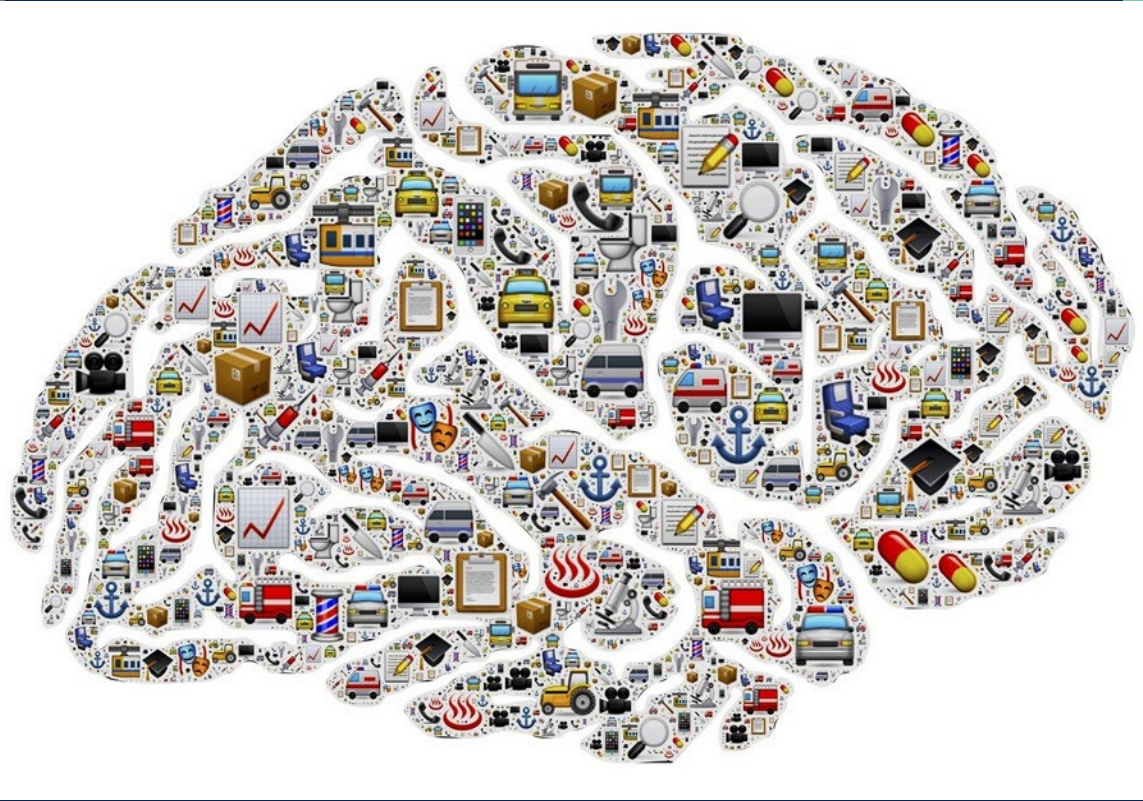


(Lea, n.d.-a)

- Jamie Houston

(Lea, n.d.-a)





(miss\_official, 2024);  
(Porlan, 2018);  
(artificiallawyer, n.d.);  
(*Top Productivity Apps  
for iPhones in 2022,*  
2022); (iStock, n.d.)

What compels our brain to  
marshal its attention span  
and listen to a story and why  
is this important for us  
today?



A story is a narrative of  
connected events, fictional or  
nonfictional, spoken or  
unspoken, used to  
communicate meaning



# The History of Stories



(Emerald , n.d.);  
(Bernard , n.d.)





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• We still use them today!

(School Crosswalk Sign, n.d.); (No Diving, n.d.); (Biohazard, n.d.); (Deer Crossing, n.d.); (Smoking Ban, n.d.)



# The History of Stories

- Mankind became more advanced, settled down and passed stories through word of mouth
- Stories were used to make sense of the world
  - Ex. Ancient Greek, Roman, and Norse Mythology



(*Greek Mythology*, n.d.); (Rara, n.d.); (Enfield, n.d.)

# The History of Stories

- Stories became useful in conveying themes and meanings



*(Jesus Speaking in Parables, n.d.); (Alone with Jesus, n.d.)*



# The History of Stories

- Moving into the 1500s, William Shakespeare ushered in a new era of storytelling
- His writing explored themes of love, jealousy, grief, madness, and more



# The History of Stories



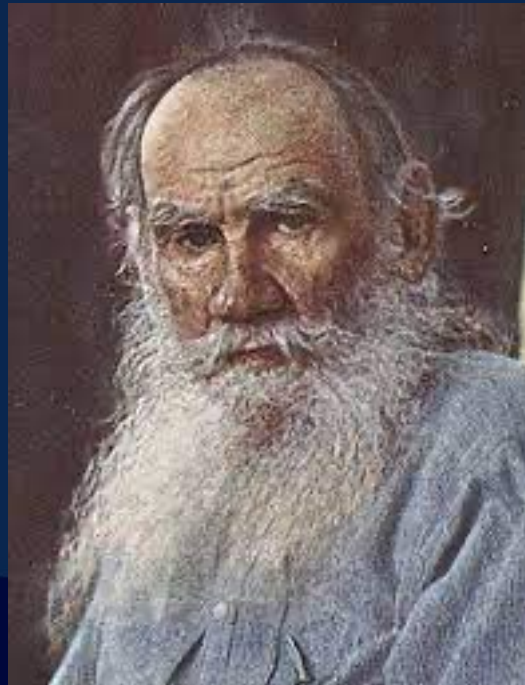
Jane Austen

(Thought Co., n.d.);  
(Wikipedia, n.d.);



Emily Dickinson

*(Emily Dickinson, n.d.); (F. Scott Fitzgerald, n.d.)*



Leo Tolstoy



F. Scott Fitzgerald



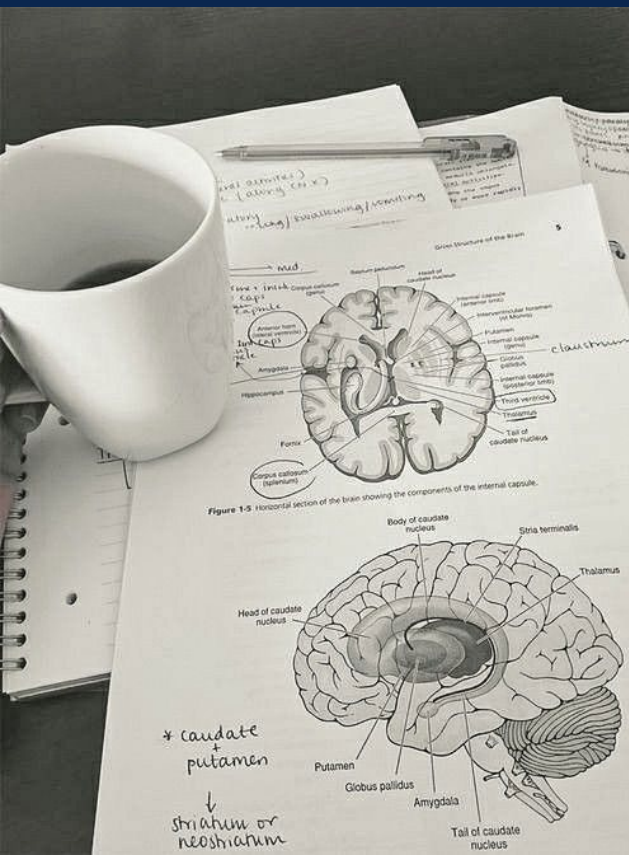
# The History of Stories

- Movies are visual stories
  - They became so popular that we created mass industries dedicated to producing them
- In 2022, the US and Canadian movie industries became a 7 billion dollar industry

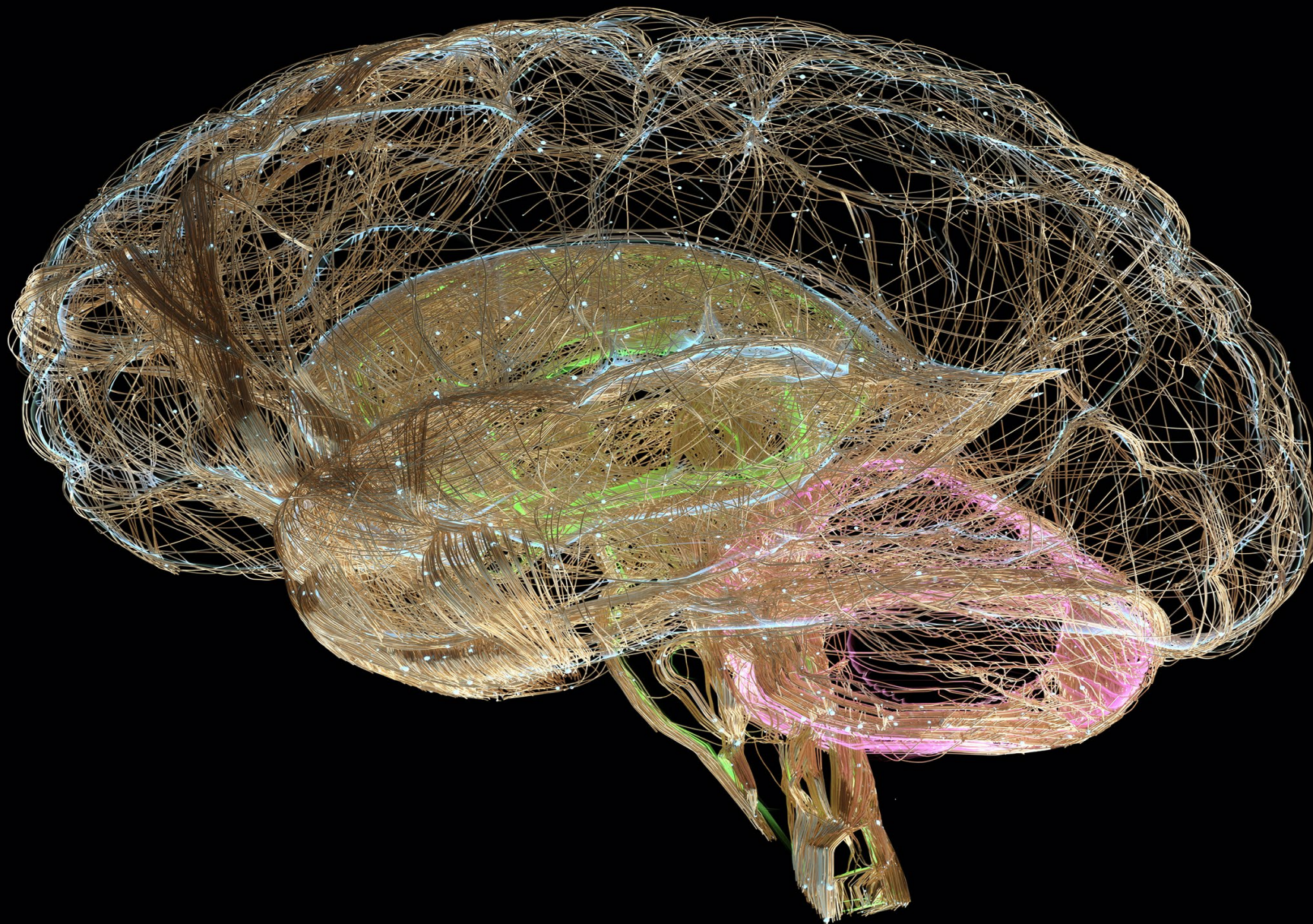




# Psychology and Stories



(Aesthetic School Motivation, n.d.); (Study Books, n.d.)



# HOW STORYTELLING AFFECTS THE BRAIN

## NEURAL COUPLING

A story synchronizes the listener's brain with the teller's brain.

## MIRRORING

Mirror neurons enable listeners to mirror experience

## CORTICAL ACTIVITY

Two areas of the brain are activated when processing facts. Stories activate many additional areas such as the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.



## DOPAMINE

The brain releases dopamine in response to an emotionally-charged event, resolution of conflict, or even recognition of a pattern, creating a pleasurable response and ease of memory and recall

## CORTISOL

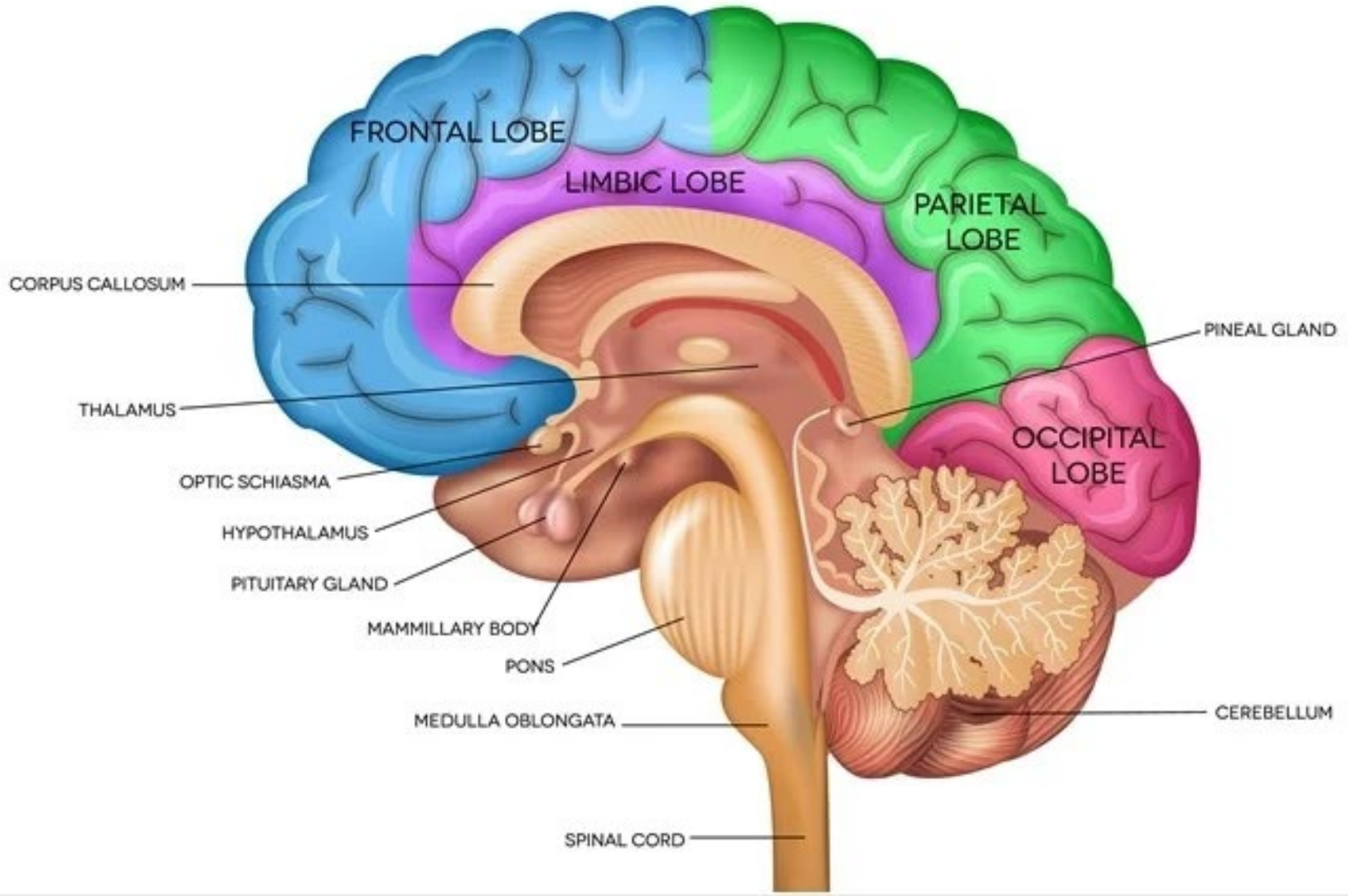
The brain releases cortisol when it experiences conflict which increases attention and memory

## OXYTOCIN

The brain releases oxytocin in response to characters that increases empathy and connection as well as compassion and trust



# ANATOMY OF THE BRAIN



It is structurally part of our brain to  
experience storytelling

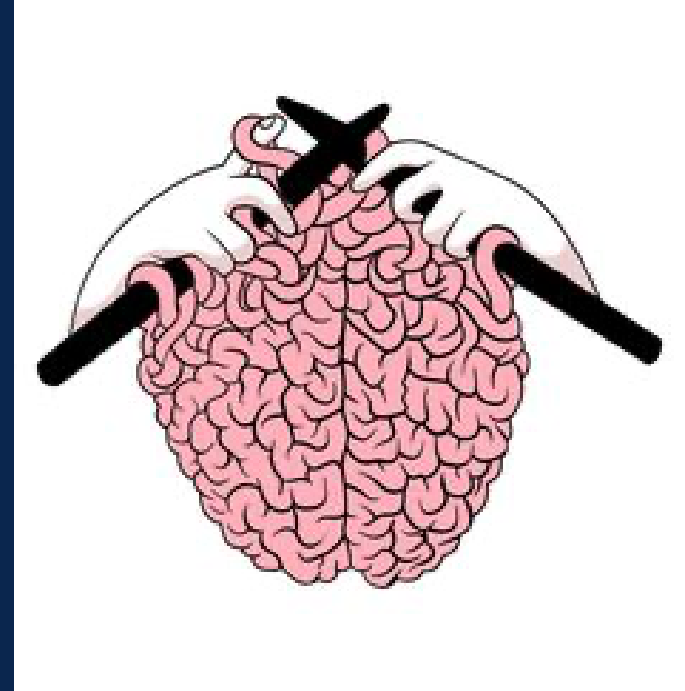
Whether it's to explain how the world works,  
write a novel, or simply catch up with a  
friend, our brains crave stories.



(RawPixel, n.d.)



# Theory of Mind



(Sticker Mania, n.d.)



# Theory of Mind

- Stories are a Theory of Mind
- They provide a narrative structure
  - Plot, character, setting, and themes
- Our brain produces these same structures every day



What does this prove?

Our brain will create stories based on our  
real-life surroundings even if we don't  
actively seek them out

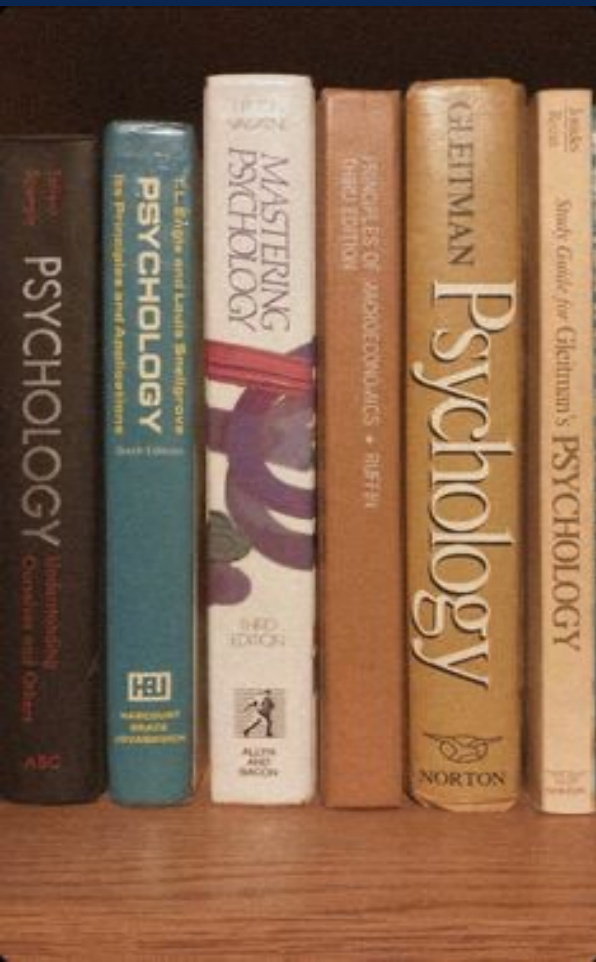


*(Psychology Aesthetic, n.d.)*



*(Storytelling, n.d.)*

# Why is this important?



# Why is this important?

- Stories are fundamentally important to all ages
- Throughout history, we have preserved the basic forms of storytelling



# Why is this important?

Our brain processes imaginary stories the same as real experiences

We are wired to receive and communicate stories





Humanity is psychologically wired to receive these stories which is what makes them delectable and necessary in every era.



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