

The Brain Says It's True

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The Brain Says It's True

*A Story About Truth
for Teenagers*

Blurt Snodgrass

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*For every teenager
who has ever been absolutely certain
— and absolutely wrong.*

There is an argument happening right now.

Maybe it's in a school hallway, a group chat at midnight, or a dinner table where two people who love each other have somehow ended up on completely opposite sides of something — both of them certain, both of them frustrated, neither of them able to understand how the other person can't just see what's obviously, plainly, completely true.

They're both right about some pieces. They're both wrong about others. And neither of them can see which is which.

Here is the thing nobody in that argument knows: their brains are the ones responsible.



Your brain has been lying to you about truth your entire life.

Not maliciously. Not to hurt you. But quietly, consistently, and very convincingly.

Here's what it does: it takes whatever you believe and labels it true. Not *probably* true. Not *true from where I'm standing*. Just: true. Full stop. End of discussion.

Psychologists call this *naive realism* — the assumption that what you see is reality, and what other people see is just their bias getting in the way. You watch the news and think you're getting facts. The other person watches different news and thinks the same thing. Both of you walk away convinced the other one has been fooled.

It never occurs to either of you that you might both be standing in the same cave, each seeing different pieces of the same shadow.



Plato had a thought experiment about this more than two thousand years ago.

Imagine you were born in a cave. Chained to a wall. All you could see were shadows moving on the rock in front of you — shapes thrown by a fire burning somewhere behind you. You would grow up believing those shadows were real. They would be your entire world.

Now imagine someone unclipped your chains and walked you outside.

You would be overwhelmed. Confused. Maybe angry. Because everything you thought was real would suddenly look completely different in the light.

But here's the part most people skip over: just because you're outside the cave doesn't mean you're seeing everything. You've just traded one set of shadows for a bigger one. There might be another cave beyond the forest. There might always be.

Which means the question isn't *am I right?* The question is *what kind of right am I?*

And there are five kinds.



THE FIRST KIND

Memory Truth



This is truth built from what you remember.

Her name was Jordan. And in seventh grade, she had an idea.

It was for a history project — her group had to present on the American Revolution, and Jordan suggested doing it as a fake news broadcast, like it was happening live. She'd even sketched out the format on a piece of paper the night before, excited enough that she'd had trouble sleeping.

She pitched it to her group the next morning. Three seconds of silence. Then Tyler said “I think we should just do a poster” and everyone nodded and that was that.

Jordan folded her paper in half and put it in her bag.

She didn't suggest another idea for two years. Not in class, not in group projects, not even in conversations with

friends when someone asked what they should do on the weekend. She'd learned something that day — or thought she had. She wasn't the ideas person. That was simply true.

Except here's the thing about memory: it isn't a recording. It's a reconstruction. Every time you replay it, your brain rebuilds it slightly differently — shaped by your mood, by what's happened since, by the story you've been telling yourself ever since.

Jordan doesn't remember that Tyler didn't even look up when he said "poster." She doesn't remember that her teacher, walking past, paused for just a moment when Jordan's sketch fell out of her bag — and almost said something. Later, she would wish she had.

The idea might have been great. The room might just not have been ready.

But the memory hardened. And hardened memories have a way of feeling like facts.

THE SECOND KIND

Objective Truth



This is the real thing. Measurable. Observable. Verifiable. The kind of truth that lets engineers build bridges that don't fall down and doctors prescribe medicine that actually works.

Objective truth is what everyone claims to have. Almost nobody does.

Marcus was failing math.

Not struggling. Not finding it hard. Failing. Three tests in a row, each one worse than the last. His parents asked how things were going and he said fine. His teacher sent home a note and he intercepted it at the mailbox.

Everything in Marcus's world was signaling red. And Marcus was showing everyone green.

Why? Because if he admitted it was red, it became real. As long as everyone around him thought things were fine, some part of him could almost believe it too.

Then one Tuesday his teacher kept him after class and put the three tests on the desk between them. No lecture. Just: “I can’t help you if I don’t know what’s actually happening.”

Marcus looked at the tests for a long moment.

Then he told the truth. Out loud, where it could do something.

That conversation was the worst five minutes of his month and the most useful five minutes of his year. Because objective truth — the kind you can actually point to and measure — is the only kind that lets you fix things. It doesn’t care how you feel about it. It just sits there, waiting for you to be brave enough to look.

THE THIRD KIND

Shared Truth



This is truth by agreement. And it is more powerful than most people realize.

Money has value because we all agreed it does. Countries exist because we all agreed on borders. Schools, laws, teams, fandoms — all of it runs on shared stories that enough people bought into.

The dangerous part is that shared truth doesn't need to be accurate. It just needs enough believers.

By ninth grade, everyone in Priya's friend group knew that Zoe was the funny one, Maya was the smart one, and Priya was the quiet one.

Nobody had decided this. There'd been no meeting. No vote. It had just settled like dust — slowly, invisibly, until one day it was simply the way things were.

And Priya had believed it. She'd stopped making jokes because Zoe was the funny one. She'd stopped raising her hand in class because Maya was the smart one. She'd made herself smaller and smaller to fit the shape the group had decided she was, because the price of belonging was staying in that shape.

Because that's the real engine of shared truth: belonging. Belief becomes the entry fee. If you want to be in the group, you accept what the group accepts. And once you're in, your brain helpfully supplies all the reasoning you need to explain why you believed it all along.

It wasn't until Priya changed schools junior year and walked into a classroom where nobody had decided anything about her yet that she understood what had happened.

She made a joke on the first day. The whole class laughed.

She'd been the funny one all along.

This is how good teams build unshakeable confidence in each other. It's also how perfectly intelligent people end up believing things that make no sense — because the

alternative was being on the outside.

The question worth asking: *do I believe this because I've thought about it, or because everyone I know believes it too?*

THE FOURTH KIND

Emotional Truth



This is the truth that lives in your gut.

And your gut is not always wrong. In fact, when you're skilled at something — when you've spent hundreds of hours doing it, noticing it, getting it wrong and trying again — your gut is picking up on patterns so fast your conscious mind can't track them. A great goalkeeper knows before the penalty kick which way the ball is going. She doesn't know how she knows. She just knows.

Dev had a bad feeling about the trip.

He couldn't explain it. Everything looked fine on paper — his friends had planned it for weeks, the weather was good, everyone was excited. But something in his gut kept pulling at him like a loose thread.

His friends told him he was being anxious. Maybe he was. He'd been anxious before about things that turned out fine. So he ignored the feeling and got in the car.

Two hours in, it turned out one of the friends had lied about having permission to use his parents' cabin. The whole trip unraveled. They turned around and drove home in silence.

Dev thought about his gut feeling the whole way back.

The problem is that gut feelings don't come with labels. They don't say *this instinct is based on years of experience* or *this instinct is based on the fact that you're scared and tired and you haven't eaten since noon*.

A feeling can be wisdom. It can also be anxiety wearing a disguise.

The only way to tell the difference is to ask: *have I been here before? Do I know this territory?* The more skilled and experienced you are in an area, the more your gut feeling is worth listening to. The less you know, the more carefully you have to check.

Dev's gut was right that day. But he'd also had the same feeling the week before about a math test and gotten an A.

That's the thing about emotional truth. It doesn't always know what it's talking about. But sometimes it knows before you do.

THE FIFTH KIND

Desired Truth



This is the most dangerous kind. And the most powerful.

Desired truth is when you believe something because you want it to be true.

A girl auditions for the school musical. She sings, and the room goes very quiet in the specific way that rooms go quiet when something has gone badly wrong. But she walks out certain she nailed it. Why? Because she *needs* to have nailed it. The desire is doing the believing.

That's the bad version.

Here's the good one.

Aisha had been working on her app for eight months.

It was a study tool — something that helped students track which topics they actually knew versus which ones

they just thought they knew. She'd built the first version herself, staying up late on school nights, teaching herself to code from videos online.

Everyone she showed it to said nice things and then didn't use it. Her computer science teacher told her kindly that there were already a hundred apps like it. Her parents suggested she focus on her grades. Her best friend said "that's so cool" in the voice people use when they mean "I don't really get it."

Aisha kept going anyway.

Not because she had evidence it would work. She didn't. Not because everyone believed in her. They didn't. She kept going because she had *decided* to believe it was worth doing — and that decision, made fresh every morning when she opened her laptop, was the only fuel she had.

That's desired truth at its best: the stubborn, unreasonable choice to believe in something before the proof arrives.

But here's the other side.

There's a version of Aisha who ignores every signal — not just the doubtful ones, but the real ones. Who keeps building something that genuinely isn't working because admitting it would hurt too much. Who uses desired truth as a blindfold instead of a torch.

The difference between those two versions isn't talent. It's whether she's willing to occasionally put down the desired truth and pick up the objective kind — to look clearly, adjust, and then choose to believe again.

Desired truth, chosen wisely, is how people do things that shouldn't have been possible.

Desired truth, chosen carelessly, is how people stay in situations long after every signal is telling them to leave.

The difference is whether you're using it as fuel or as a blindfold.

So here you are. In that argument. Or that moment. Or that decision that feels enormous.

Your brain is doing what it always does — labeling something true and handing it to you like it's settled.

But now you have a question you didn't have before.

What kind of true is this?

Is it memory truth — a story you've been telling yourself so long it feels like fact?

Is it objective truth — something you can actually point to, measure, verify?

Is it shared truth — something you believe partly because the people around you believe it too?

Is it emotional truth — a gut feeling that might be wisdom or might be fear?

Is it desired truth — something you're holding onto because you need it to be real?

You don't have to throw any of it away. You just have to know what you're holding.

Because the moment you can name the kind of true something is, you stop being its prisoner. You start being its reader.

And readers, unlike prisoners, get to turn the page.

...

The End

Turn the page.

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