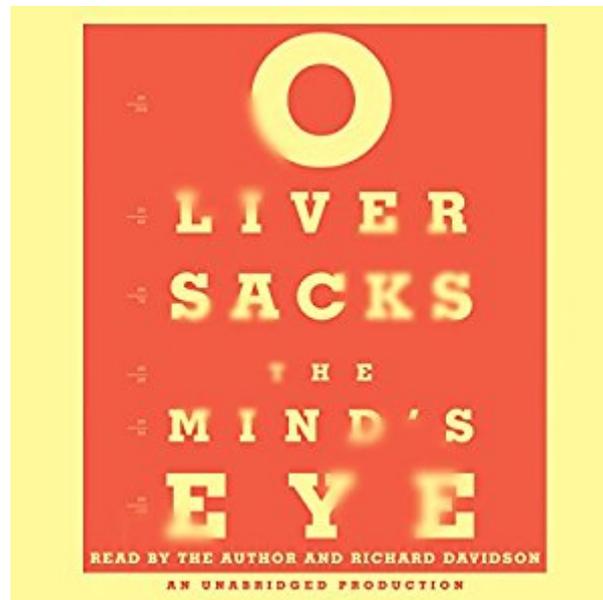


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# The Mind's Eye



## Synopsis

From the author of the best-selling *Musicophilia* (hailed as "luminous, original, and indispensable" by *The American Scholar*), an exploration of vision through the case histories of six individuals - including a renowned pianist who continues to give concerts despite losing the ability to read the score, and a neurobiologist born with crossed eyes who, late in life, suddenly acquires binocular vision, and how her brain adapts to that new skill. Most dramatically, Sacks gives us a riveting account of the appearance of a tumor in his own eye, the strange visual symptoms he observed, an experience that left him unable to perceive depth. In *The Mind's Eye*, Oliver Sacks explores some of the most fundamental facets of human experience: how we see in three dimensions, how we represent the world internally when our eyes are closed, and the remarkable, unpredictable ways that our brains find new ways of perceiving that create worlds as complete and rich as the no-longer-visible world.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 44 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: October 26, 2010

Language: English

ASIN: B004993C58

Best Sellers Rank: #17 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Eye Problems #144 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Medicine #189 in Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Neuropsychology

## Customer Reviews

Oliver Sacks has a distinct style of story-telling. He comes across a patient with unusual symptoms. He takes the time to get to know the person in detail. The person is amazing, cultured, refined, and suffering from a brain dysfunction that his other noble qualities compensate for. The doctor visits the patient's elegant home, they share a love for classical music or some other refined art, and the whole discussion leads to musing on the nobility of the human spirit and the utter weirdness that can happen to the human brain. This book starts out like that, with a story about a classical musician who slowly loses her ability to read, first words, then music, then an inability to recognize much of

anything visually. At this point, I felt that the writing was pleasant and interesting, but a bit predictable. A second similar story follows. I still didn't realize that this book focused specifically on sight, vision, and the part that the brain, rather than the eye itself, plays in the ability to see. (I know, the title was a dead give-away, but I took it too metaphorically.) But then the book veers off in a direction that I wasn't expecting. Dr. Sacks himself is diagnosed with cancer in his eye. He undergoes surgery and radiation, and his vision is changed in odd ways. Much of the book is based on his own detailed notes on his experiments with himself, his internal observations of what he experiences. There is a great deal of reflection on stereopsis, the ability to see in 3-D, which curiously, he had been a big fan of, belonging to a society in New York based on old 3-d imagery. Just like the people he so often writes about, now he himself turns out to be a patient whose particular gifts and interests are suddenly impinged upon by a peculiar ailment. (Are the gods mocking us?)

If I were to ask you to describe the differences between what your eyes see, and what you see, you'd probably think it an odd question. After all what you see is what your eyes see, right? Curiously enough, what you see when you perceive the world around you is very different from what your eyes "see." Consider this: The human eye can detect fine detail over an angle of about 2 degrees. That's not much; it's roughly the area of a dime held at arm's length. Your first instinct is probably to say nonsense; after all, you can easily perceive the entire scene before you, over an angle of at least 90 and as much as 180 degrees. You're right, at least in part. You perceive the wide expanse of the world before you, but what you perceive and what your eyes take in are two very different things. The world you perceive is not the raw input from your eyes, but rather something constructed by your brain, using input from your eyes as well as a lifetime's experience and memory of the world around you. Here's another example. You've probably, at one time or another in your childhood, placed a finger in front of your face, and then viewed it through each eye in turn, noticing how it appears to jump back and forth and you switched eyes. Obviously, your eyes see slightly different pictures of the world. Yet when you look at the world, you don't see two different pictures. You see a single picture of the world, with a sense of depth and dimensionality not apparent when viewing with either eye alone. That third dimension isn't there in the pictures coming from your eyes- it has to be added by the brain. Neurologist Oliver Sacks has made a second career for himself writing about neurological afflictions, and how they affect the people who suffer them.

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