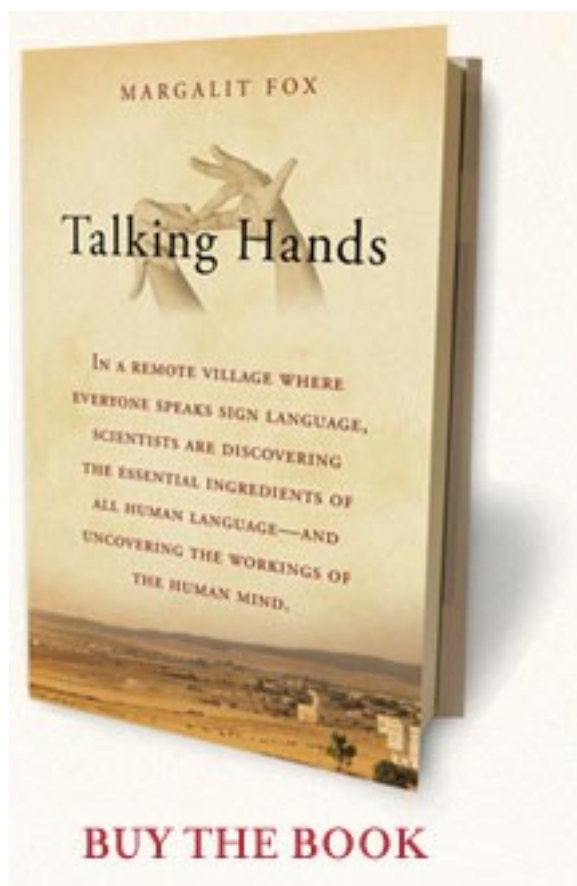


Talking Hands



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出版者:Simon & Schuster

出版时间:

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780743247122

Talking Hands is a book unlike any other. For the first time, a book for a popular readership takes a look at the mysterious and beautiful world of the signed languages of the deaf--and explains what they reveal about how all language, signed and spoken, works inside our heads. Written by a New York Times journalist originally trained as a linguist, the book combines the exciting popular science of Oliver Sacks and Steven

Pinker with the lyrical prose of Tracy Kidder and John McPhee.

The narrative of Talking Hands takes readers to a place like nowhere else on earth: the village of Al-Sayyid (pronounced es-SAYY-id), a remote Bedouin community in Israel where everyone "speaks" sign language. There, as the result of an unusually high incidence of hereditary deafness, an indigenous sign language has sprung up entirely on its own, used by deaf and hearing villagers alike. At every hour of the day, in nearly every house in the village, in the fields and in the mosque, there are people talking in sign. A veritable island of the deaf, Al-Sayyid is a place that few outsiders have ever seen, and that no journalist has ever before reported on.

Until now, no one has attempted to decode the mysterious sign language of the village. Talking Hands follows an international team of scientists, two from America and two from Israel, as they set out to decipher this remarkable language. Because the sign language of Al-Sayyid has arisen completely on its own, outside the influence of any other language, it offers a living demonstration of the "language instinct," man's inborn capacity to create language from thin air.

If the researchers can decode this language—if they can isolate the elements that make the village sign language a language—they will have helped identify the ingredients essential to all human language, signed and spoken. And in so doing, they will have illuminated fundamental, long-sought truths about how all language works in the human mind. But as Talking Hands grippingly shows, their work is also a race against time, because the unique language of the village may already be endangered.

Besides chronicling the work in Al-Sayyid, Talking Hands offers a fascinating introduction to sign language around the world, from American Sign Language to Israeli Sign Language to British Sign Language and many more. In lively, accessible prose, the book explains why signed languages—languages as beautiful, vital and emphatically human any other—are today at the heart of some of the most exciting developments in cognitive science. In short, Talking Hands will captivate anyone interested in language, the human mind and journeys to exotic places.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Talking Hands_下载链接1](#)

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评论

[Talking Hands_下载链接1](#)

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