

# Why tell a story?

DATA STORYTELLING CONCEPTS



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# Humans are storytelling creatures

- Story telling is a proven method of communication
- Stories provoke emotion
- Emotion leads to change



<sup>1</sup> Brent Dykes, "Effective Data Storytelling" (Wiley 2020)

# Stories are better than "just the facts"

A screenshot of an Oxfam donation page. The top half features a blue background with a green and yellow decorative bar at the top. The Oxfam logo (a white circle with a stylized 'O') is positioned next to the word 'OXFAM' in white capital letters. Below this, a large white rectangular area contains the text 'DONATE NOW. SAVE LIVES.' in bold, dark gray capital letters. To the right of this text is a close-up photograph of a smiling man with a beard and mustache, showing his teeth. He appears to be of African descent. The bottom half of the page contains a paragraph of text: 'Now, more than ever, your support means everything. Millions of families around the world are struggling to overcome hunger, poverty, and injustice. You can help.'

**DONATE NOW.  
SAVE LIVES.**

Now, more than ever, your support means everything. Millions of families around the world are struggling to overcome hunger, poverty, and injustice. You can help.

# Changing behaviors

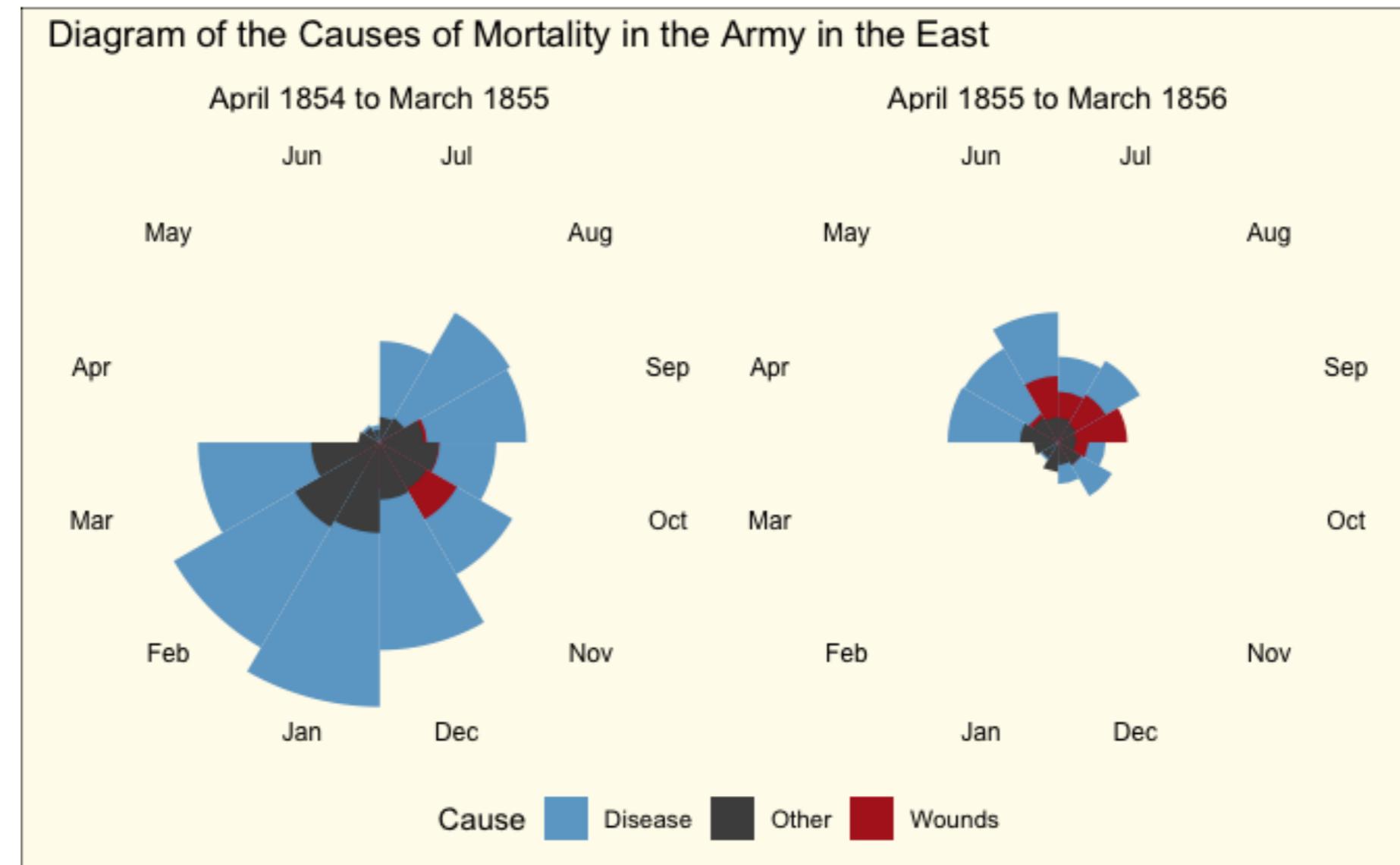
- Story telling isn't just slides
- An actionable insight is a conclusion drawn from data
- Data stories relate insights with a message
- Complex information is easier to understand



TED talks are popular, short format lectures by subject matter experts about something they find to be important

# Nightingale's graph

Florence Nightingale made the calendar year into a circle, charting casualty causes by month



# **Let's practice!**

**DATA STORYTELLING CONCEPTS**

# The very human basis for data stories

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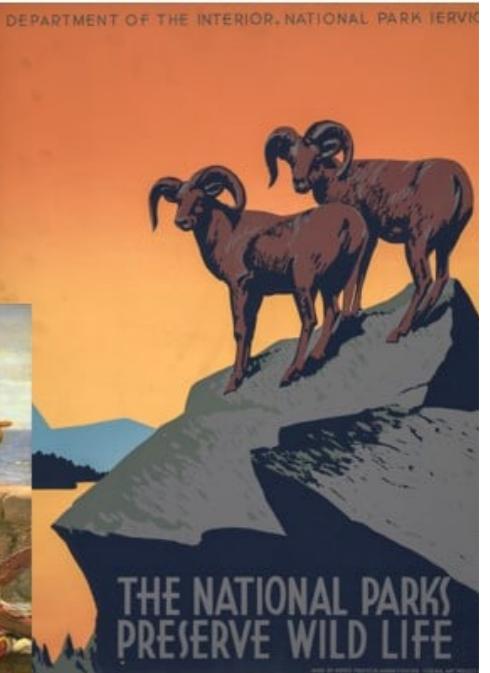


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# Deep cultural reasons that stories work

- Narratives are derived from psychological needs
- People seek patterns and stories explain those patterns
- There are many types of stories, such as fables, parables and even public service announcements



# Know what they know and feel what they feel

- We can vicariously experience something through a story
- Facts are perceived and emotion felt as the parts of the brain work together
- You can feel good based on a pleasant podcast or TV show



# Mental simulation

- Narratives are important because they blend facts and emotion
- Neural coupling makes us feel as though we are all connected in a good way
- Our brains readily accept facts as presented in a story



# Modern times



# **Let's practice!**

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# Building a blockbuster story

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# The exposition or problem



- The exposition or problem is the first stage
- A princess being kidnapped by a dragon is a great opening scene



<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav\\_Freytag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Freytag)

# Rising action

- Many events take place here
- Tension and suspense are built
- A knight on a quest to save the princess is rising action



# The climax of a story

- The third stage is the climax
- The main characters overcome obstacles
- A climatic battle by the knight against a dragon is a good example



# Falling action

- The falling action occurs after the climax in the story
- Most of the events foreshadow the last section of the story
- The knight and princess may journey home as part of falling action



# The resolution or conclusion



# TV Advertisements as stories

- The Super Bowl is a championship football game played in the United States.
- These ads often tell stories



<sup>1</sup> Rosen (2014)

# Research shows this structure is effective

- Advertisements that followed a Freytag structure were more memorable.
- All the model parts can be lengthened or shortened depending on the format or media platform
- A data story knits together a narrative, the data and visuals.



# **Let's practice!**

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