

Harnessing the Power of Storytelling



Melanie C. Green
Department of Communication, University at Buffalo
mcgreen2@buffalo.edu

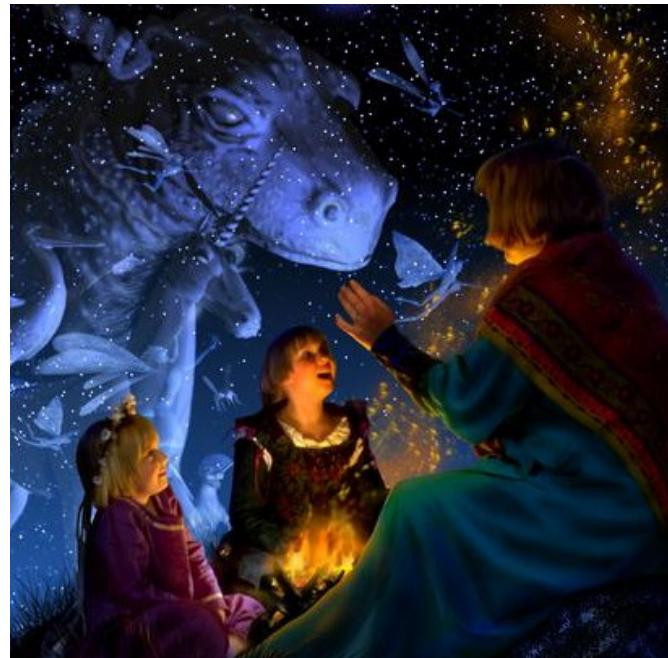
Three S's

- Soundbites
- Statistics
- Stories

What do stories do?

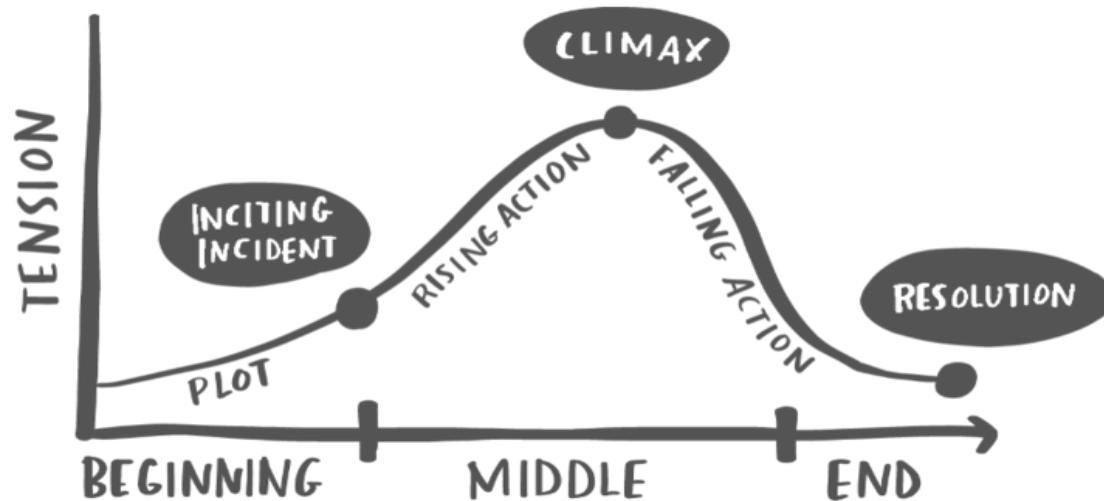
*...they make children go to sleep
and soldiers go to war.*

– Jens Eder



What is a narrative?

- Conveys a series of events, typically with a beginning, middle, end: dramatic arc



Getting people to pay attention

- Stories are interesting and entertaining

Overcoming resistance or reactance

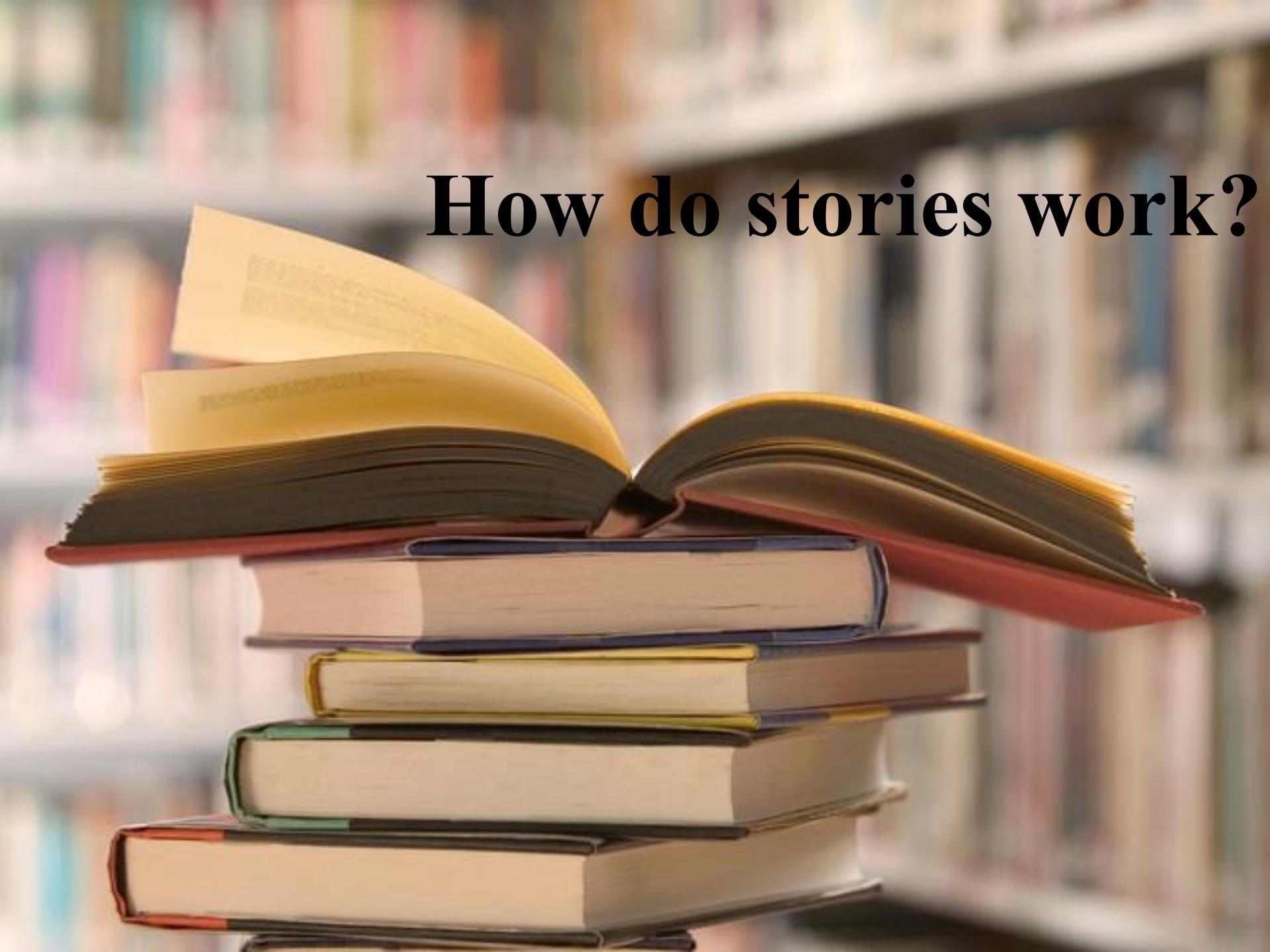
- Stories seem inviting and not threatening

People don't care about an issue

- Stories can make it seem more personal

The issue is too complicated

- Stories can make information more accessible

A stack of books is shown in the foreground, with one book open to reveal its yellowed pages. The background is a blurred image of a library or bookstore, with many more books on shelves.

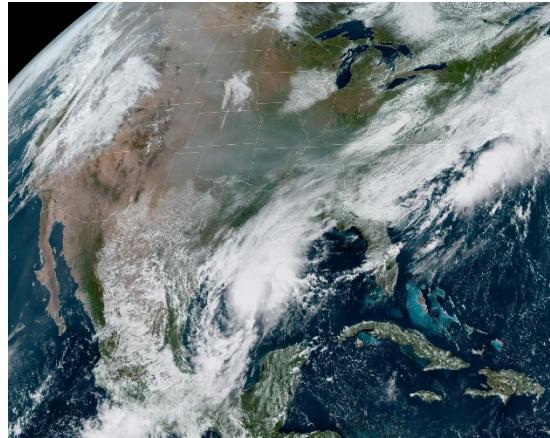
How do stories work?

Transportation into a Narrative World

- Combination of attention, imagery, and emotion
- Immersive process: feeling present in the story world
- Applies across media: readers, listeners, viewers



Transportation leads to greater attitude/ belief change



Appel & Richter, 2010; Chang, 2009; Escalas, 2004, 2006; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, 2004; Johnson, 2012; Mazzocco, Green, et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2011; Vaughn et al. 2006; Wang & Calder, 2006; see van Laer et al., 2014 for a review

Transportation

- Can reduce counterarguing
- Increase emotional connection
- Create mental imagery



Narrative Benefit: Empathy

- Narratives are effective at creating empathy for individuals from “outgroups” (different than audiences)



Stories Provide Causal Structure

without
storytelling

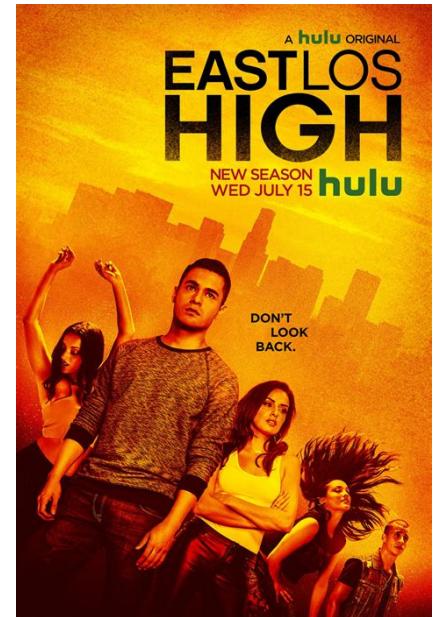


Storytelling



Stories Show People What To Do

- Characters as role models
- Self-efficacy: “If she can do it, so can I!”



Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura, 1977



Creating Effective Stories

Find entry points to help people connect



Even short stories can be powerful



Example: Campus tour Career Center Story

Think about...

- What is the purpose of the story?
 - To share, to connect, to inform, to persuade, to motivate, to inspire?
- What is the message that you want the story to convey? How can you make that message clear?
- What are the stakes of the story, why does the story matter?
- The first version doesn't have to be the final version

😊

Not All Stories are Equal

- Content matters
 - Resonance of values or other elements with the audience
 - Structure of story
 - Narrative quality
- Not just using a story, but using the right story

STORY
TELLERS

Who Should Tell Your Story?

- Sometimes...everyone!
- Sharing stories person-to-person can create bonds, help people feel heard, build bridges across differences: many benefits



Opinion | How the psychology of political division could lead us out of it

Studies suggest that people who empathize during disagreement are better able to persuade others.

By Jamil Zaki and Luiza Santos

September 10, 2024 at 6:30 a.m. EDT

Ben and Emily (whose names have been changed to preserve their privacy) were among more than 160 Americans who spoke about their opposing political views as part of an experiment we ran at Stanford. Over and over, we observed as participants with rival opinions came to these conversations ready for combat — and left feeling changed. Afterward, they reported feeling less hostile toward the other party and more humble in their own views. When asked to rate the pleasantness of these dialogues, the most common response was 100 on a 100-point scale.



PRINCIPLES OF PERSUASION

BY DR. ROBERT CIALDINI

Source Qualities



AUTHORITY

- Credible authority
 - Expertise
 - Trustworthiness



LIKING

- Friendship and liking
 - Similarity: points of connection with audience
 - Authenticity

Example: Connecting with Audience



David Forrest, Ph.D., Hansel Tookes, M.D., M.P.H., Harry Levine, and Tyler Bartholomew, Infectious Diseases Elimination Act (IDEA)

Multiple Storytellers

- Social proof/consensus: People are highly influenced by the behavior of others (even when they don't realize it)
- Multiple storytellers can help share or establish social norms (“everyone is doing it”)



Stories and Misinformation



Drivers of False Beliefs

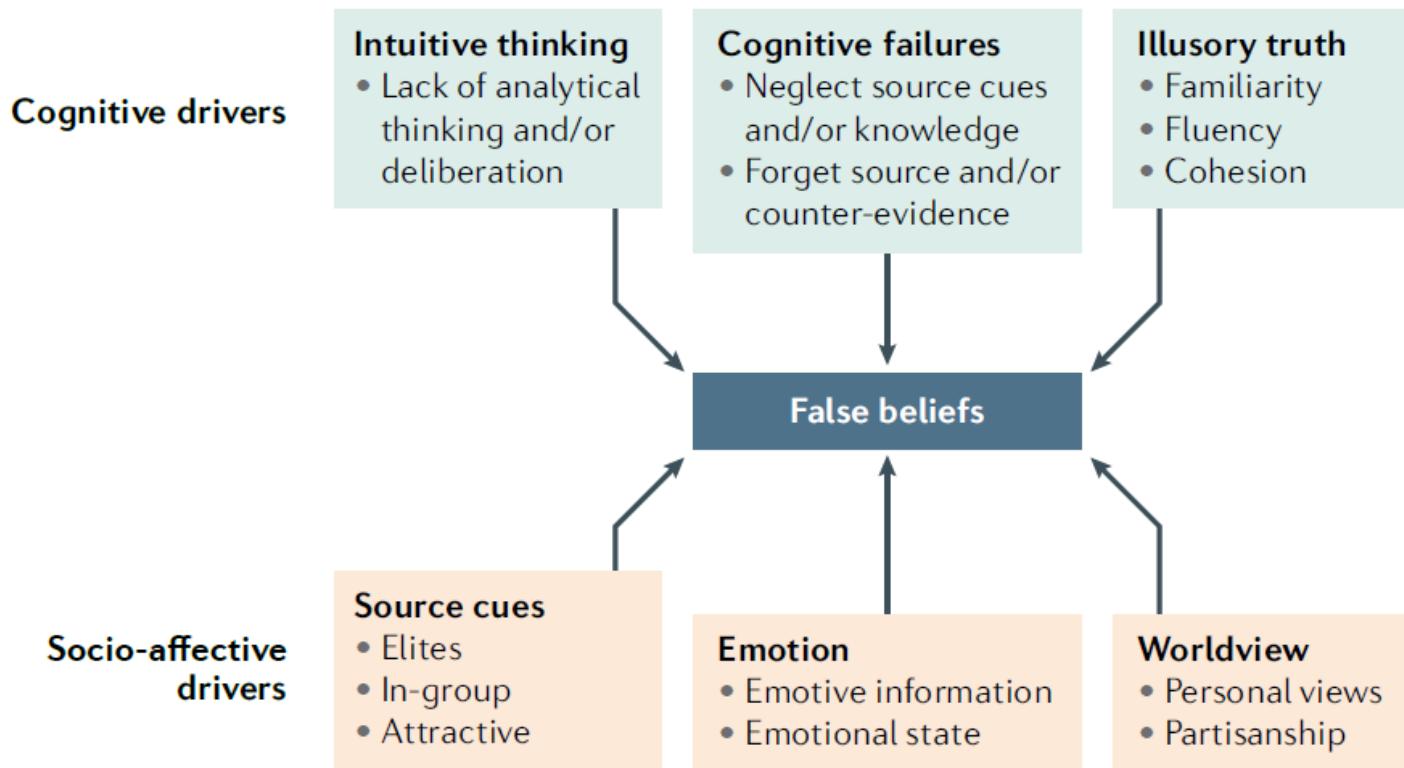
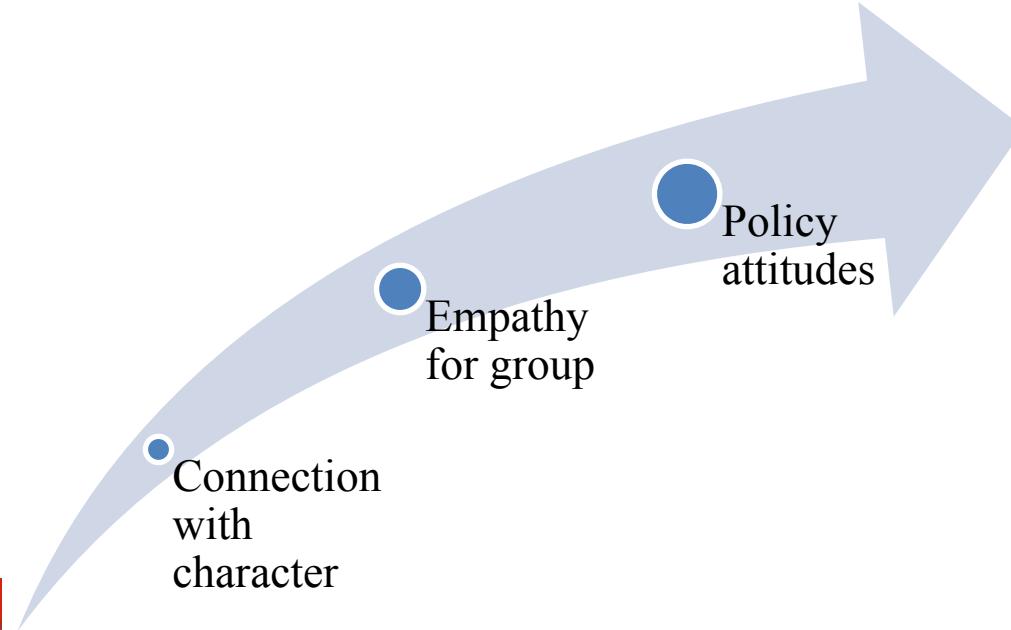


Fig. 1 | **Drivers of false beliefs.** Some of the main cognitive (green) and socio-affective (orange) factors that can facilitate the formation of false beliefs when individuals are exposed to misinformation. Not all factors will always be relevant, but multiple factors often contribute to false beliefs.

Generalizing from Specific Cases



Transporting
Narrative

Challenge for Misinformation Correction

- Generalizing occurs even when story is explicitly described as not typical (Strange & Leung, 1999)
- Difficult to contradict a person's lived experience even if it is not consistent with scientific evidence

A close-up photograph of a person's hands cupping a glowing incandescent lightbulb. The bulb is brightly lit from within, casting a warm, orange glow that illuminates the fingers and the surrounding area. The background is a solid, dark purple or black, making the light from the bulb stand out. The hands are positioned with the fingers slightly spread, cradling the bulb.

Using Stories to Correct
Misinformation

Narratives can provide a framework for organizing information

- People want to have coherent view of world and situations
- Merely retracting or debunking wrong information is not sufficient if the info is part of a network of knowledge
- Narratives can provide alternative causal explanations and increase effectiveness of corrections

Emotions and Mental Imagery

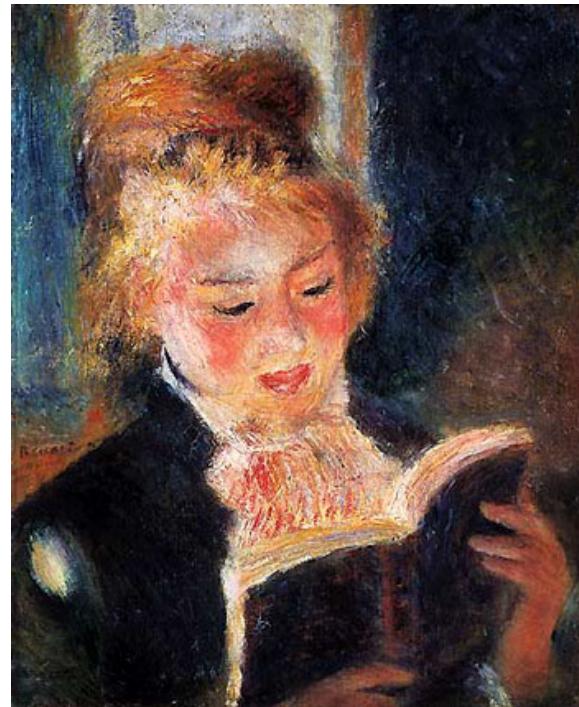
- Corrections can leave behind “belief echoes” (affective or emotional remnants of misinformation)
- Narratives can enhance correction by evoking emotions or images (e.g., Sangalang et al., 2019)
- Can be a challenge due to negativity bias



Moving Forward



Thank you!



Email: mcgreen2@buffalo.edu