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Daily Mail .com

Tuesday, Jul 19th 2016 8AM 70°F 11AM 81°F 5-Day Forecast

There are just SIX plots in every film, book and TV show ever made: Researchers reveal the 'building blocks' of storytelling

- Prior to this study it was believed there was 3 to more than 30 plots
- Used fictional stories that have been downloaded over 150 times
- Most popular stories follow the 'fall-rise-fall' and 'rise-fall' arcs

By [Stacy Liberatore For Dailymail.com](#)

Published: 14:56 EST, 8 July 2016 | Updated: 20:01 EST, 8 July 2016

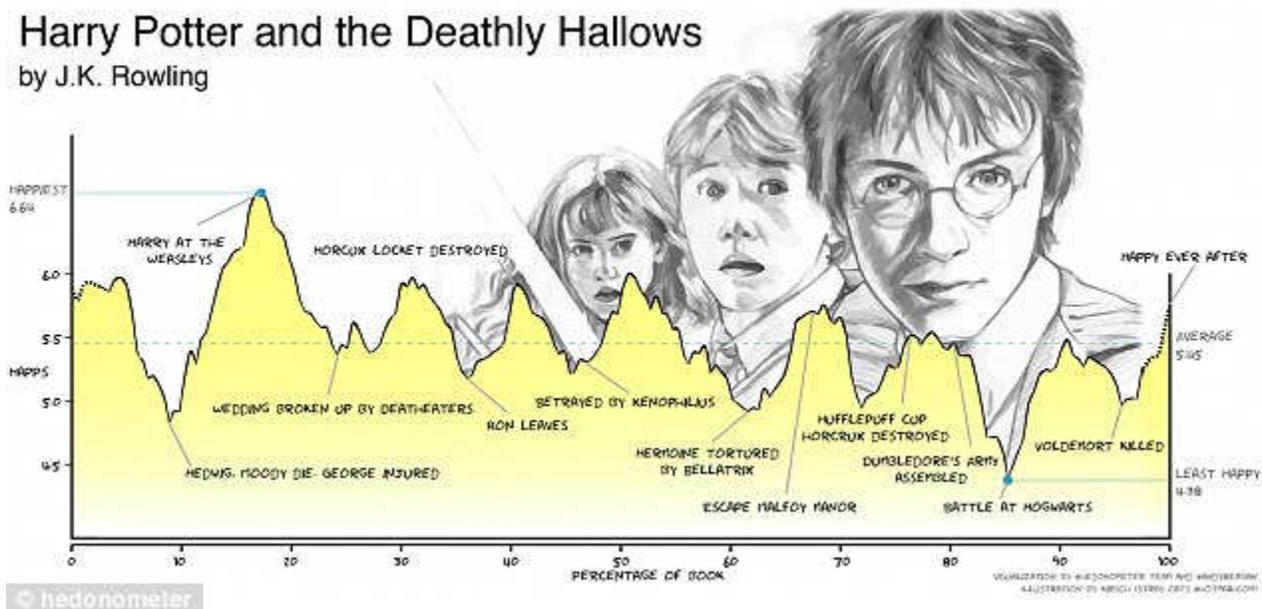
From Harry Potter and Romeo and Juliet to the stories of Oedipus and Icarus, almost every tale told conforms to one of just six plots, researchers have claimed.

A major new analysis of over 1,700 stories identified the core plots 'which form the building blocks of complex narratives'.

Researchers used complex data-mining to locate words linked to positive or negative emotion in each story to reveal the set of arcs.

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Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows by J.K. Rowling



A major new analysis of over 1,700 stories identified the core plots 'which form the building blocks of complex narratives'. Shown, the plot of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, which researchers found has the 'rise, fall rise' plot.

WHAT ARE THE SIX ARCS?

Fall-rise-fall: 'Oedipus Rex', 'The Wonder Book of Bible Stories', 'A Hero of Our Time' and 'The Serpent River'.

Rise-fall: 'Stories from Hans Andersen', 'The Rome Express', 'How to Read Human Nature' and 'The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali'.

Fall-rise: 'The Magic of Oz', 'Teddy Bears', 'The Autobiography of St. Ignatius' and 'Typhoon'.

Steady fall: 'Romeo and Juliet', 'The House of the Vampire', 'Savrola' and 'The Dance'.

Steady rise: 'Alice's Adventures Underground', 'Dream', 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' and 'The Human Comedy'.

Rise-fall-rise: 'Cinderella', 'A Christmas Carol', 'Sophist' and 'The Consolation of Philosophy'.

The most popular stories have been found to follow the 'fall-rise-fall' and 'rise-fall' arcs.

An emotional arc is similar to a plot building block that tells a story by generating an emotional response from the reader, reports [MIT Review](#).

For example, 'man falls into hole, man gets out of hole' or one of the most well-know, 'boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl'.

And prior to Computational Story lab at the University of Vermont's study most believed there was anywhere from three to more than thirty different arcs.

To conduct the study, researchers used sentiment analysis, which is the idea that words have both positive and emotional impacts, to map the emotional arcs.

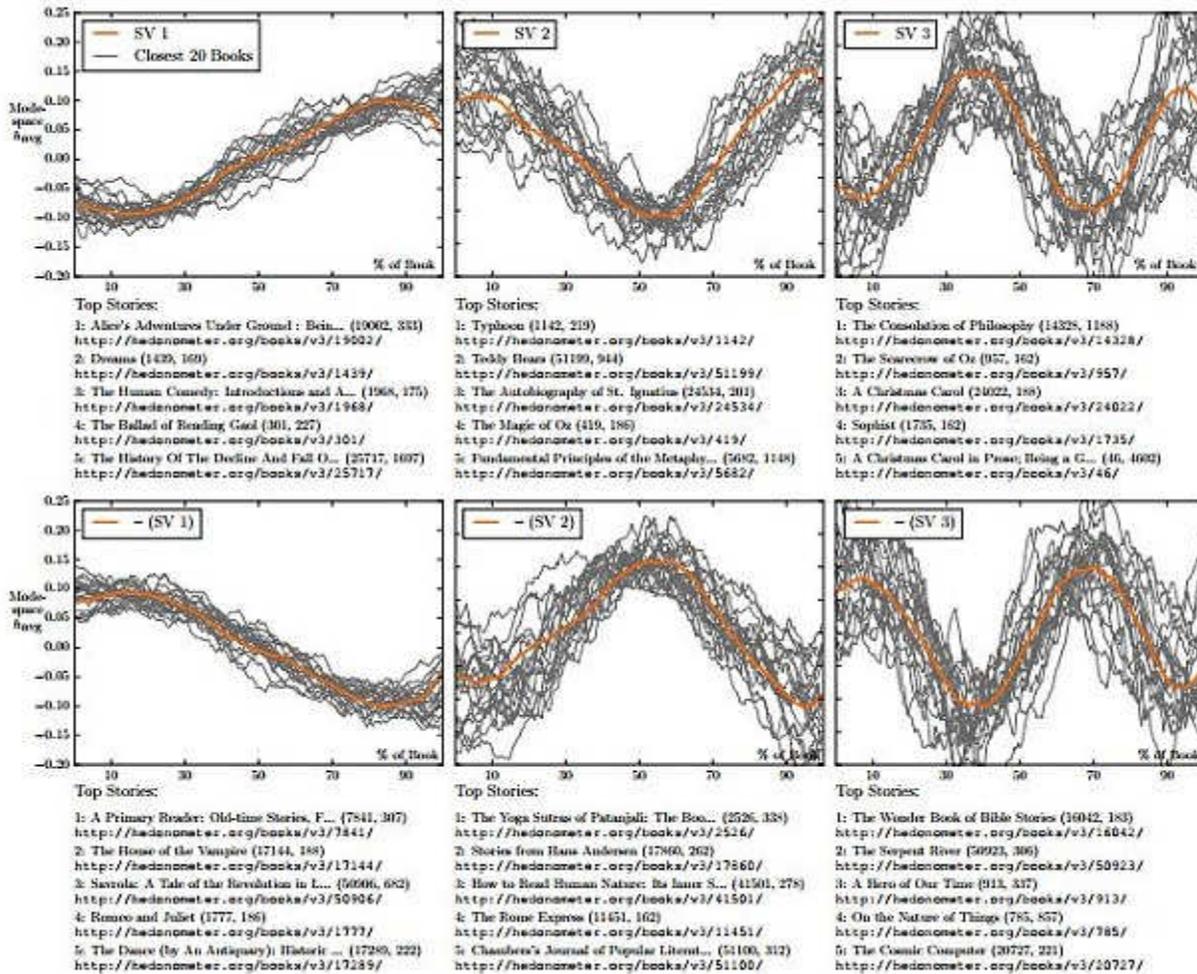
Words can be measured of the emotional valence of text and how it changes from moment to moment.

The team then analyzed the emotional polarity of 'word windows' and slid these windows through the text to create a picture of how the emotional valence changes.

This task was performed on fictional works taken from the Project Gutenberg website that had been downloaded more than 150 times each.

And finally, the data-mining technique led the team to the six main emotional arcs: Fall-rise-fall, like Oedipus Rex; Rise and then a fall, such as stories from Hans Andersen; Fall and then a rise, like The Magic of Oz; Steady fall, like in Romeo and Juliet; Steady rise, like in a rags-to-riches story such as Alice's Adventures Underground; Rise-fall-rise, like that of Cinderella.

'We strengthen our findings by separately applying optimization, linear decomposition, supervised learning, and unsupervised learning,' reads the study published in the journal arXiv.

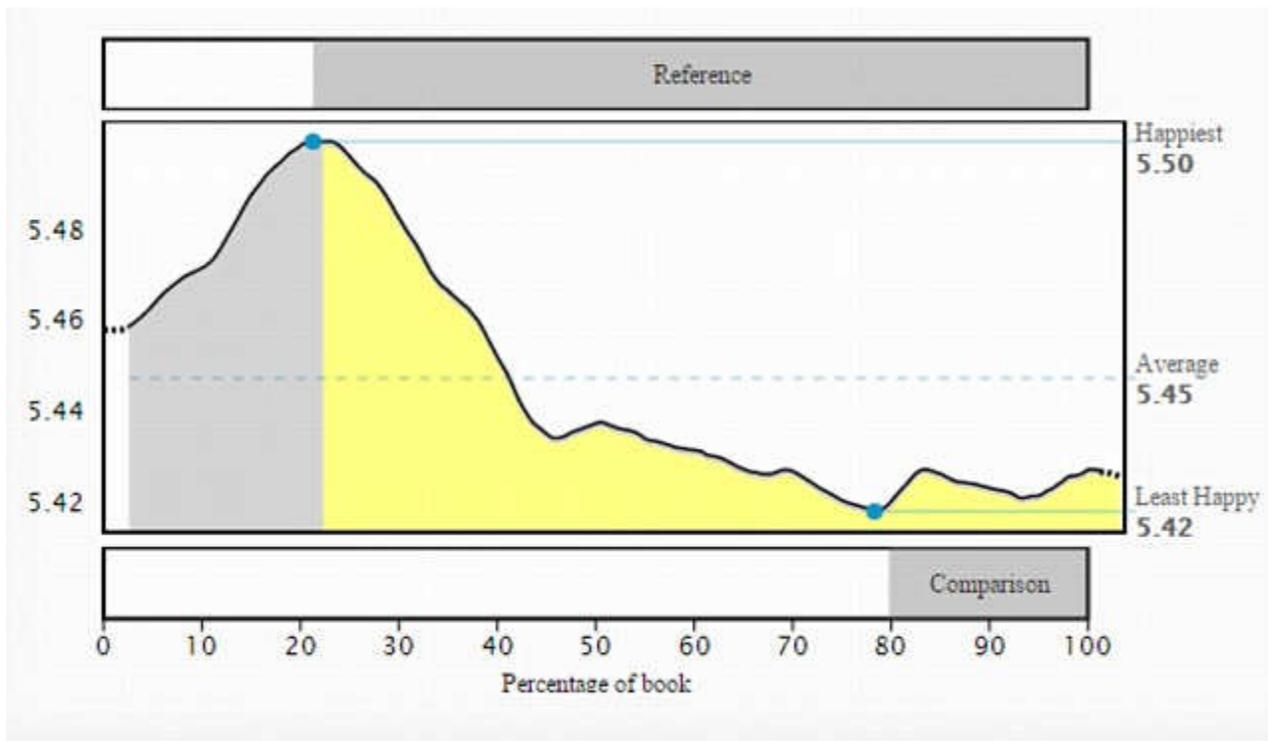


From Cinderella and Romeo and Juliet to the stories of Oedipus and Icarus, almost every story conforms to one of just six plots, researchers have claimed. The six in order: Rise, Fall-rise, Rise-fall-rise, Fall, Rise-fall-rise, Fall-rise-fall

'For each of these six core emotional arcs, we examine the closest characteristic stories in publication today and find that particular emotional arcs enjoy greater success, as measured by downloads.'

The team also dove into the seven book series of Harry Potter, as it may seem these stories would have multiple plots.

But, the entire series can be classified as 'Rag to riches' and 'Kill the monster' story.



Researchers scanned over 1,700 stories into a computer and used data-mining to find words that convey positive or negative emotion in order to reveal the most commonly used plots. Shown in the graph is one of the 6 plots, 'Steady fall' and results when the team analyzed Romeo and Juliet

There are also many sub plots and connections between them that complicate the emotional arc of each individual book.

And feeding the story into the computer, it clearly revealed all of the low parts in the stories that many fans know too well.

Following the discovery of the set of six arcs, the team dug deeper into the link between emotional arc and the number of story downloads in order to find which types of arcs are most popular.



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CINDERELLA: OR, THE LITTLE GLASS SLIPPER.

THERE was, many years ago, a gentleman who had a charming lady for his wife. They had one daughter only, who was very dutiful to her parents. But while she was still very young, her mamma died, to the grief of her husband and daughter. After a time, the little girl's papa married another lady. Now this lady was proud and haughty, and had two grown-up daughters as disagreeable as herself; so the poor girl found everything at home changed for the worse.

But she bore all her troubles with patience, not even complaining to her father, and, in spite of her hard toil, she grew more lovely in face and figure every year.

Now the King's son gave a grand ball, and all persons of quality were invited to it. Our two young ladies were not overlooked. Nothing was now talked of but the rich dresses they were to wear.

At last the happy day arrived. The two proud sisters set off in high spirits. Cinderella followed them with her eyes until the coach was out of sight. She then began to cry bitterly. While she was sobbing, her godmother, who was a Fairy, appeared before her.

This task was performed on fictional works taken from the Project Gutenberg website that had been downloaded more than 150 times each. Researchers found that the most popular are those that involved two sequential man-in-hole arcs and a Cinderella arc followed by a tragedy

HOLLYWOOD IS INSPIRED BY ANCIENT STORYTELLERS

A team of scientists at the Centre for Language Studies at Radboud University in the Netherlands found that stories tend to be retold using the most recent versions of them.

By examining more than 200 different versions of the story Red Riding Hood from the past 200 years, the researchers found there was a strong 'lopsidedness' in how they were retold.



Many of the story structures depicted in William Shakespeare's tragedies like Romeo and Juliet can fall under the a 'Fall' arc category

They found that re-tellings tended to reply upon more recent versions of the story rather than using older material.

The findings might help to explain why common story-telling threads can be found thought out literature, theater and cinema.

For example many of the story structures depicted in William Shakespeare's tragedies like Romeo and Juliet can be found repeating in later stories.

Indeed, his own story of star crossed lovers appears remarkably similar to the legend of Tristan and Iseult, according to some experts.

But the findings also explain why remakes in the film industry can often seem to fail to take the story in a new direction.

The researchers also found that a small percentage of early texts – which they call pre-texts – spawn most of the re-tellings.

This means that some versions can have far more influence over the way a story is told than others.

In the case of Little Red Riding Hood, the researchers say the story can trace its beginnings back to 1697 when the first literary version of the tale *Le petit Chaperon rouge*, was written by Charles Perrault.

They point to two striking changes made later by the Brothers Grimm – the rescue of the child by a hunter and the emphasis on obedience or good behavior – that have become pervasive in subsequent re-tellings.

They constructed what are known as story networks by crating computational word models that classify relationships between texts.

The researchers said: 'Re-tellings of Red Riding Hood preferentially link to a small number of stories that are pre-texts of many other re-tellings.'

The most popular are those that follow Icarus (rise-fall) and Oedipus (fall-rise-fall) arcs and stories that follow more complex arcs, which use the basic building blocks in sequence.

Researchers also say that the most popular arcs are those that involved two sequential man-in-hole arcs and a Cinderella arc followed by a tragedy.

There are two stories that really support the 'Rags to riches plot mode, which are Alice's Under Ground' and 'Dreams'.

And among the most categorical tragedies, the plot that is a steady fall, are 'Man in a hole', Romeo and Juliet and The House of the Vampire.

The team also found that the 'Cinderella', 'Oedipus', two sequential Man in a hole" arcs and 'Cinderella" with a tragic ending are the most successful emotional arcs.



Following the discovery of the set, the team dug deeper into the link between emotional arc and the number of story downloads in order to find which types of arcs are most popular. The most popular are those that follow Icarus (rise-fall) and Oedipus (pictured) (fall-rise-fall) arcs

Kurt Vonnegut on the Shapes of Stories



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[orman](#), Catalhoy uk, United Kingdom, 1 week ago

lay the DM proves there is no such thing as a new story.

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10

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[ckett](#), Middle America, United States, 1 week ago

g good comes out of Hollywood anymore, anyway. Yeah, 6 plots and mostly sequels. A waste of time and money and don't forget the left-wing propaganda and conditioning for the masses. We're all sheep to the slaughter, you know.

Click to rate

10

5



[ktastic](#), Antananarivo, Madagascar, 1 week ago

It's not a glass slipper.. It was a fur slipper. From the French 'en verre' means made of fur was mistranslated as 'made of glass'. Glass footwear isn't really practical, is it? See also camel and rope being the same world in Bible talk. Who would want to put all camel through the eye of a needle?

[Click to rate](#) 3 1



[yo](#), Einstein ally, United States, 1 week ago

One out of six of these story plots requires gratuitous violence and the abusive and excessive use of firearms. TV and movies teach violence and firearms abuse, then the stars of those movies that make a living being the worst human examples for walking excrement come out politically against the proper and safe ownership of firearms, but you can't argue with them, because they all have aggressive armed bodyguards who will kill you if you get too close. If anyone emulated their handling and use of firearms from their movies and TV, that person would end up in prison or dead. I'm so tired of their ignorance and the abusive behavior they market.

[Click to rate](#) 15 9



[tie Vyris](#), Idahohoho, United States, 1 week ago

But you'll notice: These days they're keeping their fingers off the trigger.

[Click to rate](#) 2 2



Unlisted, United States, 1 week ago

groupings. Excitement in stories is a ride up and down hills and all this said was that stories start in different places on the hilly ride and end in different places on this hilly ride. No big deal.

[Click to rate](#) 7 1



[Aloobop](#), Alop Bam Boom., United Kingdom, 1 week ago

There are just two kinds of people in this world. People who believe there are just two kinds of people and those who don't.

[Click to rate](#) 24 1



[staken](#), Bismarck, United States, 1 week ago

Coming out loud...it's our shared human nature. No news here.

[Click to rate](#) 8 3



[us de Obvious](#), paddle thine own, Bouvet Island, 1 week ago

There is actually only one, read Homer's Odyssey to start. The ones here are only parts of each other and so not separate. All written works can be fitted into the one theme or reversals of it, variations [as here] etc.

[Click to rate](#) 6 1



[prof](#), Franklin, United States, 1 week ago

Just thought that the author's name was "Hans Christian Anderson."

[Click to rate](#) 4 0



[tie Vyris](#), Idahohoho, United States, 1 week ago

I know but it's too long to fit in that teensy-tiny sidebar.

Click to rate

0

0



[prof](#), Franklin, United States, 1 week ago

ht the name of the author was "Hans Christian Anderson."

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