The Danger of a Single Story

Synopsis

This activity is a discussion about a TED Talk by Ngozi Adichie (2009) called, “The Danger of a Single Story”. In this talk, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie tells the story of her own awakening to the realizations about the limitations of cultural stereotypes that we inherit through our upbringing. While narrating her own story, Ngozi Adichie challenges viewers to examine broaden their views to include more complexity and nuance in their view of others.

Preparation

*As you watch* [*this video*](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)*, think about your responses to the below discussion questions. (You may wish to use the interactive transcript for the video to help you understand the speaker or for later reference.) Answer the questions below where it says* ***“Click or tap here to enter text”*** *and**submit your answers to the Dropbox by the due date. Be sure to answer in complete sentences.*

Discussion Questions

1. Listen to what Adichie says about her experiences of reading as a child. Think of a culture other than your own which you heard or read about as a child. What image of that culture was created in your mind because of your early exposure?

As a child, I often heard about Japanese culture. The image in my mind of Japanese culture was the food particularly sushi and sashimi. Also, the image of samurai and ninja. I thought of them as strong figures with armors and combat skills.

1. Think of a culture that you know little about. What ideas do you have about this culture? Where did these ideas come from?

One Culture that I know little about is the culture of Korea. Korean Pop music, or K-pop has become a global phenomenon, with groups like BTS and Blackpink achieving international fame. K-pop is not only about music but also fashion, dance, and fan culture.

1. Most of us tend to use stereotypes to make assumptions and judgements about others, especially when we have little information. In your experience, what is the danger or harm in doing this?

Stereotyping can affect personal relationships which can lead to misunderstandings.

1. Listen to what Adichie says about the power structures of the world:  *“Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.”   
   “How [stories] are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.”*  
   Are you surprised by her statements? Why or why not?

I'm not surprised by Adichie's statements because she's highlighting the fact that power allows certain groups to not only tell the stories of others but also to make those stories the only or most accepted narratives. It's not surprising because history has shown how power can shape and control the way stories are told and who gets to tell them, often to serve the interests of the powerful.

1. As Adichie points out, we all hold some single stories or stereotypes about other groups of peoples, even though we are not often aware of it. Adichie believes that reading stories can help us to reject single stories in favour of a more complex view of the culture. In your experience, what are some other ways of doing this? Give an example or two from your own life either of things that you have done or that you could do to increase your understanding of other groups or cultures.

One example that I’ve experience is watching documentaries, films, and TV shows that expresses the lives and experiences of people from different cultures. For example, documentaries about indigenous communities have provided me with the understanding of their life.