

Dangers of a Single Story

The speech given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie primarily focuses on the extremely important topic surrounding the dangers of a single story. The present times, being one where past unrivalled judgements are being questioned and where information, whether it be true or false, spreads around the globe like wildfire, make the topic of a single story extremely important to explore. The speaker expertly structures her talk in such a way that the audience will learn to define a single story through her chronological life experiences and the true implication of believing a single story will be realised by the time a conclusion is reached.

Adichie begins the talk with an anecdote from her childhood, setting the scene for the avid reader her younger self was. She predominantly read American and British children's books and unsurprisingly was heavily influenced by them. She took for granted that her not being able to relate to the circumstances of the blue-eyed white characters was normal. This is extremely relatable especially in a time where representation of races and genders has finally become recognised in the entertainment industry, to remind those who do not understand the significance of these measures of a time when having a non-white protagonist was unheard of. We humans learn from what we see. If we never see those who look like us in powerful places, we subconsciously assume that there is no place for us there. Adichie narrated her experiences in such a captivating way by bringing in instances of humour and irony to relieve the stress of the situation lightly, while not demeaning the importance of the narration. She went from assuming that the family which worked for hers when they were well off were nothing but poor, as she had heard from their single story, she became the object of a single story on moving to America. Her roommate assumed Adichie would be a tribal and "Authentic" African with no practices bearing any resemblance to other Americans. She even heard a single story of Mexicans and imagined them to be nothing but abject immigrants. The way the world is today, especially with the widespread of misinformation, no one is safe from the danger of having a single negative story associated with them.

Even though Adichie had a loving childhood, she also had her fair share of rough times just like everyone else. Yet, neither the negatives nor the positives purely define her as a person. We humans are complex species. We cannot be understood by a single experience in our eventful lives. A single story has the power to rob a person of their dignity, but in the right way, can be used to empower and to humanise. Adichie's concluding line resonates powerfully in the room after the resounding speech, "when we reject a single story, we regain a form of paradise."