

3.5 Danger of a Single Story

Educator Objective

Educators will reflect on their individual cultures, histories, backgrounds, and values in order to recognize that they, as well as their students, have a unique perspective and that each perspective should be valued and celebrated.

Overview

Stories have power. Expressing that power is not just the ability to tell a story about another person, but to make it a fittingly complete story of that person. People are often referred to with a single story—a diagnosis. For example, the “tall kid,” “poor kid,” etc., but people are multi-storied. People’s identities are not just *one thing*. If people hold a single story in their minds for entire groups of people, they run the risk of having a distorted view of the multi-layered people who they meet. Only recognizing one story leads to the stereotyping of groups, as if what is true about one must be true about all. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) stated, “Stories matter, many stories matter.” This pertinent message can inspire students to seek out the many stories of the people who they meet. No longer are students distant individuals forced into the same space every day; each student is a person with a context that others can understand. Each student’s uniqueness should be recognized.

Materials/Set-Up

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story Transcript (available for download through the *AVID Culturally Relevant Teaching* webpage on MyAVID) [The full talk is available at www.ted.com/talks.]

Instructional Steps

- Choose one of the following six-word stories
 - Chance encounter turns enemies into friends.
 - His first kiss was her last.
 - Two funerals: one hated, another beloved.
- Prompt educators to write with a three-minute quickwrite on the selected six-word story: “What is the story about? Fill in the blanks.”
- Ask educators to turn to their elbow partner and share their quickwrite. Warn them that this could potentially be emotional and that they should be respectful of various emotions.
- Ask for several volunteers to share out their quickwrite to the larger group.
- Direct educators to talk for five minutes in a group of four to six: “How do your experiences *frame*, or shape, the way that you view the world?” (This discussion will work best if educators have previously completed the activities on perspective and framing.)

- Have educators form small groups and provide each group with a transcript of Chimamanda Adichie’s TEDTalk.
- In their groups, direct educators to popcorn read the entire transcript or selected portions of it aloud.
- Give educators time to talk in small groups about the following questions:
 - How does the “Danger of a Single Story” translate into our classrooms?
 - How do we ensure that every voice is validated and celebrated in our classrooms?
- Direct each group to brainstorm ideas about how we can ensure that every voice is validated and celebrated in our classrooms.
- Each small group then creates a poster with all of the ideas that they generated.
- Have each group share the poster that they created with the larger group.
- Display the posters in the room and allow time for a gallery walk.
- Produce a list of all the ideas that the educators generated and pass out to all in attendance as a reminder of how we can all work to create a culturally relevant classroom.

Extension

- To extend learning, chart key words as educators use them, and have them write a summary using as many of the words as possible.

