

## The Danger of A Single Story

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a famous Nigerian author and overall storyteller. She gives a very powerful and engaging speech as she shares stories from her life as a child, to her present experiences. Adichie gives the audience clear examples of how a single story can affect someone's preconceived notions on a group of people. This speech is an important one to hear because it educates the audience on why a single story can be almost detrimental to a people and the development of connectivity between different peoples. She shares many stories with the audience, as she is a storyteller. Although stories should connect us, sometimes they can separate us in ways we can't comprehend until they happen. Her goal at the end of this speech is to inform us on how a single story can, indeed, be dangerous. Through different stories of experience, she gives us an inside look at the very danger she is speaking about and opens up a world of questions and possible answers.

In this paper I will go over several elements of the speech that stood out to me and helped me get a firm hold on the lesson behind it. Through her stories from university, giving other speeches, and life experience in the world in general. It is

important that we, as the intelligent life forms we are, understand that one story is not the definitive factor of a person's life and that it can be inappropriate to apply a single story to a person when we haven't had the opportunity to learn of their personal background. We can all learn something that we haven't fully understood yet through this speech and I think everyone who can should watch it to better understand what makes a people unique and deserving of the same storytelling

She starts off by addressing the audience as a storyteller—Adichie is well known for works, such as *We Should All Be Feminists*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Purple Hibiscus*. She then goes on to share several stories under twenty minutes. She starts off slowly, with a relatively short story that helps understand the dangers of a single story and throughout the speech seems to only use stories to convey her message. By the end of the speech she is spewing story after story, which then lets the audience in on the idea that we **do** need more than just one story to work from. These stories went on to support her argument that a single story can shape the way a people are looked at, and can put every person in the shoes of one person. Specifically, she speaks about what sparked her interest in storytelling as a career. From a very young age she would read stories consisting of people who ate apples, lived in snow, and spoke about the weather. These stories planted seeds of creativity in her head and she then found herself composing her own stories. However, some key elements remained the same: the

characters ate apples, they experienced life in the snow, and spoke of the rare and beautiful weather. Adichie goes on to say that she was reading and writing of things she had no experience with, leading her to the understanding that people like her could not or did not exist in literature. Unlike the characters in her story she lived in the beautiful sun, eating mangoes, and never speaking of the weather because there was no need to talk about what was already known to happen. If we look at this we see that a single story influenced her from a young age to write of people she had know idea of. Another example of this that we see is when her professor told her that her story's character was "not authentically African, simply because they drove cars, had food, could use stoves." Not all Africans are living in poverty, therefore there cannot be a single definitive way that they all live. This later helps her educate the audience on the **power** of a single story. These experiences show that she didn't face the same hardships that people may think she and other Africans faced, she clearly showed that people quickly reduced her to the single story of the poverty stricken African. She states, "The power of a single story is not only the ability to tell a story, but to make that story the definitive story of a person or people. Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again and that is what they become." She says this because she found herself in Mexico and understood everyone there to be "immigrants" because Mexicans are now notoriously known to be immigrants. She was ashamed of herself because she "bought into the single story of Mexicans". One other story she tells to reinforce the argument is when the university student came up to her and said, "it is such a shame that Nigerian men

were physical abusers like the father in your story.” The single story created a norm for Nigerian men that couldn’t have been further from the truth because not every young American man is a serial killer like Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*. She used that as retaliation, telling the boy, “I just read a book called *American Psycho*, and it is such a shame that all young American men are serial killers.

I am not proud to admit that I am one to often fall into the trap of a single story, but this is something that takes time to unlearn and finally put behind you. It takes understanding that the world is a complex place made up of complex people and that you must keep an open mind. This will never be easy to shake as new discoveries are being made, things may seem normal to some and at the same time can be detrimental to others. This is why we need to constantly fight for and make change. It is unfortunate, but I often find myself wondering who a person is and what their background is and then confining them to their appearance and how they express themselves without actually knowing them.

Like I said, I am not proud of doing this because it affects my perception of the person and whether or not I would like to interact with or get to know them. I do, however, feel that I am getting better because I have begun to see people as they wish to be perceived, and I allow myself to be open toward others and their stories. This speech opened my eyes to the idea of the danger behind a single story that I never even knew

existed. I now realize I have to allow that person to make themselves known to me. If we want to connect with others and share different stories, we must share **all** stories. We cannot fail the people who are different from us because we are all special and deserve to be seen, heard, and known. So don't be a danger and fall into a single story's trap, let that person be known to you and develop a brand new story to tell.

#### Works Cited

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

<https://www.chimamanda.com/about-chimamanda/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimamanda\\_Ngozi\\_Adichie#Books](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimamanda_Ngozi_Adichie#Books) (to view a small collection of her books and a brief overview of Adichie)