



Name: _____

Class: 8C 8V

The Danger of a Single Story (Abridged) By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So, the year I turned eight, we got a new house boy. His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday, we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. **Their poverty was my single story of them.**

→ Why do you think it was so easy for Adichie to create a single story of poverty about Fide's family?

Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well...and assumed that I did not know how to use a stove. What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me...My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. **In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way...no possibility of a connection as human equals.**

→ According to this passage, why could single stories prevent us from connecting with other people?

So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate's response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people,



fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family...

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about **power**. There is a word, an Igbo word (Igbo, pronounced Ee-bow, is a language spoken in Nigeria), that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is “nkali.” It's a noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another.” **Like our economic and political worlds, stories too, are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.**

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.

→ Why does it take power to make a story the definitive, single story of a person?

...The truth is that I had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family. But I also had grandfathers who died in refugee camps. My cousin Polle died because he could not get adequate healthcare. One of my closest friends, Okoloma, died in a plane crash because our fire trucks did not have water. I grew up under repressive military governments that devalued education, so that sometimes, my parents were not paid their salaries.

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. **The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.**

→ Do you **agree, disagree, or both agree and disagree** with these last two bolded sentences. Explain your thinking in at least two complete sentences. You can use examples from your own life to back up your claim.

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Flip this paper over! Your final question is on the back!

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