



Exceptional Educational Journeys



ELA Lesson Plan

# THE DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY

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# PREFACE

This 4-part guide is for teachers who want to help students understand the importance of considering different perspectives in expository or persuasive writing.

Through author **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story,"** students will learn how stereotypes grow from one-sided views of people and places. Through **Sherman Alexie's "Superman and Me,"** students will hear the perspective of someone who has experienced stereotyping based on a one-sided narrative. Students will craft their own definitions of stereotypes, make connections between the texts and themselves, and ultimately analyze a current issue in an essay that will encompass multiple perspectives.

*This lesson is aligned to Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History, Social Studies, and Technical Subjects. The three-day plan touches on both Reading and Writing standards for grades 9-12.*

## RESOURCES

[Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story | TED Talk](#)

[Short Story: Sherman Alexie's "Superman and Me"](#)

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leandra Beabout taught high school English at Concord High School in Elkhart, IN, before transitioning to a brief career in newspaper journalism. She now splits her time between teaching online English classes, freelance writing, and content marketing. She attended middle school in Slovakia, taught English in Uganda, and most recently returned from a trip to Croatia. She travels and writes as often as possible.

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## CONTACT US

### General Information

*For group leaders or schools:*  
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# LESSON OVERVIEW

## DAY 1

Time	Lesson Steps	Materials
5 min.	<p><b>1. Bell Ringer activity:</b> As students enter the classroom, instruct them to get out a piece of paper. Students will do a timed quick write (3-5 minutes) prompted by three questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is a stereotype?</li><li>• Are stereotypes true?</li><li>• Have you ever felt judged because of your gender, age, race, or appearance?</li></ul>	Paper, writing utensils, whiteboard/ projection screen for questions
5 min.	<p><b>2. Ask students to share some of their answers.</b> Create a list of ideas and generate a class definition of “stereotype.”</p>	
20 min.	<p><b>3. Pass out student worksheet.</b> Encourage students to take notes and fill in answers as they watch. Watch TED talk.</p>	Projector and speakers (or SMARTboard) to play film  IEP/504 Plan accommodation: Teacher may provide printed transcripts of the talk.  Student Worksheet - Located in the back of the packet.
5 min.	<p><b>4. After students have had a moment to complete the worksheet, review answers together.</b> Write this on the board: “The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.”</p>	
10 min.	<p><b>5. Discussion:</b></p> <p>First, ask students to turn to a partner and talk about “single story” labels or incidents they have experienced personally. (~3 minutes)</p> <p>Next, discuss these “single story” experiences as a class. How is being judged for a single story harmful? How have we told single stories about others.</p>	

Time	Lesson Steps	Materials
10 min.	<p><b>6. Read Sherman Alexie’s “Superman and Me”</b></p> <p>Explain that this short story highlights one more account of someone defying a single story. Instruct students to pay attention to stereotypes and single stories in the text. (The story may be read aloud in pairs, read aloud as a class, or read individually by students.)</p>	<a href="#">Copies of “Superman and Me”</a>
5 min.	<p><b>7. Exit Slip:</b> Instruct students to get out a scrap of paper/sticky note and respond: “What is the danger of only having a single story about a place or person?” Students can turn in the paper or put the sticky note on the board as they leave the room.</p>	paper/sticky notes

## DAY 2

Time	Lesson Steps	Materials
5 min.	<p><b>1. Bell Ringer activity:</b> As students enter the classroom, instruct them to get out a piece of paper. Students will do a timed quick write (3-5 minutes) prompted by two questions. A sample answer to the second question can be provided on the board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a stereotype? (This is a repeat of yesterday’s first question, but students can now draw on Adichie’s TED Talk.)</li> <li>• What “single stories” have others created about you (or could create about you)?</li> </ul>	Paper, writing utensils, whiteboard/ projection screen for prompts
10 min.	<p><b>2. Small group analysis:</b> Divide students into groups of 3-5. Instruct them to skim or re-read “Superman and Me” and discuss the single story (stereotype) Alexie defies in the text. What alternative perspective(s) does he offer?</p> <p>Students must identify specific sections in the text to support their conclusions during the discussion. Emphasize the importance of citing textual evidence throughout the class.</p>	<a href="#">Copies of “Superman and Me”</a>

Time	Lesson Steps	Materials
20-25 min.	<p><b>3. Whole class analysis and discussion:</b> Ask each group to share their conclusions and text citations.</p> <p>Groups will likely choose the same quotes. That's fine, but encourage them to explain why each quote is important, teasing out inferences as you go. For instance, if students cite "A smart Indian is a dangerous person, widely feared and ridiculed by Indians and non-Indians alike," allow discussion for why this might be the case.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Students might make personal connections during this discussion. Encourage respectful listening if individuals want to share. The following quote can be a powerful prompt for students who feel they live one "story" at home, another in school:</p> <p>"We were Indian children who were expected to be stupid. Most lived up to those expectations inside the classroom but subverted them on the outside."</p>	<p>Projector and speakers (or SMARTboard) to play film</p> <p>IEP/504 Plan accommodation: Teacher may provide printed transcripts of the talk.</p>
5 min.	<p><b>4. Introduce the essay assignment to students.</b> Explain that they will write an in-class essay relating "The Danger of a Single Story" to a current issue or event. They will need a minimum of two sources for this essay. Day 3 will be spent researching in the library. Day 4 will be spent writing the essay in class.</p>	
10 min.	<p><b>5. With a partner, students will brainstorm a list of possible current issues or events for their essays.</b> The teacher should be available for questions and topic approval during this process.</p>	scrap paper for brainstorming
< 5 min.	<p><b>6. Exit Slip:</b> Instruct students to get out a scrap of paper/sticky note and write their top two ideas for their essay topics. They will leave this in class for approval.</p>	paper/sticky notes

## DAY 3

This entire class period will be spent in the library or computer lab.

Return students' exit slips from yesterday, with topic approval or a suggested topic alternative.

Students will find a minimum of two strong sources, each representing a different side of the issue. Students will mark a minimum of two quotes per source to use in the essay. Instruct students to bring their sources to class tomorrow.

## DAY 4

### In-class Essay Assignment

*Prepare these essay instructions on the board, screen, or slips of paper:*

“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.” -Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Write an essay describing the “danger of a single story” in relation to your approved topic. Use a minimum of two sources and four total quotes. Here is your suggested outline:

Introduction: Describe your topic, its importance, and why it is sometimes misunderstood.

Story 1: Describe one side of this issue. Use at least two quotes.

Story 2: Describe another side of the issue. Use at least two quotes.

Conclusion: Why is this issue important? Why are multiple perspectives important? How does seeing two or more sides help you understand it in a clearer way?

## Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story | TED Talk

### 1. List two stereotypes mentioned in this TED talk:

Adichie mentions several stereotypes about Africa. She also mentions her own stereotype about Fide, her family's impoverished houseboy. She mentions her college roommates assumption that Adichie would listen to "tribal music."

### 2. What is 'nkali'?

Power. "To be greater than another."

3. According to Adichie, "The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

### 4. What is the danger of a single story?

When we hear only one story about a person or place, we risk misunderstanding. We assume this is the only story -- when in fact, our lives are made up of many overlapping stories.



# STUDENT WORKSHEET

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## DAY 1 ACTIVITY

[Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story | TED Talk](#)

1. List two stereotypes mentioned in this TED talk:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is 'nkali'?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. According to Adichie, "The problem with stereotypes is not that they are \_\_\_\_\_, but that they are \_\_\_\_\_. They make one story become the \_\_\_\_\_ story."

4. What is the danger of a single story?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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