Using **“The Danger of the Single Story”** as a Lens to Examine Literature, Media, and Social Interactions

“When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise” (Adiche).

Few texts have impacted my teaching and learning as much as Chimamanda Adiche’s 2009 TED talk **“The Danger of a Single Story”**. The language Adichie offers to discuss stories (how they have power, how they can limit us) has changed the narrative I share with my students when we talk about stories we read, stories we watch, and stories we tell. Teaching in a mostly white, suburban college town, it is often difficult to talk about racism, sexism, and other -isms with my students-- they often claim it doesn’t exist, or that they don’t see it. However, using Adiche’s work as a starting point has been the key to opening the door for discussion, writing, and reflection about what it means to be “other” and to have a single story.

Additional resources:
- **The True Story of the Three Little Pigs** Jon Scieszka (children’s book)
- **American Born Chinese** Gene Yang (graphic novel)
- “Kung Fooled” (5 minute youtube video--examines stereotypes of Asian-Americans & ends with a funny subversion of the entire skit, reinforcing how single stories can be limiting.)
- **Rabbit Proof Fence** film
- **Whale Rider** film
- **Thug Notes** --a “thug” summarizes and analyzes classic texts
- Construction workers analyze “Wrecking Ball”

**After Night Falls: Considering Humanity’s Resistance & Resilience**

**Essential Questions:**
- How can we challenge the single story by considering the elements of resistance in the holocaust or in genocides rather than merely seeing people as victims?
- Can we forgive people for committing crimes against humanity? What are the limits and possibilities of forgiveness?
- How/why do we separate ourselves from the "other" in wars, in religions, or in political situations? Conversely, what turns an enemy or "other" into a human just like us?

As you read Elie Weisel’s **Night**, one other text, and watch the film **Rabbit Proof Fence**, please keep these questions in mind. There will be two major assignments for this month: first, you will teach, along with your group, about your choice novel; secondly, you will compose an in-class essay on these three texts in the context of the above questions. There are other minor assignments as well.

“The Holocaust illustrates the consequences of prejudice, racism and stereotyping on a society. It forces us to examine the responsibilities of citizenship and confront the powerful ramifications of indifference and inaction.” ~Tim Holden, PA Congressman
Post-Colonial African Literature & The Danger of a Single Story

For your final project in this unit, you will create something demonstrating your understanding of the concept of what Chimamanda Adiche calls the single story. Remember in her speech when she says: “The single story creates stereotypes. The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” Your job in this project will be to look beyond the single story—either through analysis, satire, fiction, research, or some other format.

Requirements:
- you must have a writing element (if you write a fiction story, create a vlog, or choose to write satire, you must write a justification of how you addressed the issue of a single story);
- you must address the issue of a single story in your work;
- there must be an element of sharing/presenting with the class;
- Formal rules of writing apply to this project—craft your work, avoid weak verbs, and consult the formal writing guidelines handout.

Project options:
- A traditional literary analysis where you examine *Things Fall Apart* and/or your choice novel and answer the question: How does this text enforce and/or subvert the concept of the single story? (~1000-1500 words)
- A media analysis of a film, TV show, or commercial, where you analyze how it enforces or subverts the concept of a single story. (~1000-1500 words)
- A satirical essay/video of “How to write about ________.” This option must include a rationale/justification attached to it that relates your piece to the main ideas of this unit. (each part of this ~500-750 words)
- A fictional piece where you write “The true story of ________.” This option must include a rationale/justification attached to it that relates your piece to the main ideas of this unit. (each part of this ~500-750 words)

*“It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power”* (Adiche).


Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerrillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial' and 'Tribal'. Note that 'People' means Africans who are not black, while 'The People' means black Africans.

Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannas.
and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular.

Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls, and eat things no other humans eat. Do not mention rice and beef and wheat; monkey-brain is an African's cuisine of choice, along with goat, snake, worms and grubs and all manner of game meat. Make sure you show that you are able to eat such food without flinching, and describe how you learn to enjoy it—because you care.

Taboo subjects: ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved), references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola fever or female genital mutilation.

Throughout the book, adopt a sotto voice, in conspiracy with the reader, and a sad I-expected-so-much tone. Establish early on that your liberalism is impeccable, and mention near the beginning how much you love Africa, how you fell in love with the place and can't live without her. Africa is the only continent you can love—take advantage of this. If you are a man, thrust yourself into her warm virgin forests. If you are a woman, treat Africa as a man who wears a bush jacket and disappears off into the sunset. Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed.

Your African characters may include naked warriors, loyal servants, diviners and seers, ancient wise men living in hermitic splendour. Or corrupt politicians, inept polygamous travel-guides, and prostitutes you have slept with. The Loyal Servant always behaves like a seven-year-old and needs a firm hand; he is scared of snakes, good with children, and always involving you in his complex domestic dramas. The Ancient Wise Man always comes from a noble tribe (not the money-grubbing tribes like the Gikuyu, the Igbo or the Shona). He has rheumy eyes and is close to the Earth. The Modern African is a fat man who steals and works in the visa office, refusing to give work permits to qualified Westerners who really care about Africa. He is an enemy of development, always using his government job to make it difficult for pragmatic and good-hearted expats to set up NGOs or Legal Conservation Areas. Or he is an Oxford-educated intellectual turned serial-killing politician in a Savile Row suit. He is a cannibal who likes Cristal champagne, and his mother is a rich witch-doctor who really runs the country.

Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment. Moans are good. She must never say anything about herself in the dialogue except to speak of her (unspeakable) suffering. Also be sure to include a warm and motherly woman who has a rolling laugh and who is concerned for your well-being. Just call her Mama. Her children are all delinquent. These characters should buzz around your main hero, making him look good. Your hero can teach them, bathe them, feed them; he carries lots of babies and has seen Death. Your hero is you (if reportage), or a beautiful, tragic international celebrity/aristocrat who now cares for animals (if fiction).

Bad Western characters may include children of Tory cabinet ministers, Afrikaners, employees of the World Bank. When talking about exploitation by foreigners mention the Chinese and Indian traders. Blame the West for Africa's situation. But do not be too specific.

Broad brushstrokes throughout are good. Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do in mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause.
Describe, in detail, naked breasts (young, old, conservative, recently raped, big, small) or mutilated genitals, or enhanced genitals. Or any kind of genitals. And dead bodies. Or, better, naked dead bodies. And especially rotting naked dead bodies. Remember, any work you submit in which people look filthy and miserable will be referred to as the ‘real Africa’, and you want that on your dust jacket. Do not feel queasy about this: you are trying to help them to get aid from the West. The biggest taboo in writing about Africa is to describe or show dead or suffering white people.

Animals, on the other hand, must be treated as well rounded, complex characters. They speak (or grunt while tossing their manes proudly) and have names, ambitions and desires. They also have family values: see how lions teach their children? Elephants are caring, and are good feminists or dignified patriarchs. So are gorillas. Never, ever say anything negative about an elephant or a gorilla. Elephants may attack people's property, destroy their crops, and even kill them. Always take the side of the elephant. Big cats have public-school accents. Hyenas are fair game and have vaguely Middle Eastern accents. Any short Africans who live in the jungle or desert may be portrayed with good humour (unless they are in conflict with an elephant or chimpanzee or gorilla, in which case they are pure evil).

After celebrity activists and aid workers, conservationists are Africa's most important people. Do not offend them. You need them to invite you to their 30,000-acre game ranch or 'conservation area', and this is the only way you will get to interview the celebrity activist. Often a book cover with a heroic-looking conservationist on it works magic for sales. Anybody white, tanned and wearing khaki who once had a pet antelope or a farm is a conservationist, one who is preserving Africa's rich heritage. When interviewing him or her, do not ask how much funding they have; do not ask how much money they make off their game. Never ask how much they pay their employees.

Readers will be put off if you don't mention the light in Africa. And sunsets, the African sunset is a must. It is always big and red. There is always a big sky. Wide empty spaces and game are critical—Africa is the Land of Wide Empty Spaces. When writing about the plight of flora and fauna, make sure you mention that Africa is overpopulated. When your main character is in a desert or jungle living with indigenous peoples (anybody short) it is okay to mention that Africa has been severely depopulated by Aids and War (use caps).

You'll also need a nightclub called Tropicana, where mercenaries, evil nouveau riche Africans and prostitutes and guerrillas and expats hang out.

Always end your book with Nelson Mandela saying something about rainbows or renaissances. Because you care.

For more resources, or to find this electronically,

http://tinyurl.com/hoffman-ncte14

OR, scan the QR code--->

5 minutes presentation from roundtable