**The Danger of a Single Story**

**by**

**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

*A note to IGCSE students: When using this resource, make sure that you have your EdExcel Anthology to hand. A range of coloured pens or highlighters would also be useful for annotating the anthology extract.*

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| **1. Background and Context**  Employee badge with solid fill  A picture containing person, indoor, wearing  Description automatically generatedChimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria in Africa. Her father was a professor and her mother was a university registrar. Adichie studied at university in both Nigeria and the United States. In 2005 her first novel, **Purple Hibiscus** (2003), won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Best First Book. Now an established and successful novelist, she also teaches creative writing and divides her time between Nigeria and the United States.  This text is a speech which Adichie delivered at a TED conference. TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design, is an organisation which posts short talks online with the slogan *ideas worth spreading*. |

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| **2. Summary of the text**  Map  Description automatically generatedBlog with solid fill  In this speech, Adichie talks about her own identity as a Nigerian living in the USA but also in more general terms about how we see ourselves and how we see other people. She says that often we make judgements about people knowing only one thing about them and this can lead to prejudice. She refers to the power of stories to make her point and argues that we need to be aware that everyone has more than one story to sum up who they are. Rejecting the idea of the single story can lead us to a paradise where prejudice does not exist. |

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| **5. Understand Key Vocabulary**  Teacher with solid fill  line 7 was obligated felt that she must  line 14 impressionable and vulnerable easily influenced and easily hurt  line 20 a mental shift a change of view  line 21 my perception of literature the way that I saw books and stories  line 22 kinky hair curly hair  line 25 the unintended consequence a result that was not meant to happen  line 28 conventional doing the usual, expected things  line 29 as was the norm as was usual  line 31 house boy a boy who helps with housework  line 37 raffia dried palm leaves  line 38 it had not occurred to me I had never thought  line 49 her default position the view she took without thinking  line 50 patronizing superior  line 51 catastrophe disaster  line 57 incomprehensible hard to understand  line 64 immigration people leaving their home country  line 64 synonymous meaning the same thing  line 65 fleecing taking all the money from  line 70 immersed involved in, concerned with  line 71 abject hopeless or dejected  line 75 to dispossess and to malign to exclude or to criticize people |

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| **4. Analyse the language and structure of the text**  Thought with solid fill   1. Look closely at the first line of the text. Which words and phrases tell you that this is a spoken rather than a written text?   2. The first story Adichie tells is about her childhood reading and writing. How does she use contrast in lines 3-13 to show the differences between what she read about in books and what she saw and experienced in Nigeria where she lived? How did the audience react at this point in the Youtube video you watched of the talk?  3. Which two words in line 14 (starting *What this demonstrates…* ) show the power of stories for children?  4. Why was the discovery of African writers so important for Adichie? Why does she repeat the phrase *people like me* in line 21 and line 26? What does she mean when she says that she went through *a mental shift in my perception of literature* (lines 20-21)?  5. The second story or anecdote Adichie tells involves Fide who worked for her family in Nigeria as a house-boy (lines 28-41). Why was she surprised to see the basket made by Fide’s brother? What does Adichie mean by, *Their poverty was my single story of them*? (lines 40-41)  6. The third story Adichie tells is about her university roommate (lines 42-53). What three things did Adichie’s roommate do which showed that she had a *single story* about Africa? How does Adichie use humour here to make a point?  7. Why do you think that line 48, *She assumed I did not know how to use a stove* is foregrounded by being placed in a one-sentence paragraph? How might this affect the spoken delivery of the speech? Similarly, why do you think there is a colon (:) in front of *a single story of catastrophe* (line 51)? How would this affect the delivery of the speech?  8. Find a triple (or rule of three) in lines 51-53 (starting, *In this single story)* and comment on its meaning and effects.  9. How does Adichie explain in lines 54-60 that she comes to understand her roommate’s response to her? What link does she make between her roommate’s response to Africans and the way she, as a child, viewed Fide’s family?  10. In the fourth story Adichie tells she describes a trip to Mexico (lines 61-72). Why does she say that this story makes her feel *guilty* and *overwhelmed with shame*? What *single story* had she believed about Mexican people?  11. How does Adichie use repetition, contrast (or opposites) and sentence lengths in lines 73-77 to make her point about the importance of stories?  12. The extract ends with a reference to Alice Walker, an African American writer, reading stories with her family to reach *a kind of paradise* (line 81). What does Adichie say, in the last sentence of the extract, that we need to do in order to reach *a kind of paradise*? What does she mean by this? |

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| **7. Consolidate your understanding**  Building Brick Wall with solid fill  The stories used in the text are listed below. Add brief notes in each box to explain what each story shows. The first is done for you.   |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s single story of her childhood reading and writing**  Adichie’s early writing reflected her early reading of British and American books. As a child she believed that books should be about white children in foreign countries and could not be set in Nigeria where she lived. This was her ‘single story’ about literature. |  |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s single story of Fide’s family** |  |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s roommate’s single story of Africa** |  |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s single story of Mexico** |  |  | | --- | | **The story of Alice Walker reading a story to her family** | |

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| **8. Answer a practice examination question: IGCSE EdExcel English Language, question 4**  Signature with solid fill  **How does the writer use language and structure to explore ideas about identity? You should support your answer with close reference to the extract, including brief quotations (12 marks)**  Note:   * Three pages are allowed for your answer in the examination * Remember to consider LANGUAGE and STRUCTURE in your answer * Write about WHAT the writer says about identity and HOW she says it * Use some of the sentence starters below if you wish   **Ten Sentence Starters:**  In this speech, Adichie explores ideas about who we are and how we see others…  The talk is structured around five anecdotes or stories which…  Adichie describes the contrast between her early reading and writing and …  The discovery of African books caused Adichie to …  The story of Fide and his family…  Adichie uses humour to add power to the story of her American roommate…  Adichie admits that she too is guilty of …  At the end of the extract, Adichie uses powerful language to …  The reference to Alice Walker…  The message of the text… |

**The Danger of a Single Story: Suggested Answers**

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| **6. Analyse the language and structure of the text**  Thought with solid fill   1. There is a personal tone at the start as Adichie introduces herself with *I’m a* *storyteller*. The next sentence begins with *And* which creates a conversational tone. 2. As a child Adichie wrote about the things she had read about in British and American books. Her stories featured children who ate apples, played in the snow and talked about the weather. This contrasted with Nigeria where children ate mangoes and the sun was always shining so no one talked about the weather. At this point in the TED talk Adichie’s audience laughed at the contrast. Adichie’s single story about what should be in books came from what she had read rather than what she experienced. 3. Adichie says that we are all *impressionable* (easily influenced) and *vulnerable* (easily hurt) to the power of stories, particularly as children. She relates this to her own experience as when young she did not believe that stories could ever contain characters like her. 4. Discovering African writers was important to Adichie because for the first time she saw African people like herself feature in stories. She repeats the phrase *people like me* to emphasise the point because this was so important to her as a writer. It brought a *mental shift* or change in view in the way she saw literature because she realized that she could write about things she knew. 5. When she was young Adichie was told that Fide was from a very poor family. She was surprised to see a beautiful raffia basket that his brother had made because she assumed that no one in such a poor family could be so talented and creative. When she says, *Their poverty was my single story of them* she means that she defined the family as simply poor and never expected anything else from them. 6. Adichie’s roommate was surprised that she could speak English, expected her to listen to African tribal music, and assumed that she would not know how to use a stove. The Africa she imagined was a place of wars, poverty and disease. Adichie uses humour by describing her roommate’s disappointment when she produced a tape of Mariah Carey rather than tribal music. The contrast highlights her roommate’s misconceptions about African people and shows that she had only a *single story* of Africa. 7. The line *She assumed I did not know how to use a stove* is foregrounded for emphasis by being placed on a line on its own. The reader would probably pause before and after the sentence to show the roommate’s implicit ignorance and prejudice. Similarly, the colon before *a single story of catastrophe* makes the reader pause to emphasise the point that the roommate, like many other people, assumes that Africa is a place where disasters happen and aid is needed. 8. The triple is the repetition of the negative phrase, *no possibility of…*. The repetition of *no* shows that the roommate sees Africa in purely negative terms and can see no connection between her life as an American and the life of an African person like Adichie. The negative reflects the closed mind of the roommate who can see Africa as no more than a *single story*. 9. After living in the US for several years and seeing how Africa is presented, Adichie comes to understand that her roommate had only a *single story* of Africa because Africa is so often presented in negative terms as a place with problems of poverty, war and disease. She realises that her roommate had made assumptions about Africa in the same way that she had made assumptions about Fide’s family and seen nothing apart from their poverty. 10. Before going to Mexico Adichie had heard debates about immigration which characterised Mexicans as people who try to enter the USA illegally to gain free benefits. When she arrives, she sees Mexicans leading normal lives and feels she has misjudged them by believing a *single story*. 11. The words *story* and *stories* are repeated multiple times to emphasise their importance. Contrasting positive and negative terms such as *dispossess/ empower* and *break/ repair* are used to show the power of stories. Short, blunt sentences such as *Stories matter* make the point hit home. 12. At the end of the extract Adichie tells the story of another writer, Alice Walker, telling stories to her family which allowed them to regain *a kind of paradise*. Adichie relates this to her theme by saying that when we reject the *single story* and understand that there is always more than one story of a person or a place, we too can reach *paradise* – and maybe by this she means a world without prejudice. |

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| **7. Consolidate your understanding**  Building Brick Wall with solid fill   |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s single story of her childhood reading and writing**  Adichie’s early writing reflected her early reading of British and American books. As a child she believed that books should be about white children in foreign countries and could not be set in Nigeria where she lived. This was her *single story* about literature. |  |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s single story of Fide’s family**  As a child Adichie knew that Fide, the houseboy, came from a poor family. When she visited his house and saw a beautiful raffia basket made by his brother, she realised that *their poverty was my single story of them* and that actually, as well as being poor, they were creative and talented. |  |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s roommate’s single story of Africa**  The roommate assumed that as an African, Adichie would not speak English, would like tribal music and would not know how to use a stove. She had a *single story* of Africa as a place of poverty, wars and disease. |  |  | | --- | | **Adichie’s single story of Mexico**  When Adichie visited Mexico, she was surprised to see Mexicans going about their daily business and realised that she had been influenced by the news in the US which presented Mexicans as illegal immigrants. She sees that she has stereotyped Mexicans in the same way that she has been stereotyped as an African. |  |  | | --- | | **The story of Alice Walker reading a story to her family**  Alice Walker shares a story with her family to lead them to *a kind of* *paradise* and Adichie says that if we reject single stories and understand that every person and place has more than one story, we too may reach a paradise where prejudice does not exist. | |

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| **8. Answer a practice examination question: IGCSE EdExcel English Language, question 4**  Signature with solid fill  **If you are studying by yourself, check your answer against the simplified mark scheme below**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Mark** | **AO2: How the writer uses language and structure to achieve effects** | | 1-2  3-4  5-7  8-10  11-12 | **Limited** understanding of language and structure; few references to the text  **Some** understanding and comment on how the writer uses language and structure; some references to the text  **Clear** understanding with explanation of how the writer uses language and structure to achieve effects; apt and relevant references to the text  **Thorough** understanding and exploration of how the writer uses language and structure to achieve effects; detailed references support the points made  **Perceptive** understanding and analysis of how the writer uses language and structure to achieve effects; references skilfully selected to clarify points made | |