

# The Danger of a Single Story

## Facilitation Guide



Tool for

**Intellectual Character**



**60 minutes**



**Educator-prep  
K-12 educators**

### Materials

- Watch:  
[Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story](#)
- Class or small group
- Large paper and markers or whiteboard

### Making Connections

Principled Innovation asks us to work with others and recognize the limits of our own knowledge so that we can better understand and tackle the complex issues our communities face.

Connecting Character Assets:

[Truth-seeking](#)  
[Humility](#)

### About this Guide

As truth-seekers, we need to seek out the multitude of stories that shape an individual or community in order to truly understand others. This activity uses a TED Talk by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” to explore this process of perspective taking and building understanding. Participants will reflect on and share their own experiences of learning to see beyond a single story.

**Truth-seeking** is rigorously pursuing the information we need to better understand our world and then using that information in an honest, fair, and empathetic manner.

Truth-seeking is the process of finding and evaluating information that deepens our understanding of the world around us. One way to do this is by seeking out a better understanding of the multidimensional experiences of others, through dialogue, travel, reading, and listening to stories. Deliberately engaging in these activities can help us to avoid falling into stereotypes that feed us with only part of the information we need to make **moral and ethical decisions**. Our understanding of the truth about our world is – and always will be – inescapably partial and personal, and we continually stand in need of other perspectives to complete it. As Principled Innovators, we must then take our new understanding and use it to make moral and ethical decisions and develop creative solutions to challenges.

In this video, the author discusses her own experiences in learning to see beyond a single story in a personal and powerful way. She describes the need to engage actively, patiently, and with humility in the work of **perspective taking** and being open to taking in new information and changing one’s mind. It provides a concrete example of one way to go about seeking the truth and the impact that this process can have.

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### Instructions

**Note:** Steps 1-2 could be done as an individual assignment outside of a group setting. This would allow for more discussion and sharing time in the group setting.

#### 1 Situate

Provide the definition of truth-seeking offered above. Have the group brainstorm what comes to mind when they hear the term “truth-seeking” and what might be some ways to go about doing it. Explain that the video they are going to watch is a TED Talk of a Nigerian author talking about her own experience with truth-seeking.

#### 2 Present

Ask participants to think about and write down their responses to the following questions. Consider using the following prompt to lead into the questions. You may want to model the activity by offering an example from your own experience.

Like the speaker in the video, we have most likely had the experience of having a “single story” in our mind about an individual or group of people. You have probably also had the experience of being the subject of a single story that someone else had in mind. For example, when you first met your college classmates, did you form a picture in your mind about someone’s background or personality that you later realized was wrong or incomplete? Or have you had a student whose classroom behavior made you assume a particular “story” about them or their family, only to later realize that there was a more complicated story going on?

Think about a time you’ve encountered a “single story,” and write down your answers to the following prompts.

- Who was the subject of the single story?
- What were the main elements of the single story?
- Where did your or the other person’s understanding of the single story come from?  
That is, what was the source of the misinformation?
- What made you or the other person realize that the single story was not accurate?
- How did you go about expanding your or the other person’s understanding to give a fuller picture of reality?

#### 3 Share and Discuss

Ask the group to take note of any similarities or themes that emerge from the various stories. Discuss what comes through in the stories as the best way to open one’s mind to multiple perspectives and a fuller understanding of a person or group of people. What context or circumstances best support this **truth-seeking behavior**?

Depending on the size of the learning community, this step could be done as a full group or in small groups like pairs or triads. Time permitting, give each member of the group the opportunity to share their experience of a single story with the others.