* **Synthesis Activity**

(Danger of a Single Story, TOTC, Les Mis)

*As you are listening to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” annotate your text for any and all evidence regarding identity.*

**Excerpt from “The Danger of a Single Story”**

A person is in charge of shaping his identity.

Loss of identity weakens a person.

Identity can be altered by outside forces.

Identity is fixed and cannot be altered by outside forces.

I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story." I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader,and what I read were British and American children's books.

00:38I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples,

01:03(Laughter)

01:05and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out.

01:09(Laughter)

01:11Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

01:25My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was.

01:35(Laughter)

01:36And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.

01:43What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story,particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.

02:14But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.

02:35Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

02:58I 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.

03:42Then 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.

04:12Years 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 was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey.

04:41(Laughter)

04:44She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.

04:48What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. 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 feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.

05:20I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity, and in many ways I think of myself now as African. Although I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country, the most recent example being my otherwise wonderful flight from Lagos two days ago, in which there was an announcement on the Virgin flight about the charity work in "India, Africa and other countries."

05:54(Laughter)

05:55So, 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.

06:34This single story of Africa ultimately comes, I think, from Western literature. Now, here is a quote from the writing of a London merchant called John Locke, who sailed to west Africa in 1561 and kept a fascinating account of his voyage. After referring to the black Africans as "beasts who have no houses," he writes, "They are also people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts."

07:04Now, I've laughed every time I've read this. And one must admire the imagination of John Locke. But what is important about his writing is that it represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are "half devil, half child."

07:31And so, I began to realize that my American roommate must have throughout her life seen and heard different versions of this single story, as had a professor, who once told me that my novel was not "authentically African." Now, I was quite willing to contend that there were a number of things wrong with the novel, that it had failed in a number of places, but I had not quite imagined that it had failed at achieving something called African authenticity. In fact, I did not know what African authenticity was.The professor told me that my characters were too much like him, an educated and middle-class man.My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they were not authentically African.

08:20But I must quickly add that I too am just as guilty in the question of the single story. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. The political climate in the U.S. at the time was tense, and there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleecing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

08:53I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.

09:25So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

09:36It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, 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.

10:11Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly." Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story.Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.

10:51I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him that I had just read a novel called "American Psycho" --

11:07(Laughter)

11:09-- and that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers.

11:14(Laughter)

11:18(Applause)

11:24Now, obviously I said this in a fit of mild irritation.

11:27(Laughter)

11:29But it would never have occurred to me to think that just because I had read a novel in which a character was a serial killer that he was somehow representative of all Americans. This is not because I am a better person than that student, but because of America's cultural and economic power, I had many stories of America. I had read Tyler and Updike and Steinbeck and Gaitskill. I did not have a single story of America.

11:54When I learned, some years ago, that writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful, I began to think about how I could invent horrible things my parents had done to me.

12:07(Laughter)

12:09But the truth is that I had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.

12:16But 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. And so, as a child, I saw jam disappear from the breakfast table, then margarine disappeared, then bread became too expensive, then milk became rationed. And most of all, a kind of normalized political fear invaded our lives.

12:56All 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.

13:24Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria.But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.

13:44I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

14:08So what if before my Mexican trip, I had followed the immigration debate from both sides, the U.S. and the Mexican? What if my mother had told us that Fide's family was poor and hardworking? What if we had an African television network that broadcast diverse African stories all over the world? What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories."

14:32What if my roommate knew about my Nigerian publisher, Muhtar Bakare, a remarkable man who left his job in a bank to follow his dream and start a publishing house? Now, the conventional wisdom was that Nigerians don't read literature. He disagreed. He felt that people who could read, would read, if you made literature affordable and available to them.

14:55Shortly after he published my first novel, I went to a TV station in Lagos to do an interview, and a woman who worked there as a messenger came up to me and said, "I really liked your novel. I didn't like the ending. Now, you must write a sequel, and this is what will happen ..."

15:10(Laughter)

15:13And she went on to tell me what to write in the sequel. I was not only charmed, I was very moved. Here was a woman, part of the ordinary masses of Nigerians, who were not supposed to be readers. She had not only read the book, but she had taken ownership of it and felt justified in telling me what to write in the sequel.

15:32Now, what if my roommate knew about my friend Fumi Onda, a fearless woman who hosts a TV show in Lagos, and is determined to tell the stories that we prefer to forget? What if my roommate knew about the heart procedure that was performed in the Lagos hospital last week? What if my roommate knew about contemporary Nigerian music, talented people singing in English and Pidgin, and Igbo and Yoruba and Ijo, mixing influences from Jay-Z to Fela to Bob Marley to their grandfathers.

16:05What if my roommate knew about the female lawyer who recently went to court in Nigeria to challenge a ridiculous law that required women to get their husband's consent before renewing their passports?What if my roommate knew about Nollywood, full of innovative people making films despite great technical odds, films so popular that they really are the best example of Nigerians consuming what they produce? What if my roommate knew about my wonderfully ambitious hair braider, who has just started her own business selling hair extensions? Or about the millions of other Nigerians who start businesses and sometimes fail, but continue to nurse ambition?

16:46Every time I am home I am confronted with the usual sources of irritation for most Nigerians: our failed infrastructure, our failed government, but also by the incredible resilience of people who thrive despite the government, rather than because of it. I teach writing workshops in Lagos every summer, and it is amazing to me how many people apply, how many people are eager to write, to tell stories.

17:13My Nigerian publisher and I have just started a non-profit called Farafina Trust, and we have big dreams of building libraries and refurbishing libraries that already exist and providing books for state schools that don't have anything in their libraries, and also of organizing lots and lots of workshops, in reading and writing, for all the people who are eager to tell our many stories.

17:35Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

17:55The American writer Alice Walker wrote this about her Southern relatives who had moved to the North.She introduced them to a book about the Southern life that they had left behind. "They sat around, reading the book themselves, listening to me read the book, and a kind of paradise was regained."

18:16I would like to end with this thought: That 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.

18:29Thank you.

18:30(Applause)

*As you are reading the excerpt from A Tale of Two Cities primarily describing Dr. Manette, annotate your text for any and all evidence regarding identity.*

**Excerpt from *A Tale of Two Cities***

**Then, as the darkness closed in, the daughter laid her head down on the hard ground close at the father’s side, and watched him. The darkness deepened and deepened, and they both lay quiet, until a light gleamed through the chinks in the wall.**

**Mr. Lorry and Monsieur Defarge had made all ready for the journey, and had brought with them, besides travelling cloaks and wrappers, bread and meat, wine, and hot coffee. Monsieur Defarge put this provender, and the lamp he carried, on the shoemaker’s bench (there was nothing else in the garret but a pallet bed), and he and Mr. Lorry roused the captive, and assisted him to his feet.**

**No human intelligence could have read the mysteries of his mind, in the scared blank wonder of his face. Whether he knew what had happened, whether he recollected what they had said to him, whether he knew that he was free, were questions which no sagacity could have solved. They tried speaking to him; but, he was so confused, and so very slow to answer, that they took fright at his bewilderment, and agreed for the time to tamper with him no more. He had a wild, lost manner of occasionally clasping his head in his hands, that had not been seen in him before; yet, he had some pleasure in the mere sound of his daughter’s voice, and invariably turned to it when she spoke.**

**In the submissive way of one long accustomed to obey under coercion, he ate and drank what they gave him to eat and drink, and put on the cloak and other wrappings, that they gave him to wear. He readily responded to his daughter’s drawing her arm through his, and took—and kept—her hand in both his own.**

**They began to descend; Monsieur Defarge going first with the lamp, Mr. Lorry closing the little procession. They had not traversed many steps of the long main staircase when he stopped, and stared at the roof and round at the wails.**

**“You remember the place, my father? You remember coming up here?”**

**“What did you say?”**

**But, before she could repeat the question, he murmured an answer as if she had repeated it.**

**“Remember? No, I don’t remember. It was so very long ago.”**

**That he had no recollection whatever of his having been brought from his prison to that house, was apparent to them. They heard him mutter, “One Hundred and Five, North Tower;” and when he looked about him, it evidently was for the strong fortress-walls which had long encompassed him. On their reaching the courtyard he instinctively altered his tread, as being in expectation of a drawbridge; and when there was no drawbridge, and he saw the carriage waiting in the open street, he dropped his daughter’s hand and clasped his head again.**

*As you are reading the excerpt from “Les Mis,” annotate your text for any and all evidence regarding identity.*

**Excerpt from “Les Miserables”**

The convicts sing in time with the rhythmic pulls on the  
rope -  
  
 **CONVICTS** Ha - Ha -  
  
 **CONVICT 3** Ha - Ha -  
 Look down, look down  
 Don't look them in the eye   
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 You're here until you die.  
  
 **CONVICT 4** No God above  
 And Hell alone below  
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 There's twenty years to go.  
  
The camera RISES UP to find JAVERT, the officer in charge   
of the convict workforce, looking on, his face rain-lashed   
and expressionless. He stands above the men on the top of  
the dock, as lines of convicts labour beneath him on the  
steep steps of the dock wall.  
  
Behind Javert, through the storm rain we glimpse a forest of   
half-built ships, their ribbed frames like great skeletons in   
the mist.   
  
FOREGROUND convicts are at work on another ship that is  
almost completed, labouring in the crashing spray.  
  
 **CONVICT 2** I've done no wrong  
 Sweet Jesus, hear my prayer!  
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 Sweet Jesus doesn't care.  
  
 **CONVICT 5** I know she'll wait  
 I know that she'll be true -  
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 They've all forgotten you.   
  
 **CONVICT 1** When I get free  
 You won't see me  
 Here for dust!  
 **3.**  
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 Don't look'em in the eye.  
  
 **CONVICT 3** How long, O Lord  
 Before you let me die?  
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 You'll always be a slave.  
 Look down, look down  
 You're standing in your grave.  
  
With a last great heave the lines of convicts haul the   
damaged ship onto the slipway.   
  
CRACK! The stern flagpole of the ship snaps in a vicious gust   
of wind and crashes down into the shallow water near Valjean.   
Javert sees and points his stick at Valjean in silent   
command. Valjean stares back for a beat, defying him. Then he   
drops down into the seething water and re-emerges with the   
great mast in his hands, held over his head. His head breaks   
water with his bitter gaze still on Javert, as he throws the   
mast ashore in a deliberate display of strength.   
  
Javert nods to the guards, and they begin to form the  
chained men into lines to return to their prison. The storm  
is passing now, blown by the driving wind.  
  
Javert approaches Jean Valjean.   
  
 **JAVERT** Now Prisoner 24601.   
 Your time is up  
 And your parole's begun.  
 You know what that means?   
  
 **VALJEAN** Yes. It means I'm free.  
  
 **JAVERT** No! It means you get   
 Your yellow ticket-of-leave.  
  
He hands Valjean a folded yellow paper.   
  
 **JAVERT** This badge of shame  
 You'll show it everywhere.  
 It warns you're a dangerous man.   
  
 **VALJEAN** I stole a loaf of bread  
 My sister's child was close to  
 death  
 And we were starving.  
 **4.**  
  
 **JAVERT** You will starve again  
 Unless you learn the meaning of  
 the law.  
  
 **VALJEAN** I know the meaning of those  
 nineteen years  
 A slave of the law!  
  
 **JAVERT** Five years for what you did,  
 The rest because you tried to  
 run.  
 Yes, 24601!  
  
 **VALJEAN** My name is Jean Valjean!  
  
 **JAVERT** And I'm Javert!  
 Do not forget my name.  
 Do not forget me -  
 **24601!**  
 He strides away to command the lines of convicts as they're  
 marched away. Valjean walks away, hardly able to take in   
 that he is free at last.  
  
 The convicts sing as he goes.   
  
 **CONVICTS** Look down, look down  
 You'll always be a slave.  
 Look down, look down  
 You're standing in your grave.

Synthesis Assignment

Read the provided sources (including any introductory information) carefully. Then, on chart paper synthesize the provided texts by pulling text evidence from each selection that defends, challenges, or qualifies (whichever one your teacher has given you) the claim that one’s identity is created by external forces.