

Activity Overview: This activity connects a fascinating Ted Talk from award-winning author Chimamanda Ngozi with a reflective exercise on propaganda and nationalism in the context of WWII. In **Part 1**, students watch Ngozi's Ted Talk and respond to and discuss reflection questions. Teachers can end there or use it as a jumping off point for a follow up exercise on propaganda included below.

In her Ted Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Ngozi talks about the danger of only believing in and listening to narrow descriptions of people, places, and events. After reflecting on the Ted Talk with some debrief questions, students will be assigned to find examples of "single stories" in WWII era nationalist propaganda.

The goal of this activity is for students to gain skills in media literacy by learning to recognize bias and one-dimensional narratives, but also weigh the use of such messages during times of national crisis.

Learning Outcomes:

- Are prepared to discuss issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to listen and ask questions with compassion, open mindedness, and respectfulness.
- Use valid information sources to make informed decisions.
- Develop and practice habits of civic engagement and responsible informed citizenship.
- Acknowledge that perceptions are influenced by various socio-cultural aspects. Develop understanding of difference, cultivating empathy, and building cross-cultural competencies.

Information for Instructor:

Link to Ted Talk: Danger of a Single Story

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda ngozi adichie the danger of a single story/c](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/c)

Assignment included: "Nationalism, WWII, and Propaganda"

Time should be taken to discuss the complexity of people and recognize problems that can arise by reducing them to a single idea. It is also appropriate to address how these lessons are complicated by national emergencies and the need for unity in a time of crisis. This activity and discussion can be adapted to the time allowed within the given unit.

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Instructions:

Part 1

Watch “Danger of a Single Story” either in class or for homework. Students may be given questions before watching the Ted Talk.

Discussion Questions:

- What is a single story?
- What is the danger of a single story?
- What are single stories people have about you?
- What do people miss when they write a single story about you?
- What single stories might exist between communities? Nations? Ethnicities?

Part 2

In part 2, students will examine examples of propaganda from WWII and discuss how propaganda and nationalism tell a single story.

Before starting the assignment (and to make sure that students have a firm grasp on the concept of propaganda) students should respond to these questions as a class.

- What is propaganda and how can we recognize it? What examples come to mind?
- How is it used? Is it ever justifiable or necessary?

The class might give examples of propaganda that served harmful purposes, such as Nazi propaganda. To expand their perception of propaganda, the teacher may show students a picture of Rosie the Riveter and explain that this is an example of propaganda that was used for a cause that is generally accepted as good.

Next, students will complete the assignment: either in class or for homework, students will find their own five examples of WWII era propaganda. The teacher can decide if students should bring their examples to class and talk through the discussion questions in groups, or if they should submit their examples and their written responses directly to the teacher. After students have their five examples, they should respond to the questions below (either orally or in written format)

- How does propaganda contribute to nationalism?
- How is nationalism creating a single story?
- Can nationalism and the complexity of individual citizen stories coexist?
- Can a nation be unified and not nationalistic?

Applications: This exercise could be adapted to most any modern day conflict or national crisis. The Vietnam War, for example, provides opportunity to consider propaganda used by both sides. In a Government or Contemporary Issues course, it would be useful to examine political messaging of lobby groups to help develop media literacy and critical thinking. It is helpful when dealing with hot political topics to establish parameters of the discussion and focus on critique of the media techniques, recognizing attempts to appeal to our emotions or be selective with information, rather than the political issue itself.

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Assignment Step 1: Watch Chimamanda Ngozi's Ted Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story." Come to class prepared to discuss reflection questions and main takeaways in class.

Discussion questions:

- According to Ngozi, what is a single story? What is the danger of a single story?
- What are single stories people have about you?
- What do people miss when they write a single story about you?
- What single stories might exist between communities? Nations? Ethnicities?

Assignment Step 2: Examine examples of propaganda from WWII and discuss how propaganda and nationalism tell a single story.

Before finding your own examples, think through and respond to these questions with your class:

- What is propaganda and how can we recognize it? What examples come to mind?
- How is it used? Is it justifiable or necessary?

Next, you will find your own 5 examples of WWII era propaganda. After you have found your examples, respond to the questions below.

- Describe the examples that you found. Do you see any single stories being used? What are they? Are there any generalizations being used?
- How does propaganda contribute to nationalism?
- How is nationalism creating a single story?
- Can nationalism and the complexity of individual citizen stories coexist?