Refugees “Crisis”

The danger of a single story

1. Listen to Chimamanda Adichie’s TED talk up to 9:39 and take notes on the examples given.

<https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript>

Example #1: Little Chimamanda used to read American and British children’s books about white and blue-eyed characters. As a consequence, she started writing her own stories about white children only. She thought that books always had to deal with foreign little girls, by their very nature.

Example #2: Chimamanda’s family had a house boy from a very poor family. When Chimamanda once visited Fide’s family, she was surprised that Fide’s brother had made a beautifully patterned basket. It had never occurred to Chimamanda to see Fide’s family as anything else but poor.

Example #3: At the age of 19, Chimamanda went to the U.S. to go to university. Her American roommate expected her to be poor and to listen to tribal music because Chimamanda came from Africa: She did not expect Chimamanda to be similar to herself.

Example #4: A professor told Chimamanda that her stories were not “authentically African” because her characters were middle-class people and too much like him.

Example #5: When she was in Mexico, Chimamanda was surprised that the people were just like her, living their lives, smoking and laughing. She had expected Mexicans to be just like they were always shown on the media: abject immigrants.

This 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.” (self-fulfilling prophecy)

Explain in your words what Adichie calls the “danger of a single story.”

1. Listen to the second half of Adichie’s TED talk (9:39 up to 18:40) or read the transcript https://ssw.unc.edu/files/TheDangerofaSingleStoryTranscript.pdf, starting at p. 3, next-to-last paragraph, with the sentence: “It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power.”
2. Choose one or more of Chimimanda Adichie’s statements and comment on them from your own point of view, taking into consideration what you know about the media representation of refugees.
* It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power.
* The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.
* 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.