

## **Challenging the Single Story of Migrants**

**Directions:** Read the brief overview below and then discuss the questions about the following two excerpts from Chimamanda Adichie's presentation "The Danger of a Single Story." Record your answers the space provided.

In her 2009 TED Talk, Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie described the effects that labels can have on how we think about ourselves and others. In her presentation, she warned about the danger of having a "single story" about an individual, group, or place, because "when you show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, that is what they become."

## The Principle of Nkali

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo [a language spoken in Nigeria] 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.

1. How are stories about migrants—people moving from place to place—told? Who tells them? When are they told? How many stories are told?

2. How are stories about immigrants who have settled in the United States told? Who tells them? When are they told? How many stories are told? Facing History and Ourselves

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED video (filmed July 2009, posted October 2009), 18:49, accessed March 28, 2016.

## **Power and the Single Story**

Power 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 . . . <sup>2</sup>

3. Where does Sonia Nazario start Enrique's story?

4. How would Enrique's story be different if Nazario had started it on top of the train in Chiapas? In Nuevo Laredo on the United States–Mexico border? Following Enrique's arrest in Florida?

5. Where do you think "single stories" of people and places come from? How can we seek what Nigerian author Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories"?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED video (filmed July 2009, posted October 2009), 18:49, accessed March 28, 2016.