Handout

Countering the Single Story

Directions: Choose one community you belong to or that has personal significance for you. This can be your school, neighborhood, ethnic or religious community, extended family, peer or friend group, or volunteer or extracurricular organization. Then complete Steps 1, 2, and 3.

Step 1:

In the space below, create an identity chart for your community. Write the name of your community in the circle. At the ends of the arrows, write words or phrases that describe your community.

Step 2:

Once you've chosen a community, think about the following questions:

1. What is a single story commonly told about your community?

2. What effect does that single story have on the way others think about the community? About how its members think about themselves?

3. Return to the identity chart you created in Step 1. How does it compare to the single story?

4. If you were putting together a more representative story of your community, who should have input on the story?

5. Whose voices should be included?

6. What types of media and artifacts should be included?

7. What types of professionals could help you put together a representative story? (Think about historians, librarians, teachers, etc.)

8. What other individuals and community members could you consult?

9. How can you ensure that important voices and perspectives aren't left out from the story you tell?

10. What if the individuals and community members you consult share stories that conflict with each other? Can that conflict be included in your narrative?

11. What might change if others learned a new, more complex and diverse story of your community? What difference might it make for the community today? What difference might it make for the future?

12. Return to your identity chart. Are there any changes or additions you would make to it now?

Step 3:

Write a paragraph that responds to most of the prompts above. Be sure to explain how your story will offer a more just and equitable narrative of your community.