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Reflection in the First Year Seminar: Moving beyond the Single Story

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Reflection in the First Year Seminar: Moving beyond the Single Story

This series of in-class and at home reflective assignments was designed for the Liberal Arts: Social Science and Humanities First Year Seminar. Drawing on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story" and the chapter "Citizens of the World" from Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit*, students begin to develop an understanding of the role of the liberal arts in moving towards a more complex perception of cultural differences across the world. They also reflect on their own biases and experiences during the first semester. Students write the first reflection after discussing the TED talk and the chapter in class at the beginning of the semester, and they return to some of the questions posed by these texts at the end of the first semester. This allows for a greater sense of continuity and coherence, as students reflect on their own learning experience over the course of a semester, deepening their thinking about important questions related to the role of the liberal arts in examining global issues from multiple perspectives. The main objectives of the assignment are

- To strengthen integrative learning as students reflect on connections between their own learning and life experiences
- To strengthen global learning as students begin to understand global events from multiple and often divergent perspectives
- To encourage students to reflect on the ways in which their own lives intersect with those of others
- To highlight the crucial role of the liberal arts in deconstructing single stories and questioning simplistic constructions of binary opposites and superficial labeling of others

The two main assignments are formal reflections, one at the beginning and one at the end of the semester (10% each). These assignments are supported by in-class reflection and discussion.

Assignment Prompts

In-class Writing Response to Adichie's "Danger of a Single Story"

(https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

- Adichie begins her talk by referring to the literature that shaped her ideas of the world as a child, telling a story of the world as a place inhabited by blue-

eyed, blond-haired people drinking ginger beer. What kind of stories did you grow up with (literature, TV, movies, stories your family or friends told you)? Were any of them “single stories,” giving you a one-dimensional, stereotypical idea of a person or group of people?

- Can you think of a person or a group of people about whom you—or American society at large—might still just have a single story? Where do those stories come from, and why do they persevere? Can you think of ways to change that?

Formal Reflection 1 (due week 4)

Write a 400-word reflection on the purpose of a liberal arts education and your place in it. Make sure to provide illustrations and make significant connections (between personal experience, readings, class discussions, global events). Refer to at least one of the texts or TED talks we discussed in class (consider especially Martha Nussbaum's "Citizens of the World" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story"), giving concrete examples of the contents of a liberal arts education that you think may help you in your personal development and benefit society at large. Consider the following questions:

- What kinds of knowledge and skills does a liberal arts education provide?
- What do you believe to be the most important things people need to learn to become active members of a democratic society and good global citizens?
- How do you expect the liberal arts to influence you as a person?

Final Formal Reflection (due week 12; students receive the prompt at the beginning of the semester)

Write a 400-word reflection on your first semester at LaGuardia. Make sure to provide concrete examples and illustrations and make significant connections (between personal experience, readings, class discussions, global events). Respond to the following prompt:

- As you experience your first semester, think about the diversity of the people and stories you encounter. What did you learn about people's different backgrounds and values? Have any of the conversations/lessons/texts in your first semester changed your view on an issue from a single story into multiple stories? In other words, in what ways has your first semester at LaGuardia deepened your understanding of the lives of others?