



Unicorns v. Rhinos

The Danger of a Single Story

LESSON PLAN

The purpose of this lesson is to explore how having a limited perspective complicates our capacity for critical empathy and collaborative problem solving. This lesson allows students to work together to negotiate for their side of the story in a mock council meeting and then debrief how their stories connect to the essential elements of dignity and modern politics.

Objective

Students will engage in conflict negotiation primed with a single story to explore how having a limited perspective complicates the capacity for critical empathy and collaborative problem solving.

Time: Up to two 45 minute sessions

Materials: Narratives for each point of view are attached below the Educator Instructions.



Preparation

Teachers prime students that the more seriously they take this activity the better it will go. Outline that the objective of today is to try and come to a decision about a local dispute, which they will learn more about once they have their narratives.

Divide students into two groups. Tell groups that once dismissed to work they will be doing the following tasks prior to the debate:

- Reading their side's narrative (which are attached below)
 - Give each side their narrative but do not allow them access to the other narrative.
 - The goal is to make sure each side only sees their story

[Unicorn Narrative](#)

[Rhino Narrative](#)

- Deciding who will be speaking at the council meeting (can be as many as they want)
- Generating their negotiation points
 - One side is clearly written to be the one with “legal rights” so be prepared that the Unicorns may argue that the issue is non-negotiable

Teacher note: I have run this exercise many times and it goes differently every time. If a student discovers the “trick”, which is that the negotiations are set up to fail, go with it rather than shutting down. Be flexible to the students in front of you. This can still be fruitful, even if students uncover the goal before the reveal at the end.

Work Time

Give the two groups 25 minutes to read their narrative, choose who will be speaking on behalf of their group, and create their negotiation plan

Ideally, let one group go into the hall or another space in your school so they do not over hear each other. If you are facilitating over Zoom students from each group can go into a break out space.



Town Council Meeting

The groups come back together into the classroom. Each side gets 5 minutes to explain their case and explain their demands in an opening negotiation. The opposing side remains quiet as the other group shares.

Each group then gets 10 minutes to discuss the other side's opening negotiation and decide if they want to agree to the terms or continue to negotiate.

- ❑ If they want to continue to negotiate, they have to come up with a rebuttal to the other side and articulate their demands.
- ❑ If students are able to create a plan, have leaders from both sides agree and shake on it. The more likely scenario is that they will not be able to reach an agreement and each side will be dug into their own perspective.

Teacher note: You can choose to stop the activity after one round if you are under time constraints. You can replicate this process as many times as you see fit. The complicated nature of negotiation allows for this to be repeated as many times as you feel appropriate for your given group of students.

Debrief and Reflection

Ask students to take a deep breath and re-set/shed their animal identity. Give students a few minutes to make some notes in response to the following question:

- ❑ Why was this activity complicated?
- ❑ How does this activity relate to the concepts of Fairness and Benefit of the Doubt? Define them here if you have not yet.

Debrief their responses and list their ideas on the board or in the chat on Zoom.

After you feel they have explained the key points, expand the discussion and ask them to make connections between this activity and modern social and political conflicts.



Ways to Extend Learning:

- Show students Chimamanda Adichie's TEDTalk [*The Danger of Single Story*](#) and ask students to make connections between her talk and the Unicorn v. Rhino Exercise.
- Have students look for a current example from the news that illustrates a Unicorn v. Rhino type argument.
- Have students write a reflection about the activity connecting this experience to their own lives.
- Encourage students to discuss the activity with their parents or an adult in their lives.