A logo for a tv show

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Library Extension Project

# Activity: Whose Story Gets Told

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Description: Video discussion group; Panel discussion

Target audience: Tweens and teens

Objectives: To decode media messages and help young people recognize the danger of a single story and empower them to make change.

Suggested Text:Participants will understand that portrayals in the media are not necessarily accurate or authentic to what people of various identities and communities experience in real life. This activity invites participants to understand media representation and its influence on how the media depictions impact how real-life individuals are seen and see themselves.

Key term and definition:

**Media representation** is “how media, such as television, film and books, portray certain types of people or communities. There are a number of groups who are underrepresented in most Western media. They include women, people of color, LBGTQA+ people, people with a range of body shapes and types, people of non-Christian religions, and differently-abled people. There has been a steady increase of diversity in media, but progress has been long and slow,” [notes](https://arabfilminstitute.org/what-exactly-is-media-representation-anyway/) the Arab Film & Media Institute. “When a group of people is only ever represented in negative ways, it adversely affects the way others see them, as well as the way they see themselves.”

Description:

This program is an opportunity to learn how media create messages about people of different backgrounds and how those messages can be distorted and inaccurate. It also invites participants to consider how their own ideas about people unlike themselves have been shaped by media representations.

Option 1: The participants come and get some food while watching “The Danger of a Single Story.” Afterward, the participants watch the “Whose Story Gets Told?” videos on the Wonder Media Library website. These videos will prompt discussions, which will be facilitated by library personnel.

Option 2: Panel discussion with folks whose stories have been distorted by media and how that impacts them. These discussions should have a moderator/facilitator who is experienced in creating a safe environment for people to share uncomfortable truths. Make sure moderators understand their role to ensure safety of all by establishing ground rules for discussion.

Materials needed:

Wonder Media videos; device to share videos to a large group, food!

Suggested runtime: 60-75 minutes for a library activity, but manageable as a more streamlined 50-minute classroom activity.

Youth adaptation or extension activity: Whose story gets told **and why**? Dive into the reasons that some stories get told and others are marginalized. This might be media ownership and the drive to make what sells, audience preferences and/or what audiences are accustomed to, and stereotypes around different identities. The discussion might also explore why some media depictions about different kinds of people are told with more nuance and depth than media stories about other kinds of people.

Classroom adaptation: Select videos and keep to a 50-minute time frame. If the students have their own computer devices, then the class can be broken into groups that each watch one video and write a response to share out. If the students do not have their own devices, the facilitator can play 2-3 videos (one at a time) and have students offer their thoughts on the videos.

Adaptation for adults: Speaker/panel discussion program.

Unique Space or Personnel Needs: Moderator (adult adaptation); program room; storyteller (youth).

Resources: [“Danger of a single story”](https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg?si=9rma5R_O88g095xx) TED talk; [Native North Storytelling](https://www.youtube.com/@nativenorthstorytelling8495) (YouTube); [The UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report](https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/hollywood-diversity-report-2023/)

Media Literacy skills at work in this activity:

* Analyze media messages and the systems in which they exist, especially economic and social (this is called media decoding);
* Assess the influence of those messages on audiences’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors;
* Consider how these messages shape how we create media ourselves (social media posts on Tik Tok or Instagram, etc.)
* Consider media representation and how media portrayals can celebrate some characteristics and behaviors and diminish or ignore others.

For background reading, see this [article](https://arabfilminstitute.org/what-exactly-is-media-representation-anyway/) about media representation and what it means for underrepresented and misrepresented groups.

Printables: A Media Decoding guide (see below) to encourage critical questioning of the video content. Also available [here](https://www.projectlooksharp.org/Resources%202/PLS%20Questions%20for%20Analying%20Media%20Poster.pdf).

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