

Unicorns v. Rhinos- The Danger of a Single Story

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.

Activity Description:

1. Teacher primes students regarding buy in- 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. Tell groups that once dismissed to work they will be:
 - a. Reading their collective narrative
 - i. Give each side their narrative but do not allow them access to the other narrative.
 - b. Deciding on who will be arbitrators at the council meeting (can be as many as they want)
 - c. Generating their negotiation points (if they have any- the one side with "legal rights" may open with this issue being non-negotiable)
2. Give groups 25 minutes to read, choose who is speaking and how, and create their negotiation plan
3. Groups come together and each side gets 5 minutes to lay out their case
4. Groups get 10 minutes to re-organize their arguments/negotiation points based on opening negotiations
5. Groups get another 5 minutes to share their negotiation plan
 - a. 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
6. If students are able to create a plan, have leaders from both sides agree and shake on it. More likely, they will not be able to reach an agreement. Stop the activity and ask a representative from each side to read their narrative to the other
7. Allow 10 minutes for students to free write in response to the following question:
 - a. Why was this activity complicated?
8. De-Brief their responses (15 min or so)
9. Ask them to make connections between this activity and modern social and political conflicts
10. A reflective HW assignment and follow up activity/debrief for the next day will allow for deeper processing and connections.

*I would also recommend sharing the lesson with parents so they can use it as a chance to engage their children in meaningful conversation and

Narratives Attached Below

Unicorn Narrative

You are all athletic, beautiful, smart Unicorns, and you inhabit a large majority of Berkeleyville. Your people are routinely referenced as the model for beauty; you are well represented in all forms of Unicorn media and are frequently featured around the globe in advertisements, movies, and TV. You are a good, caring, kind community who cares for each other deeply. You really love being Unicorns. You have a long history in Berkeleyville; you are the majority political force and feel that you govern fairly and with the best interest of your people at heart. You have a very charismatic leader who runs the government; he is revered around the globe for giving amazing speeches and is very persuasive. He has really helped elevate the Unicorn population and you are all very grateful for him. One of the things you love most about him is his ability to articulate what makes Unicorns so special, your beautiful, silky coats and quiet magic. While there have been no recent magical events attributed to Unicorns, your history is full of stories of magical Unicorns who did great deeds, helped others, and spread peace, stable governments, and prosperity. Your magic is regarded in your community as your most important, sacred quality. Recently however, a once small issue has become a matter of huge debate in Berkeleyville, who controls the sparkly watering hole. There is plenty of water available to all the other creatures of Berkeleyville, but a limited amount of sparkly water. This watering hole is located in your portion of the town, and you own the current legal rights. Frankly, you are not quite sure why this is even up for debate because you actually need this water more than others. While you hear all this talk about how it is not medically proven, you know deep in your Unicorn hearts and souls that this water is what makes you special; it is the most important element to your beautiful coats, and more importantly, it is what gives you your magic. The loudest voices in the watering hole debate are from the surrounding Rhino population. These big, loud Rhinos are arguing that they should have equal access to the sparkly watering hole, which is insane. There is plenty of normal water available for the Rhinos, this is a proven fact based on many recent geological surveys. The normal water wells are deep, and connected to many underground aquifers, so there is no fear

that they will run out. Also, it is an obvious fact that since Rhinos are so much bigger than Unicorns, which means if you let their community have open access to your sparkly water they will drain the resource incredibly quickly, and then no one will have sparkly water. This water is essential for your population to have their most treasured quality, magic. The Rhinos do not need the special water, and again, their bulky, giant bodies will drain it. While you have always had decent relations with the Rhinos, there have also been challenges. About 35 years ago, a group of Unicorns were out celebrating national sparkly water day. They were all dressed up in their customary outfits, and peacefully gathering in the center of Berkeleyville to hear the annual address from their leader. One of the younger Unicorns wandered away from the herd and was attacked by a group of young Rhinos. While the Rhinos claimed that they had been scared by one of the nearby Lions, you know this is not true. They were looking for a chance to hurt you, on your most special day, and trampled that baby Unicorn to death on purpose. It is historical fact, backed by many sources, that Rhinos have a long standing jealousy of Unicorn magic, and you know this is what motivated the attack. What makes matters worse, you are so freaking sick of listening to these Rhinos telling you what to do, and always claiming that they have the correct point of view. It is not correct, it is just pro-Rhino. What's worse, they never actually listen to the Unicorn point of view, they just wait for you to stop talking so they can tell you why they are wrong. They just keep saying that we are too focused on our looks, which again, is an obvious indicator of their jealousy. The Unicorns have never done anything to the Rhinos; you have always treated them fine and did not even get revenge after the brutal murder of the baby Unicorn. In order to protect your population, you simply banned all Rhinos from coming into the center of town on your holidays. If they could be trusted, fine. But they cannot. You do not want to hurt the Rhino population, and you know blocking them from the water will not damage them. There was a recent report published in the one of the Berkeleyville newspapers, *The Berkeleyville Review*, proving that the normal water is not damaging.

Rhino Narrative

You are members of the proud, strong, Rhino community. You are large, kind, smart, thoughtful animals who are revered for your intelligence and grace. You love being Rhinos so much, and your large, strong horns are one of your favorite qualities. Rhinos have inhabited the lands of Berkeleyville for thousands of years; your culture's histories tell stories of a time before any other animal shared these lands. You are an organized community who cares so deeply for others and wants a more active role in the local politics of Berkeleyville. While you have representation on the town council, you only have 2 Rhinos out of 20 council seats. Your population is smaller than that of the other animals, but not so much smaller that you should have such a small say in local decisions. Since Rhinos have been in the land the longest, you know deep in your hearts that you have the best interest of Berkeleyville at the center of your community, and want to ensure it is a great place for all the animals. You do not have a single leader who stands out or takes control; you have a few leaders who are strong, however because you do not have a single leader some of the other animals see you as being weak. Recently, a major issue has developed which is causing your community to demand action. Your watering holes are notoriously far away; it take the average Rhino 45 minutes just to get to the watering hole, so you have to spend a lot of time during your day going back and forth for water. The water there has also been of lesser quality and dirty for ages. In the past year there have been numerous instances of illness in the Rhino community and some of your own have died due to Rhino flu, which has been directly connected to the water from your watering holes. A recent report published in *The Berkeleyville Gazette* proved that there is toxic material leaking into your aquifer, which is tainting the water. This is a life or death matter and your community is in turmoil. Rhinos are scared. You used to have access to a much cleaner watering hole near the center of town, however that watering hole was taken over by the incredibly aggressive, invasive population of Unicorns who moved into the area a few hundred years ago. The Unicorns were initially a welcome presence as they brought positive attention to Berkeleyville. However, you Rhinos have grown tired of

their insistence that the world be all Unicorn all the time. You feel strongly that they push a Unicornist agenda at the expense of others, which is not what your ancestors of Berkeleyville would have wanted. It is not fair that they make policy that is pro-Unicorn simply because they think they are better than the other animals. They always talk about being magic, which you know is not true. 25 years ago there was a famous story published in *The Berkeleyville Gazette* that proved that their magic was fiction, not science. Some of the most reputable scientists in the animal community conducted, wrote, and published the study. Not only is the water cleaner, this particular watering hole also holds incredible significance; generations ago this was the birthplace of the original Rhino. Every year you hold a festival in your town celebrating the birth of original Rhino; there is wonderful music, delicious food, and lots of joy. 35 years ago there was a major tragedy on this holiday. As is custom on the Original Rhino birthday, the young Rhinos travel together to visit the original watering hole and pay homage to their ancestors. On their way, your youth were attacked by a pride of Lions. It was a brutal attack that killed 15 young Rhinos; while many of the survivors turned for home, a small group of 6 of the youngest Rhinos ran the other way. Rhinos grow relatively quickly so it can be hard to tell their age, which not many other animals know and is always causing issues within the animal community. The terrified youngsters, traumatized by what had just happened, ran into town and, to add to the tragedy of that day, accidentally trampled a baby Unicorn to death. Since then, the Unicorns have banned any Rhino from coming to the healthy watering hole. The issue of access to clean water is a life or death matter for the Rhino community, and all you want is a fair solution.