

Brittany Carlson

Hello, everyone! My name is Brittany Carlson I'm a junior majoring in psychology and minoring in sociology from Red Oak, IA. As cliché as it sounds, I believe in many things, but one thing that has been weighing heavily on my mind lately is my belief in stories, more specifically, the power of a single story. Stories can be funny, sad, suspenseful, boring. However they may be described, they are that way for a reason. Just as there are many different types of stories you read, each of us have different stories with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, talents, weaknesses, and perspectives that influence our individual story, making it unique.

To give you an idea of what I mean about all of this, I'll tell you a little about my story. Growing up, I moved around quite often due to my dad's job. I have learned that moving frequently has been very beneficial to me in the long run, teaching me how to adapt and adjust fairly quickly to new and different people, situations, and environments. While growing up, I did not understand these "benefits," but as I have grown and matured, I have found this trait to be useful. It was especially handy while I was studying abroad in Bangor, Wales this past Spring semester, but I'll expand more on that experience in a bit. I come from a very close, horribly embarrassing, sometimes funny, Christian family. I have an older brother and a younger sister, making me the victim of the ironically unacknowledged, yet ever apparent "middle child syndrome." Being the forgotten middle child has its perks, however; I didn't get in trouble as often as my siblings because who can punish the child you don't remember? Turns out, this makes me most obedient and therefore favorite of the three, or so I like to think. As my friends

know and all of you can probably tell, I sweat, all the time. I also sing while walking around campus when I think I am alone, I absolutely love giraffes, I can be very weird, and I enjoy getting to know others better, but that's enough personal information for now!

As I mentioned before, I traveled thousands of miles away from home to study in the beautiful country of Wales. While abroad, I was introduced to an entirely different way of life in a different university, culture, and country. In one of my classes we watched a TED talk entitled, "The Danger of a Single Story." The talk was given by, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an African novelist. Now, we all tend to ask at some point in our academic career, "When would I ever use this information later on in life," but this was different. For me, the timing of this information could not have been better. It was towards the very beginning of the semester and my time in Wales. Chimamanda spoke of her experience studying in America and how her roommate among others had only given her credit for what little they knew or thought they knew about Africans. She was taken aback by just how naïve they were. After class, I went back to my room to process and reflect on her words. I realized that if I wanted to get the most of my experience in Wales, I needed to be completely open-minded and accepting of others. What good would it do to judge others or rely solely on stereotypes in order to decide what to do and who to interact with?

I now realize that if I hadn't been in the class, or had skipped that lecture, my time abroad would have been much different and overall much less enjoyable. I would not have gotten to know or meet the people I now consider life-long friends, I wouldn't have gone to

some of the places I visited, and I would not have done many of the things I did if it weren't for something as miniscule as attending a lecture. My story would be completely different.

What I want all of you to take back from me standing up here and talking for entirely too long is that all of us in this room and across campus are different. We each have a story unique to us which is what makes this ensemble, campus, and world so great. We come from different backgrounds, are involved in several different activities and organizations, but we are all here for the same reasons (hopefully): to grow as musicians, create beautiful music, challenge ourselves and each other, and come together to express and become something much bigger than any one of us. This ensemble would truly not be the same if any one of us were not part of it, yet not one of us is more important than another. I encourage you to get to know one another, truly listen and learn from each other, and appreciate that the single story you may take from someone's appearance is only one page in the book of their life. I encourage you to take advantage of our upcoming retreat to connect with one another or at least say hello and introduce yourself. Be open-minded and accepting of the people in this room (and everywhere you go for that matter). Make the most of our time together and I promise your experience will be enhanced even if it is the tiniest bit more. This choir is so much more than a group of voices; it is a place to express yourself artistically, to meet and make friends, a way to relieve stress, come together, and create the Central A Cappella Choir's story.

My name is Brittany Carlson and I believe in the power of a story.