

Dealing with Different  
By Ewa Olaniyan, grade 5

New day, new school. It was my first time being a student in St. Joseph, and I was not having a good day.

It's dad's fault. He's the one who got a job here and took us from our comfortable house in Lagos, Nigeria, to Calgary, Canada. Sure, we now have a bigger house than we had before, and other cool stuff, but I missed our comfortable home. I miss my friends and family, my cousins and my teachers. To top all my problems, I had to move back two grades. You see, back in Nigeria, I was in JS2 (Junior Secondary, that's the Nigerian equivalent of 8th grade), but here, because I was 11 going to 12, I had to go back to 6th grade. I complained to mom last night.

"But *moooom*, it's unfair!"

"I know *omo mi* ( my child in Yoruba ) but it's the law."

"Ayotide doesn't have to start a new school." I muttered, but then stopped. It wasn't fair to say that, my little brother was only 4 years old. My older sister, Arike, rolled her eyes and sighed.

" *Aburo mi* (younger sister) Darasimi, stop complaining. Here in Canada, we're safer, we have a clean slate and may I add, no 3-4 hours of traffic everyday!" She said laughing. "No robbers breaking in. Think of that instead of complaining."

Annoyed, I stomped to my room. I knew Arike was right. Here, at least I had my own room. But I missed everything we had in Nigeria.

My mind went back to this morning, I had practiced talking in front of the mirror. But that, I guessed, wasn't enough. So I practiced again while I made my way through the halls of St Joseph.

“Hi, my name is Darasimi Ayodeji. I’m 11 and a half years old. I’m from...” I stopped. My voice in Nigeria is normal, but here, I felt as if it held a fake accent. I tried a Texas accent, then an Irish accent. After 18 different accents, I finally decided on a British one. Mum would be furious if she ever found out I wasn’t being proud of my “Nigerian heritage” but I don’t mind.

It’s because of Nigeria's imperfections that we’re here anyway.

I had finally found my classroom, and stared at the teacher. I ducked down. I had just realized a very embarrassing fact, we were almost the same height. I had always been taller than my peers (dad claims it is the drop of Senegalese blood in our veins) but this was a new low, or high, or... Ugh. I couldn’t go up there and talk, the kids in my class would make fun of me, I thought. Unfortunately, teachers can’t read minds.

“Quiet down class! Now, we have a new student today from Nigeria. Her name is Damasimi Aedaji. Damasimi, please come introduce yourself!”

He said my name wrong.

Sometimes I’m grateful I’m Nigerian. Like when Nigeria got gold in my 2 favorite sports during the olympics, or when I learned that Nigeria's Nollywood makes the second most movies in the world, even more than Hollywood! But today wasn't one of those days.

I dragged my feet to the front of the room. I wanted to hunch over, but that would be a wrong first impression. I looked around the room. I saw only 2 other people who were black like me. 3 in a class of 25, meaning we made up exactly 12% of the classroom population, I thought.

I don’t even remember what I said. I just remember the teacher telling me something about someone being my school guide. The rest of the class was a daze as well. I just counted to my

favorite number, 15, about 10 times before the bell rang. That was like counting to 150, which, if I was...

I was interrupted by a girl. I think I remember her from my classroom. "Hi, I'm Chetana! We met in the homeroom! I was hoping you would want to be a part of my group for the L.A assignment?" She spoke faster than anyone I had met before. At the time, I was sure her voice was faster than the speed of light, but that couldn't be possible, I thought to myself, since light goes at exactly 186,282 miles per second. As we approached the cafeteria, that's where another problem hit.

There wasn't anyone to sit with at lunch. I didn't want to eat in the bathroom, but it seemed like there wasn't any other choice, unless I said yes to Chetana. The bathroom could hold up to 500,000 bacterias by square inch! My jollof rice didn't deserve such contamination..Sure her name means "intelligence", but names (and looks I added in my mind) can be deceiving, right? Grudgingly (but thankfully at the same time) I said yes.

As I suspected, Chetana invited me to sit with her friends. I overheard one of them talking about making her science project with playdoh. Automatically my mouth opened and I muttered "Play Doh was originally used to clean walls." Chetana dropped her fork. Her friends stared at me from head to toe.

I know the way I think is peculiar. People usually think in pictures or words, in sounds or emotions. I believe I am the only person in the world who thinks in facts. Most people would say that means I'm a verbal thinker, but that isn't necessarily true, because facts are not just words..... excuse me, I digress.

The rest of my classes were a breeze. Now that I'm alone in my room, all I want to do is sleep. I lay face down in my bed, put my head on my pillow, sigh, and fall asleep.

The weeks flew by, and I continued working on my presentation with Chetana, and we thought of a perfect topic. I even thought I was fitting in until lunch one day. I was talking with Chetana and we were finishing our project. When a kid walked past our table. She stopped and pointed at my hair. Then she screamed “Her hair defies gravity!” I felt my head hurt. A boy was pulling my hair, I guess trying to make sure it was real. I couldn’t take it anymore. In the choice of flight, fight, or freeze, I chose to run. I hid inside the bathroom stall, which wasn’t my best choice because, hello, germs? Chetana knocked on the door.

“Go away.” I said. With my voice cracking, it was impossible to hold my British accent.

“Those guys are mean.” Chetana replied. I could imagine her shaking her head. I opened the door and she pulled me up from the ground. I smiled. She was a good friend. Chetana whispered something in my ear. I nodded and smiled. We had a plan.

“Chetana and Darasimi’s group, you’re up.”

I rubbed my hands together. I could feel my heart beating against my rib cage vigorously. I took deep breaths and forced myself to calm down. I recited facts in my head to help me focus. Chetana seemed nervous too. She kept alternating between looking at my face and yanking her hair. We started our presentation.

It might have taken me 12 hours and 38 minutes to get from Nigeria to Canada.” I started. I was wringing my hands behind my back, and my heartbeat was going so fast, I was sure I had Tachycardia right then and there, but I knew that couldn’t be possible because....

I jerked my mind back to the present and continued. “I might have hair that defies gravity and might be taller than most students, but I’m human. If all we see is color, hair, size, style, then we forget that the real beauty is on the inside. It doesn’t matter if we’re big or small, if we have

hazel colored hair or green eyes. We're all human. Differences are just that, differences. What makes us unique is inside. Our talents and abilities. Our personalities and so on."

Chetana smiled, and went into detail about her story and how her family moved from India to Canada when she was six. When we finished our presentation, every kid in the classroom had a tear in their eye.

When I got back home. I hugged my brother and led him to his room. When I approached my bed, I remembered my first month in a Canadian school. I remembered the valuable lessons I learned from this experience, and how many more I was sure to learn. I remembered how everyone thinks differently, how everyone speaks differently and eats different foods. But I remembered what I remembered above all. Everyone is human, and everyone's unique, but what makes us unique is our personalities, talents, abilities, etcetera.