

NEWTON THEATRE COMPANY,
NEWTON NORTH HIGH SCHOOL,

NEWTON SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL,
AND NEWTON YOUTH SERVICES PRESENT:

The Monologue Project:

Voices of Color

JOIN US FOR AN EVENING OF ORIGINAL THEATRE PIECES
WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS OF COLOR.

HEAR THEIR STORIES.

SUNDAY, JUNE 4TH, 4-6PM

NEWTON CULTURAL CENTER AUDITORIUM

SECOND FLOOR, NEWTON CITY HALL

FREE ADMISSION

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Winter – Anisha Aziz

Oh how much I pity you, you're a child that doesn't adore their own reflection.

A drug addict that's addicted to looking like a mannequin.

Your kryptonite is a lighter skin tone.

Why inspire to have straight hair when your curls are popping.

Why inspire to be them when they tan to be you.

Oh how much I pity you, may the seasons change while you age.

A Skin-Deep View – Imani Bibuild

Picture two girls standing in a glass box side by side. Girl A is tall, skinny, pale skin, with long brown hair and freckles. Girl B short, smooth brown skin and kinky short hair. Now which one do you think is prettier? I realize this scenario may sound bizarre, but do you want to know a secret? This happened to me. This changed the way I saw myself, myself in relation to the girls around me and my view of the entire world.

My best friend at the time, Anya who was 10 years old and I, only 8, thought we were models and that one day we would be famous together, so for practice we would go to the mall and pose in the windows of different stores with the mannequins and see people's reactions. So one day we were at the arsenal mall and we decided to go into the windows of the gap and pose with the mannequins. Just then, two old white women passed by and stopped in front of us. And of course they chuckled at the sight of these two little girls thinking they were grown women. One of the women said "They are too cute!" The next one pointed right at Anya and said, "I pick that one." The first woman happily agreed with her friend, and through her endless chortling said "Yes she is BEAUTIFUL! She looks like such a model." After they'd had their fill of our entertainment, I had wondered why these women had pointed at her, looked at her, preferred her. What did she have that I didn't? What did they see that I couldn't? I questioned if I was seen as beautiful? What is beautiful? And Who got to define beauty? But at 8 years old, the opinion of others can influence how you see yourself and whether you can love what you see or grow to despise it.

What these women could not know was that comments like these coupled with the subliminal messages from media built up over the years like pennies in a jar. And now those pennies fall into that jar like the endless tears from her cheeks every time she takes a look in the mirror. What they could not see is the beating, hitting, prying she does at her skin; praying it's just a surface layer she can pick off. They don't understand that their comments are microaggressions and like a magnifying glass they zoom so far in on her imperfections that she no longer sees a person, but rather the distortion the stereotypes they label her as. And like little shards of broken glass impossible to put back together into something beautiful, she lives with this broken image of herself. She can't accept the words "Beautiful, intelligent, important" for herself. All she believes is "ugly, disgusting and insignificant." These words only harden her and marr what little self-esteem she has left. It took me seven years later to finally become comfortable with who I am. Seven. Even though I've come a long way, there's still a ways I have to go. But if you were these women, if you could define beauty. If you were one the one to decide what makes a model, which girl do you pick? Or do you pick at all?

Becoming Black Girl – Imani Bibuild

Black girl, Black girl

Never quite understood

Always alone, never apart

Black girl, Black girl

She's too dark, not dark enough

She's too skinny, not skinny enough

Black girl, Black girl

Why do you wear hair like that?

Why are you always angry?

Don't you know racism is over?

Black girl, Black girl

You will never be good enough

This world is not yours for the taking

Black girl, Black girl

Stop overreacting!

Black lives DON'T matter

Oh poor Black Girl

You're still just a nigga

You're still just a slave

Black Girl

Stop calling me that!

Black girl, Black girl

Isn't that your name?

No, That's not who I am

Black girl, Black girl

Black girl, Black girl

Black girl?

YES I AM!

Why Change for People? – Shaniay Chatelain

Race

It is something so defining
From the people you talk to
And where you grew up
Something so small as your name

My name

My name is Shaniay Chatelain

And I hated my name

I changed it

From Chatelain to Chatelin

From my name to “simple”

Easier to say

I was so embarrassed

Changed it all together

I wasn't the me I was

I was a “white” me

Then

It went from me being embarrassed in front of teachers

To them embarrassing me

A teacher

As I am waiting for my mother

Comes up TO ME

And says that I missed the bus

What bus

The METCO bus

Because I was black

I am supposed to be on that bus

I can't live anywhere else

I stopped being me

People stopped letting me be me

But now I am me

(In Creole)“My name is Shaniay Chatelin and I am me”

Too This, Too That – Melanie Chien

I think one of the first things people see when they look at me is my race. Not my smile, not my appearance, but my race. And a lot of the time, in an instant, they think they know almost everything about me. *She plays the piano, she speaks perfect Chinese, she has perfect grades.* In reality, I quit piano after one summer and have been dancing ever since. My Chinese is barely passable, and my grades certainly aren't perfect.

I often feel that when I'm in America, I am Chinese, and that when I'm in Taiwan, I'm American. I will forever feel the echoes of being the perpetual foreigner.

When people ask me where I'm from, I tell them that I was born in Newton, but that is never enough. Instead, they ask me, "But no like, where are you *really* from?" and I am forced to define myself by the place where my parents are from. It's an automated response, like a voicemail, almost as if I'm not there. *Well, my parents are from Taiwan, but I was born in Newton.* This isn't to say that I'm not proud of my roots, but it's difficult to accept that people only see me for my race.

A few months into the sixth grade, we were talking about the scientific method during a normal day in science class with Ms. R and our additional teacher, Mr. W. I had, and still have, a friend named Isabella. We are both Asian and have black hair, and we were friends. But it was not easy to get us mixed up. We were just different. Towards the middle of class, we both raised our hands for the same question, and Mr. W pointed to me, but said Isabella's name. Since we were sitting on opposite sides of the room, it was apparent that he had messed up. The class giggled, and as I glanced over at Isabella, we exchanged a knowing look. However, what came next surprised us both. He said, "You or you. Either one, it doesn't matter. I don't care. It's all the same anyways." *I don't care.* It seemed harmless at the time.

I responded so innocently. "That's ok," I said, blushing. I might have even made a joke. *It happens all the time,* I thought to myself. And it did. I've always been mixed up with other Asian people. It's never a matter of my name itself, my name isn't "Taiwanese" per se, but it was always because of my race. I've never really had a problem with it, so I've always shrugged it off. Every teacher I've had has always apologized and the mistake is erased. However, something about this time was different. Even as I said the words, I knew they weren't true. It wasn't okay. I felt the shame rush to my face, presenting itself in red blotches on my cheeks and pockets of heat on my scalp. I was sweating, and I quickly looked down at my paper to focus on something else, anything else. I focused all my energy into keeping my eyes dry. I struggled to pinpoint exactly where I felt wrong, why I couldn't bring my sixth grade self to let it go.

When Ms. R pulled me aside later to apologize, she had tears in her eyes. She understood. This wasn't about a simple, harmless mistake that warranted a quick apology. This was about a purposeful dismissal of a part of me, something that shouldn't and can't ever be taken away from me. From that point on, I didn't wait for a trigger for my response when someone got my name wrong, I acted on it.

When I visit Taiwan, I get looks that say *you're not from here.* When I walk into stores in Taiwan, people say, "你是从美国来的吧, 是不是?" (which means: "You're from America, right?") and I have no choice but to murmur "Mm" and nod my head politely. This immediate categorization distances me from a

place I already feel far away from. The obvious language barrier for me is a hurdle that I will never get over, no matter how hard I try. After eight years of Chinese at Huaxin Chinese School and six years in school, I still feel anxious around my relatives who live in Taiwan, afraid that I won't understand them or that they won't understand me.

In America, my skin is considered too light, in Taiwan, too dark. In America, I am considered too quiet, in Taiwan, too loud. These things don't define me, yet I never belong. I'm not sure whether this is part of my Asian American identity or if it is a byproduct of it, and that's something I'm still trying to figure out.

A Lesson of Friendship – Alex Chin

Over the summer, I was offered a job at Kwong Kow Chinese School to be the violin and kung fu teacher. I had a student in both my violin and lion dance class named Brian. Everyone told me he was a troublemaker. No one, not even his parents, could control him when he was angry. My piano teacher told me that she'd known him since he was two, and that he could never be changed. At first, I thought he was a normal ten year old. I didn't notice a difference between him and my other students, but that was before the tantrums. When he threw a tantrum, he was an inconvenience for everyone, and eventually, the school had enough.

During high school, I became friends with someone I knew since middle school. I never talked to her much, but she was the only Asian person other than me in my history class, so I felt that I wanted to try to get to know her better. Every day after history class, she greeted me with a smile before we started walking to math class together. She was a very stoic person that never hid the truth behind her words. I faced a lot of struggles during that school year, but I always looked forward to those walks to math. Those times were a time to destress and get clear my mind. She never knew what my problems were, or why I was down, but she was always there to talk to on the walk to math class. We never really talked about anything important. Most of our conversations consisted of what we learned that day, or how hard a test was. Eventually, the year ended, which concluded our walks to math, but to my surprise, we shared the same math class the next year.

One day, I was teaching the class how to punch, but Brian kept annoying the kid next to him. I went over to him and asked him to stop, he didn't, and after five minutes of arguing, he started vandalizing school property. He was isolated from the other students and two teachers had to watch over him as the school waited for his parents to come. Everyone treated Brian like something that couldn't be fixed, an extraneous case. I was done teaching, but I felt like I could do something. I didn't care how tedious or difficult it would be and I didn't know what the outcome would be; I wanted to step up to the challenge. While I could have easily avoided the situation, I still asked the principal if I could do anything to help, so the principal told me to watch over Brian as his parents came to pick him up.

Walks from history to math class became coincidental walks after school. She walked in the same direction of my bus stop, so it was a pretty nice replacement from our short walks from the year before. As we began to talk more, I began to see her as more than the "girl from history class". At one point, I realized that I had a crush on her.

I had made plans with a friend after work that day, but I decided to wait with Brian and Ken, the other teacher, for an extra hour. In that hour, I made Brian see what no one has ever shown him: a sense of understanding. I treated him like a normal kid; I treated him as a friend. I wanted to try something unique. I thought back to when I was a kid and I had a tantrum: what did I want? Why was I mad? What would have made me happier? Instead of dealing with Brian, why not think like Brian? Then I realized what I could do. I walked to a Brian, curled up in the corner of the room and tried to start a conversation "Hey Brian I brought your sister here. What was her name again?" I looked at him and no response, I decided to ask Ken, only to be greeted by a shrug. "Yeah, hmm, I think it was actually Sharon." Brian caught my lie, and looked up. He

knew I knew the answer to my own question, but Ken didn't. This was just the beginning of our quiet conversation. I continued to talk to Ken about "my life". Our conversation seemed like banter, but I knew Brian saw it as something else. I would tell Ken, "One day I told my mom I would go out to eat dinner with my friends, but I actually stayed out until 8:00 playing Pokémon GO!" I was told Brian would stay out late hanging out with his friends until late at night. I was telling the story of Brian to Ken. "You don't know me" was a common phrase I used as a kid, so I decided to show Brian that I did know him. I was talking to Ken, but I was speaking to Brian.

Having her company every day, knowing that she too was dealing with challenges in her life showed me that people could help in small ways. I didn't know what he was going through, but I was able to show him I could be there for him. She showed me that with motivation, I could do anything. I wouldn't have had the confidence to try something new like making two things I love, violin and lion dancing, into a job where I could teach kids. I was motivated to grow up, try harder, and be open to new ideas. In that hour, I treated him like a friend. She changed me, and now, I'm changing other people. His whole life, he was treated like a monster that needed to be watched at all times. At times, I feel like Brian. I feel misunderstood and think no one cares about me, but I had someone who helped me find an outlet to calm down.

Eventually his parents came, and the principal suspended him from the school for a week. When he returned, there was no more tantrums, no more trouble, no more grief. Brian had changed. He started having more fun and got along better with his classmates. A month after Kwong Kow had ended, I was informed Brian wanted to start violin classes, and he asked for me to be his teacher.

My time at high school is coming to an end, and with that, we'll be going to different schools next year. My lifeline will no longer be with me next year. All the stress and confusion I'll continue to face will be faced without a helping hand. But, with all so many uncertainties ahead, I feel like I'll be able to survive. I liked her because of the things she did, and now I've been able to learn from her. She's done her job as a friend, and it's time for me to move on.

This was the first and last year I will be teaching Brian. Next year I will be going away for college, so we can no longer have weekly lessons. Throughout our whole year of lessons, he's never thrown another tantrum. I may not have been the best teacher, but I think I was able to teach him more than just the violin. I became his new friend that he could lean on; I was his "girl from history class". I'm sure that as time goes on, Brian will be able to move on and pass on what she passed on to me.

Define American – Heleni Daly

"I will build a great wall -- and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me --and I'll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words."

I have always been my grandmother's favorite child. She always spends the most money on me during Christmas, and I'd awkwardly sit among my cousins as I opened Barbie dolls, princess tiaras, and sparkly pink nail polish. My grandmother always request to speak to me when she calls my home. She questions my grades, my boyfriends, my college. I don't dare to mention the girl I'm seeing, or even attempt to correct her when she confuses "University of Hartford" with "Harvard." To her I am perfect, she hears what she wants to.

My parents used to send me to her apartment complex in Cuban Miami for weeks during the summer. My grandmother would dress me up and then parade me around to all the other grandmothers also in floral bathrobes and lime green hair curlers.

" **Esta**, es tu nieta?" they asked in disbelief, leaning down and getting so close to my face I can see the red lipstick on their stained teeth.

"Ah que Linda!" They exclaimed, when they seemed convinced." Una *princesa* !"

On Saturdays I was taken to Dolphin mall. We would walk by all of the outlets and cheap stores, and go directly to Forever Twenty-One. According to my grandmother, it was the only store in the mall that was for "pretty girls". It took me a long time to realize that what she meant by pretty was "white". We would stalk by the marshalls, the outlets, the cheap dollar stores. She carried shopping bags and pride, the tiny shirts and floral skirts signified accomplishment. It showed that we were "better."

We ate at the Cheesecake Factory instead of the mall's food court. I wasn't allowed to have a kids menu, or order anything that she didn't approve of. Whenever I reached for the bread she'd slap my hand away, then tell me once again, to sit like a lady. I was never allowed to play in the playground in the middle of the food court despite my constant begging. Once after my seven-year-old self cried in protest my grandmother roughly grabbed my arm and pulled me away. "Es para los pobres" She hissed.

It is for the poor.

My family is a line of people immigrating to other countries. My great grandfather fled Nazi Germany to Cuba, my great grandmother fled from Argentina under the dictatorship of Peron to Cuba, and her father fled from the dictatorship of Franco in Spain. My grandparents met in Cuba and escaped the dictatorship of Fidel Castro. And it was in Mexico my mother was born, and in Miami, Florida in which she was raised.

I was born and raised American with all of this culture intertwined. I am everything, and therefore nothing. I have no way of claiming an identity because I am so many series of immigration. And that is why I define myself as American. A mixture of cultures, races, colors, languages, religion, ideals. My identity is a rich mix of a fight for freedom. This is what it means to be American.

To be an American is to be a mixture, but who gets to "be American"? My white skin gives me that privilege. I can proudly walk around claiming I am Cuban and feel comfortable and included because of my long blonde hair and skinny white waist.

Why is this?

What gives me the right to proudly claim I am American? Why is my older sister, who

has darker hair and tan skin is claimed as Hispanic and I am not. We need to stop labeling by physical appearance.

Why is it that my Grandmother shielded me from the poor? Why was there such a need for separation? Does shopping at forever twenty-one make me more American? I think not. Stop praising me for my skin. I am no better, and I demand equality.

Rally – Anna Jones

To be a girl is to be sin,
is to commit a crime just by being,
to be a brown girl is just to be
two sins wrapped up to look like one
is to be persecuted for loving yourself.
Because you can't walk around like
you're worth something and also be brown
and not have someone take it personally.
You can't walk around like you're worth something
and also be brown and also be woman
without everyone trying to take it away from you.
Without everyone trying to cut you open,
just to see what color you'll bleed.
They will try to take your insides as their own,
take your spine so they can make a necklace
out of the strange and exotic, so they can tell you
how beautiful you look when you are empty,
when everything you have is theirs.
How beautiful they look in your skin,
how perfectly your hair curls around their head,
how your lips aren't too big for their face.
How nicely your tongue, fits in their pocket.
And your voice, in their mouth.
But let me tell you,
your throat could never hold all I have to say,
my spine will not rest so easy
around someone else's neck and I
look so beautiful when I am full to the brim,
overflowing with my own self-worth.
And you should feel free to take it personally,
to try and take it away from me, to cut me open.
Because I will still bleed red, I will still be sin,
I will still walk around like I am worth something
because I still am, and always will be.

Punchline – Anna Jones

And a boy stands there,
half his face painted black and someone says
at least you are only an Arnold Palmer racist,
ya know cause you're half and half, they laugh,
not knowing that the punchline
to their joke is standing right next to them,
'cause ya know sometimes looking like this
means that not even your friends know
what jokes they can tell,
because they don't know whether you are the joke or not,
'cause no one knows whether you are the joke or not without asking
but everyone asks soon enough, what are you?
And they never mean what grade you're in or
what position you play or what you want to be
when you grow up or what you actually are,
they want to know what color your parents are
and how they mixed to make this,
and why they weren't more considerate
of everyone else when they did and why
they didn't think about how uncomfortable
it would make everyone to have to look at it
and not know what it is,
couldn't they at least have provided you with a label?
Or a warning sign? 'Cause you can't walk around
without a collar and not expect everyone to
wonder what kind of mutt you are.
If you're clean enough to take home with them,
if you'll perform your tricks for their friends,
if you'll laugh when they tell you to.
'Cause you can't not laugh at racist jokes and
not expect everyone to be offended, even if you are the joke,
even if your brother is the joke,
even if your cousins are the joke,
even if you're tired of laughing, tired of smiling for them,
'cause they only want your joy, and never your sadness,
your tears, no never your anger
They want you only when you are easy to control,
When you are laughing, laughing so hard you can't speak,
you can't breathe.

U Don't Listen to Kendrick – Jah'ray Kelly

U don't listen to Kendrick

Ur not that dark

Ur hair is curly

u must not be black

These are just some of the things I hear

Since when did my hair texture my skin tone favorite music artist define my race?

I didn't know my hair had to be nappy or my skin had to be super dark to qualify as black

People have a locked in image of every race

thinking everyone within their race all look dress sound the same

And when they're faced with somebody that doesn't fit the picture they are quick to judge

Which is not okay

When in reality we each are very unique

Which makes us better in our own way

So, no, I don't listen to Kendrick

So, yes, my hair is curly

So, no, I'm not that dark

Yes

I am black.

Crab Rangoon – Danae Lally

While I love Chinese take-out, the name can be deceiving since many famous Chinese takeout dishes are not actually Chinese. Take crab rangoons for example. They can barely pass as a deep fried cousin of the more authentic Chinese dumpling, but with the golden brown layer that covers the creamy filling with bits of crab meat inside, they are unique. They try to act Chinese although they live in America and are cooked for Americans.

Once when I was in fifth grade I was at my friend Gina's house when the phone rang. Gina sprinted to the phone, and fumbled to answer it. Much to my dismay, it was not some famous celebrity. It was just a plain old boy. Yet on hearing that we were dealing with issues involving boys my shoulders straightened, my chin lifted, and to my shame, I could not help trying to act more "cool." When I heard Gina tell him, "I'm the only blue-eyed blonde here. I'm with an Asian," my brows furrowed, my chin dropped and I was about to say, "Hey I'm not!"

But that would be a lie because I am just like a crab rangoon. I am one hundred percent Chinese, but I grew up in a white family as if I were a white child since I was adopted from China when I was eighteen months old. Growing up in a white family does not change the fact that I am Chinese, something I was made painfully aware of. What Gina said that day made me very confused, and I was having a mix of emotions, guilt being the strongest. I was upset with Gina for reducing me to my race. I was upset because I had a sinking feeling in my stomach from knowing that the boy would probably think of me as "uncool" since I was different from Gina. I was confused about why I thought he would think I was uncool. But mostly I was upset because I felt guilty for briefly feeling ashamed that I am Asian.

I have plenty of Asian American and white friends, but as I learned more about my identity I realized that I don't identify with most Chinese Americans. If you took a Chinese dumpling-loving girl and an American raised girl fascinated with all things deep fried, and mixed them together, the result is me: the crab rangoon. I am a fully Chinese person cooked a little too American to pass off as "authentic" Chinese cuisine. Instead I am something greater; I am my own unique Chinese American self. I am a mix of different flavors, creating a whole new taste that is just as good as the original.

When I eat a crab rangoon I can hear it *crunch* as flakes of toasted salty goodness rain onto my tongue. The bumpy, American fried outer shell of the appetizer supports the thick, gooey inside of the crab rangoon. Once I get past the initial crunchy hardness, there lies a whole new world within. A world made of the thick, rich interior. When I bite into the belly of the rangoon my mouth reaches its personal heaven. I can taste the creamy, cheesy, thick, gooey part with small chunks of crab buried in.

The best part of a crab rangoon is the inside, and so I have learned that the most important part of my identity is my personality. It doesn't matter if I look Chinese because I am proud of my history and my racial identity. What I do is I embrace it; I love it; I ignore the boy, and I just be me.

West of Seoul, But Far From Home - Emily Lee

“*Bogoshipoh*,” whispers Grandmother through the telephone. It takes me more than a moment to remember how to say “I miss you, too.”

My thick tongue is clumsy and flops like a fat koi fish as it struggles to form the right sounds. My response time isn’t quick enough, and she doesn’t understand my sloppy Korean. So, Grandmother hangs up.

My family and I were born on different sides of the sea. Miles and miles of Hokusai’s Great Waves between, making us into strangers. Different words, different customs, different species of love.

As I’ve grown older, these differences have become both more obvious and more problematic. One of the first colleges I got accepted into wasn’t a surprise; the school was only a safety, and surely, I was overqualified. Despite all this, I still felt immensely proud of myself when I received my acceptance letter. In my joy, I shouted out the good news to Mom. After a pause, her face twisted into unmistakable disappointment. “Not the honors college?” she asked. And with that, I saw the great cultural canyon open up between us, right there in the kitchen.

My first reaction was anger. I resented my mother, and for that, I resented myself. Perhaps the American way is too indulgent, celebrating things too small to be worth celebrating. Maybe I was wrong to expect approval for such an insignificant feat. Still, my American-born soul wouldn’t stop insisting that I’d deserved at least a drop of praise. My American side and my Korean side are battling for dominance, and I find myself lost in the chaos.

I’ve found that the majority of my pain doesn’t come from the outside world, but rather, from deep within myself. It’s not the “chinky eyes” or the disgusted looks white classmates give my lunches that succeed in tearing me apart. Rather, it’s the aching feeling that I’ve been ungrateful for all the opportunities my parents have fought to give me. It’s the way I can’t help but constantly apologize for everything I do. I apologize because every tiptoe-step I take feels guilty; it’s like I already take up too much space. It’s the loneliness of walking through this life feeling like no one understands.

There's nothing wrong with being Korean, and being American is an equally wonderful thing. The trouble comes when you realize you can't hold both. It becomes too heavy, things get dropped and broken, and people always get hurt. There's misunderstandings, and suddenly, you feel like a tiny boat on a big, unnavigable ocean.

Just a couple weeks ago, I found myself fumbling with a pair of chopsticks. I felt a wave of guilt, trying to remember the last time I'd used them. I look across the table at my parents, who use chopsticks every day, and in that moment, we are galaxies apart. I feel like a poser. Maybe, if I keep perfectly still, they won't realize that I'm not their daughter. They won't realize that there was a mix-up at the hospital and the perfect Korean girl they always wanted was lost somewhere along the way.

I've always been jealous of my white friends who call their mothers their best friends. "I'm your parent, not your friend," Mom once said to me. "We are *not* friends." All I can do is retreat back into myself because I know she'll never change. More importantly, I know it's the truth. My mother, by no fault of her own, is rooted in her ways. If I had been growing up in Korea, where formality is the norm, I don't think I'd be bothered by the lack of companionship between me and my mother. It's the fact that I'm living here, where parents smother their daughters with kisses and "I love you's," that I experience this sadness.

Even though I'm angry sometimes, there's no way in the world I could blame my parents for anything. They've devoted their lives to loving me, even though we don't show our affection in the same ways. A couple mornings ago, I quietly snuck downstairs to the kitchen to find Mom. The sun was still asleep and the house was still cold, but steam was already billowing from a cast-iron skillet on the stove. There was Mom, slaving away, showing me just how much she loves me. I instantly recognize the wonderful smell of *japchae*. The peppery sweet potato noodles, the earthiness of the carrot mingling with sesame oil, the acid of the hand-washed spinach... I feel a pang of guilt because I hardly thank her for cooking my lunches every morning. Mom, I'm sorry I sometimes forget that you say "I love you" to me every day. Not through words, but through actions - actions that transcend any single culture or language. I'm sorry, Mom and Dad, for ever in my life feeling bitter towards you. I know you're only doing what you can, and I promise I will try harder to feel my way into your world.

I am Katya – Katya Obeid

Since I moved around a lot when I was younger, I was exposed to many different people and ideas. One of the most memorable and distinctive place was a town called Monroe, in North Carolina, where I lived until 7th grade.

In 5th grade, for recess, we were allowed to play on what was known as the blacktop. All around the asphalt were scattered chalk courts of foursquare that everyone would gravitate to when released from class. I, like all the unlucky kids who couldn't make it in time, was waiting in line for my turn in the squares. Once people had come and gone, and it was my turn to play, I excitedly jumped into the square and faced the King. The King in four square holds all the power and calls all the shots. Unfortunately for me, the King who was in position during my turn to play was all too willing to use his coveted power. As I stood there awaiting his call to start, I heard the words that will haunt me forever. The kid told me I didn't belong here and that I needed to go back to where I came from.

As a naïve 10 year old, I wasn't exactly sure what he meant, but I knew it wasn't good. These words, as harmless as they seem, made me feel like I didn't belong anywhere, like there was no place in the world for me. These little words held so much power and flipped a switch within me. For a long time, I was so distraught and confused.

When I asked my mom about it, she told me that some people have different opinions about people like us and that, since it's a mean and dumb opinion, I should just ignore the kid. I did as she suggested but was still confused about one thing. Who are the people like us?

I was born in the U.S., I'm not any different than the kid or anyone else at the school. I like to think that the kid was just misinformed and was confused himself. I like to think that everyone who judges someone based on their skin color or outward appearance is misguided.

Looking back at it now, I realize that the kid knew exactly what he was saying. He chose those words to hurt me and make me feel bad about myself. And that's exactly what I did.

After that day, I stopped really openly sharing my family history. I stopped telling people my mom was born in Colombia and immigrated here with her family when she was young. I stopped telling people that my dad was born in Lebanon and moved here when he was older to get a job and to have a better life. I stopped telling people that most of my family don't even speak English. At one point I was even ashamed of my own name since it wasn't like everyone else's. Whenever I played with my friends where I had to choose a name for myself, it was never Katya, no, it was always Katherine or Katie or some other name like that. I didn't want to be different, I wanted to be just like everyone else at my elementary school, light-skinned with family that lived right there in that same little rural town with me.

I am not proud of this at all. This is what I did after just one dumb kid told me one dumb thing. Now, looking back at it, I can't imagine how just one moment changed my whole way of life.

I opened up again after I gained more knowledge about this topic through moving around and experiencing new and different things. Moving here, to Newton, also helped me see the beauty in

difference and uniqueness. I finally realized that I can't hide behind this idea that being different is a bad thing. I realized that I have to accept who I truly am. Although this is still a working progress, I am now proud to say that I am not like everyone else.

I am Katya Khaled Obeid, half Colombian, half Lebanese.

Black History Month – Achille Ricca

I've only ever had one black teacher.

According to my fourth grade memory, Mrs. Sonja Robinson was about 7 feet tall. She had curls that fell down to her shoulders and sharp sense of humor. She had a nose like mine. She had skin like mine. She sticks out in my memories as one of the best teachers I've ever had.

Before her, aside from our Ghana unit in second grade, we had only learned about black people during February, and it was always the same three. Rosa Parks, the tired old woman who refused to move, Martin Luther King, the peaceful preacher, and George Washington Carver, inventor of peanut butter.

When we started learning about the civil rights movement all I had known about it before was that black people and white people had to drink from different fountains. But Mrs. Robinson went into detail. We wrote stories from the perspective of the girls in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, grainy recordings of a charismatic DJ pushing the children's march even after JFK rescinded his support. She showed us images of the fire hoses and the dogs, videos of the National Mall so packed during the March on Washington people all blended into one large human sea. Mrs. Robinson wasn't afraid to talk about modern racism either. "This school has access to so many great resources, why do you think that is?" Silence. "Now, Look around this classroom. How many black kids do you see?" Me and Tim Brown looked at each other, then looked back at ourselves, slowly putting the puzzle pieces together. Mrs. Robinson brought my blackness into context, and in turn, sparked my love of history.

The next summer, I read *Roots* by Alex Haley. Along At home in my room, I tried making the click like I had heard the African women at church do, wondering if it would instinctually feel natural on my tongue. I asked my mom our family history, I started paying closer attention to the older people at church- it seemed everywhere I turned there was more and more history I couldn't get enough of. And being the geek I was, (and still sort of am), I just couldn't wait to learn about it in that great uncharted territory- middle school.

By February of sixth grade, I was excited for whatever was to come for black history month. We got our worksheets and I saw the same three names: Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, and George Washington Carver. The white girl in front of me turned to her friend and said, "I hate Black history month, it's so boring. We only ever learn about the same three people." I couldn't blame her. She wasn't wrong. But next year would be different, right?

February of seventh grade came and went. Our ancient history textbook had a staggering five sentences on the empire of Kush. Next year was American history, but if nothing happened, I'd take matters into my own hands.

By February of eighth grade, I had gotten in trouble, for counting too aggressively, had

been dress coded for wearing the same thing as white kids (even though my middle school didn't have a dress code), I had been told my fixing my hair was distracting while white girls were braiding, asked to “tone down the race stuff” for talking about Raven Symone with my friend, and had experiences outside of school (Ferguson, being followed in stores, getting profiled in a Costco of all places) brushed off when I tried to talk about them. All by teachers. By eighth grade, I didn't feel like most white teachers were in my side, so I didn't go to my teacher expecting much. But it still stung when he said “Oh, we don't have anything planned, but you could do something because you're... y'know.” Fine. Better than nothing. I met with him after school to see what my presentation could be on, and as I was listing off names, he had a blank look on his face. Like he didn't know anyone who I was talking about. So just to make sure I wasn't being irrational, I tested it. “I would absolutely love to do a presentation on Calvin Broadus Jr., his art is just so important to the black community.” “Right, of course.” Calvin Broadus is better known by his stage name, Snoop Dogg. My history teacher unknowingly greenlighted a project on *Snoop Dogg*. As much I wanted to see the look on his face when Calvin Broadus Jr. was on the smartboard in all his glory, I did my project on unsung black heroes instead. I couldn't give up an opportunity to show people how multifaceted black history is.

In ninth grade our Africa unit just so happened to coincide with February. To show examples of naturalism in African religion, we watched that age-old documentary... the Lion King. I decided to leave well enough alone.

Tenth grade. I was getting tired of this. We had only talked about black people in regards to King Leopold and the genocides in the Congo. A few weeks into February, once again, “are we going to do anything for black history month?” “Oh, well, you know, black history really isn't on my radar for this class, but if you're up for a presentation, you can do something.” Black people aren't on your radar? For a world history class? I ended up doing my presentation on the Harlem Hellfighters. As much as I wanted to put the word “radar” in every slide, I couldn't waste an opportunity to talk about black history.

To be fair, teachers do have a lot to balance. I recently spoke with a teacher at North, and she enlightened me to a perspective I hadn't heard before. They have restrictive curriculums, a certain number of homework assignments to give, standardized tests to prepare for- I'm not up here to roast my old teachers, I'm up here to point out gaps in the history curriculum and ask why my teachers just passed me along in a never-ending cycle of “you'll get to it next year.”

If we can spend a whole month doing a DBQ on the Boston massacre, why did we only have two weeks a about the transatlantic slave trade? How come none of us knew the name King Leopold until tenth grade? How come I've learned more black history in English class than I ever have in history class? Why is white history a core class while mine is an elective? Why is it that most of the time we learn about people of color, it's through the lens of their oppressors? Why doesn't our history curriculum reflect the histories of people of all colors equally?

Even the token historical figures have so much more to them than what we learned. Rosa Parks wasn't a helpless old lady, she was a trained activist, a secretary at the NAACP, who was chosen to be the face of the bus boycott because the original incitor, Claudette Colvin, was dark, young, and pregnant.

Martin Luther King was more than a preacher; he had fire in his throat. He was a dedicated, loving, unwavering, compassionate catalyst of change. He didn't just say he had a dream, he said a riot was a language of the unheard, he said white moderates were more of a threat to civil rights than the Klan. He was sent death threats by the FBI and *persisted* to bend the arc of the universe towards justice.

George Washington Carver didn't just invent peanut butter- he made dyes, plastics, and gasoline all out of the same plant. He headed Tuskegee's department of agriculture, he was made a member of the British Royal Society of Arts, he was admired by Theodore Roosevelt.

Matthew Henson was the first man to reach the North Pole. Benjamin Banneker's architecture helped plan the city of Washington DC, James Baldwin's moving prose and candid poetry illuminated the black experience even while he was overseas. Marsha P. Johnson threw the shot glass that heard round the world, sparking the Stonewall riots and kick starting the gay rights movement, Mary McLeod Bethune, Shirley Chisholm, Arthur Ashe, Countee Cullen, Bayard Rustin, Thurgood Marshall, Granville T. Woods, Jesse Jackson, Bessie Smith, Henry T. Sampson, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, John Lewis... We are so much more than marches and peanut butter. Why doesn't our curriculum reflect that?

Some teachers are afraid of not doing black history month justice, so they skip it entirely. Elementary and middle school black history month was tokenization at best, but at least it was *something*. What made the Snoop Dogg situation from eighth grade so infuriating wasn't that my teacher didn't know- it was that he didn't *ask*. I gladly would have said I was just pulling his leg and we could have talked at greater length about the project, instead of me leaving tight-lipped and angry. Students are *here*. We're willing to be resources, but year after year you're let down by each teacher, it gets harder to reach out. To not get cynical.

Imagine if I had never had Mrs. Robinson. I don't think I'd be standing on this stage. That fire wouldn't have been lit under me. If we had a curriculum representative of the history behind people of every color, think how many more fires we could light.

Transgender – Achille Ricca

Back in the day, in late 2015, a pair of busy brown hands went to work
Whether they belonged to God or my mother is still a matter of scholarly debate
Back in the day the hands rolled out sheets of grass one by one, set the wooden bones of
the sky and weaved blues and violets through the framework
Back in the day, in late 2015
The world cracked open and let its yolk run, unknown bright and sunny while eggshells I
had been walking on fell away

But as the sun set on my second birth, I wondered: What happens when black girl
becomes black boy?

What happens when you trade silk bonnets for satin durags?
When the swing of your hips becomes a bounce in your step?
What happens when you exchange your blackgirlmagic for blackboyjoy?

I never thought boyhood would mend the broken bits of blackness
But a naive sliver of my heart thought it just might
Smudge out the “rough around the edges” parts
The “you're so pretty, you must be mixed” parts
The “your emotions are just a symptom of that angry-black-girl gene” parts

Old adages and idioms filter, fade, and flow out of style but one rings true with a clear
high tone: The more things change the more they stay the same

What happens when you trade calamity for calamity?
When you trade being society's definition of collateral damage for being society's
definition of collateral damage?

The church still folds into itself, creaking its floorboards and hanging its dust when a
close black life is stolen in some nameless, faraway city
Cashiers still hold up your money to the light, searching for the evidence of a crime your
skin has already convicted you of
Strangers still reach for your hair as if they think they own you
As if they think after all this they still own you
Bitch becomes thug
Die-hard dyke becomes try-hard tranny
And nigger and nigga still carry the same weight-

But

Sunlight still filters through stained glass windows of the church, hanging its dust with a
honey glow only found in renaissance paintings
In the crisp harmonies of the men's choirs
Drums still beat behind the piano and in the preacher's throat
And the smell of candied sweet potatoes continues to find its way to every inch of the

house

Judge Judy and Cyberchase are still on my grandmomma's channel four

Stones and bushes still weave around her apartment complex in Arlington, Virginia

The hot dogs at the barbecue still manage to be burnt on the outside and raw on the inside

Children (whose hair coils up towards heaven) still screech and sing, dancing unabashedly in the playground next to the parking lot

Old adages and idioms filter, fade, and flow out of style but one rings true with a clear high tone: The more things change the more they stay the same.

N-Word – Will Thompson

Can I say it?

You know the *n-word*

You know where that word originates from right?

The word was conjured up by white slave owners to degrade, discourage, and deter their helpless slaves.

Do you know what it means?

It was made to describe sub-humans, beasts, animals. Not your black friend.

You must not realize that my ancestors were referred it so much that that is what they thought they were. Niggas.

I hear you in the back.

“It doesn't mean that anymore.”

“It means like homie now, right? I thought it was reclaimed.”

You have nothing to reclaim. It was your ancestors word. Their word of hatred. So much hate some of us cringe when we hear it. I know I do.

Nigger.

It's funny, though I feel like if you have to ask to say it, you know you shouldn't. You know it's taboo.

“But what if I'm rapping along with a song, that's ok right?”

Really? It's that important to you to complete a song?

Even if you were *qualified* to say it. Why would you want that? You want to be black? In America? Where you can't go to the corner store without being shot. Where you can't shop without being monitored. Where there is no “benefit” in doubt.

You don't want that; you don't want the burden that comes with the n-word.

“So you can say it, and I can't? That's not fair.”

It's not fair that my ancestors were in chains for 250 years. They spent their entire lives as slaves, and so did their children, and their children after that. And finally when they were freed, their rights were deprived. *That's* not fair.

It's cool right it doesn't mean what it used to mean right? The hate, stigma, and ugliness, gone.

Comical thing is, we finally have something you want and it was yours all along.

Too bad it's not yours anymore.

No you can *not* say the *n-word*.

Is what I should've said.

Moments in China – Claire Wang

June, 2004

Mom tells me we're going to China on an airplane that'll fly like the birds do. I picture the place beyond the rainbow that Dorothy sings of. The whole plane ride I'm too excited to sit, peering eagerly out the window at the clouds that fly past.

But, skipping out of the airport, the first thing I see is trash on the ground and smoke clouds in the sky. Unkempt men beg for pocket change on the streets.

That night, after everyone is asleep, all I can think is: *China is gross.*

June, 2006

The second time I go to China I know what's coming and I don't like it. I whine when our hotel is a star off from five, and ignore the family friends who lend me their homes for the night. At night, when jet lag hides reprieve, I think, *How can I get out?*

June 2008

I'm sitting on what can barely be considered a bed when my grandma comes in the door. Her house is far from a five-star hotel, but complaining somehow seems wrong. She sits down beside me on the bed, and hands me a red envelope.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be there for you when you were growing up," she says. "I hope that this can somehow make up for it. It isn't much, but it took me a year to save it up."

I peer inside. The money she'd spent a year saving I could've blown on two nights at that five-star hotel.

I remember all the times I whined about China and a burning feeling rises up in my chest. Suddenly I can't look her in the eye.

June 2010

When we pass yet another beggar on the street, I'm used to it. I know the protocol – don't look them in the eye, and keep walking. But this time my eyes stray, unbidden, to the figure holding a cup. It's not an unkempt man; it's a girl around my age.

"Please help me pay for school," a sign next to her cup says.

I do the taboo thing; I look her in the eye. And I find that she isn't even looking back. Her gaze strays away, as if she is embarrassed.

I want to help, but I have no change to give.

April 2015

Five years later, with skyscrapers towering over litter-free streets and beggars few and far between, China seems different. But so do I.

I spent the whole year raising money for a school in China and now visit the school on an exchange to hand over the money we've raised. When the beds are narrow and hard, and the toilets are holes in the grounds with no doors, I laugh about it and move on.

The less fortunate used to seem like characters in a story that wasn't mine. But ever since my encounter with the schoolgirl, I realized that if I didn't like seeing people struggle, then I should find a way to help instead of looking away. After all, they're people just like me.

But while I want to contribute, my trip to China reminds me that China isn't something that I have to save; it's improving rapidly on its own.

Nevertheless the look on the girl's face when we give her the money we raised was worth more than all the five-star hotels I've ever stayed at combined.

July 2015

The man in the cubicle next to me swings his chair around. "Hey, you're the new intern, yes?" he says in his best English. "I'm Jim. Welcome to Thomson Reuters! I hear you're from America! Is this your first time in China?"

I think back to who I was the first time I visited China. Spoiled, naive, and cynical. And of how far I've come since then.

I shake my head and smile. "Hardly."

A Brief Insight to the Inner Workings of my Heart and Mind – Sage Williams

I wish I could say that I'm a good writer. I wish I could say that I'm good with words but for some reason my brain can form the words but suddenly my hand doesn't know how to move. I can't manage to transfer the words from my brain to the page so the page sits there, blank, almost mocking how damaged my words can come to be once the ink leaves the pen.

Poetry is beautiful even if it's just a few words. I want to know what it would take to be good at something so effortlessly hard. Everything is scary to me. Math is hard, physics is hard, getting good grades is hard and I can't seem to do anything right. It's almost as if my brain thinks faster than I can move and suddenly all the words are forgotten and I don't know what to do with myself. So instead I look at things. I read things and I sit and think about stories. I create worlds in my head and find ways to destroy them. I don't find myself writing to write because I don't want to lose anything, and I don't want to forget.

Everyone thinks I don't have any emotions. They think I'm a selfish girl, that everything I do is for myself and myself only, but I only act that way to give the illusion that I have no heart. My heart is too big for my body. I feel things too deeply. I love people and when they don't love me back I don't know how to feel. Every emotion possible that I feel has a home for someone. Love goes to my mom and frustration goes towards school. Anger finds its way into my head and burrows its way into the nooks and crannies. It has manifested its lifestyle and now it's mine and I'm its. People ask why I'm so mean and I want to tell them that's why. Because I feel things too deeply, but anger is something I know all too well. And maybe that's because it's my default emotion and I hate it. I don't want to make people think that I do and say these things because I want to. I do it because I don't know what to do and I'm sorry.

I'm a scrapbook, okay? That's why I'm moody and tend to act a different way around certain people. I meet someone and I notice how they act around me and I adapt to them other than being myself. I want them to like me so I laugh like them, I talk like them. I become covered in a thin layer of their persona. I notice the things people do and I begin to act like them, picking up personalities as I go. It's always interesting to see how people will react when I start to imitate them. I treat them how they treat others and I finally get to see if they truly like themselves or not. Of course there will be the occasional person who doesn't need to be imitated and I consider those people to be good for me.

I know a few good people. Those few people know the good me and there's a great chance they will stay with the good me. The me that doesn't have anything negative to say after you do anything, even something as simple as tying your shoe or sharpening your pencil. The me who doesn't question your every motive and make you wonder why you still know me. I have come to recognize that there won't be many people I come across who will value me as much as these people do. Maybe one day I'll turn so mean and nasty that even those good people who know me will abandon me, and I will destroy those relationships just like the worlds I create in my head. Of course I hope that day never comes. I guess I'll just have to wait and see.

Lessons Learned – Christine Yao

When I was eight years old, I created a one-room school house. My pupil was my three-year old sister, Rebecca. I set out everything a schoolroom should have: plastic white boards covering the walls, hopscotch mats on the floor, crayons and markers in neat boxes, and big posters with letters and numbers. There was one chair in the center of the room for my sister and a much higher chair for me. It was the perfect place to teach a three-year-old the ABC's.

When I set up the classroom, I had not seen my younger sister for two years. My parents had sent her to China to live with my grandparents because my dad traveled a great deal and my mom was working full-time.

I had missed Rebecca, but it was actually kind of weird when she came back. She was both my sister and a stranger. Since I'd forgotten how to be an older sister, I made her my pupil. In doing so, I was actually adopting a traditional Chinese role. I was my sister's role model, someone she would learn everything from. It was my job to set a good example and act as her second mother .

Even though Rebecca was only four, I thought it would be a good idea to teach her some of the things I thought she should know before going into Kindergarten. On the whiteboard I wrote the first couple of letters of the alphabet.

"A apple 'ah,'" I said. "Repeat after me"

"A apple 'ah!'" Rebecca enthusiastically replied.

"B bat 'b'"

"B bat 'b!'"

When it came time to teach her the letters "m" and "n," I was almost ready to give up. She kept getting the M's and N's mixed up, and I didn't know how to help her figure out the difference between them.

"No, Rebecca, it's M."

"N!"

"Repeat after me. 'M'"

"N...n...n...n"

In elementary school, I was always made fun of for pronouncing words incorrectly, and I didn't want Rebecca to experience the same humiliations. I wanted to teach her early, too, because I knew what it felt like to be behind---it did not feel good at all. I was born in the United States, but Chinese was my first language until Kindergarten and I was placed in ELL. I questioned my placement in ELL for the first time in third grade, and asked the teachers for their reasoning. They said, "You don't know? It's for your vocabulary." Perhaps my vocabulary had gotten jumbled together because in my life I was juggling two languages.

By the time Rebecca was in fourth grade, she had become her own person. She no longer wanted me to help her with her homework and other tasks. My time with being her traditional Chinese big sister had ended.

Like me, Rebecca did have language issues in school; unlike me, however, she was fine with making mistakes and not being perfect. I saw this as her true talent, and I started to learn from her how to deal with setbacks and disappointments. I was becoming her pupil.

My biggest test came during my senior year of high school when my swim coach told me that I was cut from the team. Although I knew this was a possibility because of

my times, I was still devastated. I had been swimming with some of the girls on the team since I was five years old. I decided to overlook my disappointment and volunteered to manage the team. I would build a family out of the team, just as I had built a relationship with my sister years before.

If my sister taught me how to deal with disappointment, I learned from teaching her that my true talent is building relationships and supporting the people I love.

Vignettes - Luna Zhang

5 years old

She is 5 years old, and it's her first day of kindergarten. As she makes her first shaky steps into the classroom, a stream of thoughts run through her nervous mind:

"I wonder if I'll fit in."

"Will my English be good enough?"

"What if I wore the wrong outfit and look like a loser?"

Her eyes dart around the room: she takes in the alphabet posters, the building blocks, and the sticker charts on the wall. Then she spots her teacher and her classmates sitting in a circle, introducing themselves. Her heart begins to race, and she slowly makes her way towards the seemingly welcoming group. Yet when she finds her spot amongst her peers, she notices a confusing wave of isolation clouding over her.

"None of them look like me."

The teacher begins the roll call, and her hands start to sweat as the list slowly inches towards her name.

"Luna...Zhang?" (pronounced JANG but the teacher said ZANG)

No response.

"Luna...Zhang?"

"...here"

She's mortified. Luna Zhang isn't here, and never will be. Does she, Luna Zhang, correct her Kindergarten teacher on her simple mistake? Or does she give into the overpowering feeling of fear in the back of her mind, telling her to shut up and accept it? It's just a name after all, and regrettably, she chooses the latter. She's only 5 years old. A five year old doesn't realize the significance of her silence-that it means giving up a part of her identity, that it marks the beginning of her accommodating to the world. She's only five years old, and silence is the easiest choice to make despite her underlying guilt. She just wants to be invisible, to blend in. To fit in with the crowd, even if it means losing herself.

12 years old

She's 12 years old, and she's awkward, angsty, but determined as ever. She's a star English student, flying through every writing assignment, always craving to express her ideas. But she's having a tough time with wrapping her head around the confusing formulas and concepts taught in her science class. It doesn't come easily to her, so she works twice as hard. She spends hours after school doing a mixture of studying, memorizing, and researching, just so she can catch up with her classmates. And

it pays off. She's getting A's on her projects, and 100's on her tests. It's the most rewarding feeling, knowing that she earned it, but her classmates think otherwise:

"Are you kidding me? Stop smiling Luna. You only got that grade because you're Asian. It's in your blood to succeed."

She turns to complain to her science teacher.

"Well actually, Luna, when I was in college, I was jealous of my friend for always getting perfect grades. She was Asian, so I thought that had something to do with it."

They'll never know that she spent hours working for the grades she got on the tests and projects. Instead, they use her looks to judge her, to label her, to misunderstand her. She's 12 years old, and she's frustrated. Not at their insensitive remarks, but at herself. She's starting to resent herself, (and her looks), for invalidating her achievements.

16 years old

She's 16 years old, and she's diving headfirst into the unfamiliar world of romance. He's everything she could have ever wanted: funny and thoughtful, with a hint of dorkiness that made him unbearably cute. He's also white: pale skin, dirty blonde hair, and hazel eyes that made her fall for him in the first place. She spends hours texting him and opening her heart to let him in. The feeling of being exposed and vulnerable to another scares her, but she's in so deep with her feelings that she decides to take the risk. After the first month, he decides to introduce her to her friends. He takes her to their favorite hangout spot in Harvard Square.

"Yo man, you copped another one? Damn we got a case of yellow fever over here."

Yellow Fever. It's her first time hearing this one, and at the moment she laughs off her ignorance. She runs to the bathroom to call her friend for help.

"Luna, that means he likes you because you're Asian."

Her heart sinks as she hears the words come out of her friend's mouth. It's like a slap to the face, and she's hurt that he didn't even try to deny his friend's remark. She leaves early and cuts him out of her life. However, while her feelings for him passed with time, her resentment towards herself continued to manifest inside of her.

"Does he like me for me, or because I'm Asian?"

She finds herself asking this question constantly, as ridiculous as it sounds. She's 16, and she's wondering, would life be easier if she were white?

18 years old

She's 18 years old and everything's going right. She's been accepted into her top school with an amazing scholarship, and she's doing well both academically and socially at her school. She's 18 years old and she has it all together. Or so it seems. Everything's going right for her, yet she finds herself feeling more lost than she ever did before. Her self hatred continues to get the best of her, and she's constantly criticizing herself for things she can't control or change. She's finding it harder and harder to feign happiness to her friends, teachers, and family. It's like her body's betraying her, and slowly breaking down the facade she's created and built up for the past 18 years.

"But maybe that's okay."

And for the first time in 18 years, she lets herself feel it. She lets herself wallow in her world of pain, confusion, and anxiety. She lets herself accept the fact that she's not invincible, and that she's human. She's human, and she's had a lot of shit happen to her, and it has broken her. But for once, she's accepting her reality, and answering her body's cry for help-the best decision she's made in a long time. She's now learning to ask for help, and to be dependent. She's starting to let others accommodate to her, and to speak up for herself. She's 18 years old, and she's going through the most turbulent phase in her life, but instead of running away from it, she's facing it head on. She, Luna Zhang, is discovering herself and her authenticity- and learning to love all of who she is, the imperfections included.

MONOLOGUE PROJECT BIOS

Anisha Aziz

I am Anisha Aziz, a sophomore at Newton North High School. I wanted to be a part of the Monologue Project because it's interesting and it's a chance to voice my opinion.

Imani Bibuld

Hello, my name is Imani Bibuld. I'm a sophomore at Newton North High School and I am 16 years old. I decided that I wanted to participate in the Monologue Project after my Theatre Arts teacher told me about it. He encouraged me to write at least one submission and send it to Quinn as soon as possible. My personal mission for this project was to have my perspective heard as a girl of color living in Newton.

Shaniay Chatelain

I am a sophomore at Newton North High School. I wanted to be involved in the Monologue Project because I wanted people to know my story. Just because I go to a "diverse" school doesn't mean racism is gone.

Melanie Chien

As a senior at Newton North, I've certainly become more aware of my Asian-American identity. Crafting a piece for this project has been one way for me to continue searching for my identity and what it means to me. By participating in this project, I wanted to add more voices to the minority narrative, while also sharing my own story.

Alex Chin

I am Alex Chin, a senior at Newton North High School, and I will be majoring in Sports Management at UMass Amherst next year. The reason why I wanted to be in the Monologue Project was because throughout my senior year, my English teacher, Ms. Leong, exposed our class to many stories of Asian Americans like me. I was able to relate to many of the stories, but I didn't feel that any of them really impacted me and gave me the feeling that someone out there shared a similar experience with me. I decided to share my story in hopes to reach out to anyone that might have been in my shoes and needed that push to be able to accept who they are.

Heleni Daly

I am Heleni Daly and I am a senior at Newton North High School. I submitted my monologue to the Monologue Project because my amazing teacher, Ms. Leong, inspired me to embrace what makes me different and speak out about injustices.

Anna Jones

I am Anna Jones and I'm a sophomore at Newton North. I wanted to be part of the Monologue Project because I wanted to share in the telling of stories of people of color in our community. A long overdue opportunity to reaffirm that yes, we are here.

Danae Lally

My name is Danae Lally and I am graduating this year from Newton North High School. Throughout my years of high school I have discovered bits and pieces of my identity as an adopted Chinese American. Being adopted into a white family has given me the privilege of growing up white, and as a child I was mostly oblivious of my Chinese identity. As a senior this year I have really grown as a person and have started to explore what being Chinese American means to me. With the help of some very empowering Asian American female teachers, I have discovered how unique and different my story is and that it is worth sharing. This is why I chose to do the monologue project.

Emily Lee

My name is Emily Lee, and I'm a senior at Newton North High School. The Monologue Project has been a great way for me to explore the intricacies of my Korean-American identity; I'm honored to be a participant. My monologue is a tribute to my parents, who have given more than I could ever ask for.

Katya Obeid

I am Katya Obeid, a sophomore at Newton North High School. I wanted to join the Monologue Project because I love writing and sharing my experiences with other people. I enjoy hearing other people's voices and thought it would be great to share mine too. This is a great opportunity for me to let my voice be heard about an important topic that is very close to my heart.

Nadya Obeid (Stage Manager)

I'm in 10th grade and I go to Newton North High School. I wanted to be part of the Monologue Project because I think that racism and the experiences of people of color are really important to talk about. I think it's important to spread awareness about this topic and let people know that this kind of stuff happens all the time. I also think that The Monologue Project gives people a chance to share their stories and be heard.

Achille Ricca

I'm Achille Ricca. I'm a sophomore at NNHS. I wanted to be part of the Monologue Project because I feel like students of color don't have many opportunities to speak candidly about race. Thank you all for coming!

Will Thompson

I'm currently a Junior at Newton North High School. You may have seen me before on the football field or basketball court; however, today I will be performing a monologue. I wrote my piece as a voice for all those who have felt silenced for one reason or another.

Sage Williams

I'm 15 years old and a freshman at Newton North High School. I live in Dorchester. I wanted to take part in the Monologue Project because I thought it'd be nice to write something unrelated to school. I wanted to write without a given prompt, with people who are like me, people who understand more than other people do.

Christine Yao

I am Christine Yao, a senior at Newton North High School. I wanted to be a part of this project to educate people about the different experiences people all around us have. Specifically, I hope my story will bring a little light on how my Chinese heritage impacted my life growing up.

Luna Zhang

I'm Luna Zhang, a 12th grader at Newton North High School. I was introduced to the Monologue Project by my English teacher and wanted to participate because of how unique the opportunity was. My piece is a series of vignettes that capture different ages in my life, and how my race impacts me each time.