

# EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOUR

## COUNTER-NARRATIVES

### WITH A LIFT OF MY CHIN

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PEARLINE BARRETT-FRASER (SHE/HER)

As I take a moment to close my eyes,  
I take a deep breath and pull the cool air in.  
I relax my shoulders and lift my chin.  
Alright I got this, everything will be okay,  
I then push the buzzer and enter the school  
And begin my day.

Take the keys, the binder, the notes  
Went up the stairs to the room 215.  
Anxiously waiting to start living my dream.  
To teach, to make a difference,  
To help those after me, to educate, to motivate,  
To encourage them to **be** all they can **be**.

I take a moment close my eyes and take a deep breath in,  
This time forgetting to lift me chin.

As I enter the classroom, I feel the energy shift.  
Bodies turn, eyes stare...my anxiety begins to lift.  
I put my things down and juggle the thoughts in my head,

And remind myself why I got out of bed.  
To share my truth and live my passion  
To educate the **youth** and the youngsters, **better** than the past did.  
To show them that **movement** and dance can be used as a form of expression,  
To tell a story and make a connection.  
It can unify us, connect us and help us spread a message  
**One** of **peace**, one of **hope**, one of revolution and **changes**  
With our words, our minds, our hearts and **our time**.  
We promote **the** message of diversity goes beyond **your** skin and **mine**.  
One of questions, one of reflections  
One that changes in form  
One that makes you wonder **whose** voice, thoughts and perspective is being wore.  
Being wore **and** declared in the books,  
The movies and lessons that we share.  
Whose voice is missing, what makes you unique,  
And **Who** is **really** listening when you speak?  
Questions, conversations, this is the way to start.  
My goal is to teach our students that they are more than a work of art.  
To give them power, show them understanding, educate them with love and hope.  
So that they **too** can wake up  
And **truthfully** feel **woke**.

But again the bodies turn and the eyes stare  
As they notice somebody with such different hair.  
It's so big. It's so puffy and her skin is also Brown.  
As one student in the front says, "we haven't really seen someone like you around."

As I pull my shoulders back, lift my chin, take a deep breath.  
I **begin** speaking with **confidence**, and with **all** the energy I **had left**,  
"Good morning beautiful people, how you doing today?"  
Suddenly their chins start to **lift** and probably thinking, "Is this teacher okay?!"

I continued to speak with style and grace, “Let’s get started!” I see a shift in each face.

In a classroom way different than the one I grew up in.

The Bronx, New York where I wasn’t judged by the colour of my skin.

Or the way I wore my hair, or the way I spoke.

All that mattered is that you came to school, **and** worked hard to **grow**.

Here the community was rich with **culture**, positive vibes and flow.

Where everyone you see is **someone** you know.

With potlucks and church, cookouts and family gatherings, man how I really miss all these things.

The Music, the art and Block parties that provide a fun atmosphere,

It’s sad that some people’s goals would be to make it out of here.

But my **abandonment** and shift **in scenery** was not my choice,

Breast cancer, diabetes, and **my mother** who could not **escape the noise**.

At the age of 9, **the pain** was too hard to bear,

Oh, how I miss how she used to comb my hair.

A **different** style every **week**, no wonder till this day, I look so **chic!**

**But again**, my abandonment and shift in scenery was not my choice

It took **a** while to learn... but because of it I was able to find my voice.

From a culture where I **always** got a **seat** at the table,

My life shifted **so** quickly

**To** an environment where I **felt** unstable.

**There** people reminded me of my **Blackness**

And the way I **dressed** and **social tone**.

**Blackness** was a **characteristic** that was **no** longer my own.

But belong to **everyone else** to seemed to talk a lot.

About my hair, my skin...this was my **Canadian Culture shock**.

Where the **whiteness** was **blinding** and shocking in truth.  
The **lesson** of the **otherness**, I **quickly** learned **throughout** my youth.  
Where my **Blackness** turned to **otherness**.  
Making me feel **worthless**.  
And through the **struggle**  
**And** through the successes  
**Making** me **wonder** if I deserve this.  
But as I take a moment to close my eyes, I realize who the **hell** I am  
And I remind myself **why**.  
**Why I should never fall into that trap...that lie.**  
To not let the **comments** lead me to question **who AM I?**

Comments like:

Can I touch your hair?  
Or how did you get it to stay up there?  
Or isn't vinegar a bad word if you take out the vin\_  
Or you look great in that colour!  
Oh how I wish I had that **dark** Oprah skin!  
**Haha**  
Oh honey  
How I **wish** you were satisfied with the skin you are in.  
To have the privilege that you have to not have to worry.  
Not having to second guess, alter your tone or say you're sorry.  
Or being called **angry**  
When you are really **passionate** on speaking your **truth**.  
I hope these are **not** the lessons you teach **the** youth.  
But you know what  
....maybe you just don't understand,  
All the power that you have in your hand.  
So, I hope that you **learn**, and **open** your hearts to **change**,

Because when it **begins**  
It will start to pour like **hot** summer rain.  
My entire life has been a roller coaster of **microaggressions**  
Cultural **oppressions**  
Hair **obsessions** and cultural **protection**.  
To **build** that **tough** skin,  
So, the **comments** won't **hurt** so bad,  
As they cut **down, deep, deep** within.  
Healing wounds, still hurt, so it is **critical** that we out in the work.

**Oh** the stories I **have**...so much more.  
Things that happen inside and outside this classroom door.

The comments from staff and students I've heard.  
Even some attempting to **say** the **n-word**.

But teaching in a classroom that is different from my own.  
My lessons are the same. **Bright** and **encouraging** as my tone.  
To share **my** truth and live my **passion**  
To educate the **youth** and youngsters and **better than** the past did.  
To give them power, show them understanding, educate them with love and hope.  
So that they **too** can wake up  
And truthfully feel **woke**.

With the minutes **before** us and **actions** unknown.  
I hope to make a **mark** in the future  
As I represent my **race**, culture and **home**.

**We** can **collectively** take a deep breath,  
Pull back our shoulders **and lift our chin**.  
It is time for the world to know our **stories within**.