

## Judging

### **Characters**

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**Teacher:** *Sylvia is Acadian, in her 60's. She looks very kind.*

**Students:**

- **Danika** is a Caucasian woman in her late 50's. She looks tough and she lives alone.
  - **Yvette** is a single mother in her 40's, with one child. She is Acadian, and she calls it as it is.
  - **Frances** is African-Canadian, in her 30's, divorced with three children. She is shy, and wants to be nice.
  - **Marcel** is Acadian, in his 40's, married with two children. He is overweight and uses a walker. He makes put-down jokes and crude remarks.
  - **Clement** is African-Canadian, single, in his early 20's.
  - **Teresa** is African-Canadian, in her mid- 30's. She has bruises.
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### **Scene 1**

*The scene opens with five students sitting at two tables - no one talking to anyone else. We hear (and see) the words:*

**Voice:** "Every great dream begins with a dreamer." - Harriet Tubman

**Narrator:** Welcome. We are visiting this upgrading class because there have been problems here and the students aren't getting along. About 3 weeks ago, the teacher, Sylvia, starting setting aside an hour a week to help students improve their communication and group skills. Everything has been fine but earlier in the week a fight broke out between two students. Let's listen in.

### **Scene 2**

**Danika:** Good lord. I wish Sylvia would get here.

*(Sylvia comes in and sits down on her table facing the students.)*

**Sylvia:** Okay, it's 3:00 so let's set aside our other work and take a few minutes to stretch our legs and clear our heads before we start.

Now, I'd like to talk about what happened yesterday. I asked both Darryl and Teresa to take a breather for the rest of the week.

I spoke to them about their role in the fight and I think we have cleared most things up.

But I haven't had a chance to talk with you and this seems like a good time to do it. Let's talk about the fight and how our discussions during this hour have been going.

**Danika:** Not great.

**Sylvia:** Say more about that.

**Danika:** Look, hardly anybody says anything that matters.

**Yvette:** Yeah, we're all nicey nicey when having a discussion, but afterwards it's the same old shit.

**Frances:** Darryl shouldn't have called Teresa stupid. She didn't do anything...

**Marcel** (*snickers*): If the shoe fits...

**Yvette:** Teresa's going through some rough times.

**Danika:** Well everyone has rough times. Life's a bitch

**Marcel:** Come on. Admit it. Teresa slows us all down. It takes her too long to get anything. We have to waste our time reviewing the same stuff over and over again.

### Scene 3

**Sylvia:** This class is supposed to feel safe but it sounds like it doesn't – even with the extra time on communication and group skills.

**Clement:** True enough.

**Sylvia:** Well, we need to make this class a safer place. Do you remember when we started this a few weeks ago, we talked about Maya Angelou, she said, "The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned". We talked about this class becoming more like that so that we can all learn. And we're not there yet. What can we do to make this class safer for all of us – including Darryl and Teresa?

**Scene 4**

**Narrator:** It seems this group is still in trouble. What do you think is going on? How can the students and Sylvia help to turn this class around? We might need to learn more about these students to help us figure this out.

**Scene 5**

**Danika:** How can this be a safe place? They know I'm a dyke and they act like I'm contagious or something. And that ass Marcel always mumbles under his breath that I should use the men's john. Who does he think he is? After all these years - it still feels like shit. Can't focus when they're always judging me.

**Scene 6**

**Frances:** Sylvia tries so hard. I wish I could help. I don't want her to get mad and leave. That would be awful. Everyone should be nicer. I'd like to speak up like Yvette and not be so scared.

**Scene 7**

**Yvette:** I'm not stupid like Teresa. I know I'm the smartest one here. Danika can't do math for shit and Frances could not write if her life depended on it. I guess Clement can do it all but he's young. Oh God, I wasted my life. I should have got this stuff years ago. I'm 43 and still learning the basics. How lame is that? Maybe I'm just lazy. That's what those damn teachers always said.

**Scene 8**

**Marcel:** Everyone here is so full of themselves. What a bunch of l-o-s-e-r-s!

**Clement:** Who can learn with that racist Marcel mouthing off all the time? I hate it here. I am so beyond this. I wouldn't want anyone to know I come here.

### **Scene 9**

**Sylvia:** I don't blame these students for not sharing. Everyone's always sniping at one another. What the hell am I going to do?

### **Scene 10**

**Narrator:** 6 months have passed since we visited this class. They've been working hard to make some changes. Let's listen in again.

**Sylvia:** Okay, everyone, let's get started. Let's talk about the saying from earlier in the week. Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean. How would you say this quote relates to what we've been doing together in this classroom?

**Clement:** It means we have to help each other. Without each other, we are weak. Like when we first started this class – no one was looking out for each other. Now we do and it's better.

**Danika:** It means community.

**Yvette:** It means we have to have heart.

**Marcel:** Not to act like an asshole. *(laughs)*

**Teresa:** It's like our ocean. It's full of fish and life. But a drop of water, that's not much.

### **Scene 11**

**Narrator:** Holy shit! Are we with the same group that we met 6 months ago? These students used to be at each other's throat and now they're opening up more. And get a load of Marcel! Is he being positive? I have to find out what happened. I know Darryl dropped out but the others are all here. Come on. Let's learn more about what these learners are thinking. Maybe that will explain what happened.

**Danika:** Well, when Sylvia brought in that stuff about Port City Pride, I was blown away. First Marcel was a real jerk and then he laid it on us that his dead brother was gay. We talked about it for a couple of weeks - and then I told everyone the things that they said and did that I didn't like. Marcel still acts like a jerk but not as much as he used to. I guess I'm glad I gave people a chance because it's better now. Well, in the classroom anyways. The rest of the leaning centre still does a double take when I use the women's john. But whatever.

### **Scene 12**

**Frances:** When our class talked about anger, I learned a lot. I had no idea that I'm nice to people even when I'm mad at them. Our group thought of some things I could do to stop being so nice. They said it wasn't good for my health to keep doing things I don't want to do. I wrote what they said in my journal.

- Stop being so nice
- Take care of me too.
- Do things I want to do.
- Let others stand on their own two feet.
- It's okay to say no, even if it hurt someone's feelings.
- Make choices I feel good about.

I don't always follow this but it helps.

### **Scene 13**

**Yvette:** I can't believe how much I think about other people. I didn't even know I did it. Sylvia says it's like a disc that keeps running and won't stop. It fills my head with rotten thoughts. When Teresa wears something nice, I start hating what I'm wearing or I find something wrong with Teresa.

When Marcel says something stupid, I feel good that I'm not a pig. Clement says that I let others decide how I feel about me. I don't want to do that. Why should Teresa's pretty blouse make me feel ugly or Marcel's foul mouth make me feel good? Oh, my head is hurting just thinking about all this. I guess it will take a long time to stop comparing.

Sylvia gave me an affirmation card that I keep in my journal. I read it every day to help me...

### **Scene 14**

**Marcel:** I hate all this flakey stuff. They got me playing with pipe cleaners. They got me pot lucking. Seriously. Well okay, I'm getting into fewer fights. Maybe that will help when I get a job. I've been fired so many times for mouthing off. I'm learning to keep my trap shut.

**Clement:** I've come a long way in this class. Ready for the next level soon. I have to keep telling myself I can do it. I'm glad we're talking about racism here. Not just what happens in this room with Marcel – but out there too.

There's so many smart Black people in this world – people who started from zero like I did. So I got off to a bad start. What did Malcolm X say...“stumbling is not falling.” I'm learning more from these people than I thought.

### **Scene 15**

**Teresa:** I'm still here. That's what Sylvia says every day I arrive. I can't always make it – it's too much going on. I fall behind but at least I'm not calling myself stupid so much and not letting everyone else do it either.

It helps that we talk together as a group. Yvette sticks up for me. I need that right now. We start every day by saying how we are feeling. Sometimes I say something that's on my mind. Not often, but sometimes.

### **Scene 16**

**Sylvia:** I tell everyone not to put themselves or others down but I actually do it a lot. It's so funny when I say things like “Oh, I'm so bad at this” and the students say I can't say that. They didn't even know that teachers could be hard on themselves.

**Narrator:** Now we know more about what these students are thinking. I guess they've done a lot of talking in the past 6 months. It's helped. It turns out they were judging each other and themselves harshly. Now they realize life's hard enough without comparing yourself to another.

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# Canada

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