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Unit 1 Final Draft Education Narrative

**Proud African Muslim**

Muslim and African are two important qualities that identifiy myself and always make me proud. I learned the importance of my culture at an early age. When I was three years old, my parents decided to send me to Guinea where they were raised. This was the first time I left my birthplace (NYC) to go to the home where all my ancestors were raised. Since I was only three years old, I don’t remember every single moment in detail, but the formative moments stand out. I’m lucky to have spent two years there, because I will always cherish these memories to guide me as I get older.

Living in Guinea, I was able to learn about Islam and my native language, Fulani. Fulani was actually my first language. That was the only language spoken to me in Africa. I was only 3 years old. My grandma was mostly the reason why I knew the importance of my religion. She would always talk to me and play with me. Now that I look back, I still admire the way she carried herself. I respect her a lot. I still remember when I was at her house and she gave me some wise words.

“Si a jooli ha bimbi foufiki ah jenma aerie, a wallie nenma babama Allah jonate baraji ah walliti”, she said to me

I replied, “Mi joolei mujah mi walle nene eh baba wade!!!”

To translate, my grandma said, “If I pray everyday and help my parents, Allah(God) will keep sending me blessings and I’ll be happy as long as I live.”

I replied, “I’ll pray everyday and help my mom and dad, always.”

A takeaway I received from my time in Guinea was that I had more independence there than in NYC. Although I was very young, I had many responsibilities, and I was expected to carry them out. For example, I often went food shopping by myself, walking long distances to get to food stands. However, had I been living in NYC as a young child, my parents would have never allowed this because the very different environment would have been too unfamiliar to them, causing concern.

I felt very free and comfortable in Guinea. But unfortunately, because my parents wanted me to have a better life and a solid education, they decided to bring me back to NYC. Upon arriving here, I was forced to learn English, with the help of my family, and begin elementary school in this strange land. My unfamiliarity with this country’s culture made me feel rather uneasy. When I would play video games and do outdoor activities, it was with my brothers, cousins, and other Fulani friends who lived in my building. So, at least, I had some companionship with others from my culture.

In fact, having these brothers, cousins, and friends around taught me a lot about how to handle difficult situations. From all the fights I had had with them, I knew that violence does not solve very much. My parents punished us for fighting each other, taking away our TV and game privileges. During the times when we were being punished, we were forced to deal with each other and apologize to one another. Our parents made us explain to them and to each other why we had started fighting, and that we knew fighting was wrong. Going through this, I learned that fighting causes more problems than it solves, and that talking things out calmly with people is the best way to solve a problem.

My introduction to American culture began when I entered the first grade at Academic Leadership Charter School (ALCS) in the Bronx, NYC. At this time, I knew that I was experiencing a new and different world from that to which I had been accustomed. I was surrounded by mostly Hispanic and black kids, and I was intrigued by the prospect of engaging with those from distinctly American cultures. I was not the shy type, and I had a lot of energy, so making new friends was no problem at all.

In the second week of school, while in my favorite class, Gym, I was running and enjoying this activity. All of a sudden, Derrick, a popular, hip black American walked toward me, looking for trouble.

“You so-o-o ugly, you can never get a girl looking like that,” he yelled, smirking as other kids started to stare at us.

I angrily replied, “I can get your girl. You don’t know what you talking about!”

“Don’t make me laugh, clown. Can’t you see you just a AFRICAN BOOTY SCRATCHER!!!” Derrick retorted, laughing arrogantly with a few of my other classmates.

Without thinking I clenched my right fist and punched Derrick as hard as I could. The other kids started screaming and cheering while Derrick and I were throwing punches at each other. The teacher then rushed toward us to break up the fight.

After I had time to think and calm down, I still did not understand the meaning of what Derrick said. However, I did know the hostile intent behind those words, and I felt that he had no right to talk to me like that. I was certain that I needed to confront Derrick. Just like Malcolm X, I am quick to take action when I feel strongly about the need to do so. As he wrote in Chapter 11, “I've never been one for inaction. Everything I've ever felt strongly about, I've done something about.” Just like Malcolm did in that situation, I knew I would have to talk to Derrick because he was one of the popular kids and his opinion mattered to the other kids.

The next week after we had our fight, I decided to approach him about his words because I didn’t want to fight every time I saw him. I decided to try to talk to him instead of fighting, since fighting had only made things worse in my past experience. I knew to pick a time where teachers were not involved because they would just butt in, but the other students needed to see. The only time for that was recess. Derrick was at the basketball court with his friends, so that’s where I went.

As soon as I approached him I asked, “Why you call me a African booty scratcher?” in a calm tone.

“Because that’s what you are, simple!” he yelled back as several kids continued to stare at us.

“That’s not true. I’m just African. Stop acting stupid or we gonna fight all the time.”

“You not serious…” he said laughing as I stared at him with an unwavering expression showing him that I was serious.

He continued, “Alright, so what are you then?”

This was when I told him and all my classmates there about my culture and childhood and what makes me who I am. I had so much joy in my voice because I really am proud of my background. I told them about my time spent in Africa where there are street vendors and that as a small child, I would walk a lot of blocks by myself to get to them. I also described how my grandma taught me how to kill a chicken and goat, to cook them and how brave I felt. I even told my classmates about the holiday I celebrate, Eid. On Eid, we celebrate having fasted for 30 days from sunrise to sunset (which is Ramadan). Most people start fasting in their teenage years. On Eid all the muslims are dressed in nice and beautiful clothes and the adults we know give all the kids a lot of money. Just like on Halloween how kids go house to house for candy we would ask the adults for money and it’s traditional for them to give it to us.

Derrick looked at me with big eyes as if he heard the best story ever. I could tell right then that he had changed his view on me. He was happy and even said, “It’s cool” right along with the rest of my classmates. I learned that communication is very important in solving matters and I was glad I told him and my classmates about myself and culture. The fact is, I was always getting shown their culture in the school, but they didn’t really understand mine because I was their only source.

When the week before Christmas came, most of the kids were bragging about the holiday because they were Catholic and Christain. The Friday before the break the school was decorated in all green and the teachers were dressed up like the Christmas colors. I thought this was cool and I was very happy when the teacher handed out goodie bags. My classmates talked about the presents they would be receiving and I felt left out because I didn’t have a story to tell. I wanted to tell them about my holiday, Eid, but I didn’t think it was right to brag about it while they were in the middle of their own holiday. As time went on I got used to it and I was able to coexist with them because I know we all have our own cultures that make us proud.

By the time I got to high school, I felt as if the city had become more embracing of Africans and people of Islam. During high school I noticed that the students really respected and had great relationships with us Africans. During the entire period of Ramadan, we would fast for 30 days. The school allowed us to pray in the gym because it’s important to pray the daily five prayers of Islam on time. My first time experiencing this I was very proud and happy because I remember for a long time my holiday wasn’t represented by my school and I finally knew the feeling of my holiday being represented. I’m proud I was able to introduce my culture to my friends and my school community because it showed me that people have many different types of culture that makes them proud like mine does. I can respect their beliefs and I’m glad that people can reciprocate with the same energy. I’ve always been proud of my culture, and if you have pride in what you believe, other people will be able to respect what motivates you.