Jennifer's Story

Black Mothers as Adult Literacy Learners

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Title: Black Mothers as Adult Literacy Learners: Jennifer's Story

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Cite as:

Fearon, S. (2021). *Jennifer's Story: Black mothers as adult literacy learners*. Self-published.

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Section 1
Introduction

Black communities worldwide have long used storytelling to articulate our hopes, fears, and dreams (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Klingler, 1997). We embody a rich legacy of using stories to ask and answer epistemological and ontological questions in our own voices (Onuora, 2012, 2015). This study continues the tradition of using stories as sites to nurture joy, healing, remembrance, and usher social change. This report comprises storied memories and images recreated from transcribed conversations with four African Caribbean women on their maternal experiences and relationships as adult literacy learners in Canada. Such research helped us to understand the individual experiences of participants “as more than a series of disjointed temporal events” (Flood, p. 105) and as part of a larger collective story (Onuora, 2015).

This study used an arts-informed methodological approach to theorize the relationships between African Caribbean mother learners, literacy, and members of their communities. Arts-informed narrative research relies on empirical data informed by the literary genre and comprises personal narration and cultural stories (Onuora, 2012, 2015). I used information, descriptions, and direct quotations from participants’ transcripts, as well as graphic images to reconstruct them in order to take readers on a narrative journey through lived experiences recalled from memories.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this arts-informed narrative study was to explore with four African Caribbean women living in Toronto their maternal experiences as adult literacy learners. Specifically, I sought to understand how four Black immigrant mothers reimagined literacy. I also aimed to investigate their relationships within their families and communities as adult literacy learners. Study findings were presented as a four-part graphic short story series. This medium helped ensure that insights gleaned from the research were accessible and engaging to the participants and other Black mother literacy learners. The study's structure as a series of graphic short stories also allows for

it to be used as a resource for personal and group reflection, professional development, and collective reimagining.

Section 2
Setting the Context

2.1 Adult Literacy in Canada

In the 1980s, adult literacy was a pressing policy issue worldwide (Barton & Hamilton, 1990; Elfert & Walker, 2020). At this time, literacy was no longer perceived as a binary construct of literate versus illiterate. Instead, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners conceptualized literacy as a contextual social practice existing on a continuum (Elfert & Walker, 2020; Street, 1984). Such a shift in discourse around literacy contributed to the development and implementation of a series of international and national surveys that sought to capture the experiences of adult literacy learners.

These international and national surveys measured literacy as reading, writing, numeracy, and information processing skills across five levels (Elfert & Walker, 2020). Canadian academics, practitioners, and advocates critiqued these measures. They argued that these measures contradicted socio-cultural understandings of literacy as a plural and dynamic social and cultural practice (Elfert & Walker, 2020) “with different literacies according to the different domains of life and defined by the individual and wider community goals and cultural practices” (Addey, 2018, p. 317).

According to these scrutinized surveys, nearly half of Canadians aged sixteen and above are estimated to be in the two lowest levels of a five-prose literacy scale, with level three considered as the minimum for a person to be able to function adequately in society (Statistics Canada, 2001). Further, these surveys revealed immigrant communities as accounting for a relatively large share of the Canadian population with literacy concerns (Statistics Canada, 2001).

2.2 Black Immigrants in Canada: African Caribbean Mothers as Adult Literacy Learners

Black Canadian communities are diverse and longstanding; some stretch back to the beginning of settler colonialism in the country (James, 2010). Canada's institution of slavery began in the early 1600s and was abolished throughout British North America in 1834 (Aladejebi, 2016). The still-living legacies of slavery continue to inform anti-Black racism within all sectors of society, notably within the Canadian immigration system.

In 1955, Canada implemented the West Indian Domestic Scheme to mediate the movement of predominantly working-class African Caribbean women into domestic services across the country (Crawford, 2018; Fearon, 2020; Henry, 1968; Lawson, 2013). The West Indian Domestic Scheme reflected pervasive racist and sexist ideas that deemed African Caribbean women as best suited for domestic work regardless of their skills, qualifications, and interests in other areas (Crawford, 2003; Fearon, 2020). It was through this Scheme that my grandmother and other African Caribbean women migrated to Canada in the early 1960s. In Canada, African Caribbean women, like my grandmother, were relegated to work as domestics and nannies in private white middle-class households and hotels (Crawford, 2003; Fearon, 2020). My grandmother explains that domestic workers were not encouraged to further develop their literacy skills, nor did their demanding work schedules allow them to pursue formal education opportunities.

In addition to Canada, Caribbean nations benefited from this export of female labour "through market affiliation with Canada and from remittances sent home by domestic workers" (Daenzer, 1997, p. 85). African Caribbean women were not passive victims in this interaction (Crawford, 2003; Fearon, 2020). Many were household heads and saw migration as a way to escape poverty and limited employment opportunities in their home countries (Crawford, 2003). My grandmother and other African Caribbean women saw migration to Canada as a temporary strategy to support their families and households back in the Caribbean. At the time, to qualify to work in Canada, domestics were required to be aged 18 to 35 and without dependents (Henry, 1967; Lawson,

2013). Familial status, despite being a requirement, was overlooked by some Canadian officials tasked with meeting the country's demand for domestic workers (Crawford, 2003; Daenzer, 1997; Fearon, 2020). Consequently, some African Caribbean women, my grandmother included, concealed their motherhood identity in order to ensure entry into Canada (Fearon, 2020). By positioning my family's migration story within the historical context, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which African Caribbean mothers were affixed into marginalized positions within Canada's racial, gender, and class hierarchies.

The 2016 Census reports that Black immigrants living in Canada come from about 150 different countries (Statistics Canada, 2019). Long-established Black immigrants are largely from the Caribbean, representing roughly half of the Black immigrant population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019). The deep-rooted presence of Caribbean immigrant communities is further revealed in that most first, second, and third generation Black Canadians identify their ethnic origins as Caribbean (Statistics Canada, 2019). Data on adult literacy continues to highlight the dire literacy concerns amongst immigrant populations (Elfert & Walker, 2020). However, a paucity of literature investigates the adult literacy experiences of Canada's largest Black immigrant population — the African Carribean community.

Scholars continue to affirm that the experiences of Black mother learners are informed by varying and intersecting oppressions (Jones, 2019). Adult literacy advocates and Black women learners share stories detailing their literacy struggles alongside racism, gender-based discrimination, and economic and political marginalization (Jones, 2019). Canada's striking historical relationship with African Caribbean mothers, the literacy needs of immigrant populations, and the complex ways that Black mothers experience literacy further stress the importance of excavating and amplifying the stories of African Caribbean mothers who face literacy barriers in Canada. This arts-informed research study contributes to existing literature on Black motherwork in Canada and adult education by focusing on the maternal experiences of African Caribbean mothers who are adult literacy learners.

Section 3
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is informed by leading theories on African Indigenous knowledges, adult literacy, and Black motherwork. The study's conceptual framework directed the research process, informed the methodological design, and influenced the data-collection instruments. This framework provides an organizing structure both for reporting study findings as well as the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of these findings. My personal and familial experiences with adult literacy, Black motherwork in Canada, and Black storytelling traditions also informed the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework comprises four interconnected aspects that merge Black motherwork theories with scholarship on literacy: (1) motherline; (2) site of power; (3) collective work; and (4) homeplace.

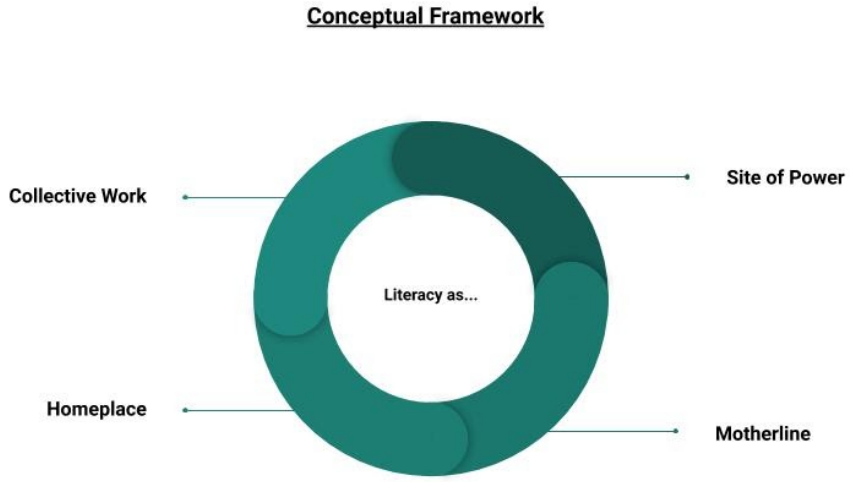
Motherline is an aspect of Black women's motherwork that centres communal learnings and knowledge systems. Black mother learners draw on diverse literacy skills to pass on to those within their networks (future, present, and past generations) learnings, dreams, and healings garnered from their own lives as well as the lives of other Black women. This use of cultural literacy and work to transmit intergenerational knowledge is highlighted in the graphic short story entitled *Jennifer's Story*.

Site of Power is a place, spanning time and space, where Black mothers and their children come together and engage in acts of resistance and liberation. African Caribbean learners in Toronto appreciate literacy as providing a foundation for Black women's activism. Literacy as a site of power is explored in the graphic short story entitled *Cassandra's Story*.

Collective Work, for Black mother learners, is a formal or non-formal way to strengthen literacy skills within community. Literacy as collective work is revolutionary as it opposes the idea that solely the individual is responsible for and benefits from literacy skills and abilities. Literacy as collective work understands literacy development as benefiting

whole communities — past, present, and future. African Caribbean mother learners' communal understandings of literacy are investigated in the graphic short story entitled, *Darlene's Story*.

Homeplace describes Black mother learners' understanding of literacy as playing an integral role in establishing a site where the agency of Black mothers and their children is nurtured. The graphic short story, *Rose's Story*, accentuates how literacy helps African Caribbean learners in Toronto create a homeplace where Black mothers and their communities are affirmed and oppressive systems are subverted.



Section 4
Research Methodology

4.1 Research Sample

A purposeful sampling procedure was used as it enabled me to yield the most information about the phenomenon under study. Since I sought to locate African

Caribbean mothers who were adult literacy learners living Toronto, a snowball sampling strategy, sometimes referred to as network or chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002), was employed. Participants and adult literacy educators were asked to refer African Caribbean mothers whom they knew to be engaged in motherwork and faced literacy challenges. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- women who self-identify as Black immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean;
- live in the Greater Toronto Area;
- have engaged in motherwork;
- are at least 21 years of age and competent to formally give consent for the interview;
- identify as an adult who struggles with literacy; and
- have completed at least two years in a community-based adult learning program.

4.2 Overview of Research Design

The following list summarizes the steps used to carry out this research.

- Preceding the actual collection of data, a selected review of the literature was conducted to study the contributions of other researchers and writers in the broad areas of adult literacy, Black motherwork, and African Caribbean histories.
- I convened a group of community advisors with professional and personal experiences in the arts, adult education, as well as connections to the African Caribbean communities in Toronto. I worked with this advisory group to determine the overall research design of the study.
- I acquired approval from the Community Research Ethics Office. The ethics review approval process involved outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including participants' confidentiality and informed consent.
- Potential research participants were contacted by text message and telephone, and those who agreed to participate received a consent form by email and consent was confirmed on recording.

- Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted over the telephone with four Black mothers across Toronto. During the interviews, participants recounted personal stories depicting their maternal practices and experiences as literacy learners.
- Interview data responses were analysed within and between groups of interviewees.
- Significant patterns were identified, and findings were reconstructed as storied and visual accounts.
- The current work was compared and contrasted with the broader literature to identify the ways in which the study aligns with the scholarship and addresses gaps and possibilities.
- Peers within the Caribbean Canadian communities, cultural institutions, adult education sector, and academia reviewed the final report and provided feedback prior to publication.

4.3 Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Although stories are the foundation of qualitative research, the development of qualitative methods for data analysis and synthesis grounded in African storytelling traditions remains largely unexplored by researchers. Dillard (2000) urges the research community to recognize the validity of African Indigenous epistemologies. Banks-Wallace (2002) addresses this call to action by developing a comprehensive analytic process, rooted in diasporic African oral traditions, for collecting and interpreting stories shared during in-depth interviews (Banks-Wallace, 1998, 2002; Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2001). Banks-Wallace inspired me to reimagine her process in ways that reveal the arts as central to the analysis, synthesis, and presentation of data.

For this study, I used Banks-Wallace's (2002) process as a foundation to develop a framework for the analysis and synthesis of research findings into creative non-fiction graphic short stories. This analytic process enabled the study to reveal the depth of participants' lived experiences and the ways in which those experiences inform their

motherwork and engagement with literacy. The study's method for data analysis included the following:

A. locating the interviews within the historical context and cultural norms,
B. demarcation of boundaries for individual stories,
C. thematic and functional analysis of stories,
D. grouping stories according to themes and functions,
E. comparison of story themes and functions across participant interviews,
F. restructuring participants' memories into written and graphic storied accounts, and
G. reviewing stories for conspicuous absences and silences.

For a detailed description of the comprehensive analytical process used in the study, readers are invited to read my doctoral dissertation, *For our Children: Black Motherwork and Schooling*. The dissertation can be accessed here.

Section 5
Presentation & Analysis of Findings

5.1 Graphic Short Story Structure

Each of the stories in this graphic series are guided by African oral traditions. Stories are structured as a call-and-response. This structure invites the reader to consider the ways that multiple research traditions (i.e., storytelling, literary and visual arts, as well as formal qualitative and quantitative scholarly work) come together to reveal the ways in which African Caribbean mother learners conceptualize literacy. The stories require the reader to reflect on and disclose their own responses to the ideas put forward by participants, current policies, literature, and previous academic studies. This format honours arts-informed methodologies and centres research around Black mothers' stories, all while illustrating links to previous scholarship.

5.2 Structure of Endnotes

I use endnotes extensively throughout each story of this graphic series. The endnotes capture the many voices, ideas, and structures that inform the experiences of African Caribbean mothers living in Canada. Endnotes are used throughout each story to invite readers to participate in an improvised call-and-response where scholarship, audience reflections and participants' voices are placed in dialogue. The endnotes further situate the stories in the historical, political, and social context of participants' everyday life as Black mother learners in Toronto.

Section 6
Jennifer's Story

6.1 Section Introduction

This section presents key findings to the questions:

- What are African Caribbean women's maternal experiences as adult literacy learners in Toronto?
- How do African Caribbean mother learners reimagine literacy?

Through the graphic short story *Jennifer's Story*, this section immerses readers in the ways that race, gender, immigration experiences, ability, and class intersect and shape participants' daily lives as Black mother learners in Toronto. *Jennifer's Story* captures the ways that Black mother learners use cultural literacy skills to pass on learnings, dreams, and healings garnered from their own lives as well as the lives of other Black women.

Jennifer's Story is followed by a discussion section entitled Story Insights. This discussion sections draw on the components of the conceptual framework (communal mothering, motherline, homeplace, and site of power) to analyse, interpret, and synthesize the findings presented by means of storied accounts. In so doing, the discussion section couples participants' narratives with literature to further synthesize findings around Black women learners' maternal practice and engagement with literacy.

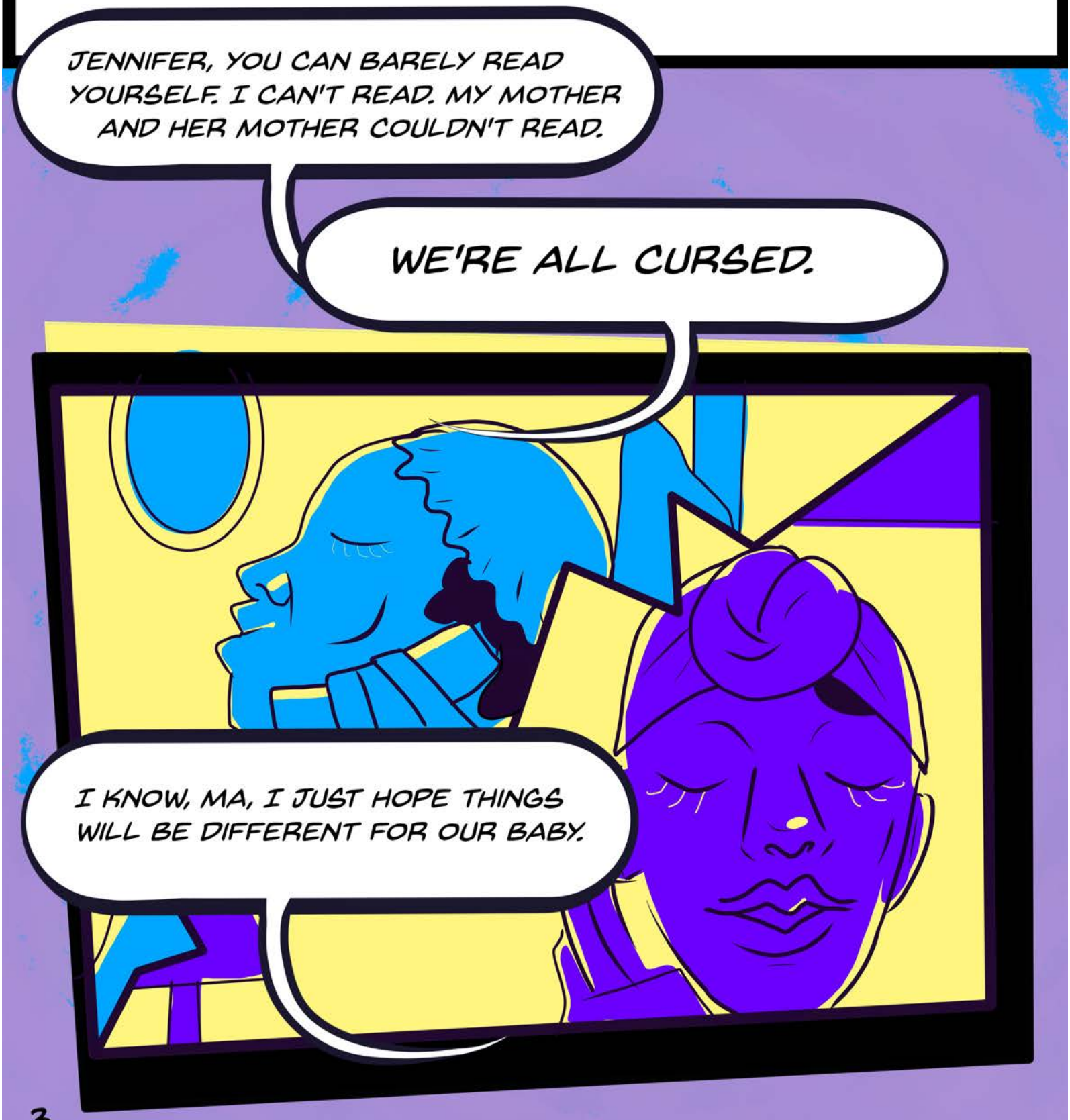
TORONTO, CANADA, 1993

ON A WEEKDAY NIGHT IN NOVEMBER 1993, JENNIFER MITCHELL SLUMPED INTO THE TWIN-SIZED BED SHE SHARED WITH HER HUSBAND, TIM. MUFFLED TELEVISION VOICES AND HER HUSBAND'S GRUNTS SEEPED INTO THE BEDROOM FROM ACROSS THE HALL.

TWENTY-THREE YEARS-OLD AND PREGNANT WITH HER FIRST CHILD, JENNIFER WEDGED THE TELEPHONE RECEIVER BETWEEN HER SHOULDER AND EAR. THE TELEPHONE CORD CIRCLED HER STOMACH AND MADE ITS WAY TO THE NEARBY NIGHTSTAND.


MA, THE DOCTOR TOLD US WE'RE HAVING A GIRL.
DOES YOUR HUSBAND KNOW ABOUT THE FAMILY CURSE?
I TOLD TIM, BUT HE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN STUFF LIKE THAT.

DARK WIRY CURLS, ALMOND SKIN AND LOW LITERACY SKILLS BOUND JENNIFER AND THE WOMEN IN HER FAMILY TOGETHER. DESPITE STINTS AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN TRINIDAD AND TWO CANADIAN HIGH SCHOOLS, JENNIFER, LIKE THE OTHER WOMEN IN HER FAMILY, STRUGGLED TO READ AND WRITE.




I'LL PRAY ON IT
GOODNIGHT

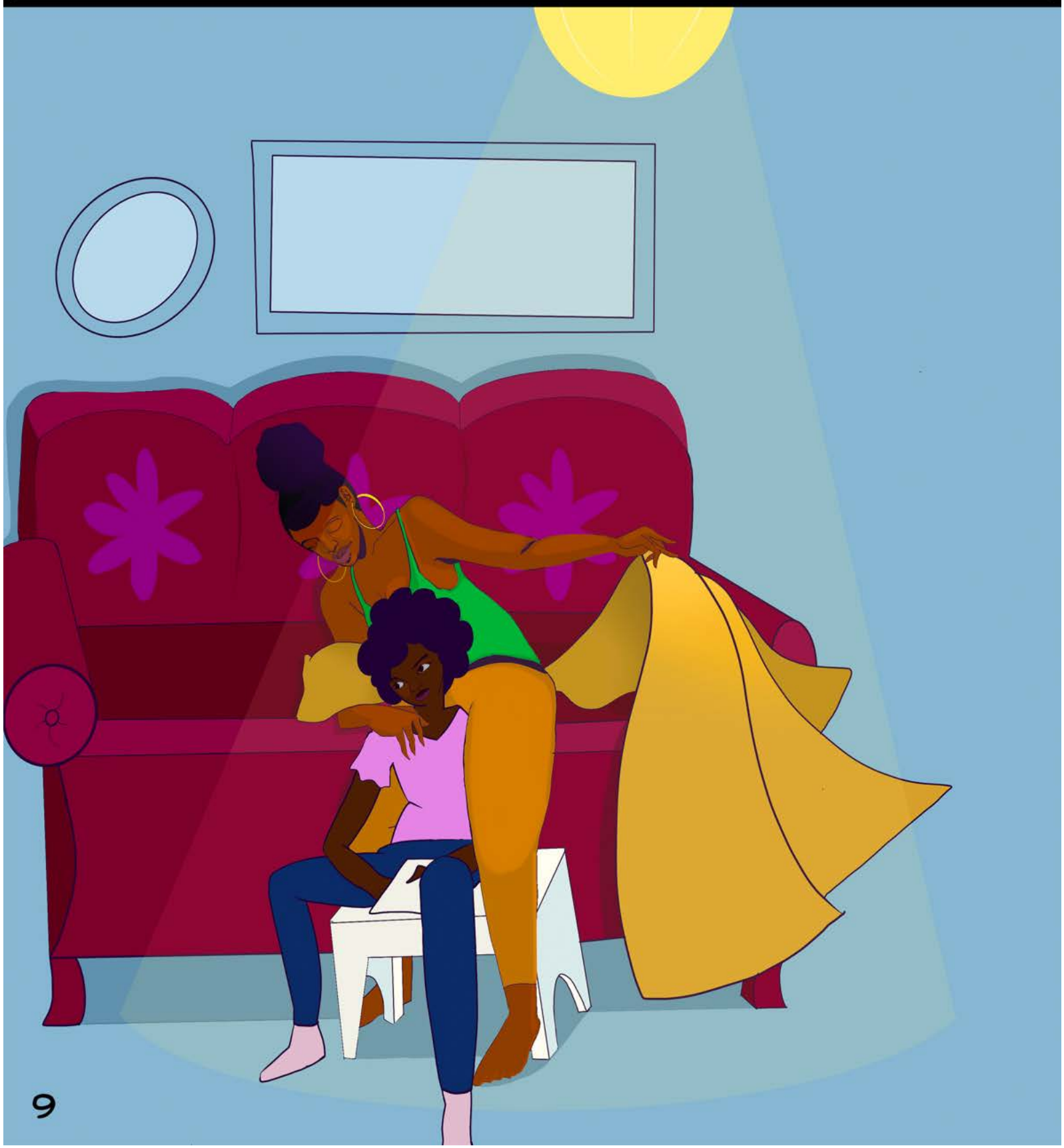
TORONTO, CANADA, 2010

ON A SPRING EVENING IN 2010, JENNIFER STROLLED INTO THE FAMILY ROOM.

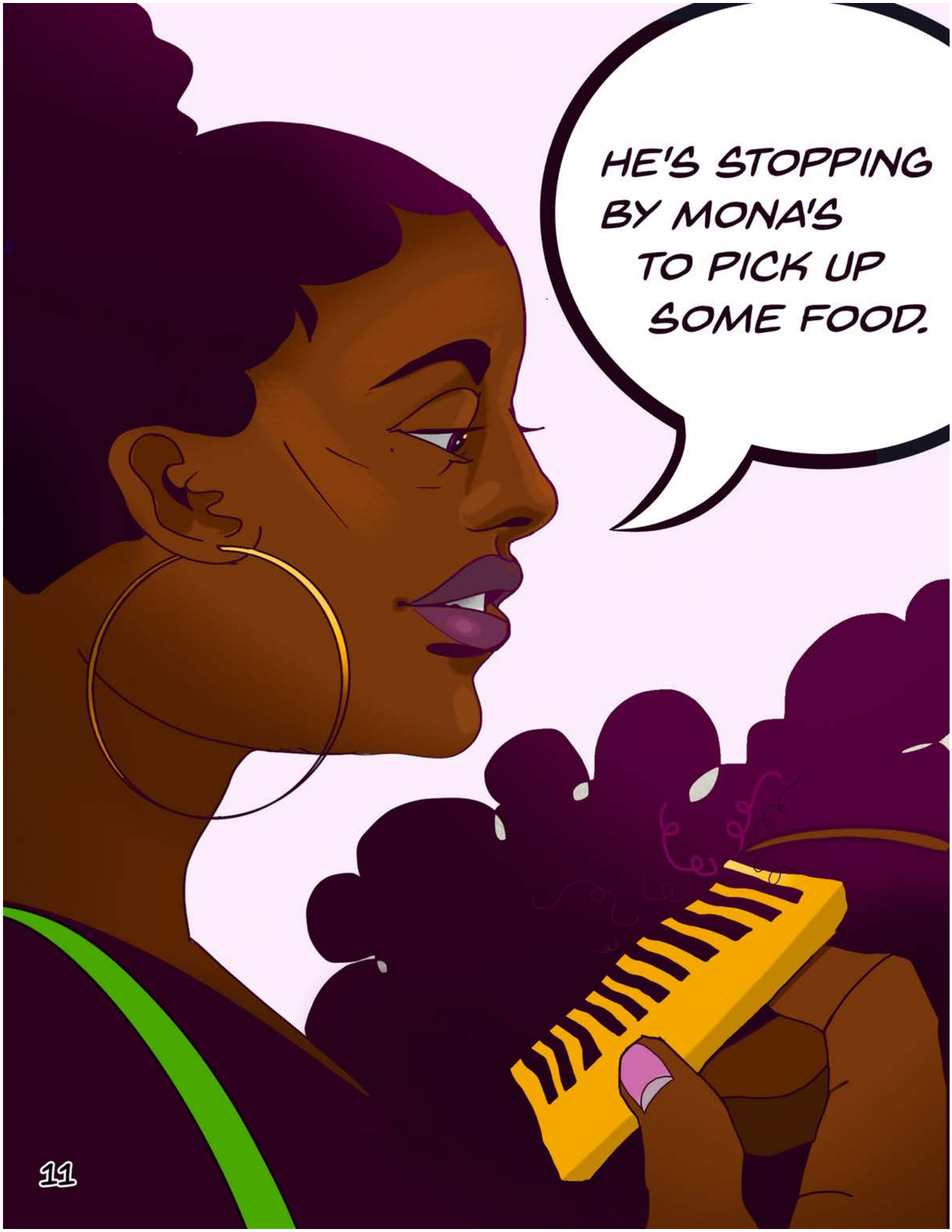
FRAMED BABY PICTURES OF JENNIFER'S SOLE DAUGHTER, ALMOND SKINNED WITH AN AFRO, LINED THE WALL AND ENCASED THE MUTED TELEVISION.

JENNIFER'S NOW TEENAGED DAUGHTER ENTERED THE ROOM WITH A DOZEN OR SO SHEETS OF PAPER IN HAND.

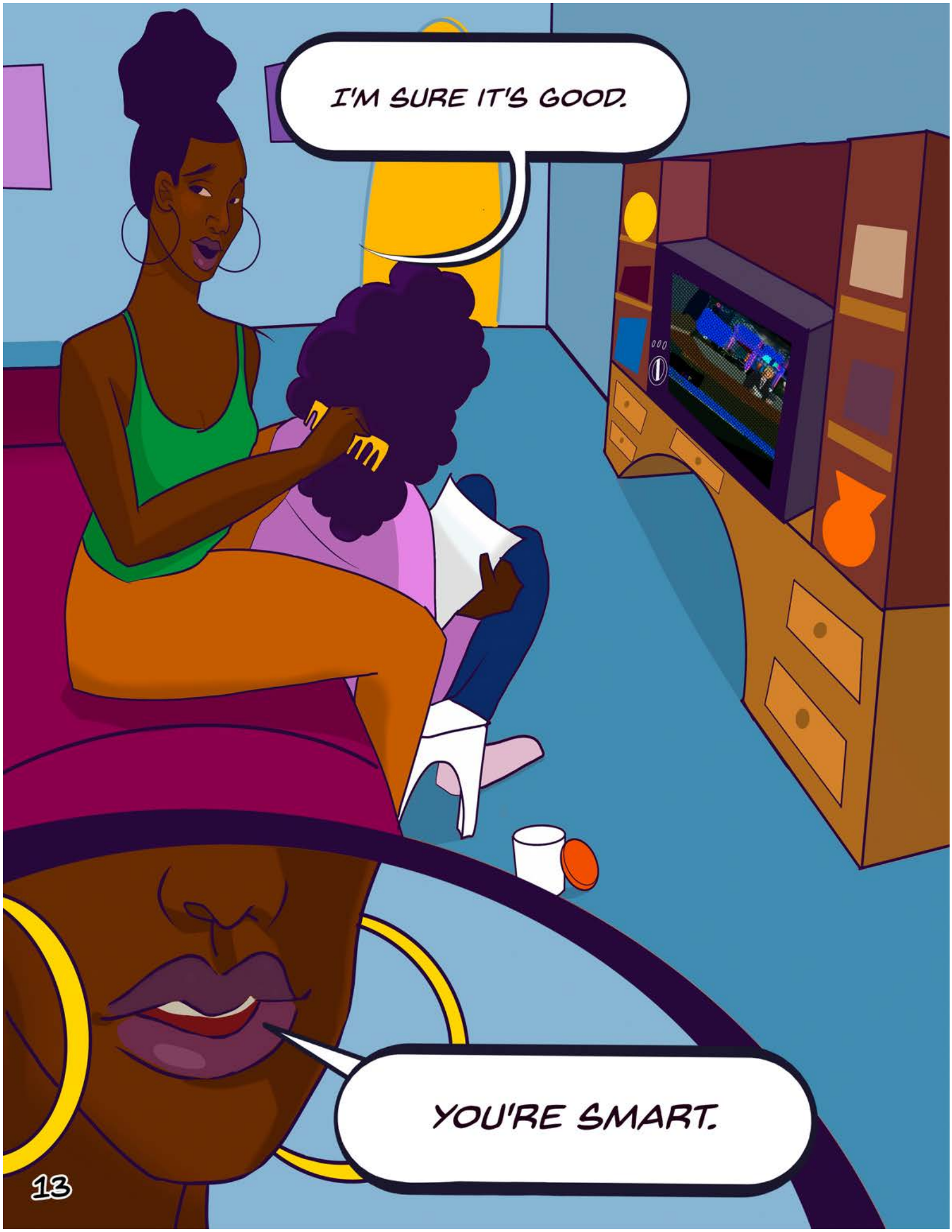
THE GIRL DROPPED TO THE PARQUET FLOOR AND SQUEEZED BETWEEN HER MOTHER'S KNEES.THE STACK OF PAPER, DOTTED WITH ROWS OF PRINTED BLACK LETTERS, BALANCED ON THE TEEN'S CROSSED LEGS.




MOM, WHEN'S DAD GETTING HOME?


HE'S STOPPING BY MONA'S TO PICK UP SOME FOOD.


YOU NEED HELP WITH SOMETHING?
I JUST WANT HIM TO READ OVER THIS ESSAY I WROTE.
IT'S GOTTA MAKE SENSE, YUH KNOW, AND IT'S DUE TOMORROW.

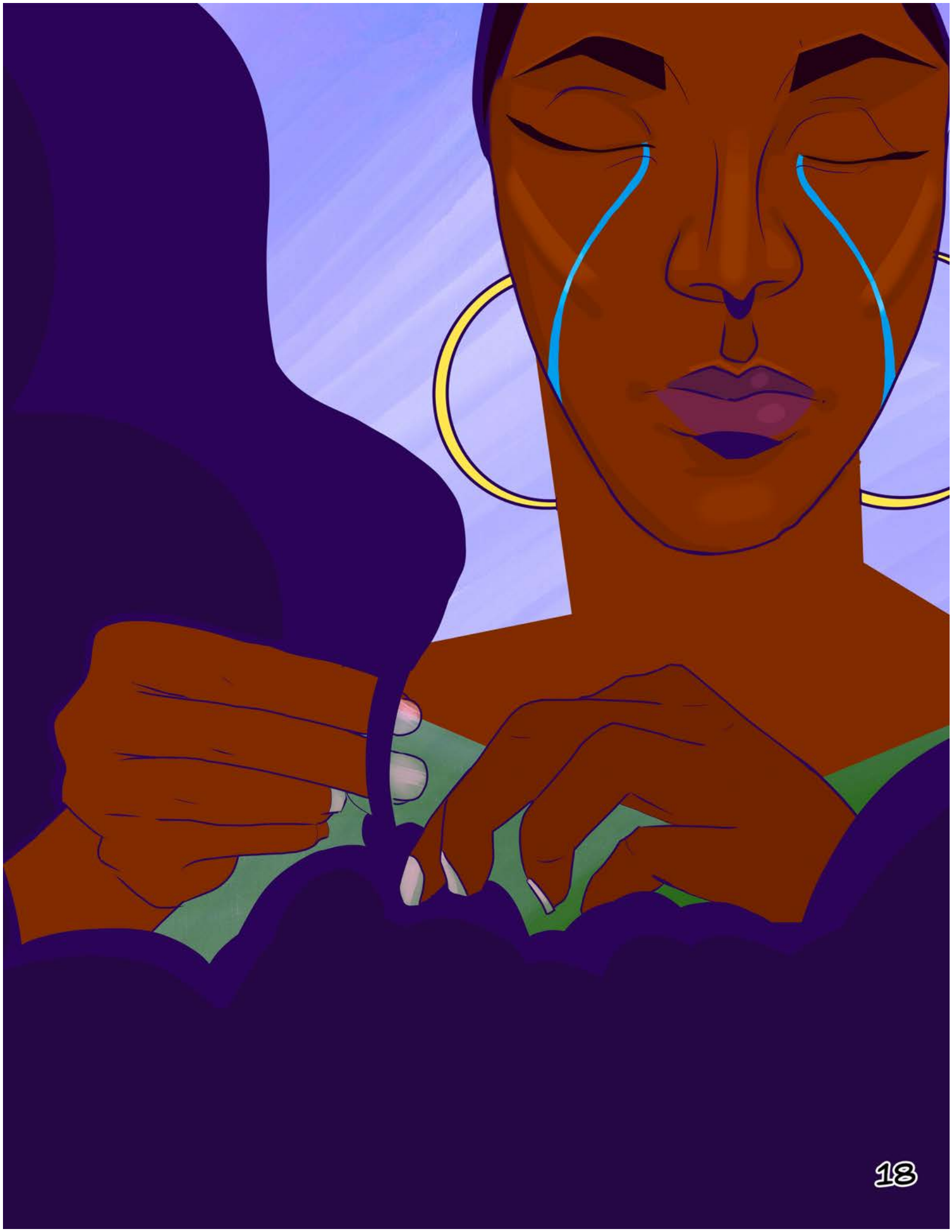

I'M SURE IT'S GOOD.
YOU'RE SMART.


THIS ESSAY,
IT HAS TO BE EXCELLENT. LOTS OF SMART PEOPLE APPLY TO UNIVERSITY. I NEED TO BE THE BEST.


LET ME SEE THIS ESSAY THEN.
YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND. I'LL WAIT FOR DAD.


I GOT SENSE YOU KNOW?
I MEAN IT MIGHT BE TOO MUCH FOR YOU TO READ.


READ IT FOR ME WHILE I FINISH UP YOUR HAIR.



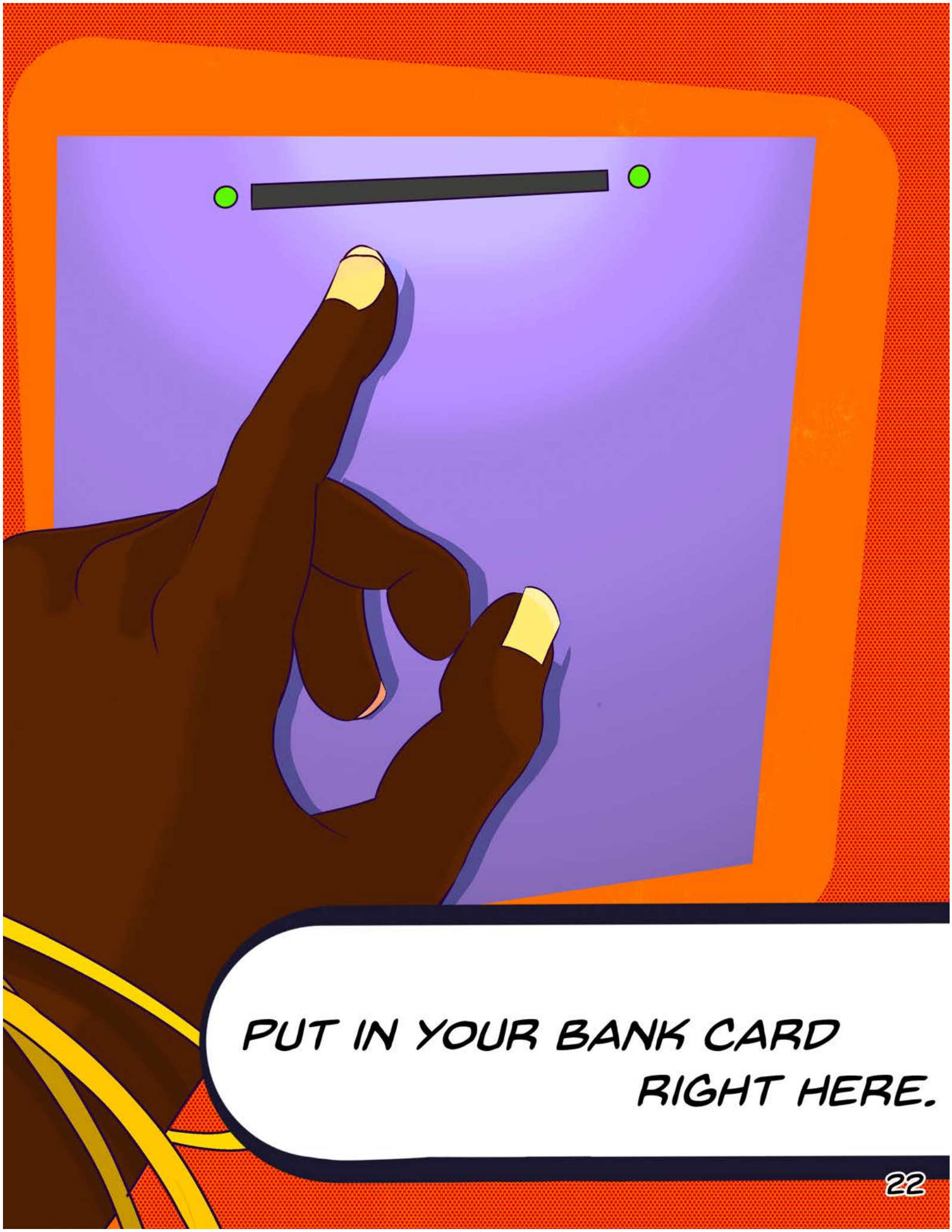
TORONTO, CANADA, 2013

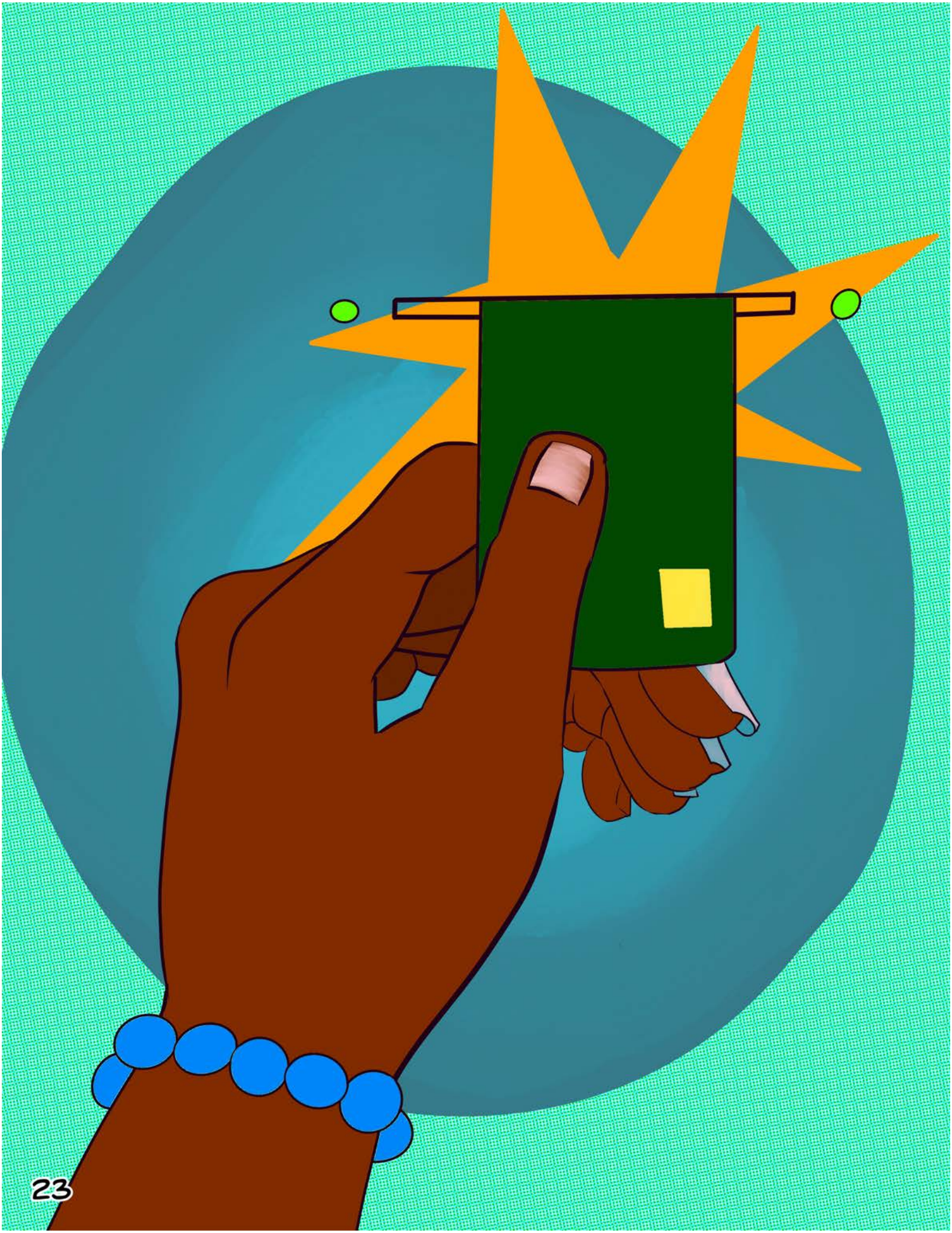
EARLY ONE SUMMER MORNING IN 2013, JENNIFER AND HER MOTHER HELD HANDS, AS THEY FACED THE OUTDOOR SELF-SERVING BANK MACHINE.

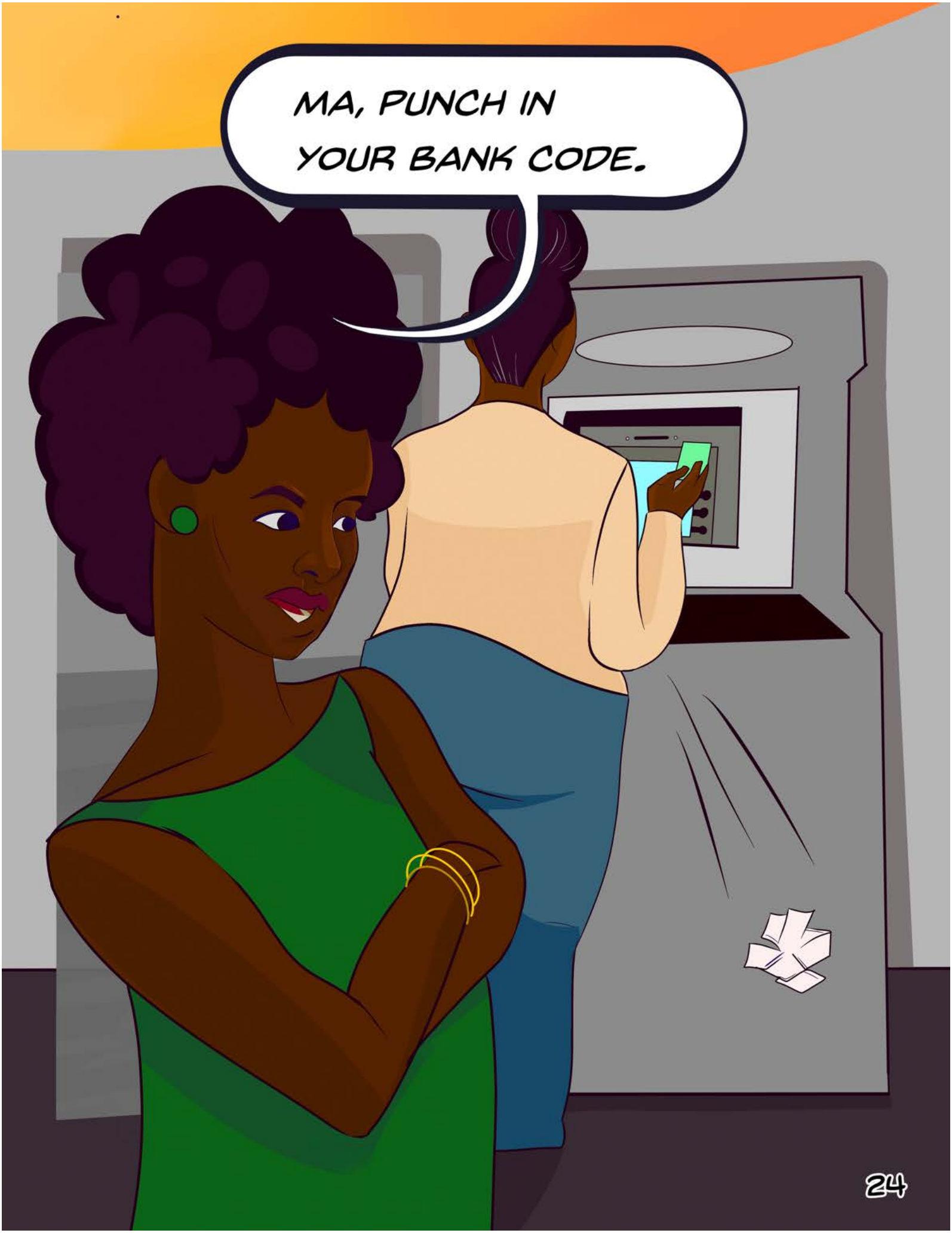
LET'S GO INSIDE TO THE BANK TELLER.


MA, WE'RE ALREADY STANDING AT THE MACHINE. JUST TAKE OUT THE MONEY.
JENNIFER, YOU KNOW I CAN'T READ ALL THOSE WORDS ON THAT MACHINE.


MA, I TOLD YOU. I'VE BEEN DOING REALLY GOOD AT MY READING CLASS.

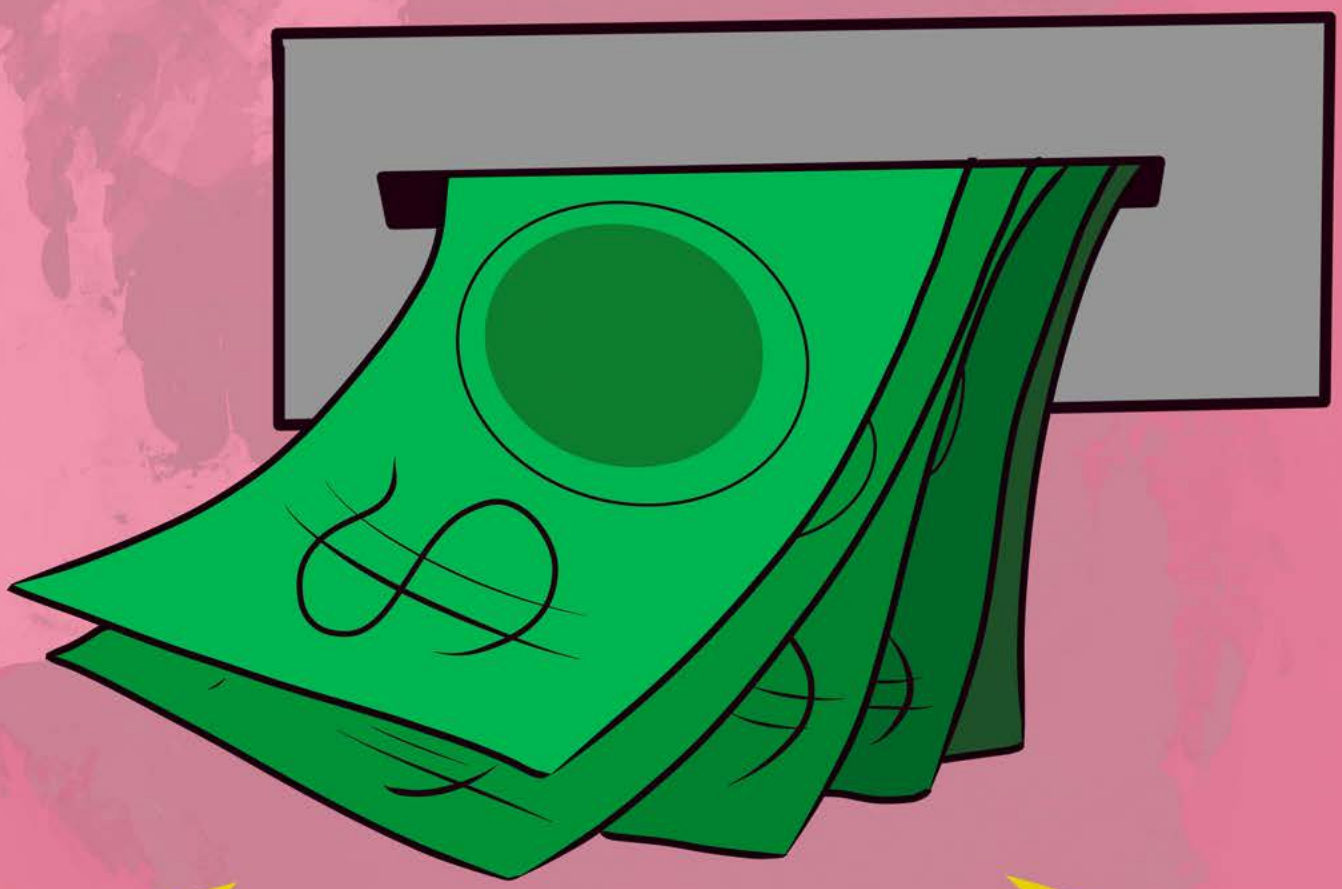

PUT IN YOUR BANK CARD
RIGHT HERE.




MA, PUNCH IN
YOUR BANK CODE.

THE OLDER WOMAN COMPLIED. JENNIFER READ SOME WORDS ON THE SCREEN AND STUMBLED OVER OTHERS AND SKIPPED A FEW ALL TOGETHER.

THE TWO WOMEN PUNCHED BUTTONS UNTIL THE MACHINE BEEPED AND RELEASED FIVE TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS.




YOU SHOULD COME TO MY READING CLASS. IT'S THURSDAY NIGHTS AT THE CHURCH.
NAW, I'M TOO OLD FOR THINGS LIKE THAT.


THERE'S LOTS OF OLDER BLACK WOMEN WHO COME AND CAN'T READ EITHER.
YOU BROKE THE FAMILY CURSE. YOU MADE SURE MY GRANDBABY CAN READ. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.


WE SENT HER TO THE BEST PRIMARY SCHOOL. AND NOW SHE'S OFF TO UNIVERSITY IN A FEW WEEKS.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER JOINED HANDS. JENNIFER'S YELLOW NAILS RESTED ON HER MOTHER'S GREASED KNUCKLES AND FACED THE MORNING SKY.


THE LANDLORD DROPPED OFF SOME LETTER THE OTHER DAY.
I'LL TAKE A LOOK AT IT FOR YOU.


YOU HUNGRY?
I CAN MAKE US SOMETHING TO EAT.

Section 7
Endnotes

Page 3

“Immigrants account for a relatively large share of the Canadian population with literacy problems, as people born outside Canada are twice as likely as those born in Canada to have literacy problems” (Statistics Canada, 2001, p.3).

“...[I]n Canada [adult] literacy is associated with poverty, stigmatised groups, and with adults who ‘made poor choices’” (Quigley, 1990, p. 104).

“According to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), 42.2 percent of Canadians were estimated to be in the two lowest levels of the prose scale (out of 5 levels) (OECD & Statistics Canada, 1995). Level 3 was considered the minimum for a person to be able to function adequately in society.” (Elfert & Walker, 2020, p. 115)

“[Black women] who must contend with a legacy of oppression are especially vulnerable to feelings of helplessness and marginalization of their feelings” (Jones, 2019, p. 51).

“[Some women] see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism” (Collins, 2000, p. 176).

Page 4

“Spirituality was taught to [Black Caribbean women] as a survival strategy, and not necessarily framed as religious practice. Nevertheless, [Black Caribbean women] are aware that spirituality can borrow from religion and thus religious rituals and practices, such as prayer, are lodged in [their] imagination as tools from which to draw strength and courage” (Bobb-Smith, 2007, p. 63).

Page 9

“The intimacy of sitting close to someone and talking about life while they style your hair is a sense of familiarity many Black people grew up with at home” (Harvin, 2020).

Page 10

Mona’s Roti is a restaurant that has been serving Toronto’s Caribbean community for decades.

Page 12

“Black daughters must learn how to survive in interlocking structures of race, class, and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those very same structures” (Collins, 2000, p. 54).

Page 13

“For [Black women], hair is not just something to play with, it is something that is laden with messages, and it has the power to dictate how others treat you, and, in turn, how you feel about yourself” (Thompson, 2009, p. 80).

Page 15

“Navigating their literacy struggles alongside the traumas wrought by racism, gender-based oppression, poverty, and political marginalization produces both anguish and strategies for resistance” (Jones, 2019, p. 49)

Page 17

“Many Black [women] have learned to deny our inner needs while we develop our capacity to cope and confront in public life” (hooks, 1981, p. 105)

Page 18

“The art and practice of loving begins with [Black women’s] capacity to recognize and affirm ourselves” (hooks, 1981, p. 107).

Page 24

“Literacy practitioners have been associated with volunteer do-gooder grannies in cardigans, rather than professional teachers, and adult literacy has, by and large, existed outside the mainstream of education and its learners outside what is generally understood as the mainstream of society” (Elfert & Walker, 2020, p. 111).

“Within a racist/sexist society, the larger culture will not socialize Black women to know and acknowledge that our inner lives are important” (hooks, 1981, p. 107).

Page 25

“[In Canada], people aged 56 or over made up more than half (54%) of all those with literacy problems” (Statistics Canada, 2001, p. 3).

Page 26

“...[For Black mothers], the decision to make her family the most important priority was an act of resistance” (Collins, 2000, p. 55).

Page 27

“ marginalized communities become more critically aware of their oppression and begin to utilize education as a practice of freedom” (Jones, 2019, p. 49).

Page 28

“... finally a phase of reverse dependence when mothers are frail and more dependent upon their offspring” (Everet, Marks & Clarke-Mitchell, 2016, p. 335).

Section 8
Story Insights

8.1 Motherline

At the beginning of the story, readers learn that Jennifer and other women in her family struggle with literacy. The story captures the diverse ways that Jennifer and her mother

pass on knowledge needed to survive to one another and future generations despite their literacy concerns. For example, readers witness Jennifer braiding her daughter's hair as a form of cultural work. While braiding hair, Jennifer challenges her daughter's perception of literacy as limited to reading and writing. Jennifer, like other study participants, broadens the meaning of literacy to include cultural literacy: the understanding of and engagement with socio-cultural wisdoms and practices. Jennifer's mother, who also struggles to read and write, cares for her family through cooking. Jennifer's mother cooks as a form of cultural work that intentionally connects past, current and future generations to their Caribbean homeland. The older woman's cooking reminds members of her family that her cultural work and cultural literacy skills help maintain the omnipresence of the Caribbean as they collectively build new homelands in Toronto.

Jennifer and her mother engage in what Lowinsky (1992) calls passing knowledge through the motherline. Lowinsky (1992) explains, "the motherline is a body knowledge, and birth story, and family story, and myth...Every woman who wishes to be her full female self needs to know the stories of her motherline" (p. 141). Study findings affirm that the motherwork of Black immigrant women who are literacy learners involves the transmission of intergenerational knowledge and practices. In their interviews, participants maintained that this passing of cultural literacy skills and cultural capital equips Black women and their children to think critically of the society in which they live.

Collins (2000), O'Reilly (2004), Trotman (2010) and King (2010), Ferguson (2010), and other feminists suggest that Black mothers' work as cultural bearers is a form of activism that supports Black women and their families' ability to thrive in North America. Participants' narratives of the motherline as a source of power complement Sheila Radford-Hill's (1986) observation that "the power of Black women was the power to make culture, to transmit folkways, norms, and customs, as well as to build shared ways of seeing the world that insured our survival" (p.168). *Jennifer's Story* conveys participants' cultural work as a way to cultivate self-love, agency, and healing amongst

Black women literacy learners and their children within a society characterized by anti-Blackness.

Section 9
Closing Thoughts

This study demonstrates the need for adult education programs to uphold Black mother learners' cultural knowledge and work as integral components of cultural literacy. Cultural literacy further equips Black immigrant mothers to engage in resistance, remembrance, healing, and joy with members of their community. Black mother learners draw on their cultural literacy skills to pass on traditions, histories, and experiences through the motherline. By reimagining literacy to include critical understandings of culture and power, adult education programs are able to partner with Black mothers to identify and strengthen the varied literacy skills used when learners are practicing cultural work.

The study also highlights the necessity for Black immigrant mothers to maintain spaces where cultural knowledges and practices are shared and reinvisioned within their social networks. These spaces provide Black immigrant mothers with affirming opportunities to further develop diverse literacy skills while undertaking cultural work. Black immigrant mothers' cultural literacy skills not only foster individual agency, but also support collective and intergenerational resistance against intersecting forms of oppression.

Section 10
Extending the Learning

10.1 Guiding Questions for Individual and Group Reflection

Readers are encouraged to modify the following questions to ensure that they are accessible and meaningful for staff and Black mother learners.

1. In the graphic short story, the characters demonstrated the various ways that Black women engage in literacy. For example, Jennifer and her mother practiced cultural forms of literacy, such as cooking and hair braiding; whereas, Jennifer's daughter stressed the importance of reading and writing.

   Learner reflection: What does literacy mean to you? How did you come to this understanding?
   Staff reflection: What does literacy mean to learners? How did learners come to this understanding?

2. The characters in the graphic short story showcased the innovative ways that cultural practices and literacies are shared amongst Black women and girls. For instance, Jennifer involved her daughter in the hair braiding process as a way to pass on knowledges and deepen relationships.

   Learner reflection: What are some cultural practices found within your community? How were these practices passed on to you?
   Staff reflection: What are some cultural practices found within learners' communities? How were these practices passed on to them?

3. Throughout the short story, readers observed Black mother learners engaged in cultural practices like hair braiding, cooking, and oral storytelling.

   Learner reflection: How do you pass on cultural practices, and with whom?
   Staff reflection: How do learners pass on cultural practices, and with whom?

4. In the short story, Jennifer's mother used oral traditions, a form of cultural work, to recall the 'family curse'.

   Learner reflection: How do you engage in cultural work? In what ways does literacy support this work?

Staff reflection: How do learners engage in cultural work? In what ways does literacy support their cultural work?

5. Towards the end of the graphic short story, Jennifer shared with her mother the sense of empowerment she experienced when gathering with fellow Black women to improve her reading skills. This short story presents Black mothers creating affirming learning spaces for each other as cultural work, and an act of resistance.

   Learner reflection: How might your cultural work be used to promote individual and collective resistance against injustices?
   Staff reflection: How might learners' cultural work be used to promote individual and collective resistance against injustices?

6. In the graphic short story, Jennifer expressed to her mother the importance of establishing learning spaces co-created by Black mother learners.

   Learner reflection: In what ways can formal learning spaces be reimagined to honour your cultural knowledges and practices?
   Staff reflection: In what ways can formal learning spaces be reimagined to honour learners' cultural knowledges and practices?

7. After reading this graphic short story, readers are left to rethink the ways that adult learning spaces can better serve African Caribbean mother learners like Jennifer and her mother.

   Learner reflection: How might cultural work and cultural literacy skills deepen your understanding, evaluation, use, and engagement with written texts?
   Staff reflection: How might cultural work and cultural literacy skills deepen Black mother learners' understanding, evaluation, use, and engagement with written texts?

For More Information

Thank you for reading this research study. To keep updated with arts-informed research projects and resources, please visit animawrites.com and subscribe to our newsletter. Also, follow us on Instagram (@anima.writes) and Twitter (@animawrites).

We encourage all readers to share this free resource widely, especially with family, friends, and loved ones. We also invite community organizations and educational institutions to use this resource in support of staff development, learner engagement, and programming. To further amplify Black Canadian women's stories and arts-informed narrative research within academia, scholars are urged to cite this resource and use it within formal learning settings.

Contributing Thinkers

Principal Investigator

Dr. Stephanie Fearon is an arts-informed researcher, educator, and Jamaican-Canadian mother. She is also the principal investigator at *Anima Writes*. Dr. Fearon's practice centres storytelling traditions to amplify Black mothers' liberation dreams and work. She draws on literary and visual arts to continue the legacy of Black communities' use of storytelling for resistance, remembrance, healing, and joy. Dr. Fearon's work affirms Black mothers as integral partners throughout research processes. Dr. Fearon invites us all to utilize storytelling as a way to reconceptualize Black maternal and familial life in Canada.

Illustrator

Curtia Wright is a multidisciplinary fine artist, mural artist, and arts educator based in Toronto, Ontario. Colour functions as a powerful element in her work to create a sense of bliss within the viewer. Her narratives focus on telling stories of Black peoples of the African diaspora, primarily speaking about her own heritage as a Jamaican-Canadian. Wright's work is often autobiographical and inspired by pop culture, Caribbean mythology and folklore.

Community Advisors

Phylicia Davis-Wesseling is the founder of the KGO Adult Literacy Program. She has worked in the adult literacy field and the non-profit sector since 2014 and is currently a board member with Parkdale Project Read in the role as Co-Chair. She has her Masters in Education from the University of Toronto, OISE and when she is not busy, Phylicia likes to spend her time reading, drawing, and painting.

Alyssa Fearon currently holds the position of Director/Curator at Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina Public Library. Integral to Fearon's curatorial practice is a community-based approach that prioritizes the voices of historically underrepresented groups. In 2018, Fearon was the inaugural Curator of Nuit Blanche Toronto's Scarborough zone. The interdisciplinary exhibition, titled *STYLL*, featured the work of more than 30 artists, authors, and performers. Fearon was also Curator at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba (2018-2020). Raised in Scarborough, Ontario, Fearon is now based on Treaty 4 territory in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Ehab Hussein is not just an educator and social worker. He identifies as a member of the Somaliland diaspora, a Muslim, a Black man, and a father. His Black Canadian experience, as well as his role as a Black father, inspires a need in him to affirm the experiences of minoritized and racialized communities in order to bring to light disparities that construct inequities in our everyday lives.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the Black mothers who participated in this study. I continue to be grateful for the insights, leadership, and vulnerability they demonstrated throughout the research process. I value the research and art that reside within their stories, as well as the stories of all Black mother learners.

Special notes

(1) Although the mothering practices of African Caribbean women formed the scope of this study, it is vital to recognize that not all mothers identify as women. (2) The

introductory section draws heavily from my doctoral dissertation, *For our Children: Black Motherwork and Schooling*. The dissertation can be accessed here.

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