

## **Shaniqua's Bad Day: A Story from Willow Tales**

Tenacious P. Willow spent the morning in a meeting. Ms. Engine, the local high school principal and friend, asked Tenacious to be present. The parents, also friends of Tenacious, asked her to be present as well.

Early in the day, there was a racial incident. A student harmed another student in an Advanced Placement Economics class.

"Shaniqua, can you please share what happened?" Ms. Engine politely asked.

Shaniqua, eyes swollen from crying, looked down at the floor and then after several minutes, looked up at Tenacious. It was as if she was weighing the pros and cons of telling the truth and then deciding that she did indeed have the courage to tell the truth even if it meant experiencing more harm.

When Shaniqua's eyes met Tenacious', they pleaded to be heard.

After taking a few deep breaths, Shaniqua began to recount the incident.

"I was in my AP Economics class and watching a film about supply and demand. We had a substitute teacher that day. There was a scene where a Black boy was designing his business plan and trying to figure out the market price for his product."

Tenacious knew what was coming next and remained, almost forgetting to breathe. She noticed that Shaniqua's mother was doing the same.

Tenacious understood that the Black boy in the film was the only Black person in the film and that Shaniqua was the only Black girl in her AP Economics class.

"And I then heard, 'Hey, look at those big lips!' by a White boy. After he made the racist comment, the other students did one of two things. They either looked down or tried to pretend they did not hear what he said or they laughed. The substitute teacher kept reading his magazine. He would not make eye contact with anyone in the class." Shaniqua continued and in a matter of fact tone.

Tenacious was right, Shaniqua had "the classroom experience" that so many Black girls have in school.

Seeing that Tenacious was empathetic, Shaniqua continued.

"Since no one was going to protect me or my feelings or my right to an education without being under threat, I had to stand up for myself. Therefore, I told the student that he should shut his mouth and I called him a dumb \*@#!. I mean, that is what came out. I was so embarrassed and so angry. No one said anything to set him straight. That substitute teacher ignored the whole thing!"

Shaniqua's response was "the response" that landed so many Black girls in the principal's office.

Tenacious then wondered if there were people in the room that thought that if Shaniqua had been quiet, then there would not have been a problem.

Ms. Engine and Tenacious had been having brave conversations about race for many years. As Ms. Engine listened to Shaniqua, she remembered a question that Tenacious had asked that had stayed with her.

“What will happen to our girls if they grow up in a society that repeatedly shows them that they have little to no worth, shows them that they cannot expect care and protection, shows them that their teachers and classmates do not have the courage to stand up for them, and shows them that they can only count on themselves?”

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