The 9th Grade Diversity Workshop Report

(A "short fiction" version of this script was first published on the website of WMRA Public Radio in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I also recorded it for them for broadcast, reading all the parts.)

CHARACTERS

 *CASEY, a 9th grade girl*

 *JOSEPHINE, a 9th grade girl*

 *MARTHA P, a 9th grade girl*

 *MARTHA W, a 9th grade girl*

All characters speak their own direct dialogue, narrate themselves, and also narrate their thoughts. The thoughts written in italics, between parentheses, are more interior, or more tamped down.

The setting is an otherwise empty classroom. The four girls are sprawled out about it however they may wish.

ALL, *sometimes in unison; sometimes not*

**Question 1**. 8 ways our group is alike, by Casey, Martha P, Josephine, and Martha V.

 #1. We all like boys.

 #2. We all have or once had braces except Josephine.

 #3. We are all tall except Josephine.

 #4. We all hope lunch is pizza.

 #5. We all think Casey’s little pointy gold heels today are awesome.

 #6. We all mostly would still rather go barefoot.

 #7. We're all the Co-Worst Procrastinator *Ever.* *(*But I'm überworst!!!)

 #8. We're all called Casey or Martha except Josephine. (Kidding!)

**Question 2**. 8 ways we are different, by Casey, Martha P, Josephine, and Martha V.

CASEY

#1. When Casey was six, she saw her grandmother’s ghost standing over her bed. They used to share the room, so with Casey being half asleep, seeing her grandmother felt almost ordinary. She sort of did know Nana was dead, but it was like their room was her doorway in the wardrobe. Between her and “the forever place."

 MARTHA V

You read the Narnia books when you were six?

 JOSEPHINE

Casey's different.

 CASEY

I'm saying I'm different because I know *ghosts* are real. No, the wardrobe portal is how I'm comparing it *now*. When I was six, I thought there was a place where time went to hide our lost stuff. *(Like when she saw their dead dog Hank slobbering over Casey's gym shoe under the back room workbench…)* So Casey only mumbled *Hi, Nana,* and fell back asleep, and never saw her grandmother again; but now she knows, and feels comforted by this, that "the forever place" is there somewhere, outside time, where nothing is ever really gone… Where Nana came back from, says Casey. The other three laugh at her. Not meanly, but Casey still doesn't much appreciate it.

*.*MARTHA V

Whereas the rest of us don’t know that at all. We come from planet Earth.

JOSEPHINE

But Casey, your planet sounds like a very nice world to come from.

MARTHA P

#2. Because Martha P is the only non-blonde [non-paleface, black-slash-Pamunkey] person in our foursome, she knows "in a different way" what this exercise is about. Which the others won't get, no matter how she "helps." So she'd rather they talk. Don't worry, she'll listen.

JOSEPHINE

#3. Josephine is the only only child in the group. She had a sister, once, but she died; Josephine barely remembers her. Her sister's name was Marian. And Josephine was "Josie" then. *(But her dad said, "You're the big kid now, sweetheart. My Josephine.")*

MARTHA V

#4. Although people call the Marthas *the twins*, because, duh, they’re physical opposites, best friends, and both named "Martha," Martha V comes from up north. They're *from* heres and she's a *come* here. Do they even know much that makes her the outsider? V. wonders how she’d even have made it here, had Martha P not adopted her. She’s a big-boned 5' 11"; at her old school she tried to hide but wasn’t good at it; she was the kid other kids were mean to. Here, personality-wise, thanks to Martha P, she’s pretty much unrecognizable as that girl. *(Except, of course, to her secret, well-hidden self.)*

CASEY

Casey wants to talk about religion. She wonders what makes her "forever place" so funny: haven’t we heard of Heaven?

MARTHA P

#5. Casey actually *likes* church; ask her.

MARTHA V

The rest of us do *not* want to talk about religion.

JOSEPHINE

#6. Josephine supposes she’s the only non-virgin.

MARTHA V

The Marthas aren’t buying this without details.

There is an awkward pause,

CASEY

Details which Casey prays that Josephine won't let herself be goaded into.

MARTHA V

V asks was it diverse or segregated, was he white, black or other? The Marthas laugh.

JOSEPHINE

Sorry, says Josephine, strike that, someone else go. Forget I said anything, Josephine says. I mean it, she says. *(Shut up, Josephine, she thinks. Please. Someone else go.)*

MARTHA P

P asks, *Friend, stranger, or relative?* and the Marthas laugh.

JOSEPHINE

Josephine bites her lip. He's a shadow in her door; she clenches her eyes; he's the dark inside her lids.

CASEY

Casey thinks, *Ew.* Casey says, *Ew.*

MARTHA V

Moving on then, says V. Striking the non-virgin mysteriously deflowered #6, and proposing a new #6. Martha V says she doesn’t watch television.

CASEY, JOSEPHINE, MARTHA P

The others say, That's not that different! Nor do they, much! Including Netflix and Hulu? Which sparks a debate about what shows Martha V so *should* be watching…

 *(Improv dialogue: the three of them talk with overlapping enthusiasm, for a good*

 *half-minute or so, about some current favorite shows. They discover one which only Josephine likes and the other two can't stand.)*

JOSEPHINE

#7, please! Josephine LOVES that show. Casey and P. laugh.

MARTHA P

Yeah, don't watch that, V, says Martha P. Aargh, y'all, she says, how long till lunch?

MARTHA V

But V's mind has drifted to back when she first came to this school, and was feeling so unexpectedly homesick for the northern town she'd left—which she had thought she hated. Mom, everybody already knows each other. And they all have money. They're really nice an' all, but it feels so narrow and exclusive…

MARTHA P *(as MARTHA V's mother)*

Well, sweetheart, any place you're not a part of yet can feel narrow. But don't worry, things will get better, if you don't expect the moon.

JOSEPHINE

Josephine is a little scared of the moon. Or at least of being outside at night with the moon's round white face the only other face anywhere around. Sure, it's *pretty*, but there was this one time, once, when she was little— *(Well, she was twelve— No. Zip it.)*

MARTHA V

My mom, V tells them, says this isn't *designed* to be a diverse community. She says the *point* of a place like this is social exclusivity. The trick, for a place like this, she says, is more to *seem* to embrace diversity; to *believe* we're inclusive; but not really be.

JOSEPHINE

We are all different, though.

MARTHA V

As people, sure. Not socially, honey. Academic background, tuition, parents' professions, where we live. Mostly we aren't.

 JOSEPHINE

There are scholarships, you know.

 MARTHA P

Yeah, because we need those kids. Or we couldn't even fake it.

 MARTHA V

Exactly.

 CASEY

You said "we."

 MARTHA P

I'm not on scholarship. Casey doesn't say anything. P. can read the you know perfectly well what I mean look on her face, though. *(Martha P should not even have opened her big bad person of diverse color mouth. And V hasn't even noticed.)*

 JOSEPHINE

Who *are* the scholarship kids anyway? I don't know. I've never thought about it.

 MARTHA P

P isn't sure if V is tactfully ignoring this or if she's lost in her own train of thought.

 MARTHA V
They're sincere, probably. V *is* lost in her own train of thought. Probably they don't even see it. What most of the parents would do and think if there were too many of those outsider kids.

CASEY

That is so cynical, says Casey, and so not true. What she thinks is: That girl's mother is a *drunk*.

MARTHA V

It *is* cynical, says Martha V to Casey. Mostly, V is less cynical than her mother. I'm not saying I agree with her. She likes to talk about systemic this, and systemic that. People aren't systemic, mostly. Who wants to be systemic? V has faith in people.

CASEY

People are well-meaning, mostly.

MARTHA P

Aargh! I'm hungry! I don't care any more! We need eight of these!

CASEY

Pizza! The others look at her as if she knows something. Casey doesn't know anything. Look, no smart phone, people! Casey's look says back at them. She turned in her smart phone, her look says, just like they did!

 JOSEPHINE

We all have smart phones. We all turned them in. They look at her. Casey and Martha P look at her. For the back up sames, Josephine tells them. Martha V is lost in her own thoughts. Some of our eight sames are stupid.

MARTHA V

And faith's important.… Martha V does have a lot of thoughts. Sometimes she does get lost in them. For #7, V says, let's put something about our different faiths. That we're a Catholic, a Methodist, an Episcopalian, and an atheist.

JOSEPHINE

Oh, says Josephine, am I the only Christian?

MARTHA P

Y’all, *focus*! says Martha P. Come *on*, she thinks. *(One more difference and we’re done.)*

*CURTAIN.*