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I start to feel estranged even before the day begins. Bus 756 stops every day on the corner of Darnell and Waxhaw in Devonwood, a good distance if I ever decided to walk. Each morning I walk to the corner and wait, four of every five days standing there alone, while everyone drives to school. And, after a few minutes out in the cold, I see the yellow door opening before me, ready to transport me into a psychedelic realm of confusion.

Having been relaxed, having concentrated on the wind, wildlife, and trees, I head to my seat without looking down the aisle. That is because I know what is down the aisle--at the back, noise--chatter, shouts, the incessant gibbering of male and female voices running together incongruously. At the front, it is the same. I am the only person who never speaks on the bus because I have nothing to say.

What is there for me to say? Having just boarded the bus and having done nothing else last night except dinner, homework, TV, and bed, I have nothing my peers would like to converse about. Their ideas of conversation are talking about people's relationships, gossip, who or what happened on last night's edition of some outlandish sitcom, what color lipstick should they wear at lunch--petty, stupid stuff to which I have nothing to contribute. Of course, we both believe what we want to say is important. That is the only similarity between us that comes to mind.

On route to school, I wonder how wonderful it would be if I could speak to someone with my same interests. Each morning I look out the windows at the scenery. I like scenery. I like to watch nature unfold before the windows of the bus--but who else on the bus cares? The girl sitting beside me wants to ask a friend behind her who put that nice weave in her hair. People seem more interested in who attached an artificial body supplement to their head than the road in front of them; we could have an impending head-on collision, and no one would know it. We both watch some sort of television, although my busmates probably watch more than I do. However, I watch the news at six. I watch the Weather Channel because I love weather. I watch the Discovery Channel. What I don't watch is MTV, sitcoms, talk shows, shows that degrade people's races, or shows that offer no understandable meaning--which are all shows my busmates would kill to watch.

It isn't just conversation that makes me feel like an outsider--people's actions also affect me. There are boys who board the bus with their pants lower than their buttocks, vests three inches thick with no sleeves, and boots the size of laptop computers that stomp the floor all the way to the back seat. They walk with a gait that seems they have one leg shorter than the other, and odd sports paraphernalia such as Adidas and Nike headbands, wristbands, legbands, and tags all over their clothes. They come dressed to school like modern-day circus clowns, and all their friends seem to like their "style." Girls are the same. Some, not all of them, walk down the aisle with spindly legs tipped with two-inch thick platform shoes and tight clothes that reveal every line on their bodies. Not to mention the use of black lipstick and nail polish, hair weave, and other "beauty items" my busmates seem to find attractive.

Unlike them, however, I appear to be out of style. I take pride in dressing moderately decent, although people next to me occasionally stare. Several girls have asked me earlier last year why I don't wear "stylish" dresses (bathing-suit style, probably), or get some weave in my hair, simply because I have a dark complexion. Why don't I prefer to straighten or style my hair? As if my hair offended them, with the myriads of other things they have to be concerned with. I do not think that a person has to "look his or her race." That idea has no meaning for me. It is an

offense to know the people I share my seat with in the bus classify others according to the color of their skin.

Aside from watching the scenery pass by or thinking about that day's educational activities, I do nothing else on my ten-minute ride to school. In my perception, people sit to the side and behind me like gray stone statues, nothing more. I no longer matter to them, and they represent no great importance to me. After all, besides sitting together, we have nothing else in common. On my bus, I feel like an outsider because I have nothing to socialize about. Out of thirty-one people, I know only one person I can make small talk to. Everyone else--it's impossible.

However, I only have to wait for ten minutes. Soon, the door will open over motionless concrete ground, and I can be free to seek someone to talk to. Ten minutes is not a long time to feel estranged; I know that just around the building, I can find more stimulating discussions. The ride to and from school will never change--neither do I want it to. I am happy being an outsider on my bus. If every step I take in ignorance of blaring, raucous tales of last night is made to take me somewhere better, I am happy.

Submitted, 970226 ret pha arnbdr pha feb 22