

# ALLIANCE FOR EQUALITY

*The Broken Curriculum!*



*The History of Lois Curtis*

Alliance for Equality and The Broken Curriculum:  
The History of Lois Curtis

A production of the George Wolfe Youth Interns at Lois Curtis Campus

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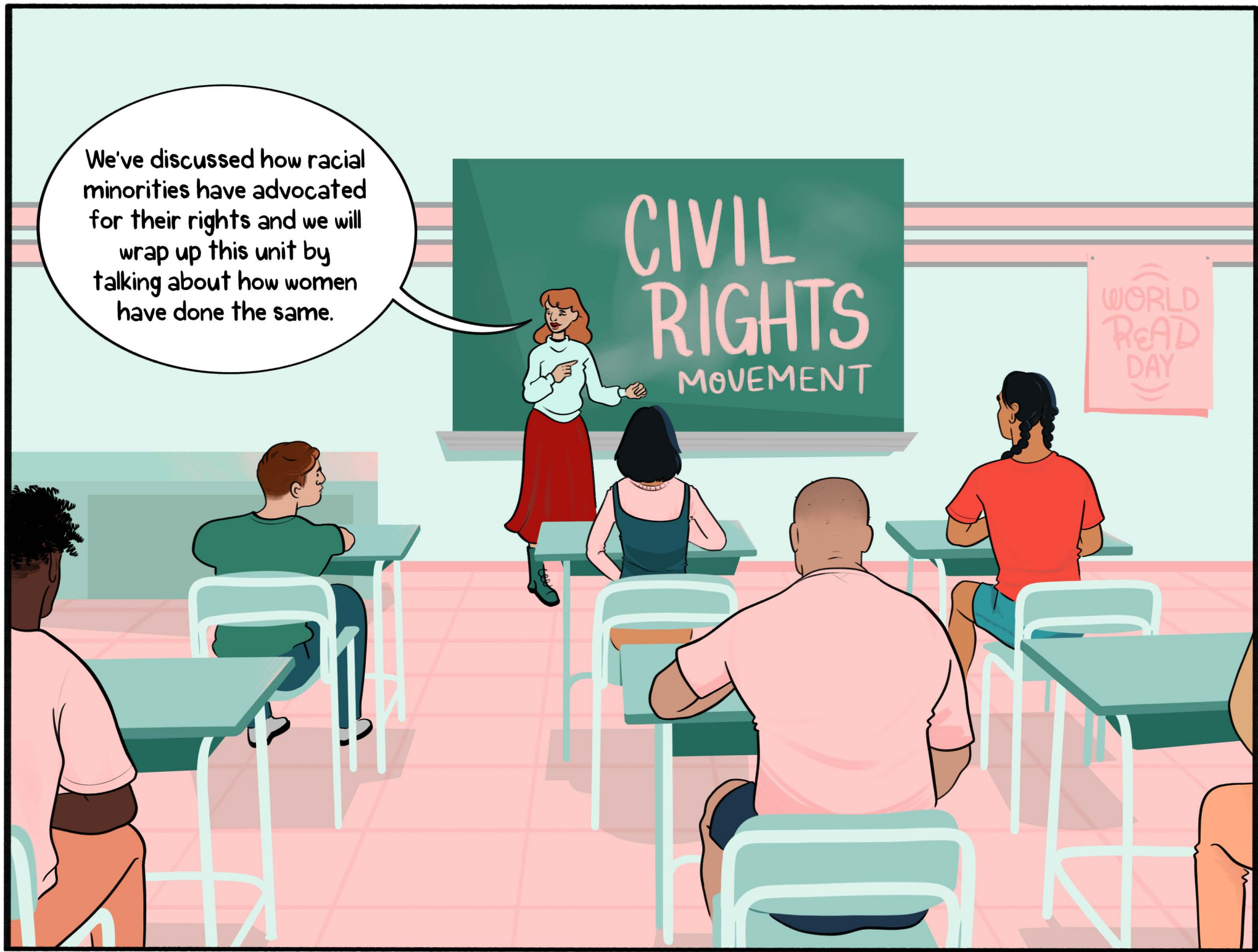
ISBN

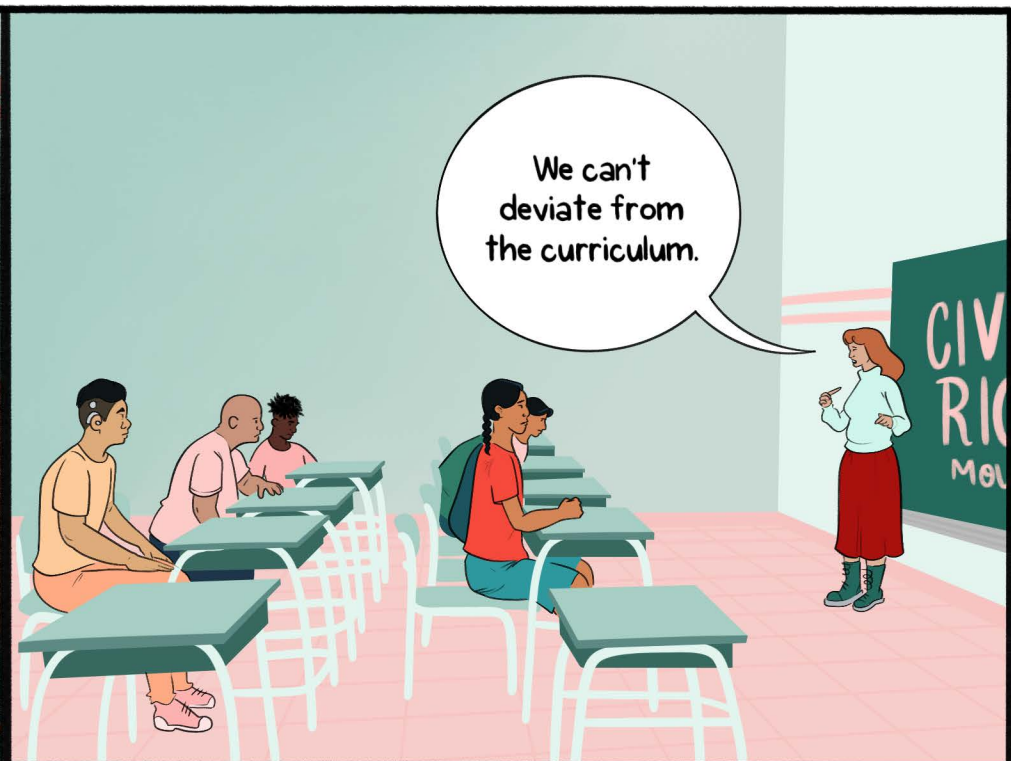
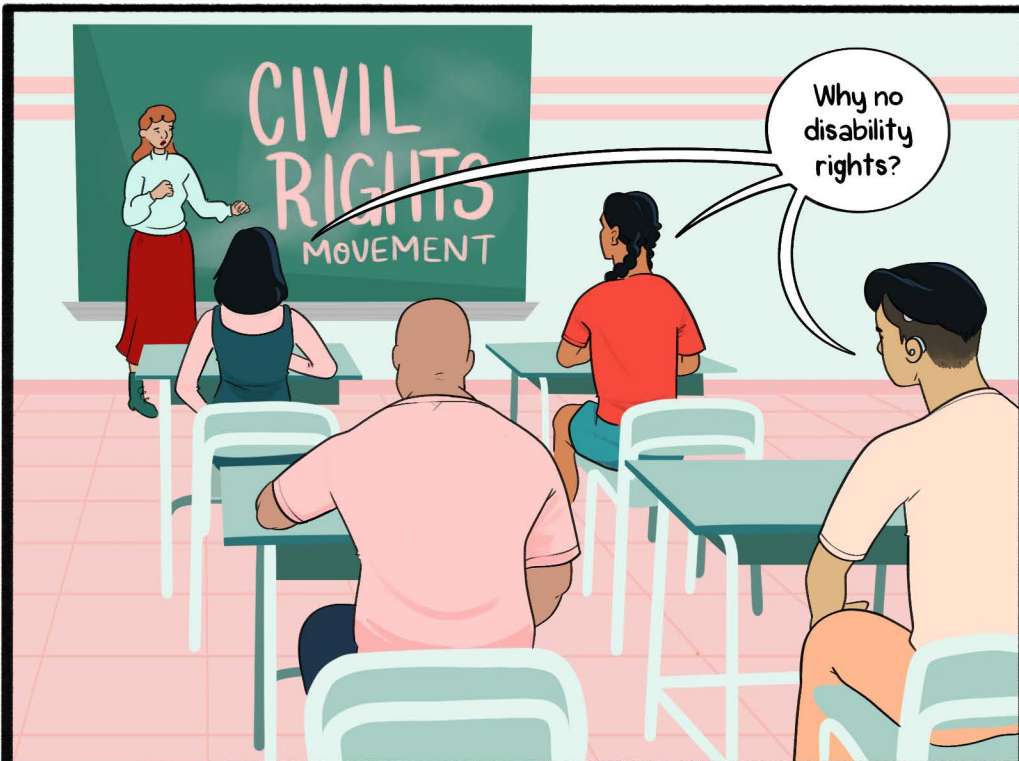
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We've discussed how racial minorities have advocated for their rights and we will wrap up this unit by talking about how women have done the same.

# CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

WORLD READ DAY







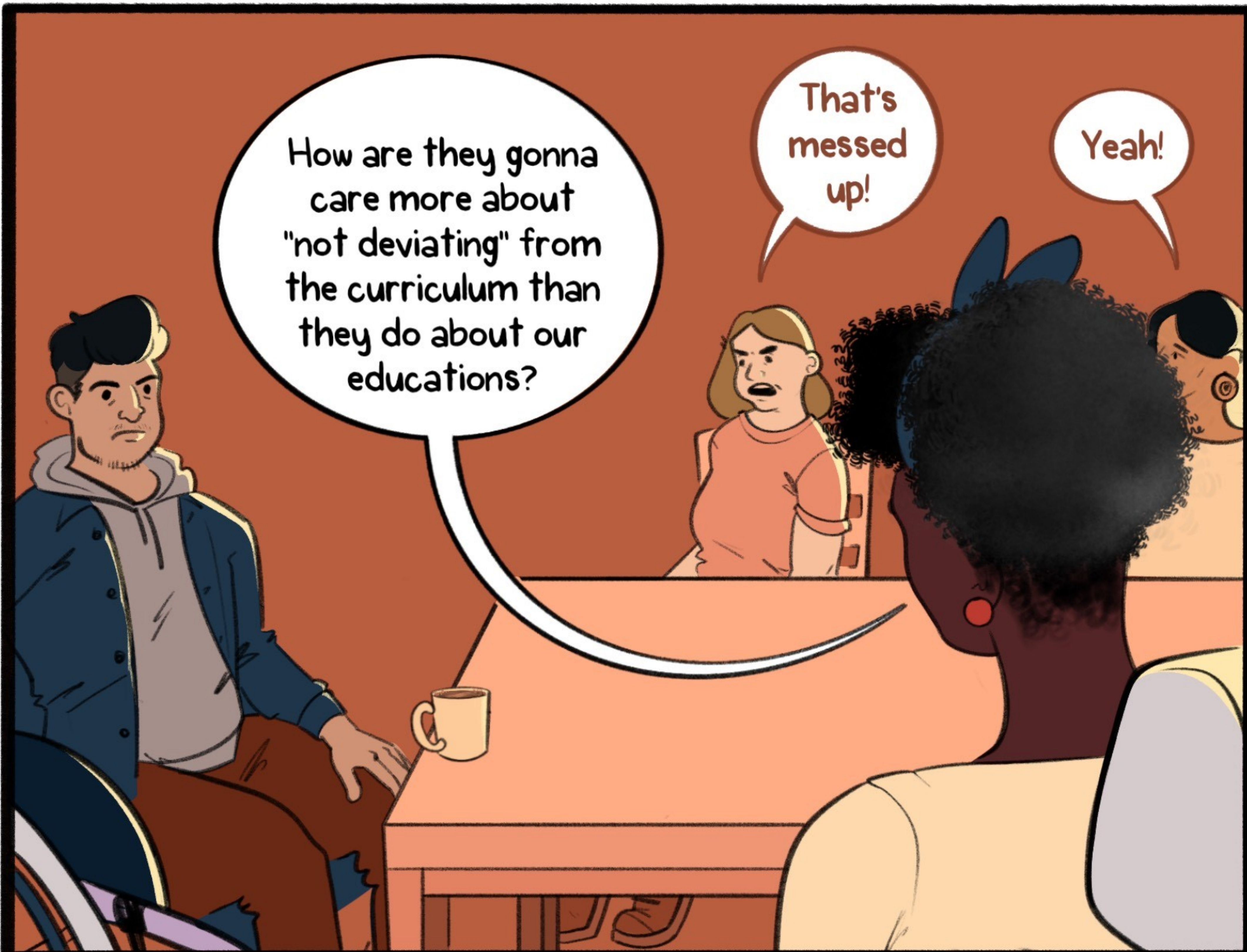
We've got to do something about this!

We can't deviate from the curriculum?

Let's meet up with Carlos!

Yeah!

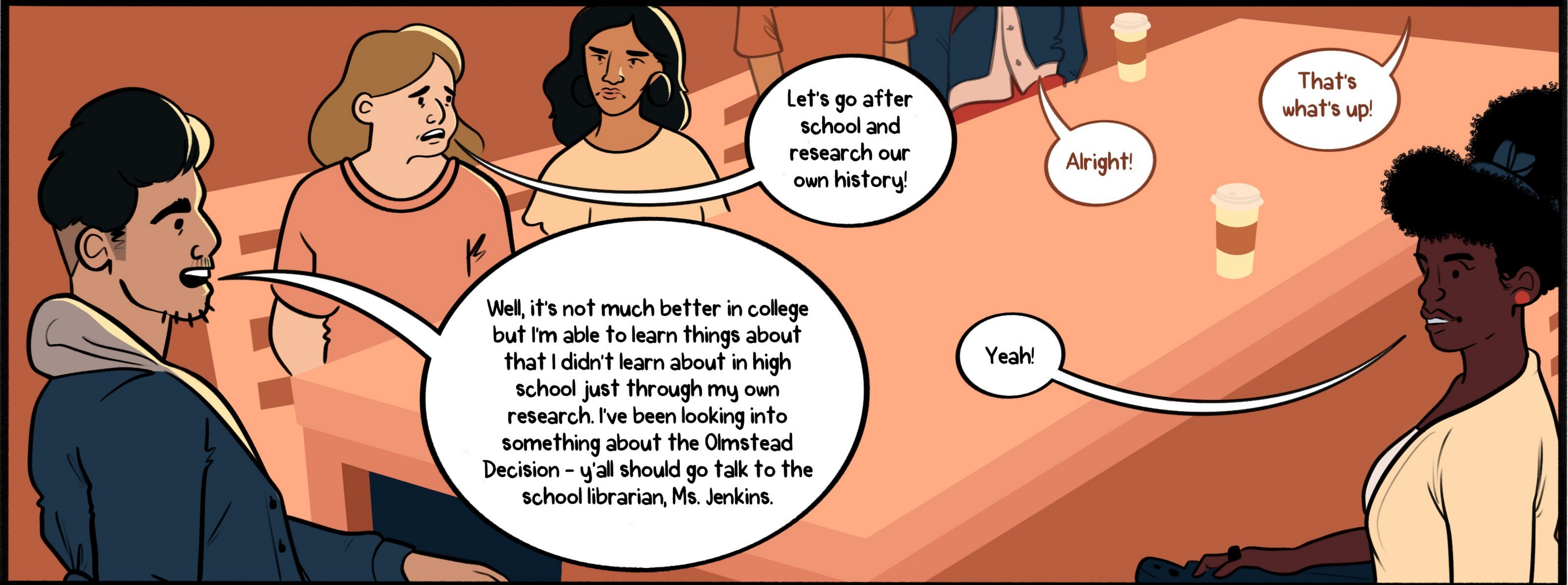
Man, that's messed up!



How are they gonna care more about "not deviating" from the curriculum than they do about our educations?

That's messed up!

Yeah!



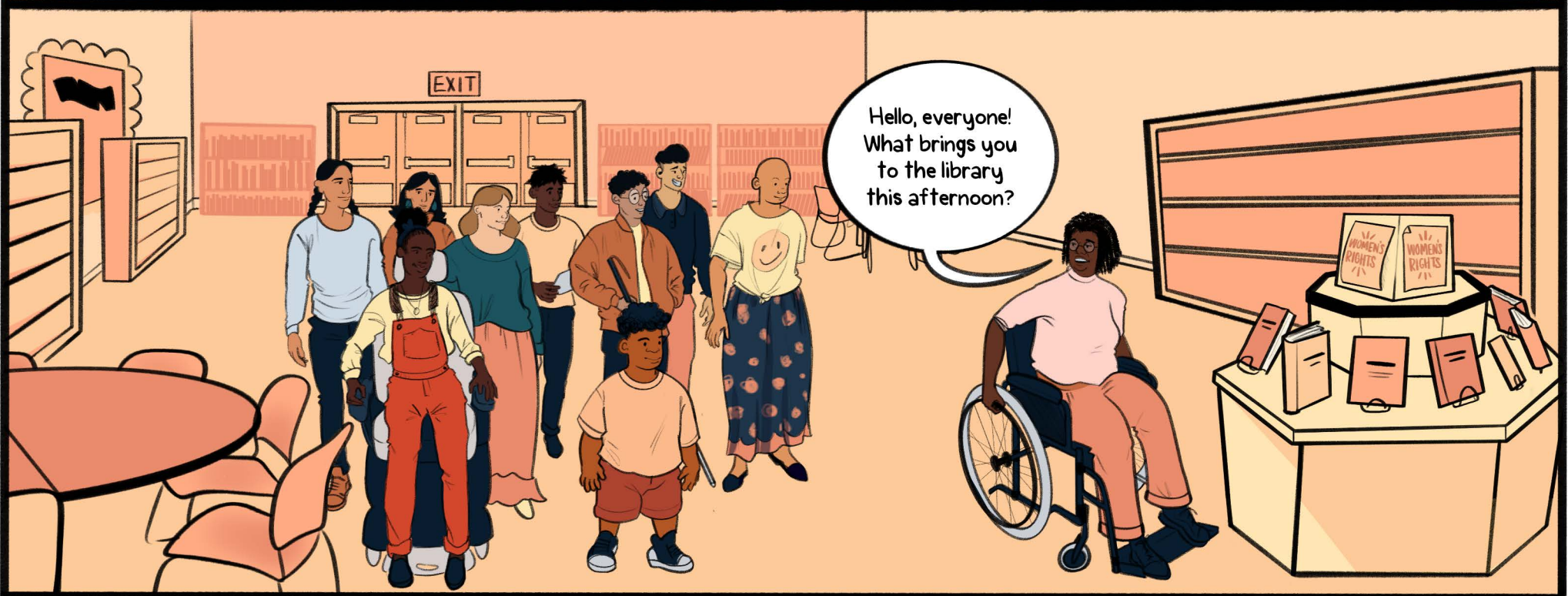
Well, it's not much better in college but I'm able to learn things about that I didn't learn about in high school just through my own research. I've been looking into something about the Olmstead Decision - y'all should go talk to the school librarian, Ms. Jenkins.

Let's go after school and research our own history!

Alright!

That's what's up!

Yeah!





Our unit on civil rights in history class didn't include disability.

We want to research disability history and share what we've learned with everyone!

Yeah!

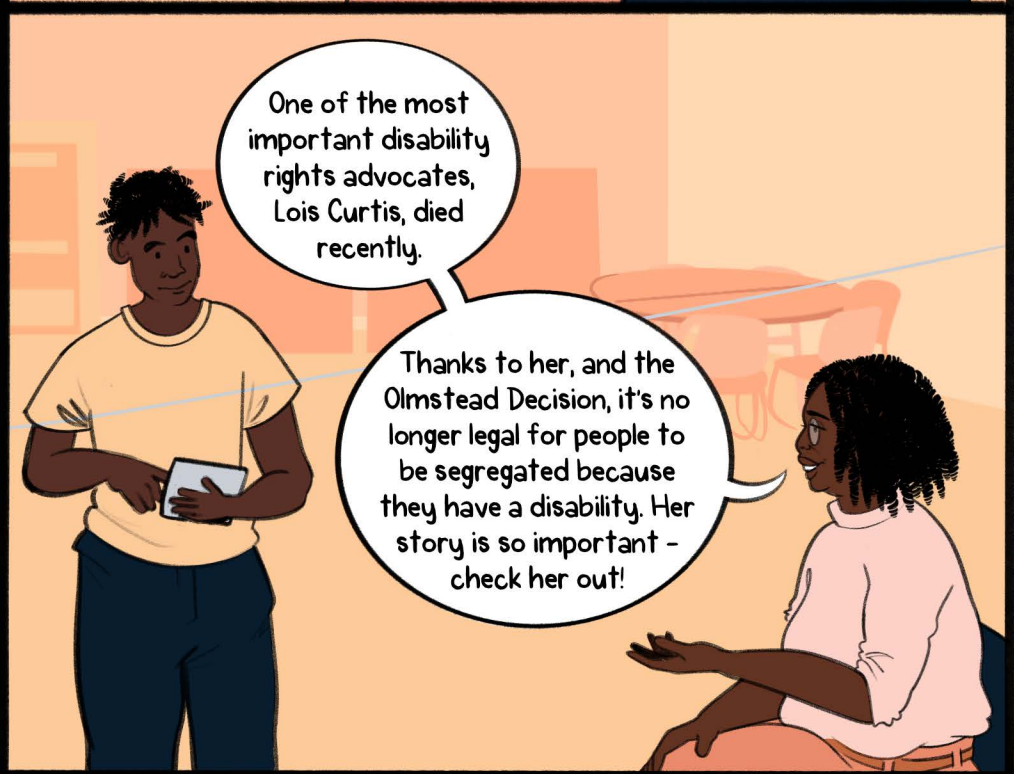


I am so excited about you wanting to learn more about disability history!

It hasn't always been the case, but, thanks to the internet, there's a lot of great information out there about people who have - and are - advocating for people with disabilities.



Carlos mentioned something about Olmstead something or other? Where should we start researching, Ms. Jenkins?

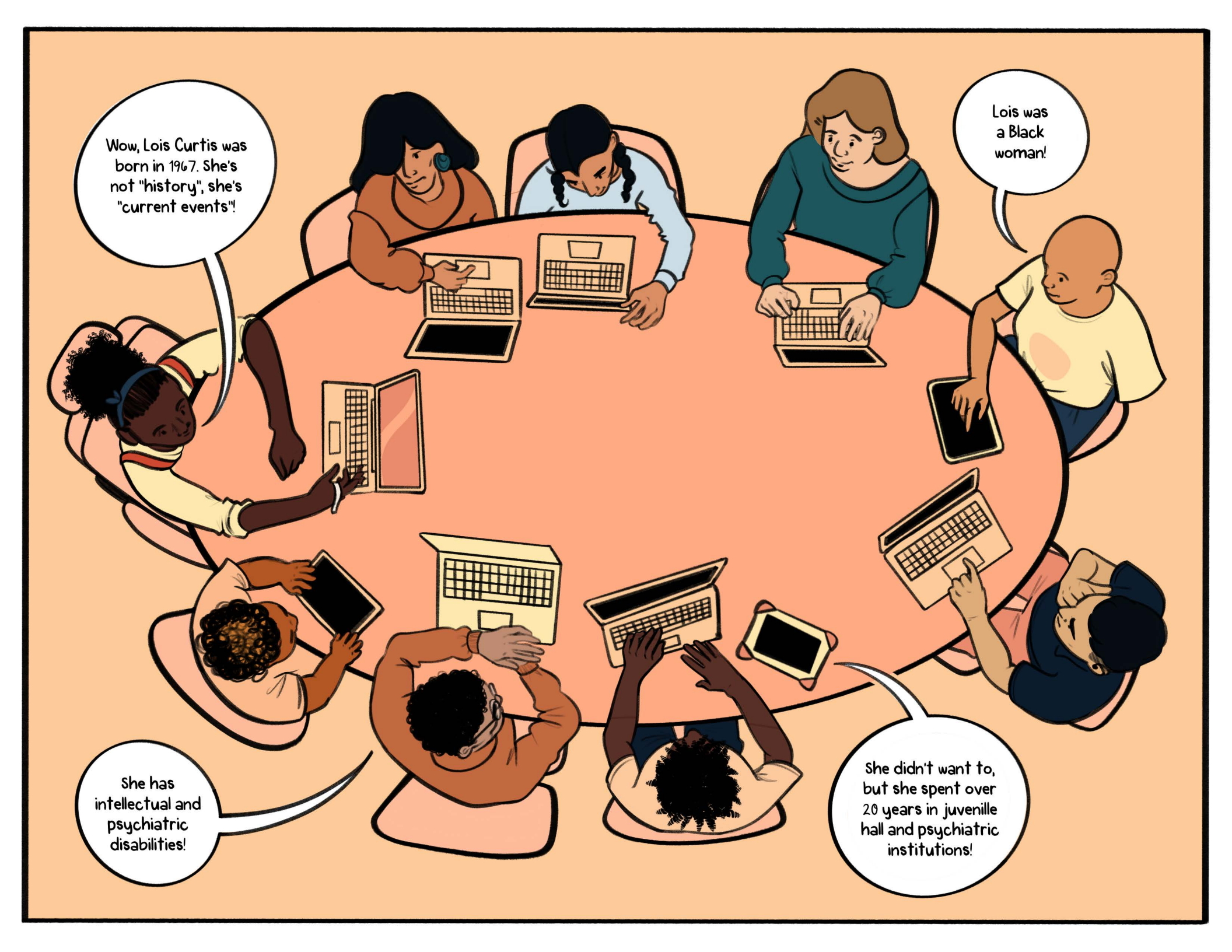


One of the most important disability rights advocates, Lois Curtis, died recently.

Thanks to her, and the Olmstead Decision, it's no longer legal for people to be segregated because they have a disability. Her story is so important - check her out!





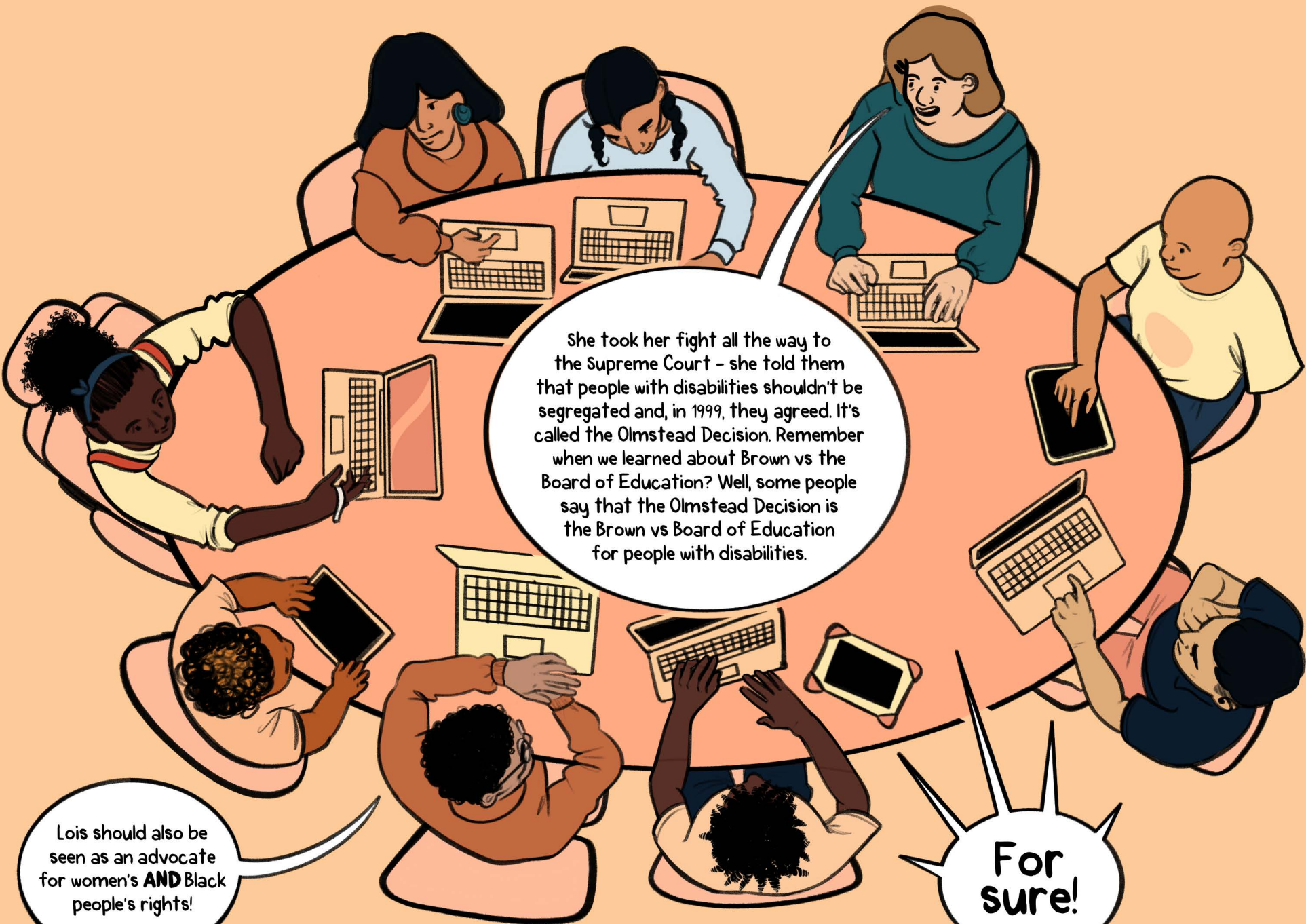


Wow, Lois Curtis was born in 1967. She's not "history", she's "current events"!

Lois was a Black woman!

She has intellectual and psychiatric disabilities!

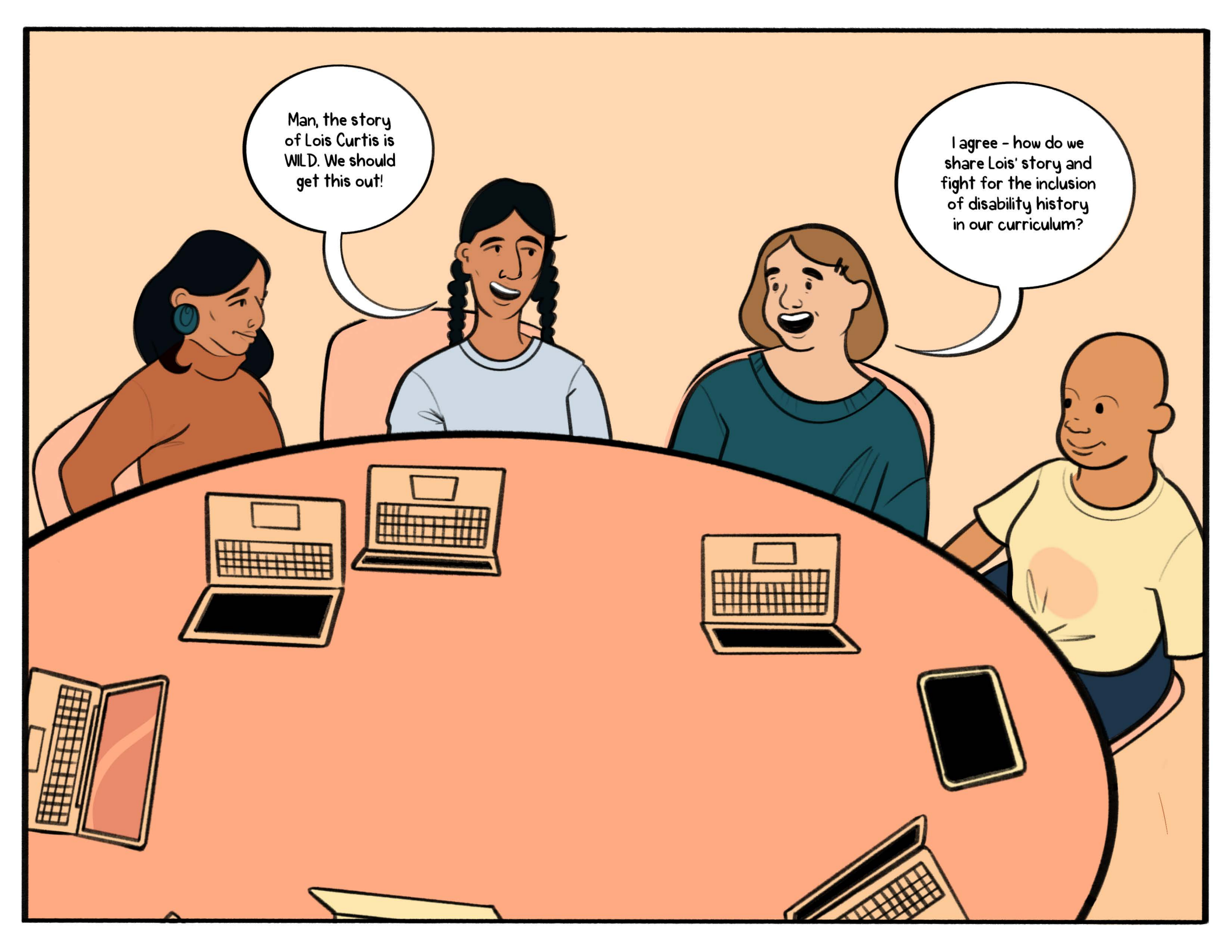
She didn't want to, but she spent over 20 years in juvenile hall and psychiatric institutions!



She took her fight all the way to the Supreme Court - she told them that people with disabilities shouldn't be segregated and, in 1999, they agreed. It's called the Olmstead Decision. Remember when we learned about Brown vs the Board of Education? Well, some people say that the Olmstead Decision is the Brown vs Board of Education for people with disabilities.

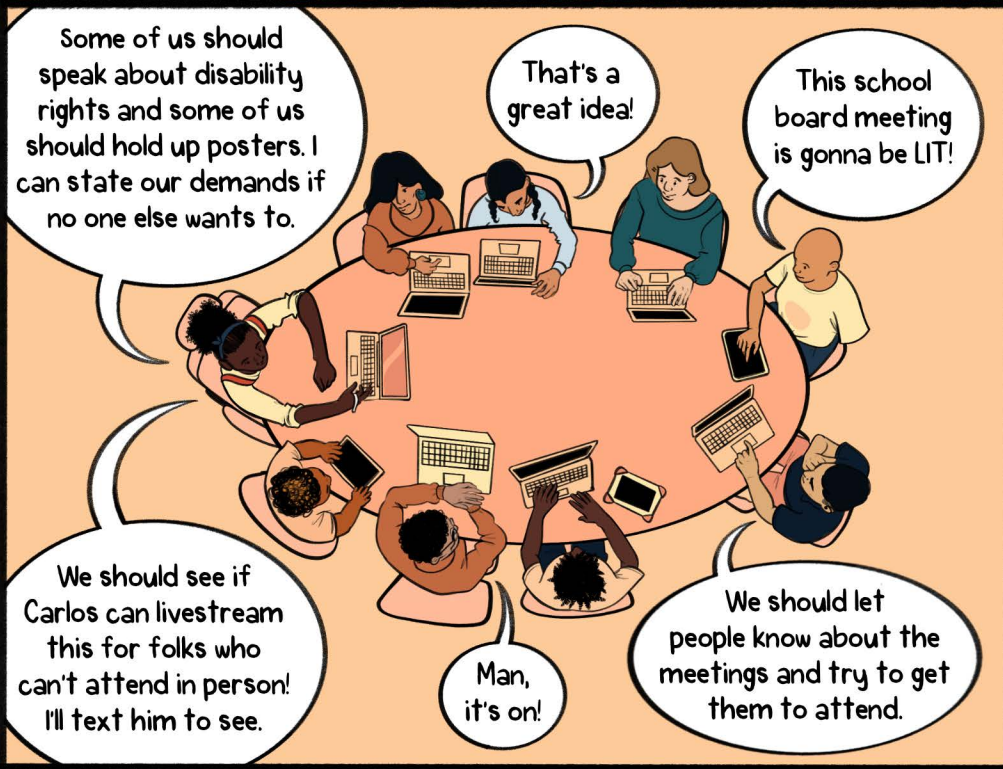
Lois should also be seen as an advocate for women's **AND** Black people's rights!

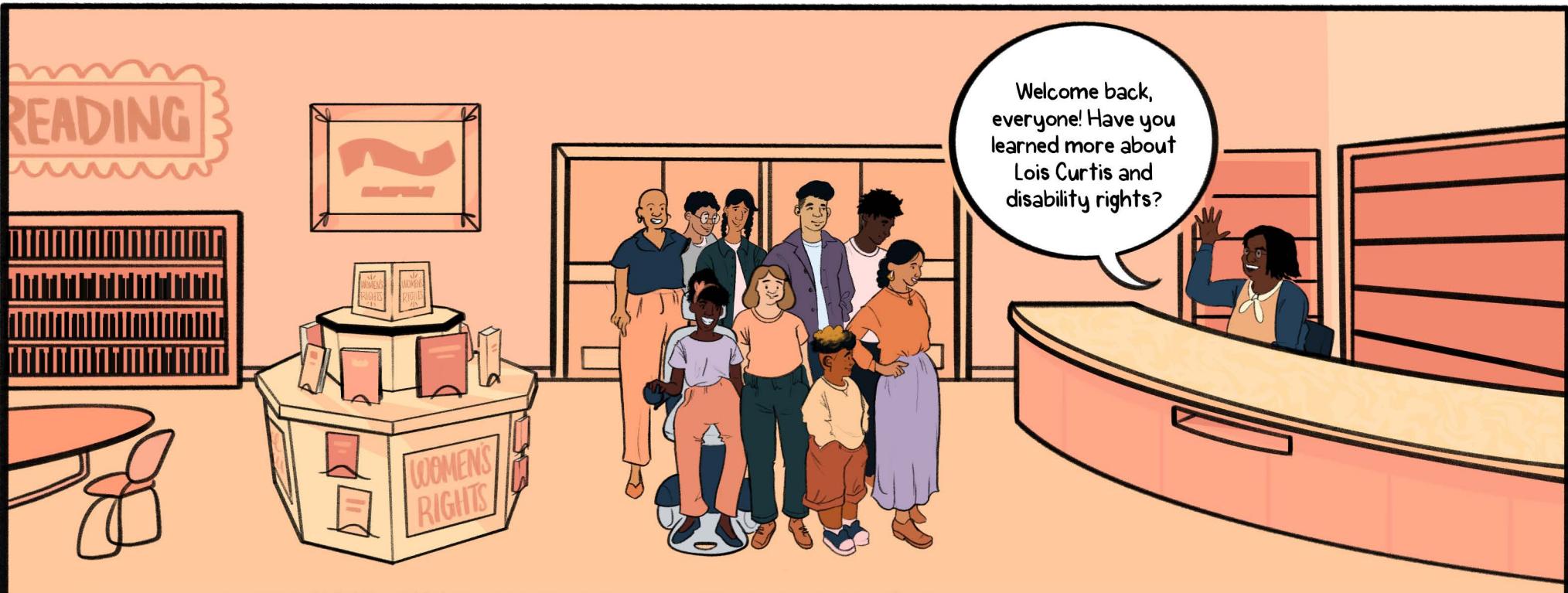
For sure!



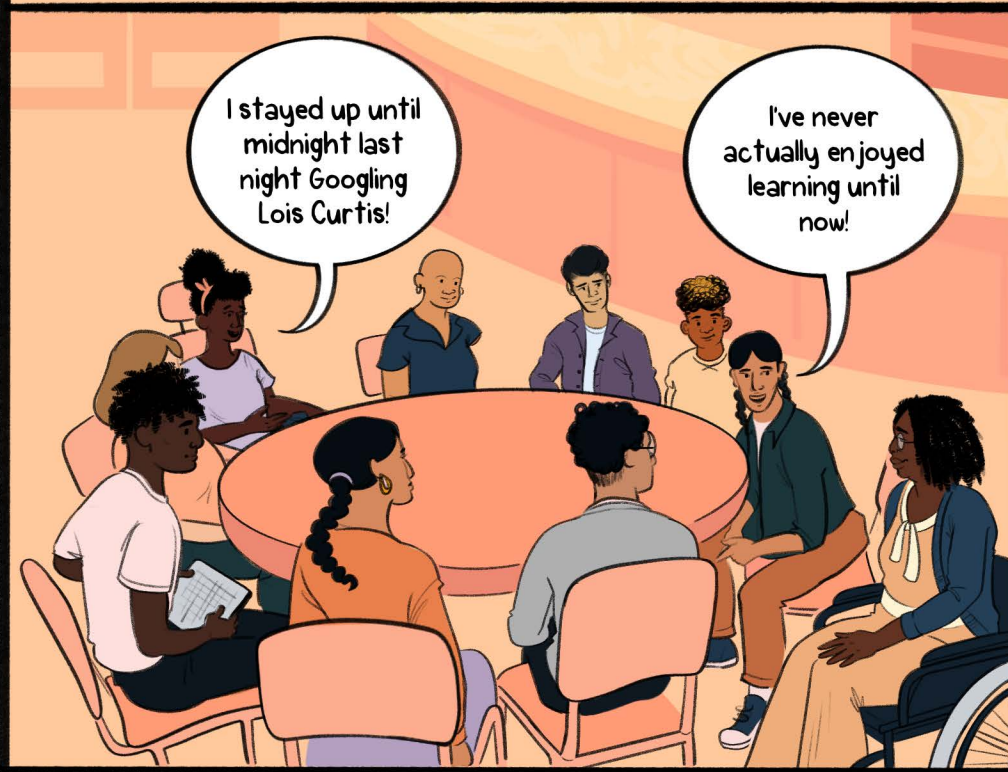
Man, the story of Lois Curtis is WILD. We should get this out!

I agree - how do we share Lois' story and fight for the inclusion of disability history in our curriculum?





Welcome back, everyone! Have you learned more about Lois Curtis and disability rights?



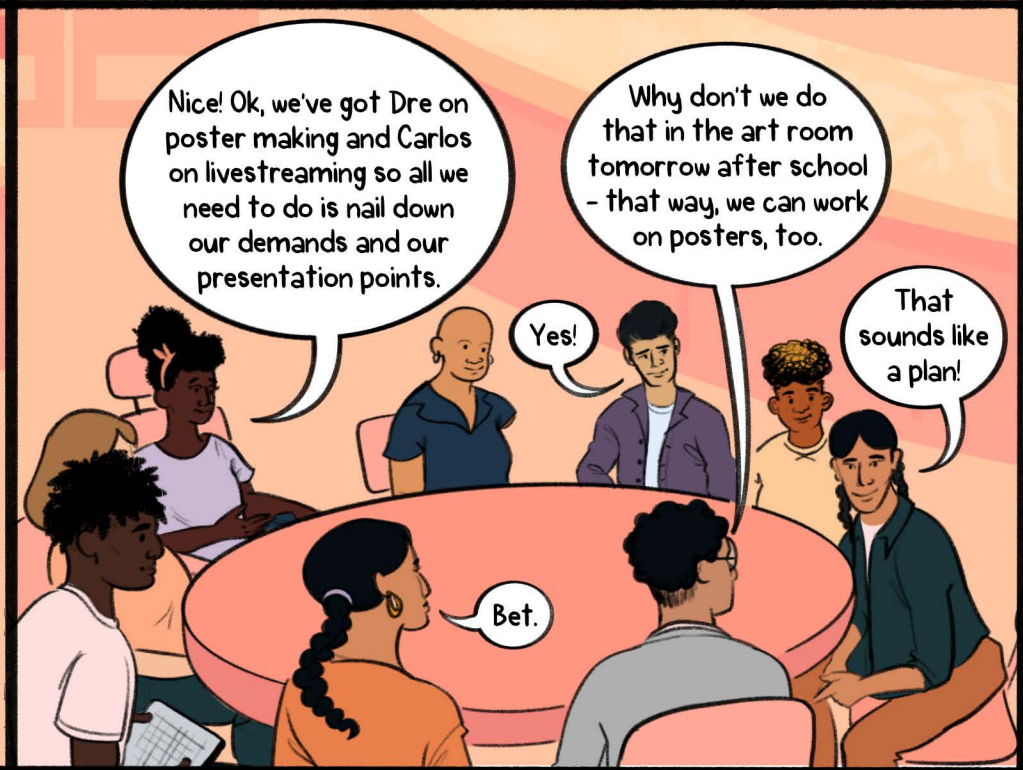
I stayed up until midnight last night Googling Lois Curtis!

I've never actually enjoyed learning until now!



Well, don't let me hold you up from your important work. Let me know if you need anything!


Sure will - thank you, Ms. Jenkins!



Ok, y'all. How about I type as we nail down the points we want to cover next week.







That makes sense - Ok, we definitely want to talk about Lois Curtis and the Olmstead Decision and the fact that, just like, thanks to Brown vs Board of Education, we can't segregate in schools because of race, the Olmstead Decision means that we can't segregate in communities because of disability.

And it's just as wrong to ignore disability history as it is to segregate people with disabilities.

That is a GREAT point, Jordan!

Well said, Jordan!  
Which leads to our  
demands, which are?

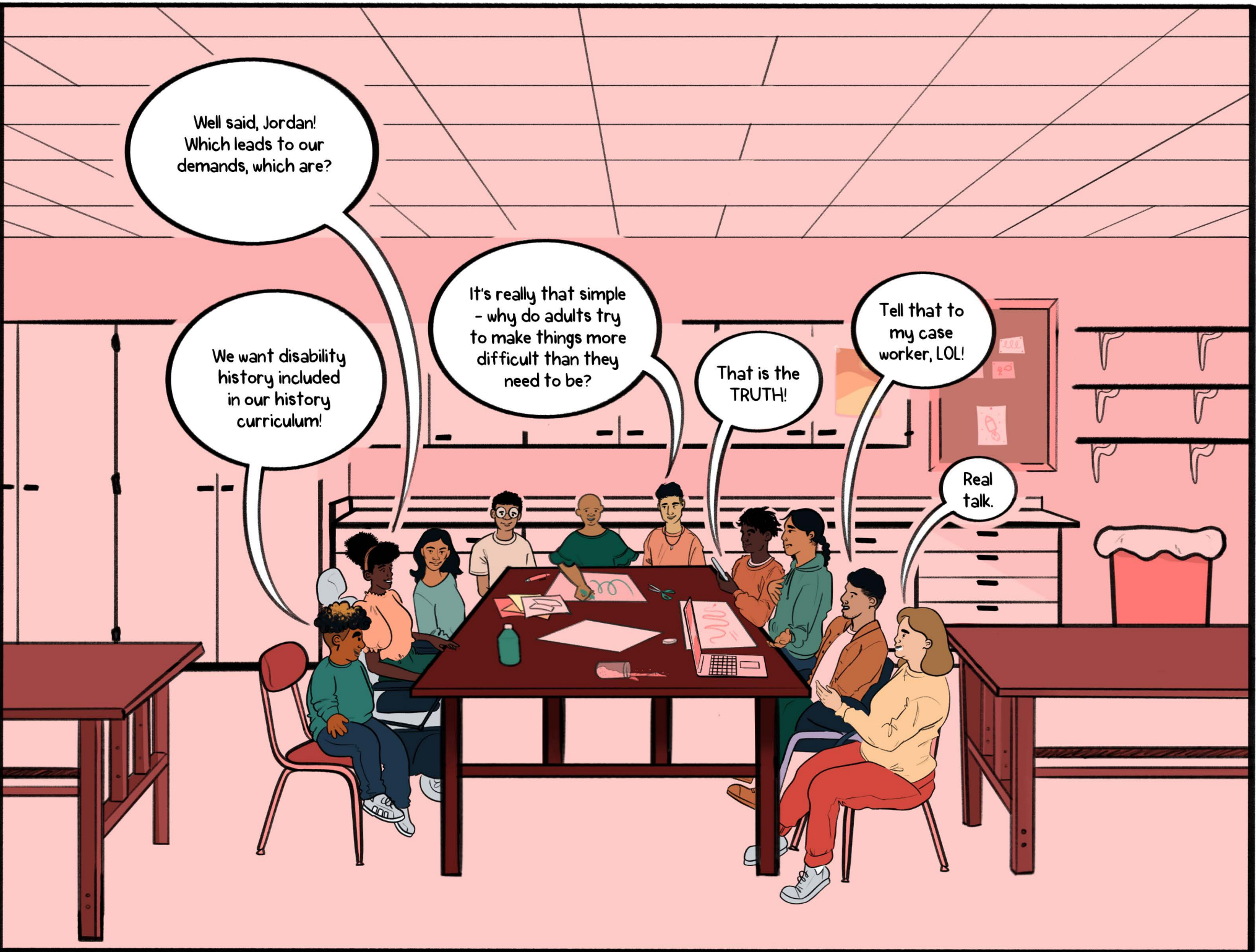
We want disability  
history included  
in our history  
curriculum!


It's really that simple  
- why do adults try  
to make things more  
difficult than they  
need to be?

That is the  
TRUTH!

Tell that to  
my case  
worker, LOL!


Real  
talk.





Ok, I definitely think we need some slogans for these posters and I've got a few ideas.

Me too!



Ok, let's get to work on these posters!

Make sure people who are watching the livestream can read them!

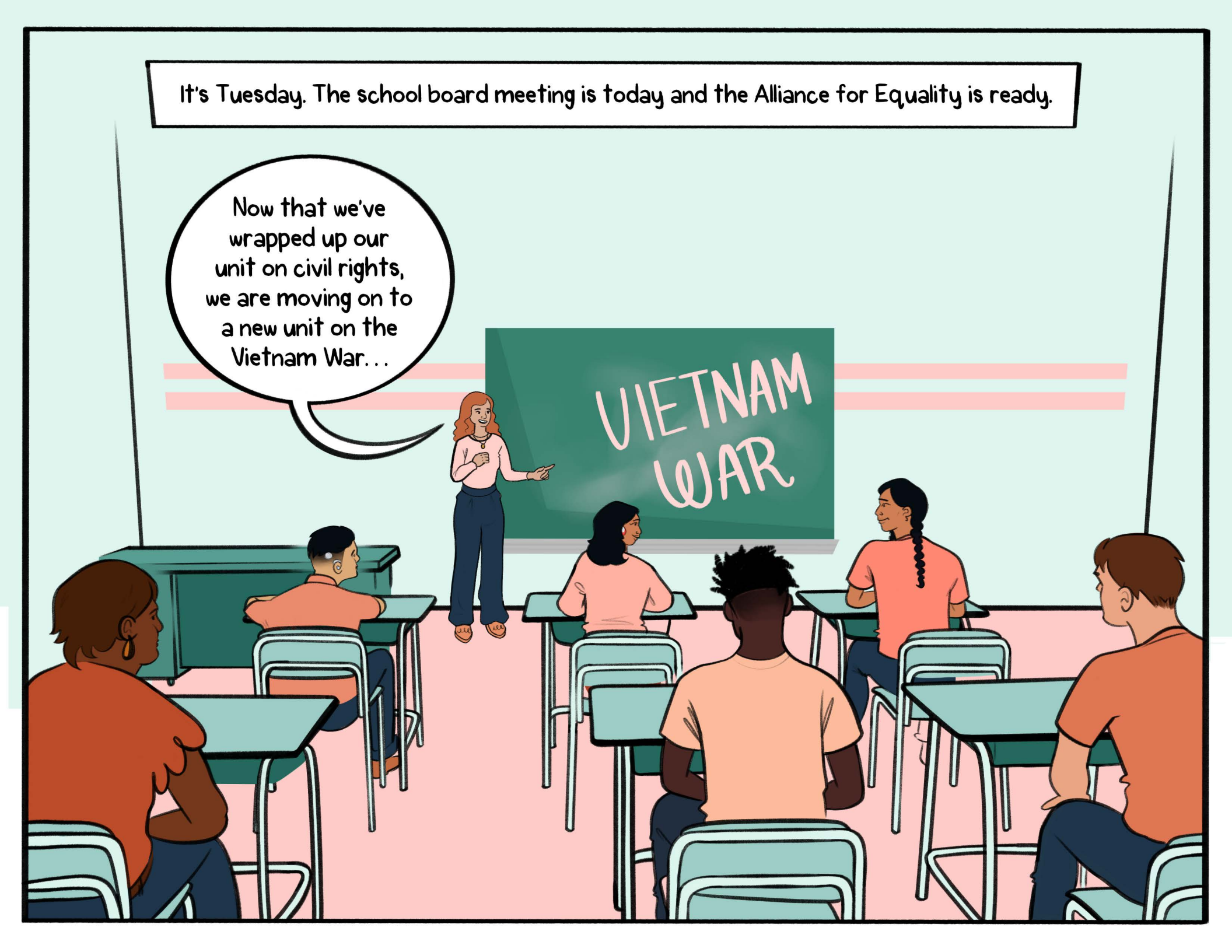
You don't have to tell me twice!

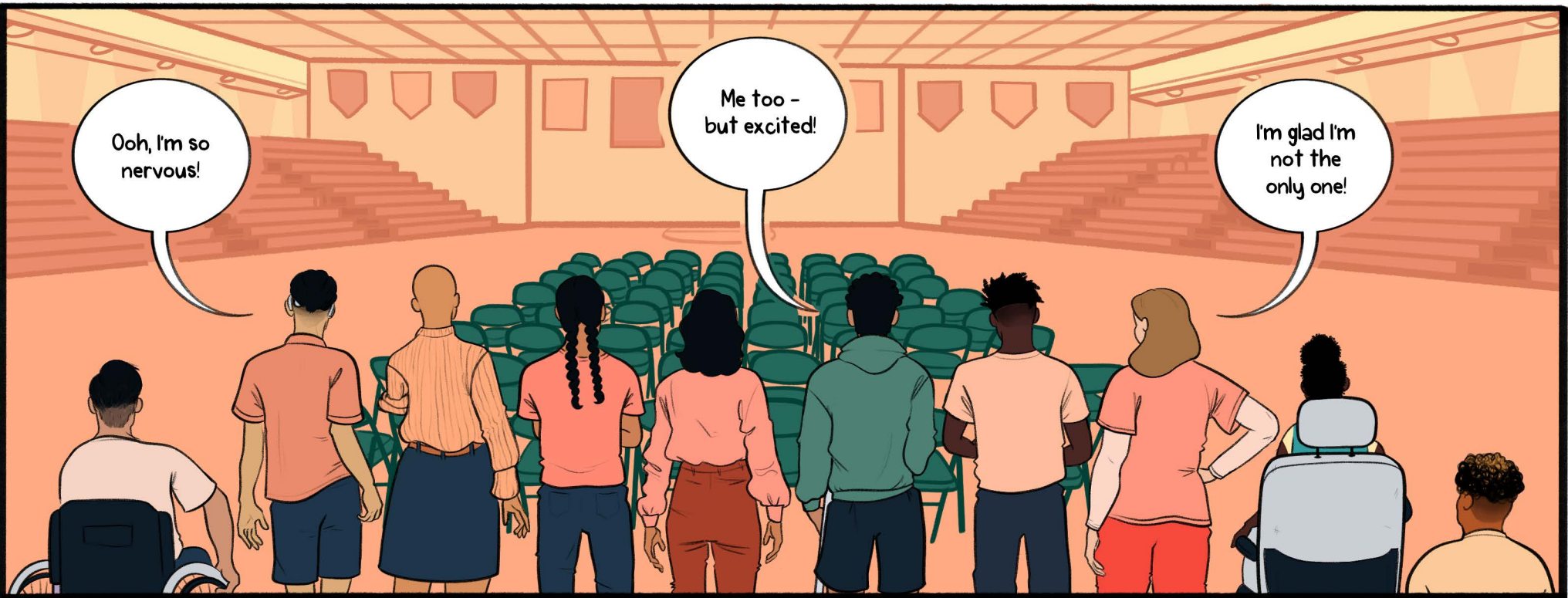
Where's the glitter?

It's Tuesday. The school board meeting is today and the Alliance for Equality is ready.

Now that we've wrapped up our unit on civil rights, we are moving on to a new unit on the Vietnam War...

VIETNAM  
WAR

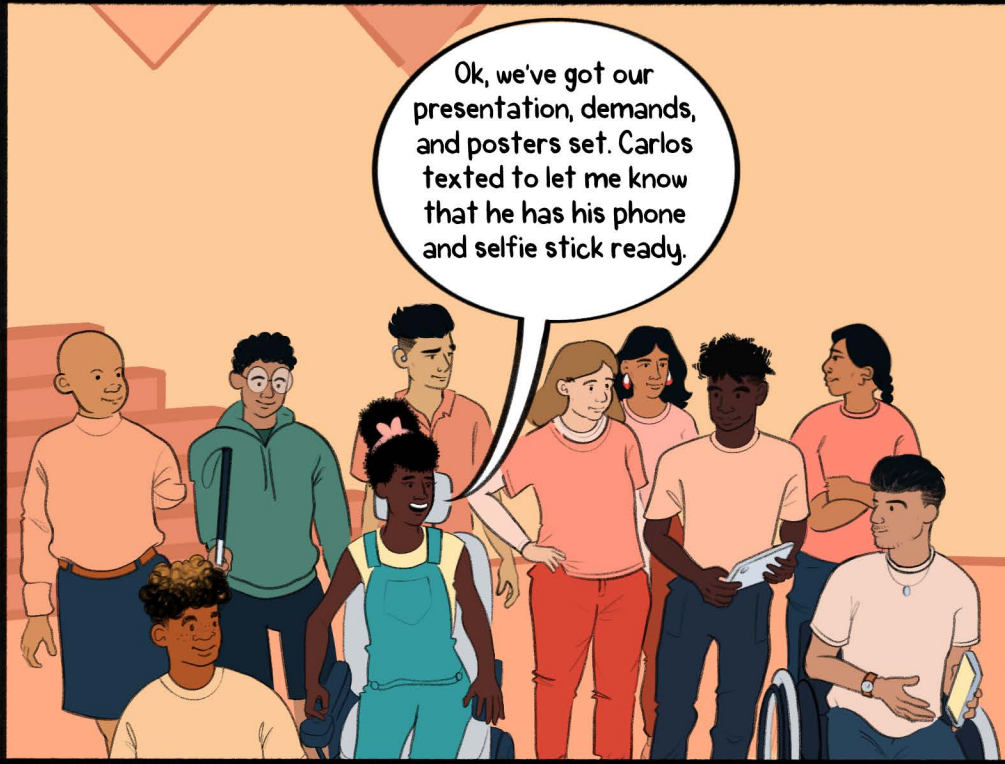




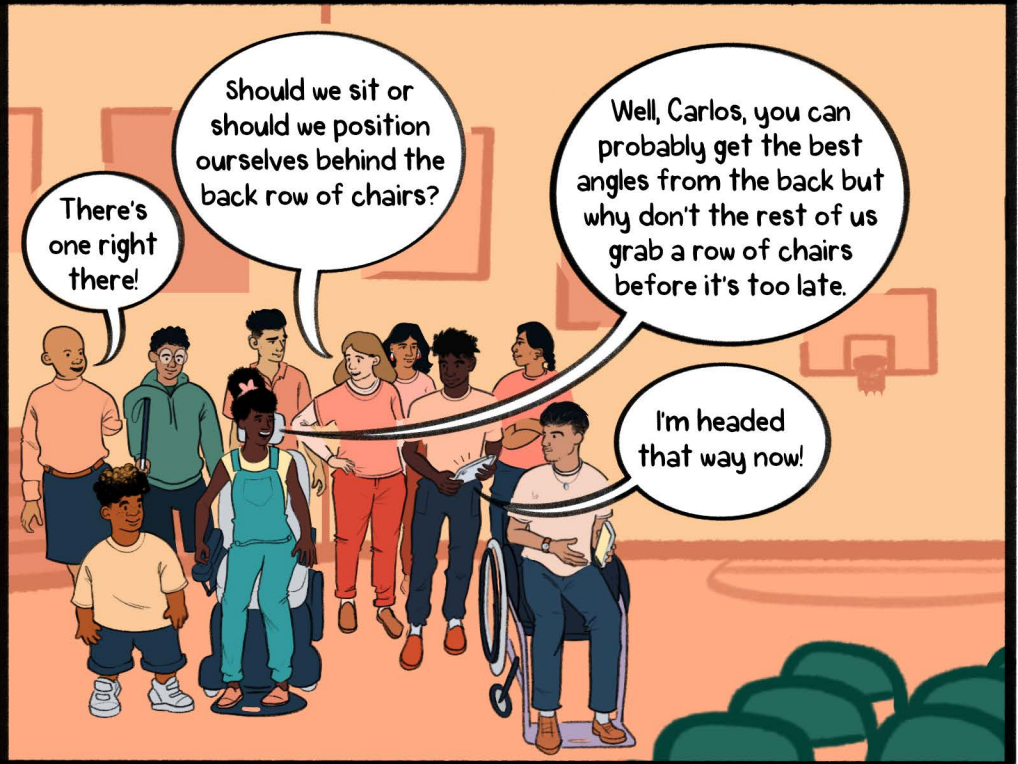
Ooh, I'm so nervous!

Me too - but excited!

I'm glad I'm not the only one!



Ok, we've got our presentation, demands, and posters set. Carlos texted to let me know that he has his phone and selfie stick ready.



There's one right there!

Should we sit or should we position ourselves behind the back row of chairs?

Well, Carlos, you can probably get the best angles from the back but why don't the rest of us grab a row of chairs before it's too late.

I'm headed that way now!




I open the floor to public comment. Who would like to speak?

My name is Kinsey and I am a member of the Alliance for Equality. We fight for the inclusion of students with disabilities and that's why we're here today.

That's right!


Yes!



We are here today because our history teacher doesn't include disability in our civil rights unit and that needs to change!

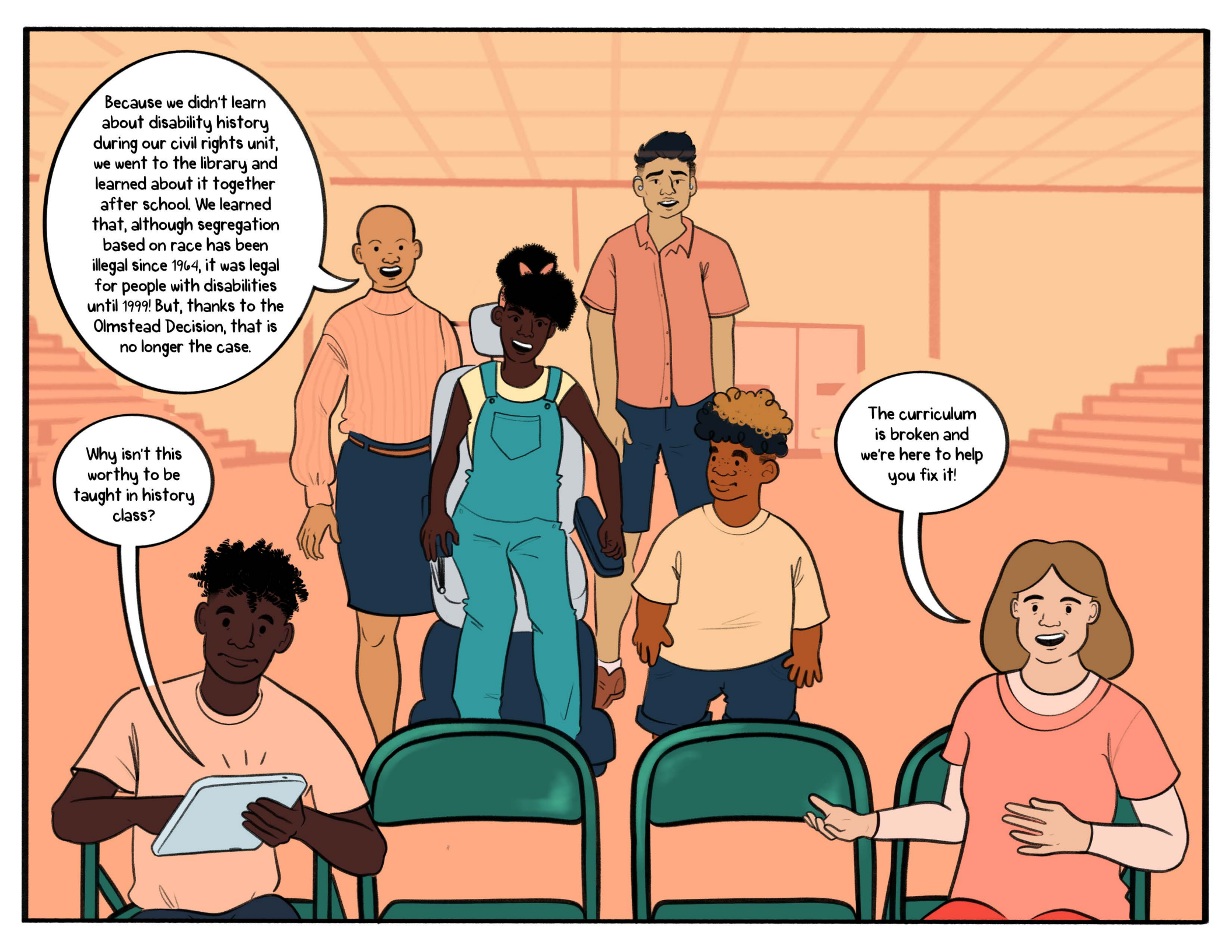
Disabled history is everyone's history!





Our demand is that whenever we're talking about civil rights that we include disability rights. It's not fair to segregate or ignore us and our history. And we want to share some disability rights history with everyone now, Shelby?







Because we didn't learn about disability history during our civil rights unit, we went to the library and learned about it together after school. We learned that, although segregation based on race has been illegal since 1964, it was legal for people with disabilities until 1999! But, thanks to the Olmstead Decision, that is no longer the case.

Why isn't this worthy to be taught in history class?

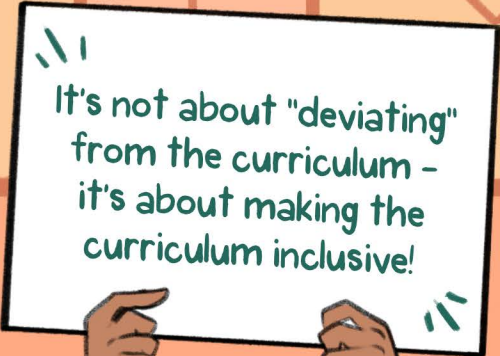
The curriculum is broken and we're here to help you fix it!



We appreciate your efforts here, but this meeting is about formality, not advocacy.



It's not about "deviating" from the curriculum - it's about making the curriculum inclusive!

A man with glasses and a green jacket is holding a white sign with green text. He is standing in a lecture hall with orange walls and rows of green chairs. To his left is a man with dark skin and curly hair, and to his right is a woman with brown hair.

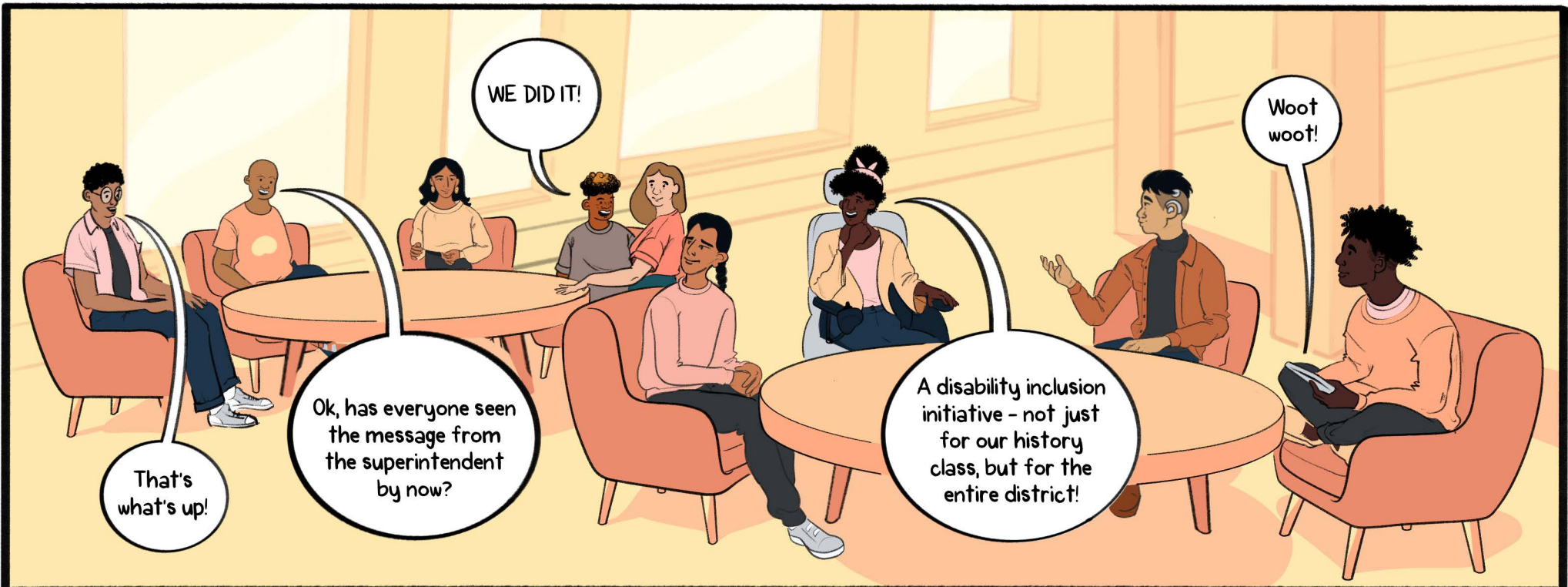
It's not about "deviating"  
from the curriculum -  
it's about making the  
curriculum inclusive!

A white speech bubble with a black outline, containing the text "We said what we said!". It is positioned to the right of the man holding the sign.

We said what  
we said!

A man with dark hair and a light-colored shirt is taking a selfie with a silver smartphone. He is smiling. In the background, a panel of three people is seated at a table on a stage. The lecture hall has orange walls and rows of green chairs.

This is SO  
going to  
go viral!





I know that's right!

Yes!

Thank you, Ms. Jenkins - you introducing us to Lois Curtis is what got all this started!

I already know, everyone. GREAT work - you all should feel very, very proud of yourselves!



*Lois Curtis 10 years after Olmstead, photo credit: Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities; <https://gcdd.org/archived-gcdd-blogs/632-advocates-cheer-landmark-settlement-to-support-georgia-residents-with-developmental-disabilities-and-mental-illness-move-out-of-instituti>*

## Who was Lois Curtis?

Lois Curtis, artist, activist, and wayshower, was born on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1967 in Atlanta, GA.

Lois' early life was marked by struggles at school. She had disabilities that made sitting still, paying attention, and learning hard. Her wandering and difficulty paying attention were treated as bad behavior so she was suspended from school, put into special classrooms while in school, and sometimes sent to mental health or juvenile detention institutions. As an adult, Lois's art included self- portraits of her memory of herself as a child, because she did not have photographs of herself from her childhood.

As Lois came into adulthood, she was left in institutions. She spent much of her twenties seeking help trying to get out of institutions. When she was out of the institutions, she struggled to stay out because it was hard for her to find and keep housing, keep herself and her home safe, and find ways to spend her time.

She finally found an advocate at Georgia Legal Aid who agreed to help Lois and other people like her make a case that if the state of Georgia had the programs and money to keep disabled people in institutions, the state should also have

programs and money to help keep disabled people out of institutions and live in their own homes and communities.

Lois and another woman, Elaine Wilson, were the two leading people in filing the case that would eventually make it to the United States Supreme Court. After years of their case moving through the court system the Supreme Court found in favor of Lois and Elaine and people like them. In 1999, the Court issued the Olmstead decision, finding that states which make disabled people go into institutions to get help are discriminating

against disabled people by segregating them from the community. States should have programs, services, and supports that allow disabled people to live in the most integrated settings possible.

The *Olmstead* decision provided enough protection to ensure that Elaine, a white woman, would successfully live independently in the community for the rest of her life. Lois spent the ten years following the Court's decision moving in and out of institutions because she could not find the help she needed to stay in the community. In 2009, Lois participated in another successful lawsuit against Georgia that addressed the state's continued practice of placing disabled people, most of whom were Black like Lois in unfairly restrictive settings.

Lois would eventually develop her own support network, which included advocates, allies, and friends, who supported her in finding housing and in living successfully in the community. She became an artist who had public exhibitions of her work. She also became a public speaker who enjoyed educating audiences about living independently. She even met then-President Obama at the White House in 2011.

Unfortunately, Lois would experience poverty for the rest of her life. She died on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, of pancreatic cancer. She had so few resources that a GoFundMe was arranged to raise funds for her final expenses and burial. Even though she was able to make a life for herself in the community, Lois never forgot that disabled people like her were still in places like the state hospitals and detention facilities she spent much of her life in.

The Lois Curtis Campus was created by Reyma McCoy Hyten and Ami Hyten in Topeka, Kansas to center the lives of people like Lois; we hope Topeka, Kansas to center the lives of people like Lois; we hope this book and our efforts honor her legacy.



Lois Curtis photo from *Pushing Limits*;  
<http://www.pushinglimits.i941.net/2011/11/16/rural-hospitals-threatened-and-how-is-the-supreme-courts-olmstead-decision-doing/>





Located in Topeka, KS, the Lois Curtis Campus is a physical and virtual hub for services, supports, and guidance that centers individuals with disabilities that experience marginalization within the disability community, including people of color, people who are homeless, people who are system involved, people who are not enrolled in Home and Community Based Services, and people who do not identify as having a disability but may experience a disability that is either not detected or not apparent.

Our efforts are inspired by the artist Lois Curtis, a Black woman with multiple disabilities who, after spending nearly twenty years in incarcerated and institutional settings, singlehandedly spearheaded efforts that led to the US Supreme Court's passage of the Olmstead Decision in 1999. Regarded by many as the "Brown vs Board of Education" for the disability community, the Olmstead Decision affirms that people with disabilities have the right to live independently. However, Lois continued to experience institutionalization as a result of systemic racism within the disability community that created barriers to her accessing community based services and supports. It wasn't until nearly ten years after Olmstead that she was able to create her own support network and move into her own apartment.

She died on November 3rd, 2022 but her legacy lives on at the Lois Curtis Campus, where we are committed to bridging the gaps that Lois and countless other multiply-marginalized people with disabilities experience in the US.

Lois Curtis Campus is disabled/Brown/Black/woman/LGBTQ/direct support professional led, and sustainably powered by solar energy.



*Lois Curtis Center co-founders Ami Hyten & Reyma McCoy Hyten*



**2023 George Wolf Youth Interns**

Back row (left – right): Ash Van Dalsem, Tommie Schmitter, Tyler Johnson, Wayne Vogh, Skyler Foster

Front row (left – right): A'Issa Law, Kai Noel, Josiah Counts, A'Lina Law