

TAMIKA

CATCHINGS



accept
'n'
respect

TAMIKA CATCHINGS

Basketball, WNBA Rookie of the Year, WNBA All-Star, Four-time All-American

Torture. Being different was torture when I was a kid. With two huge hearing aids, big clunky glasses and a funny way of talking, I was an easy target for teasing. I was bigger than almost everyone else, so I never really got beat up, but being picked on hurt just as much.

Kids can be so mean. Even though I loved school, by second grade, I was ready to quit. "What's wrong with her?" "Don't talk to her." "Why do you wear those things?" they'd say pointing at my hearing aids and laughing. I looked funny, and kids would never let me forget it. And if that wasn't bad enough, I got called out of class for speech therapy. It was so embarrassing. I'd go home crying and mad. Sometimes I felt like I just couldn't face it anymore.

One day, I decided to take control. On my way home from school, I chucked my hearing aids out into a field. I guess I thought my mom wouldn't notice, but of course she did right away. She made me go back to the field with her to look for them. But I had a pretty good arm. We never did find those things. My mom was mad, 'cause they cost a lot of money. I got spanked and grounded. But I didn't get made fun of for wearing those big, hearing aids anymore. I had to get used to life without them. I would read all the chapters before I went to school. I'd sit in the front of the classroom. I would do it my way.

There were two things that got me through those hard days: sports and my parents. When I was playing basketball, I never got teased. I could take my frustration and sadness and turn them into points, blocked shots and rebounds. My family knew that and always encouraged me to live like I play.

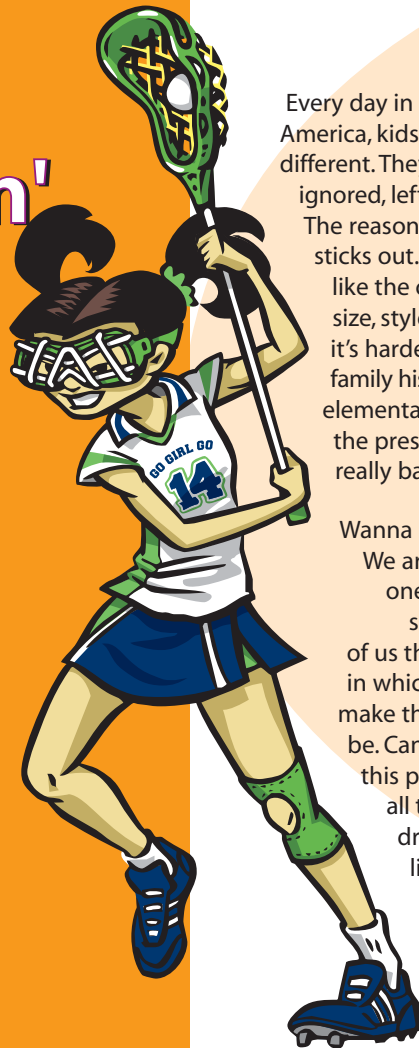


Tamika got so mad she threw her hearing aids away – read how fencer Sharon Monplaisir learned to face her temper tantrums at www.GoGirlGo.com

It took me awhile, but by the time I got to college, I realized that I had to accept being different – it is who I am. I couldn't change it. I learned to appreciate it. After all, everyone is different in some way. I'm unique 'cause my hearing is impaired. But I'm also unique because I'm a good basketball player. It's up to you to decide whether or not you'll accept being different – whether or not you'll dare to shine.

accept 'n' respect

Uni



Every day in practically every school in America, kids are picked on for being different. They are misunderstood, ignored, left out, teased and beat up. The reason? Something about them sticks out. Sometimes it's obvious, like the color of their skin, their size, style or disability. Other times it's harder to see, like their religion, family history or sexuality. In elementary and middle school the pressure to fit in can get really bad.

Wanna know what's bizarre?

We are ALL that different kid in one way or another. There is something about each one of us that is unique. It is the ways in which we are different that make this world a cool place to be. Can you imagine how dull this place would be if we were all the same? Acting, thinking, dressing, sounding and living just like one another? Ew!

The world would be a much more awesome place if humans quit trippin' on each other about their differences and started to appreciate what makes each person special. We'd have less war, less school violence and less sadness, and growing up would be a whole lot easier!

What kind of kid are you? Do you make the world a better place with how you treat people? Or do you bust on people who are different from you? When you play sports, do you make fun of the other team, talk smack to the referee? Every time you step out on the court, track or field, you choose what kind of kid you are.

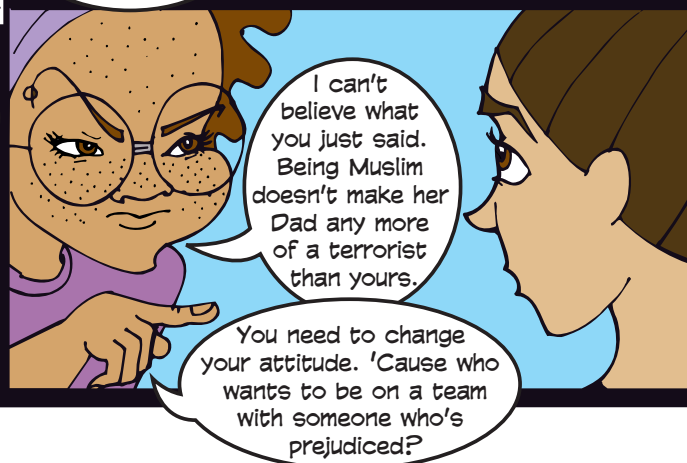
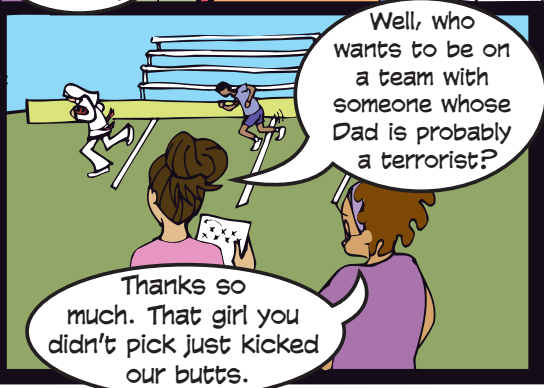
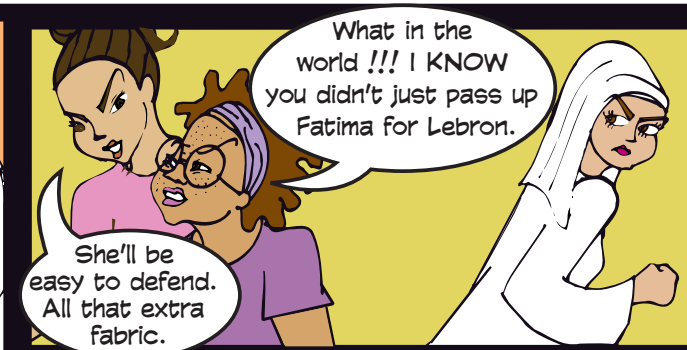
*Everyone's different;
do you know two
people exactly alike?*

Wanna help make the world a better place? Learn about differences, so they won't seem so weird. Try spending the day in a wheelchair, eat food you're not used to, go to someone else's church – just put yourself in someone else's shoes. Next, know that everything you do or say makes a difference. If someone is making fun of people because of they are different – stand up and say something. Lastly, help other people open their minds. It takes courage to step outside your gang to stick up for someone or try something new. Know that it's worth it – that you have the power to make change.



Resources

www.adl.org
www.fairplaytoday.com
www.nyacyouth.org
www.teachingtolerance.org
www.tolerance.org



whaddya think?

SEE WHAT THE SPORTS DIVA HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT AT WWW.GOGIRLGO.COM

Why is it not fair to exclude Fatima just because of her ethnicity?
What are some other prejudices kids have?