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Period Power

By Raquel French

Agg, I'm so sorry. This is so embarrassing but do you have, you know, a *pad*? I'm so sorry to bother you.

In a world where more than 800 million people menstruate daily, why are we still so flustered when talking about periods? Maybe it's because, for millennia, periods have made a person unclean across cultures and religions. This ingrained feeling of uncleanness forces girls in Uganda to skip school for fear of being teased. In Nepal, menstruators are forced to hide away in huts while on their cycle. Making periods a dirty subject has allowed period poverty to arise as we're too disgusted to discuss periods and sanitary products costs. Only 12% of menstruators in India can **afford** sanitary products. 30% of girls in South Africa miss school simply because sanitary products are too expensive.

Lucille Clifton turns the narrative on its head with her poem, *poem in praise of menstruation*. Born in Depew, New York, on 27 July 1936, Clifton is known for her poems that celebrate the female body. She uses her poems to examine the inner world of her body, which she claimed to be a theatre for her poetry. She was the Poet Laureate for the State of Maryland from 1979 to 1985, and was the first author to have two books chosen at the same time for the Pulitzer Prize. She died on 13 February 2010, after a long battle with cancer.

Clifton's poem focuses on the awe-inspiring life force of the period, as Hilary Holladay, a novelist and biographer, puts it.

Even though menstruators bleed for a total of seven years of their life, the period is still a taboo and "dirty" subject. Clifton's poem reminds us of the power that not only the period represents but also of the power of womanhood.

Despite being ridiculed and shoved aside merely because we bleed every month, we are still strong and resilient.

So next time you ask for a pad, may you do it with pride, knowing that this blood connects you to your mother, sister, cousin, aunt, to your friends and to me. And you are worthy, not despite of it, but because of it.

poem in praise of menstruation- Lucille Clifton

*if there is a river
more beautiful than this
bright as the blood
red edge of the moon if*

*there is a river
more faithful than this
returning each month
to the same delta if there*

*is a river
braver than this
coming and coming in a surge
of passion, of pain if there is*

*a river
more ancient than this
daughter of eve
mother of cain and of abel if there is in*

*the universe such a river if
there is some where water
more powerful than this wild
water*

*pray that it flows also
through animals
beautiful and faithful and ancient
and female and brave*

How can our Christian communities help young women who cannot afford sanitary products and are disadvantaged by this... every month?

**Raquel French is a Grade 11 learner. This speech was accompanied by a poetry recital she did.*