OVERLAP

Comics by

Bible, Evanz, Fatime, Juanita, Noor, Stella & Susan

K'jipuktuk-Halifax, NS, Canada

July 2026

HRC – YMCA – GRABS

Collaboration



Halifax Refugee Clinic

Shine On

GRABS

Growing Up Across Borders



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SPECIAL THANKS GO TO
JULIE CHAMAGNE AND GILLIAN SMITH AT THE HALIFAX REFUGEE CLINIC
HAYAT HUSSEIN, SAEED ALZOUBI, AND KATHRYN BATES-KHAN AT THE YOUTH OUTREACH TEAM - YMCA CENTRE FOR IMMIGRANT PROGRAMMES
AND TO
PROFESSOR EVANGELIA TASTSOGLOU AT SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY.

Credits and intellectual property

The comics and stories included in this comic book were produced by and belong to the young participant artists:

Bible, Evanz, Fatime, Juanita, Noor, Stella & Susan.

The design and layout of this comic book were produced by the young participant artists. The final comic book was produced by GRABS researcher and PhD candidate Juan Manuel Moreno and printed at the *Centre des recherches sociologiques et politiques de Paris* (CRESPPA), Université Paris 8, France.

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Front cover illustration, *Overlap*, by Juanita Useche Palacios, July 2026
Inner covers illustration, *Growing Up Across Borders*, by Juanchila, 16.10.2024
Back cover illustration, *Workshop materials*, by Juanchila, 9.8.2026
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ERC Advanced Grant No 101141171

The GRABS project

Growing Up Across Borders (GRABS) is a five-year research project examining the lived experiences of young people aged 15-25 years old who are growing up in situations of forced migration and (im)mobility across borders. The project aims to better understand how lived experiences of violence, displacement, migration and borders impact young people's lives and transition into adulthood, crossing geographical mobility with mobility across their life course.

The GRABS team is based at the Centre de recherches sociologiques et politiques de Paris (CRESPPA), Université Paris 8, France, and is composed of five researchers: Professor Jane Freedman, who is the project leader, post-doc researchers Dr Glenda Santana de Andrade and Dr Isabel Morrell, and doctoral candidates Jessi Kume and Juan Manuel Moreno. Developing and exploring creative participatory methodologies, we work together with young people to gain a better understanding about their challenges, needs and priorities, as well as their copying strategies, agency and resilience when faced with such difficulties. We believe this will put us in a better position to understand how they can be better supported in their mobility and in their transition into adulthood. In this way, we hope to provide feedback to those who deal with policies and provide services for young people in situations of forced migration.

At GRABS we work in collaboration with local researchers, service providers, and community organisations in various locations across five countries – France, Greece, and the UK in Europe, and Canada and South Africa – each place experiencing varying migration, asylum and refugee situations and regimes; housing, employment, education, health and social security systems; and historical, socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. In K'jipuktuk-Halifax, part of unceded Mi'kma'ki territory and today Nova Scotia, Canada, we have worked in collaboration with the Halifax Refugee Clinic and the YMCA Youth Outreach Team at the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programmes. We are being hosted by Saint Mary's University to be able to conduct this research.

The GRABS project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC Advanced Grand 101141171).

You can find out more about the GRABS project and research team in our website:
https://erc-grabs.univ-paris8.fr/

Halifax Refugee Clinic

The Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC) was founded in 2000, by immigration, refugee and human rights lawyer Lee Cohen, K.C., to ensure that some of the world's most vulnerable and persecuted people receive urgently needed support and representation while they navigate the complex refugee determination process. The HRC's mandate is to provide legal representation for those claiming refugee status and seeking protection in K'jipuktuk-Halifax and in Nova Scotia, to ensure that they are given a fair opportunity to present their cases before the Immigration and Refugee Board, and that throughout the process, their rights and their integrity are fully respected. In addition to immigration and refugee legal services delivery, the HRC provides robust and comprehensive settlement services, engages in local and national advocacy efforts and serves as a hub for community engagement and partnerships.

The HRC's approach is anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and client-centred. Through direct, intersectional legal and settlement services provision, the HRC works to ensure that people seeking safety in our community have meaningful access to justice, and the support and opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity and self-determination.

HRC's life changing work is guided by a volunteer board of directors and is implemented by an expert multidisciplinary and multilingual staff team and a network of volunteers, placement students and community partners. The work is made possible through various grants and funding sources and by the generosity of private donors.

You can find out more about HRC services and work with the community on their website: https://halifaxrefugeeclinic.org/about/

YMCA Youth Outreach

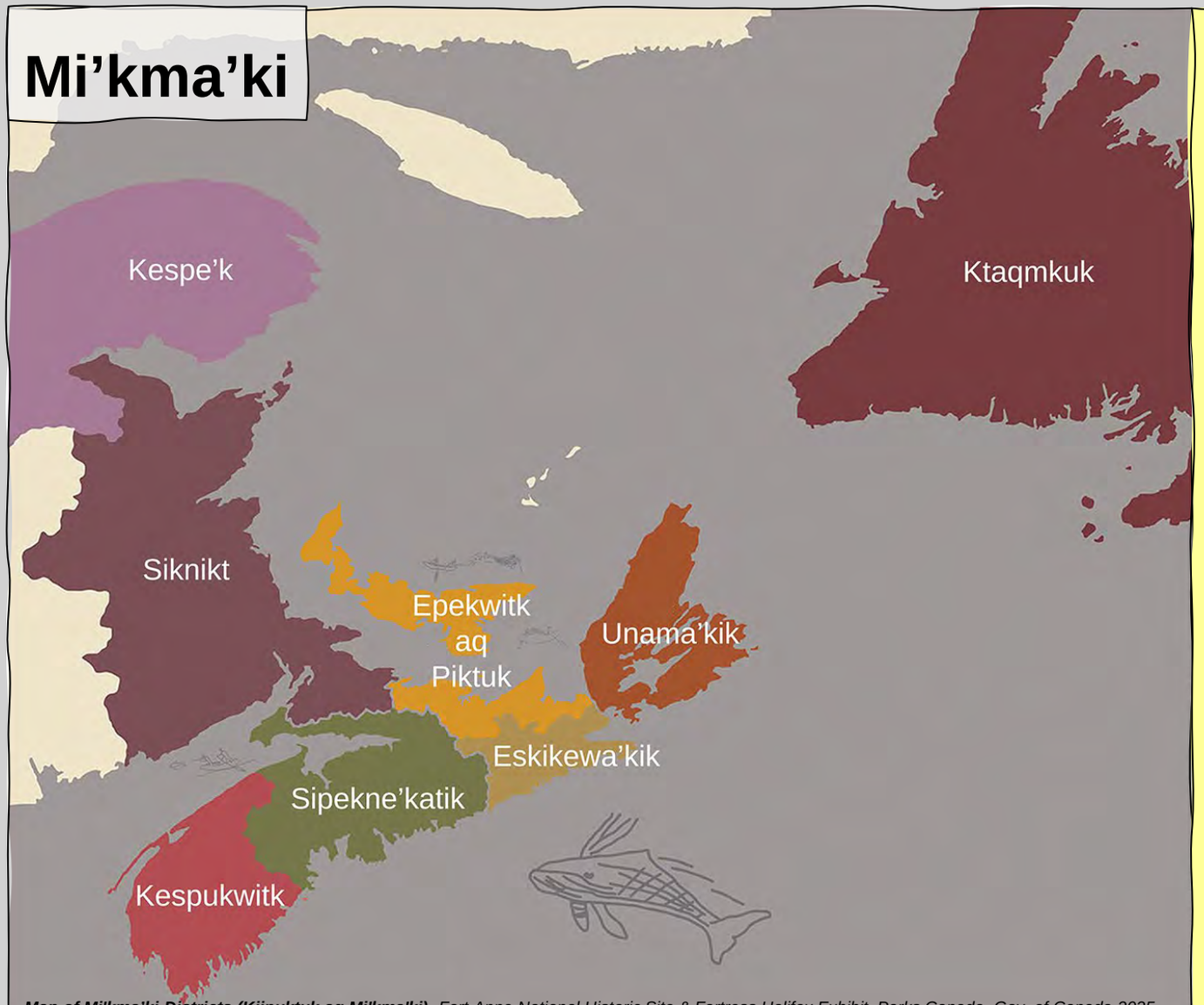
The YMCA Youth Outreach team – part of the Centre for Immigrant Programmes for the YMCA of Greater Halifax & Dartmouth – provides empowering programmes and services for young people aged 13-21, including: community leadership programmes in public speaking, conflict resolution, mentoring, and teambuilding); volunteering opportunities; school homework support; trips and social recreation activities. Through these programmes, YMCA Youth Outreach helps young people develop their leadership skills, independence and a social network essential to their settlement and sense of belonging.

The YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programmes provides newcomer children, youth, and their families with a variety of programs and outreach services to help them settle into their new communities while also supporting the community in understanding the issues and barriers they face.

YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programmes' approach is to deliver community-based support that is inclusive and welcoming. In addition to the youth outreach programmes, other services and programmes include: individual and group settlement support and advice, language support and services, employment & education navigation, active living, crisis prevention and intervention, gender-based violence prevention projects, 2SLGBTQIA+ programmes, and HIPPY (home instruction for parents of preschool youngster), as well as settlement services for students at several partner schools.

You can find out more about their work and services on their website:
https://ymcahfx.ca/ymca-youth-outreach/

K’jipuktuk, *Great Harbour*, it’s part of Mi’kma’ki



Map of Mi’kma’ki Districts (Kjipuktuk aq Mi’kma’ki). *Fort Anne National Historic Site & Fortress Halifax Exhibit, Parks Canada, Gov. of Canada 2025*

The research and workshop sessions leading to this photobook were carried out in K’jipuktuk, today also known as Halifax. K’jipuktuk means ‘great harbour’ in Mi’kmaw.

K’jipuktuk (Halifax), and what is today known as the province of Nova Scotia, form part of Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory where the Mi’kmaq Peoples have lived for more than 11,000 years.

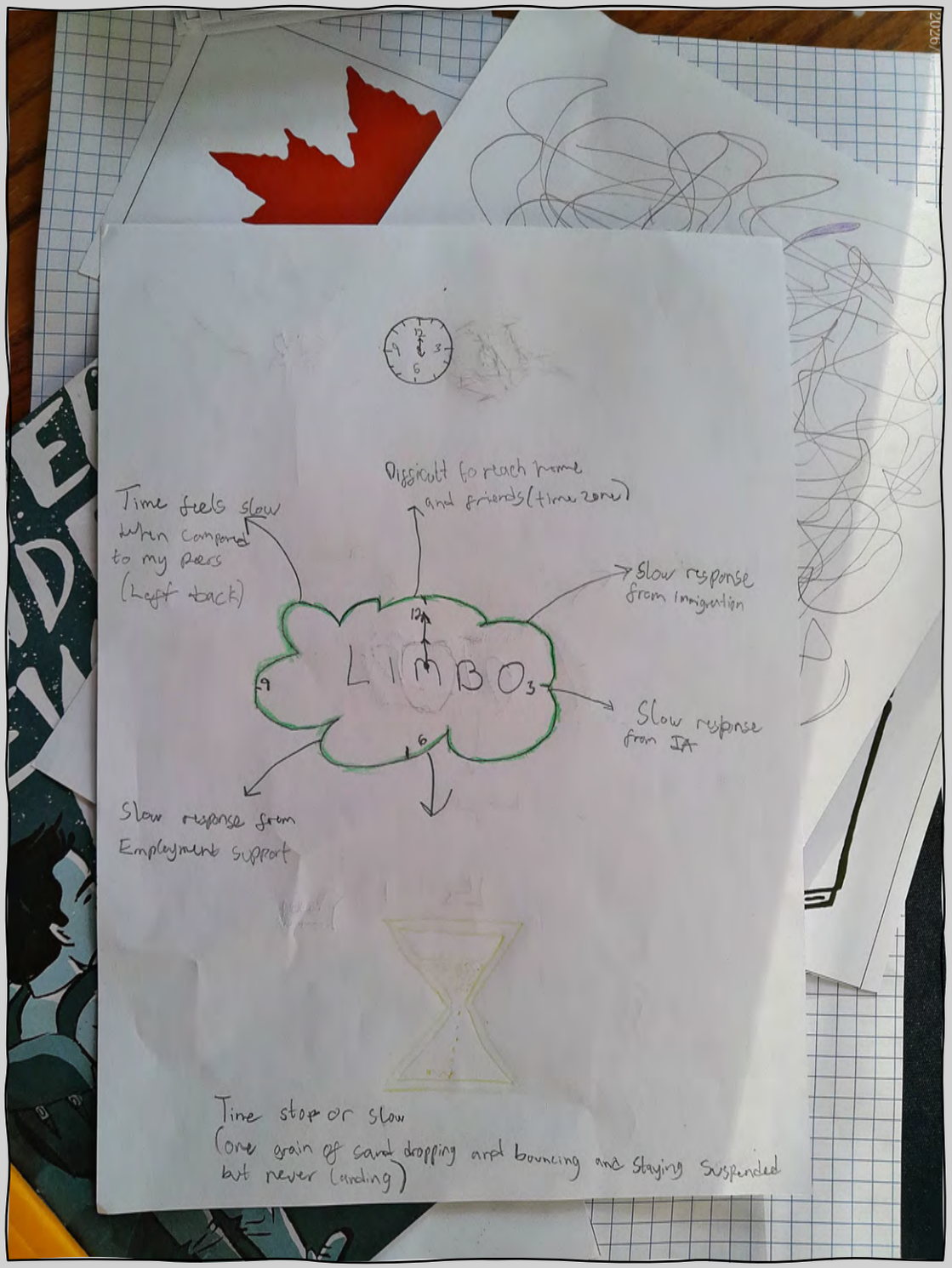
Located within the Northeastern Woodlands, Mi’kma’ki territory extends across all 4 provinces of today’s Atlantic Canada (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland), the Gaspé Peninsula, and parts of the state of Maine, in today’s United States.

We acknowledge and are grateful, as foreigners visiting, studying, working, living, or just passing through, to be in these lands to carry out this research project. Wela’lin.

Mi’kmaw district place names for Mi’kmaki and their meanings: The districts of Mi’kma’ki shown in this map and described below were based on rivers, streams and natural drainage systems. They were flexible, permeable boundaries that reflected the “changing conditions and the needs of people in each area, rather than acting as geopolitical boundaries.”

Kespe’k (”end of land”) is comprised of the Saint John River Valley and the Appalachian Mountain Range of northern New Brunswick and the Gaspé area of Quebec. **Ktaqmkuk** (”across the waves/water”) Newfoundland. **Siknikt** (”drainage area”) includes the Miramichi River and the Acadian Coast and Bay of Fundy Region. **Epekwitk aq Piktuk** (Prince Edward Island, “cradled above water” and Pictou “explosion place”) is comprised of PEI the lowland area along the Northumberland Strait, sperated from neighbouring districts by the Cobequid Highlands and the Pictou and Antigonish Highlands. **Kespukwitk** (”end of flow”) includes the area west of the La Have River to Yarmouth/Cape Sable in South/southwestern Nova Scotia. **Sipekne’katik/Sikipne’katik** (Shubenacadie, “area of wild potato/turnip”) is comprised of the Shubenacadie District and the Minas Basin Coast. **Eskikewa’kik** (translation uncertain at this time, some suggest “skin dressers”) comprised of the portion of Atlantic Coastal Region from the western portion of Nova Scotia west of Sheet Harbour to Canso. **Unama’kik** (a variation of the word Mi’kma’kik, meaning “Mi’kmaw territory”) Cape Breton Island.

Sources: **Sable & Francis (2018)** The Language of this Land, Mi’kma’ki, pp.21-22; **Mi’kmaw Place Names Digital Atlas (n.d.)** (https://placenames.mapdev.ca/); **Mi’kmawey Debert Cultural Centre (n.d.)** (https://www.mikmaweydebert.ca/)



Brainstorming concepts to convey experiences. Artwork by **Evanz**

About this comic book and the themes explored by participants

The collection of comics included in this comic book are the result of a series of creative participatory workshops (CPWs) ran by GRABS researcher and PhD candidate Juan Manuel Moreno in collaboration with the HRC and the YMCA Youth Outreach. Over 6 weeks, participating youth engaged in drawing warm up exercises and brainstorming through words and sketches to identify the themes and stories they wanted to tell. The themes emerged from discussions on what had been shared during the FGDs in an earlier visit February.

From these discussions, every week we would work on different techniques and approaches to get to the stories that the youth wanted to convey through their drawings, cartoons and comics. Basic techniques and semiotic resources on comics were shared, and all materials were provided for them to work on their drawings. Some youth knew how to draw very well, while others needed more help.

Throughout the entire workshop programme, we worked towards ‘democratising’ and ‘demystifying’ the drawing process through taking care of the materials and approaches that were provided so that youth could occupy the space and feel confident and comfortable to meaningfully participate, even when not knowing how to draw. This meant that in drawing, participants were invited to draw from memory, by copying each other’s works and making them theirs, or even by tracing and then refining from image cards, from images on the internet.

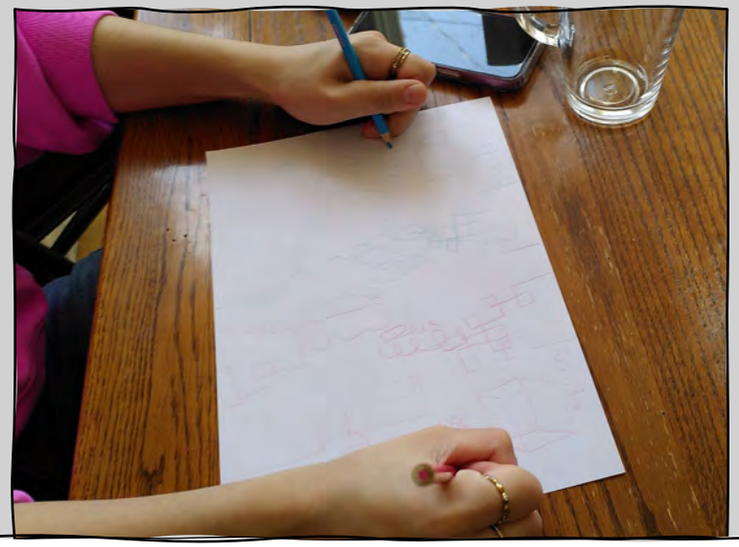
By the end of the 6 weeks, each participant produced at least one comic, they wrote a short description about the story the comics were conveying and also did short 2-minute videos so the stories of the comics could be heard directly from their voices. These videos will be made available on the GRABS website.

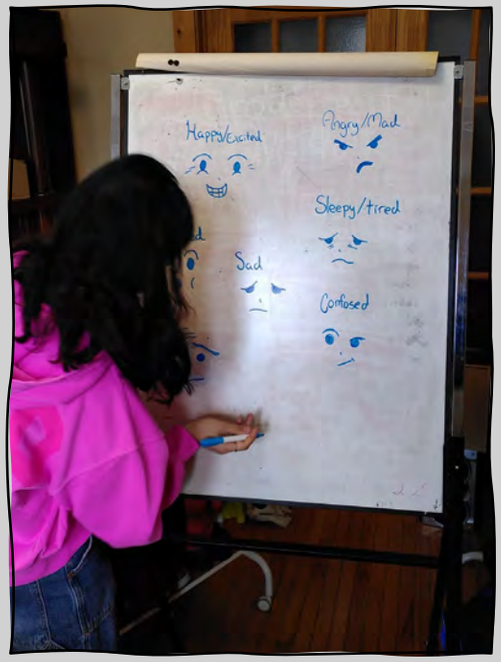
The themes explored are varied and range from weather to education, through administrative limbo and time, belonging and costs of living, mobility, isolation during Covid-19, and deskilling.

Warm up drawing, brainstorming concepts for characters & stories, and basic semiotic resources

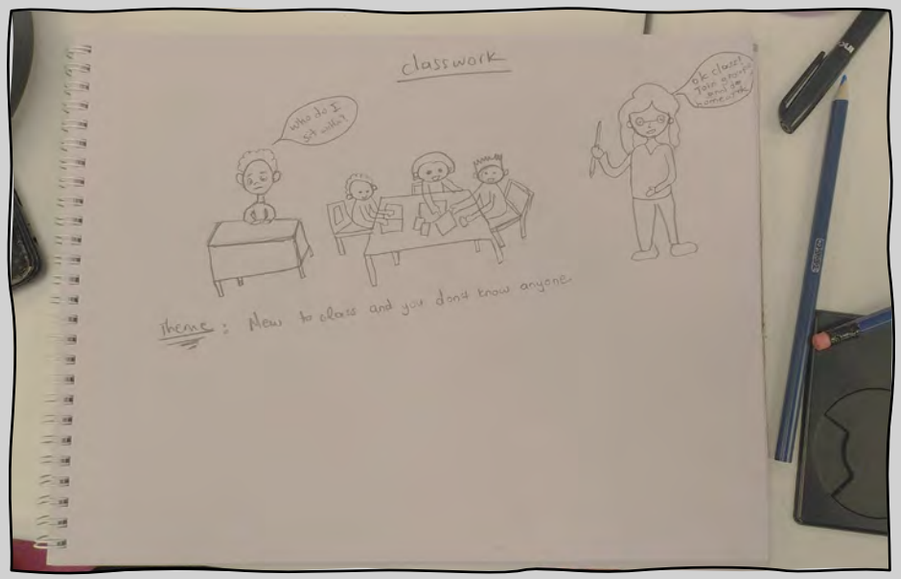
During each weekly session, we did some warmup drawing exercises, brainstorming of concepts and characters to convey and structure stories, and introduced some basic comic semiotic resources and elements.

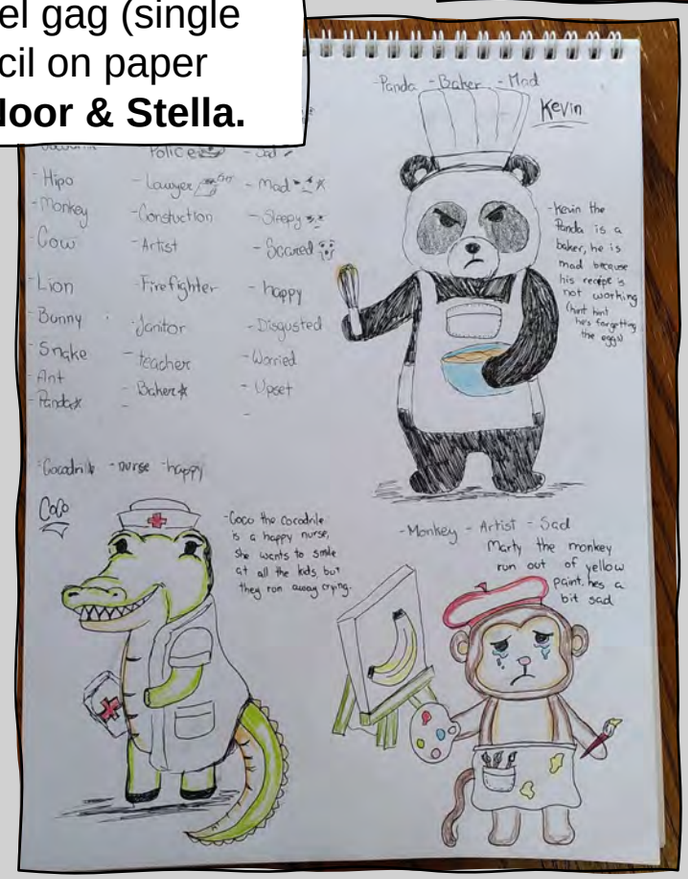






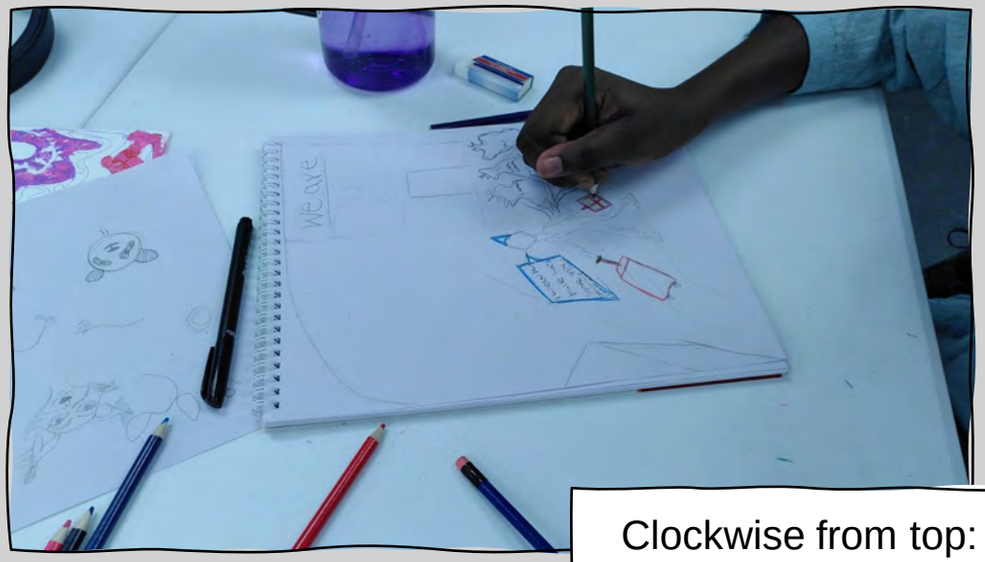
Clockwise from top: mirror drawing; brows, eyes and mouth for basic emotions/expressions; building characters (animals-professions-emotions); one-panel gag (single cartoon concept) sketch; freehand, pencil on paper doodling and filling. Artwork by **Juanita, Noor & Stella.**

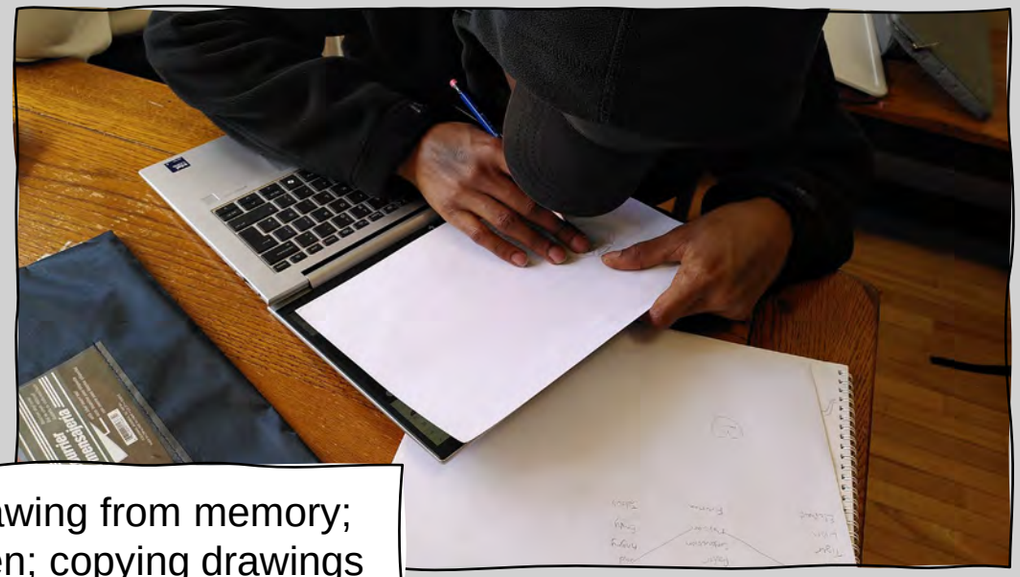




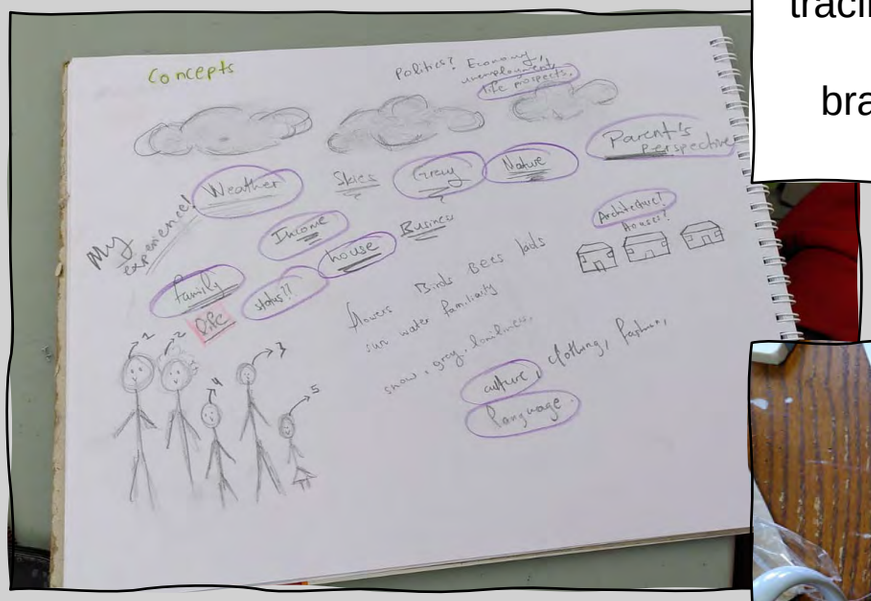
Demystifying the drawing like an illustrator for comics creation process complex

Participants were invited and encouraged to use references, tracing, image cards, copy each others' techniques… The main purpose was to create a safe space for them to share their voices and stories while exploring their own creativity skills and confidence. Some knew how to sketch from memory, others copied and traced, everyone drew.

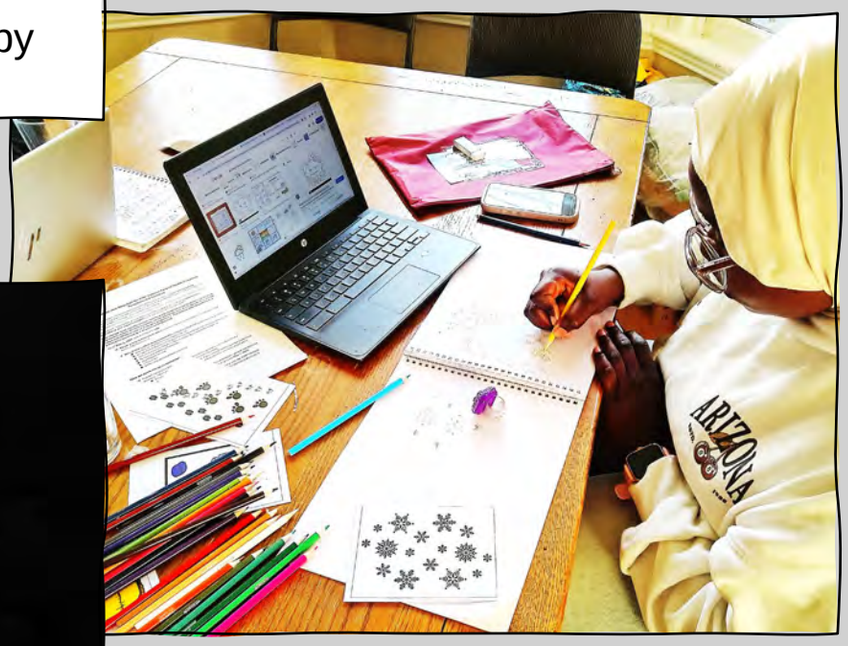




Clockwise from top: comic drawing from memory; tracing images on laptop screen; copying drawings from image cards and internet; colouring; brainstorming characters for a story. Artwork by **Bible, Evanz, Fatime, & Stella.**







Overlap

Comics by
Bible, Evanz, Fatime, Juanita, Noor, Stella & Susan


-Bible-
What document papers do I need? I Guess to be safe. pack all of them.
With all this load, who can I turn to for Help?
family
net work
School
rent
transit

WHAT DOCUMENT PAPERS DO I NEED?
I GUESS TO BE SAFE, PACK ALL OF THEM

I THINK FOR ME THE WHOLE PICTURE CAME IN A THOUGHT, IT CAME IN FINISHED PICTURE IN MY HEAD.

FOR THAT TO BE, I THOUGHT ABOUT THE THEMES THAT I FOUND INTERESTING WHICH WERE SERVICES, EDUCATION. I THINK MORE LIKE BALANCING LIFE IN CANADA, THE WHOLE IDEA WAS MOSTLY ABOUT MY PARENTS, HOW THEY ARE NAVIGATING EVERYTHING, HAVING A FAMILY TO CARE FOR, APARTMENT TO PAY, FOOD TO BUY, AND A SCHOOL THAT YOU HAVE TO ATTEND. IT BECOMES TOO MUCH TO HANDLE, AND SO THEY LOAD UP.

A LOT OF PEOPLE WALK AROUND WITH MANY HEAVY BURDENS THAT, IF YOU ASK THEM,
IT BECOMES DIFFICULT TO EVEN EXPLAIN.

COMIC AND WORDS BY **BIBLE**

MAY 2026



Freedom Dilation

This is freedom dilation. The image shows a maple leaf floating above a body of water in the view of the rising sun. And this depicts freedom, basically, freedom.

Right below it, seemingly under the water, is a sand clock. But this sand clock has just one grain falling through the glass and this one grain appears to have bounced once and is still suspended in the vacuum within the glass, but not fully, completely settling.

Because time has stopped.

The suspended grain of sand in the glass is representative of my immigration process where it seems like I've made a lot of progress, but right now it feels like nothing is happening, like it's all just stopped.
And I'm in suspended animation over there.

Comic and words by **Evanz**

May 2026.

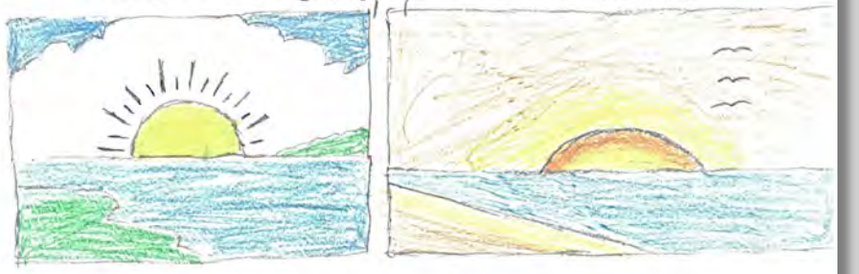
TIME

1- Document.
2- To get to work.
3- To get to school.
4- wait to get accepted for any job that you applied to.
5- to go to any appointment.
6- to go to any party.
7- to travel.
8- To meet with your family
9- To graduate.
10- To start to University.

Time go slow.

Questioning yourself
am I getting
accept to this job or not?

Waiting for days and days to get what we want
or what we are wainting for.



EDUCATION

Hoping and waiting to go back and continue my study.

Looking Forward For Graduation.

Traveling To Another country

Repeating High School



Learning New Things

Started New HAPPY Life

Leaving all The past history behind



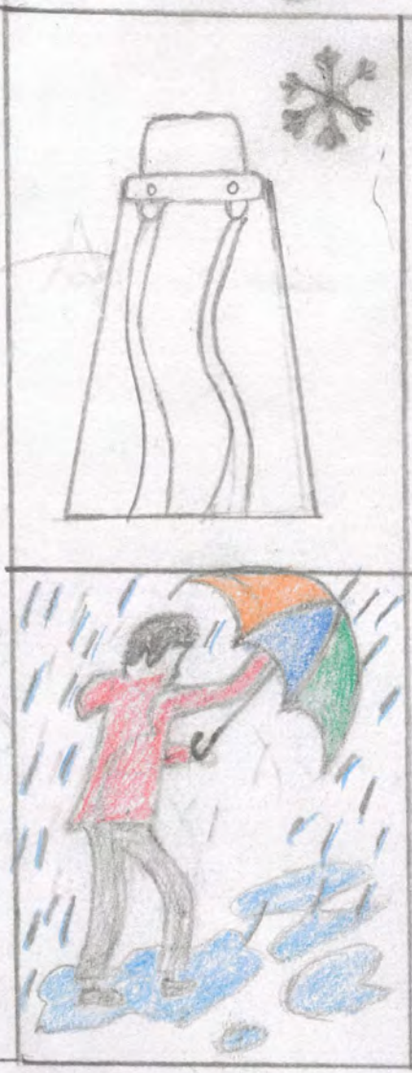




F.B.A
May 2026

WEATHER IN Canada









FBA 09/06/2026

Time, Education, & Weather in Canada

My three comics are about time, education, and weather.

In the first comic, 'Time', I show how time can feel slow when we are waiting for important things such as graduation, work, travel, appointments, or meeting family. In the second comic, 'Education', I show my educational journey, including going to school, learning new things, graduating, and starting a new chapter in life. The third comic, 'Weather in Canada', is about weather and how nature changes throughout the day and affects our lives.

Together, these comics show that life is a journey where we wait patiently, learn and grow through education, and experience the changing weather around us. They all connect to the idea that time keeps moving forward and brings new opportunities and experiences.

Comics and words by **Fatime**

May 2026



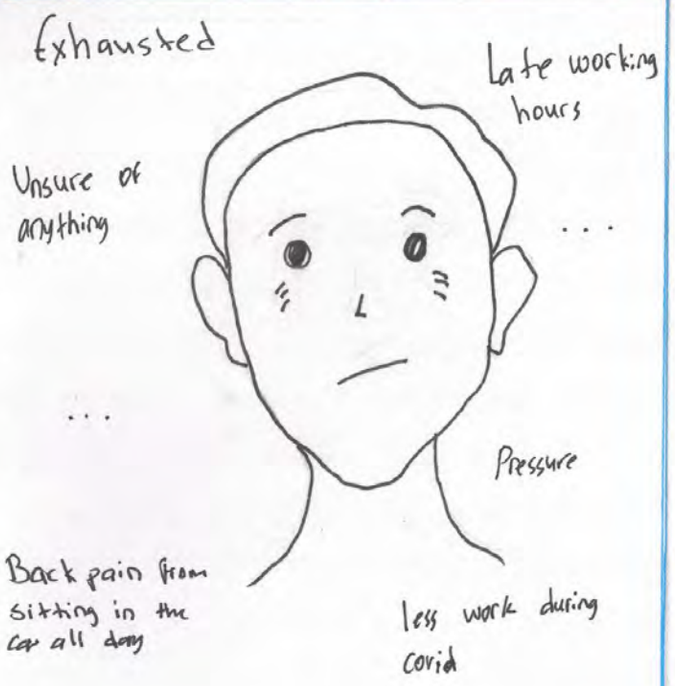
Father was a certified drug dealer back home. He worked so hard to build his career over the years.

Canada said we need pharmacist! Father say: we go Canada for a better future and better education for my kids.





Father discovers he can't work as a pharmacist without another 4+ years of eduction. Father had to work to provide for his family.



Father was still pushing through with everything. Seeing us happy made him forget his working conditions.



Despite being unable to sell drugs (legally), moving to Canada was the best decision ever made.

However, Canada's economy makes you the drug consumer, not seller.

It's a priveledge to have a supportive family specially in these conditions, becaus the system is the condition you have to suffer through.

may 13th
2026

Untitled

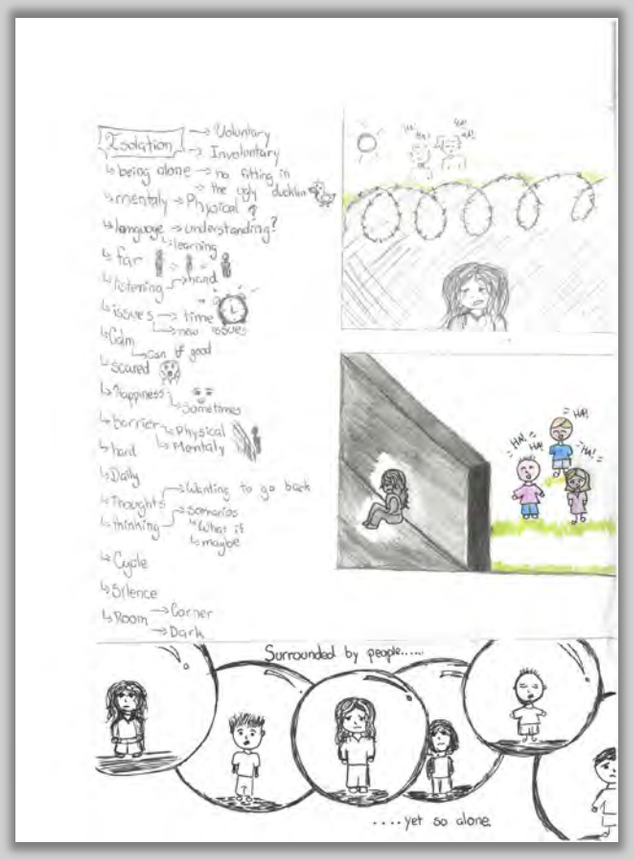
For this comic, I chose to tell the story of my father's immigration journey, and the sacrifices he made for our family.

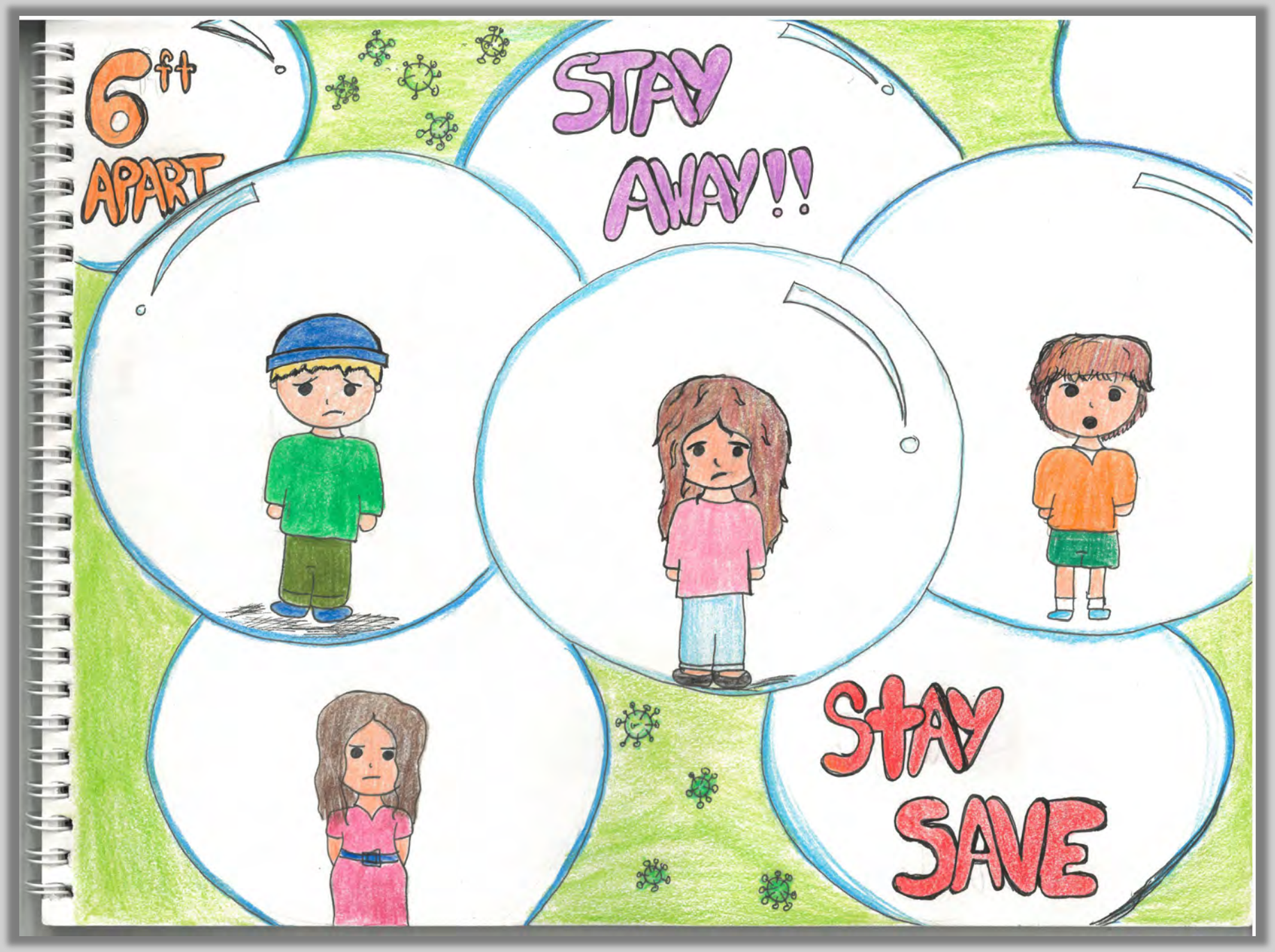
Before coming to Canada, my dad worked as a pharmacist in Palestine for over 20 years. Although he had a successful career and years of experience, continuing in the same profession in Canada would have required a lengthy and expensive licensing process. As a family of four adjusting to a new country, one of my parents needed to work right away to help support us financially. My father made the decision to put his own career goals on hold and enter the workforce instead, while my mother completed her master's degree. In the comic, I focused on his experience working as an Uber driver, as it represents both the challenges many immigrants face and the sacrifices they make to create better opportunities for their families.

Through this story, I wanted to highlight the realities of starting over in a new country and the resilience that often goes unseen behind immigrant success stories.

Comic and words by **Noor**

May 2026


Isolation
→ Voluntary
→ Involuntary
being alone → no fitting in
→ the ugly duckling
mentally → Physical ?
language → understanding?
learning
fair
listening → friend
issues → time
new issues
calm
can of good
scared
happiness
sometimes
barrier → Physical
→ Mentally
hard
Daily
Thoughts → wanting to go back
thinking → scenarios
→ what if
→ maybe
Cycle
Silence
Room → Corner
→ Dark
Surrounded by people.....
....yet so alone


6 ft
APART
STAY
AWAY!!
STAY
SAVE

6ft Apart. Stay Away!! Stay Safe

So I picked some words of how it felt moving countries and like my experience in isolation was one of the ones that stood up the most because of COVID, the different languages and everything.
So it was a whole process of first how it felt of being alone and being separated from everyone else, kind of being in your own space, a darker space while they had fun and not really getting what they had. And that connected to COVID-19 during the pandemic of you had to be alone in your own little bubble, so surrounded by people yet so alone.

From that, I moved into the bigger picture of everyone having their own bubble, staying away to stay safe, and six feet apart to social distancing.

Comics and words by **Juanita**

May 2026


Going to school in Halifax

~~Going~~ Flying to School

So this one is about going to school on the windy days. The portfolio for school is really big, so you feel like you're flying instead of walking because of the winds.

Comic and words by Juanita

May 2026

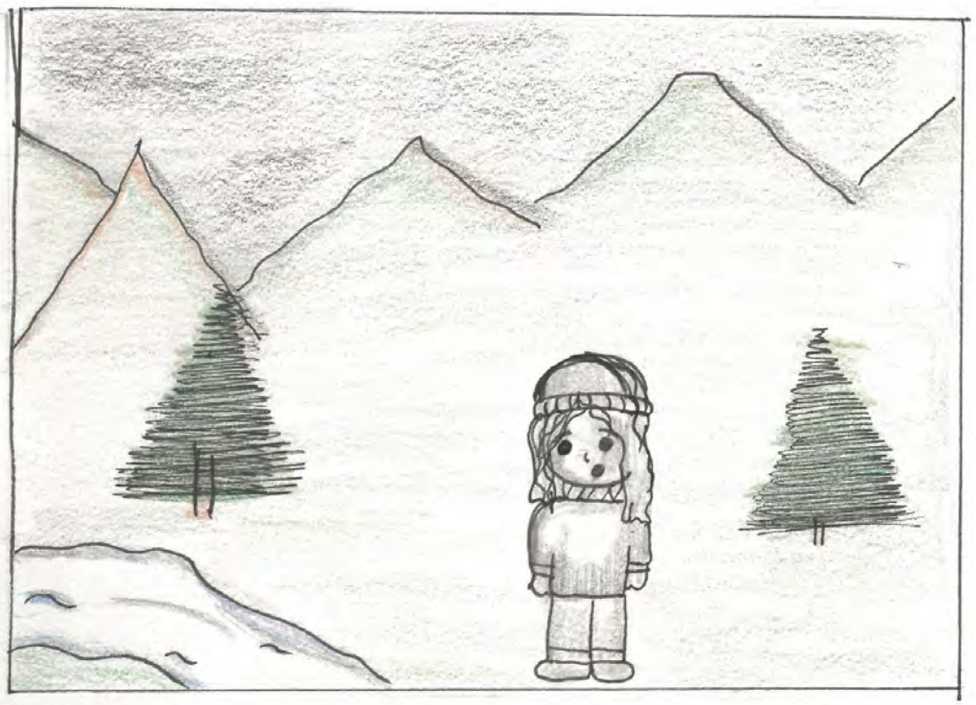




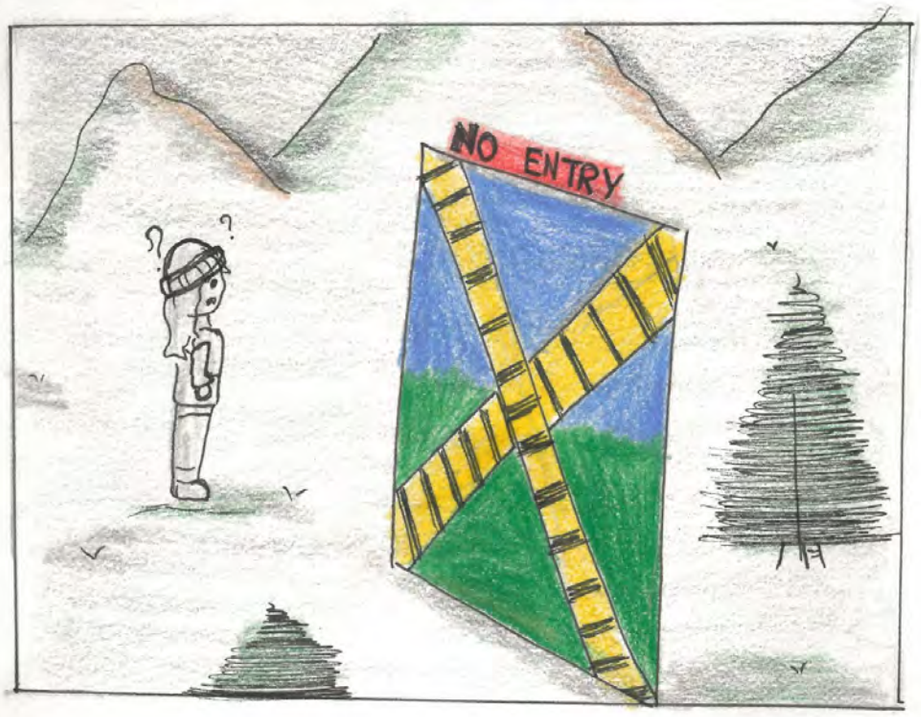


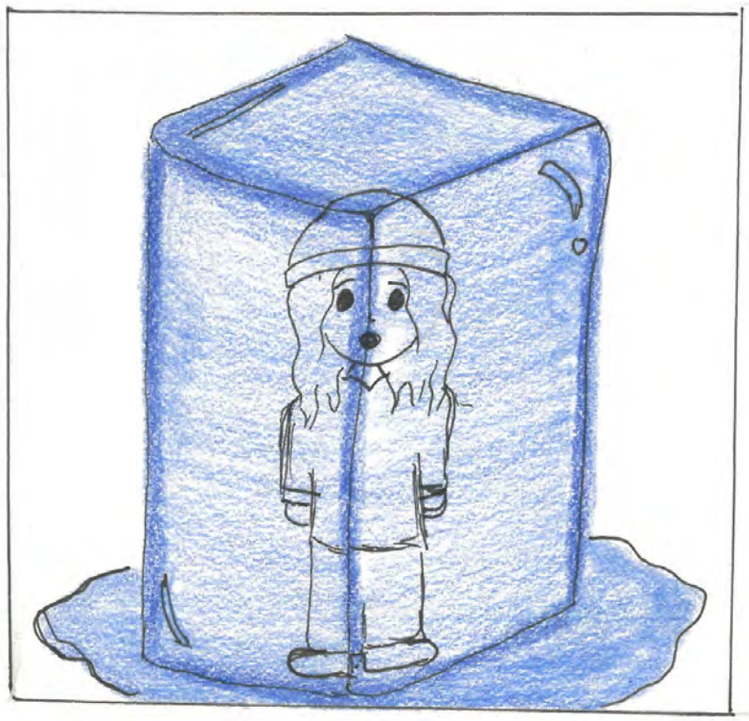







Brrr
Brr
Brr


NO ENTRY



One-way, No way back

This comic explores the emotional experience of immigrating, and how all changes in an instant.

The portal represents a one-way passage in between two countries and two versions of life. My character SJ Violet steps through the portal without realizing that there is no way back, this is a representation of the feeling of leaving home and not being able to come back, leaving everything behind, people, places... everything juts becomes a memory. I wanted the colours and expression to transmit emotion and show the feelings during the experience. With one side of the portal being warm, vivid playful: this reflecting the joy, comfort and the feeling of belonging somewhere. While the other side of the portal with the cold grey and dark colours represents uncertainty and feeling misplaced. Adding to that the change of clothing shows also the way that she had to adapt to the new world. At the end, SJ freezes in the cold winter like an ice cube. Becoming literally and symbol to represent not only the physical change in climate but also the emotional loneliness and vulnerability that immigration brings.

I wanted to capture all the overwhelming feeling of changing your life in an instant and not being prepared for it, and how it's impossible to go back to the place you once called home.

Comic and words by **Juanita**

May 2026


let's seal the deal
WHAT A MIRACLE !!!
CANADA
CANADA
WE GOT THE PASSPORTS !!!
WHERE DO I BELONG ??

Where do I belong ??

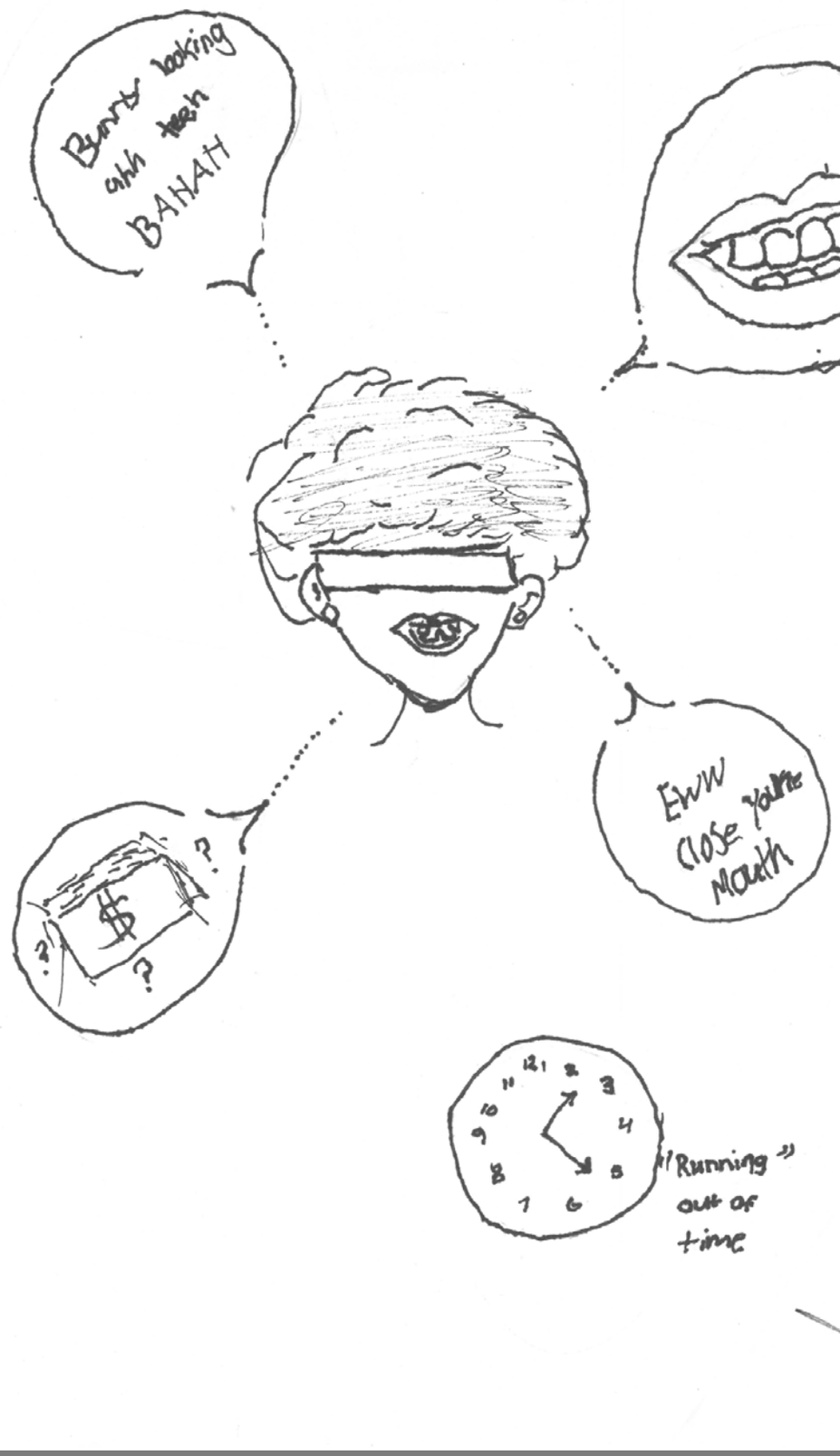
I used animals to represent me and my father as well as other people who are part of my story.

Each animal has a meaning, my father, the main character is the eagle we see in panel 1, 3 and 4. His animal is an eagle because in my eyes he was strong, confident, determined and had a fierce personality. I am the fox, a bit chaotic but observant. I am the one experiencing this story of my father (the eagle). In panel 4, there is an animal that has our back to us and is heading in the opposite direction of my father. It is a wolf, it represents Canadian people, not because they are bad, but because they are used to the cold weather and because they are independent and alone. I used the wolves to emphasize my message of the way I see Canada. A cold country where everyone does their own thing. The wolf is wearing headphones because I've observed that people here like to walk around a lot with headphones which is opposite the way people in Rwanda usually are in public. They are always interacting with other people instead.

*The last panel shows the fox (me) standing between the Canadian and Rwandan parts because my father's story is also my story and, in the end, both parts/sides are both me, both Rwanda and Canada are part of me and are both my home. In the end, it's my responsibility to learn to reconcile both sides.

Comic and words by **Stella**
May 2026

"Smile"


Barely looking with teeth BAHAH
Eww close your Mouth
"Running out of time

"Smile"

Okay, her name is Samantha.
So, this one is saying 'bunny looking ass teeth' because she got long teeth and she's insecure about her teeth, and 'euhh, close your mouth' to reference like, because her teeth look like an ankle biter because it's long.

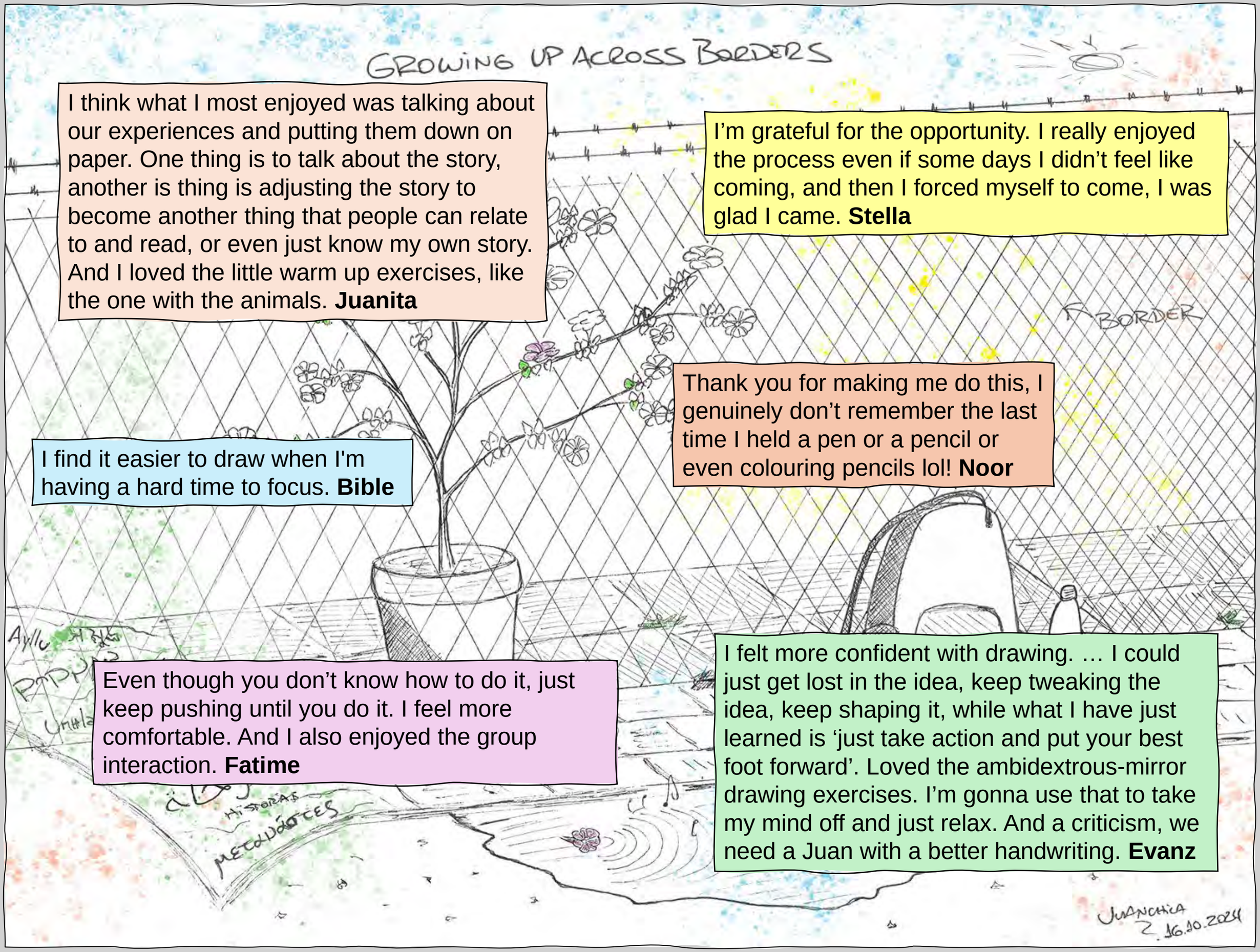
It's her dream. She wants those teeth.

The money is the big issue because she don't know how to get it. She's a teen and time is running out as in like saying like teen, like her teeth be like so ugly and like bad compared to other teens. She wants to just smile, but she can't because like they be saying, they be coming for her.
And this is a mask in her face because she lost in her thoughts.

And the title is smile with a quotation because like she don't want to.
Look at them. It's like foot long teeth. It's foot long teeth.
But yeah, that's it.

Comic and words by **Susan**

May 2026


GROWING UP ACROSS BORDERS
I think what I most enjoyed was talking about our experiences and putting them down on paper. One thing is to talk about the story, another is thing is adjusting the story to become another thing that people can relate to and read, or even just know my own story. And I loved the little warm up exercises, like the one with the animals. **Juanita**
I'm grateful for the opportunity. I really enjoyed the process even if some days I didn't feel like coming, and then I forced myself to come, I was glad I came. **Stella**
BORDER
Thank you for making me do this, I genuinely don't remember the last time I held a pen or a pencil or even colouring pencils lol! **Noor**
I find it easier to draw when I'm having a hard time to focus. **Bible**
Even though you don't know how to do it, just keep pushing until you do it. I feel more comfortable. And I also enjoyed the group interaction. **Fatime**
I felt more confident with drawing. … I could just get lost in the idea, keep tweaking the idea, keep shaping it, while what I have just learned is 'just take action and put your best foot forward'. Loved the ambidextrous-mirror drawing exercises. I'm gonna use that to take my mind off and just relax. And a criticism, we need a Juan with a better handwriting. **Evanz**
JUANCHICA
2.16.10.2024

WORKSHOP MATERIALS

RULER

GLUE STICK

WARM UP DRAWING

DRAWING PACK
- 1x Pencil
- 1x Eraser
- 1x Pencil Sharpener
- 1x Marker
- 1x Ruler
- Glue Stick/ Scotch Tape
- Colour Pencils
- 1x Sketch Book
- Image Cards
- Materials for Tracing
- Pouch

SCOTCH TAPE

K'jipuktuk-Halifax
NS, CANADA
GRABS
Project

MARKER

POST-IT NOTES

ERASER

IMAGE CARDS

Saint Mary's University

Halifax Refugee Clinic

GRABS
Growing Up Across Borders

Funded by the European Union

erc
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Shine On

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Juanchila P.B. 2026