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Curiosity to Careers: Engaging People of Color in STEM with Dr. Dijanna Figueroa.

Listening to Dr. Figueroa was very refreshing. She is a pioneer in the STEM field and I am so happy that I got to hear her story. She is inspiring and a great role model. Hearing her speak about her struggles just because she is Black was heart wrenching. She is an intelligent researcher and scientist and is worthy of being offered the same rights as her counterparts. I know that in this world not everyone is nice, but we must continue to do what we want and not be afraid of people just because we are different. (I am not Black, I am a Muslim American woman who wears hijab, so I have faced some of the same scrutiny as Dr. Figueroa).

Dr. Dijanna compared herself to the hydrothermal vents. She stated that they are 1. Geographically isolated 2. Hostile 3. Not very visible and 4. Hard to get to. Being in a science field it was isolating for her. We need to work on making the STEM field more open to people of color. She also felt that some people were hostile to her. Having a thick skin is important because there are some people that are just rude and ignorant. And it's also important to remember how many supportive people there are out there. Opportunities are hard for people of color. We need to make more opportunities of internships and scholarships available and easily accessible.

I love encouraging my students to pursue careers in the STEM field. I can't wait to tell them about Dr. Figueroa and the work that she was able to

do and discover. Sometimes all you need is a familiar face to help you push through and try. Hearing her story was inspiring and motivational for me!