

**JOY:** This will be the most divine hairstyle the world has ever seen.

**AMIRA:** Joy, what are you doing?

**JOY:** Uh, uh, uh, Amira, you must talk like a fancy-schmancy person whenever you are in my salon.

**AMIRA:** Oh, sorry.

[CLEARS THROAT]

Joy, what are you doing?

**JOY:** Perfect. Here at the Forever Ago Hair Salon, I am creating a historical masterpiece on top of my own head, a hairstyle that expresses me.

**AMIRA:** I think you do a pretty good job of expressing yourself.

**JOY:** I'm sorry, I cannot understand you.

**AMIRA:** You do a pretty good job of expressing yourself already. Why change your hair?

**JOY:** Because Amira, I want style, body, and shine, a look that's totally all mine. I'm having a hair vision. It will be a masterpiece, something that captures the essence of my favorite dog, my first visit to an aquarium, and the Eiffel Tower.

**AMIRA:** Joy, it's--

[BREATHING HEAVILY]

**JOY:** It is complete. I've given myself my dream hairstyle.

**AMIRA:** It's interesting. Is that a fish on the top, and a paw print? And it certainly is tall, like the Eiffel Tower.

**JOY:** Do you love it?

**AMIRA:** As long as you love it, that's all that matters.

**JOY:** Oh, thanks, Amira. Can I do your hair?

**AMIRA:** Oh, would you look at the time? I am late for my cat bath. Yeah, I'm supposed to give my cat a bath today. Bye.

**JOY:** Amira, wait. I'm having another hair vision. Welcome to *Forever Ago*, the show where we explore the before. I'm your host Joy Dolo here with my co-host, the incomparable Amira.

**AMIRA:** Hi.

**JOY:** Today, we are exploring the history of Black hairstyles, specifically cornrow hair braiding. We're going to learn how it made the leap from ancient tradition to the halls of congress. But first, where does hair come from?

**AMIRA:** Hair comes from my head. Thanks for joining us here on *Forever Ago*.

**JOY:** wait, there's more to it than that. But before we work out the kinks from this opening, I would like to say your hair looks particularly amazing today.

**AMIRA:** Thank you.

**JOY:** Yes, it is so cute. You've got like two big pigtails.

**AMIRA:** Yes.

**JOY:** And then the braids up on top there. How long did it take you to do that?

**AMIRA:** Like an hour.

**JOY:** An hour? Did you do it, or did somebody else do it?

**AMIRA:** No, someone else did it. I got it done in, like, a salon.

**JOY:** It looks so cute. Do you style your hair yourself normally?

**AMIRA:** I don't know. Like, when it was long, because I recently cut it short, when it was long, I could pull it back into a ponytail or do pigtails sometimes.

**JOY:** Yeah. I love that kind of hairstyle. Like, the kind of stuff that you can kind of throw it up and go. Would you ever dye your hair, like a different color, or have a really weird haircut? Are you adventurous in your hair styles, is my question?

**AMIRA:** Heck, yeah.

**JOY:** Yeah?

**AMIRA:** I mean, like, I don't know. I've always wanted to dye my hair, but my mom said, "No, it will damage your hair." And I'm just like, "God, it would be so good."

**JOY:** OK, let's imagine that your mom said, "OK, you can do it." What's the color you go to? What's your go to color?

**AMIRA:** Blue.

**JOY:** Blue. OK, so like, I don't want to judge you mom, but I had blue hair when I was your age. It was a weave, though. It wasn't actually like in my hair. It was a weave. So maybe we can talk about compromise later. Do you ever wish that you had different hair?

**AMIRA:** Ah, sometimes I wish it was like more curly. I don't know.

**JOY:** Yeah.

**AMIRA:** I like big curly hair, and my hair is kind of a little bit curly, but not a lot curly. So I have to get like-- if I want it curly, I have to get a weave.

**JOY:** Yeah, Yeah. Too big it's super curly. I didn't like my hair when I was growing up. It was super short, it was super kinky, meaning that I had very fake, tight curls that easily tangled. So I had to take special care of my hair. Every week, I would sit on the floor between my mom's legs, lean my head against her lap, and she would oil my scalp, then detangle, and braid my hair. And it took at least one hour at minimum, and I couldn't do anything because my head had to stay in one place while she braided.

When we were in a hurry, she would braid it into cornrows. Cornrows are three tiny sections of hair braided close to the scalp. They get the name because they look like the rows of a cornfield, and I hated them. All the girls I knew had long straight hair, and I thought my cornrows made me look ugly. If I wanted something fancy, I'd go to my friend's or neighbor's house and have them weave my hair. These weaves started with cornrows, and hair extensions were weaved into the cornrows. And it could be anything I wanted, straight hair, curly hair, short hair, blue hair, single braids, Afro puff. And these styles could take as long as eight hours.

**AMIRA:** That's a long time, longer than a day of school, longer than a train ride from Boston to DC, longer than the first three Avengers movies combined.

**JOY:** I know. But to me it was worth it. I felt more beautiful when I had long hair. When I could put it up in a ponytail, I felt like I fit in. Like, I was just like my friends in school or the celebrities I saw on TV. It turns out I'm not the only Black person who grew up feeling like their natural, kinky hair wasn't beautiful. On top of that, black hair can even get you in trouble in some places.

**AMIRA:** Yeah, Did you know that in some US states you can be kicked out of a sports game or even school for having braids? That's so messed up.

**JOY:** So messed up. In 2020, DeAndre Arnold received national attention when he was told he could not participate in his high school graduation ceremony unless he cut his dreadlocks. But this has happened many times. In 2018, an 11-year-old girl was kicked out of school on the first day because her hair wasn't braids. And in 2021, a highschooler in South Carolina was given a horrific choice in the middle of her softball game-- cut your braids or don't play. All of these are examples of what's known as hair discrimination.

**AMIRA:** Hair discrimination means that opportunities are taken away from someone because of the texture or style of their hair.

**JOY:** Because Black people often have their hair in cornrows and braids, we face hair discrimination more than anyone else. So today we are giving the opening speech at the Pretz and Dance, Shake It For Your Mama Hair Gala Rally.

**AMIRA:** That's a big name.

**JOY:** Well, it ought to be. It's a big cause. It's part dance off, part rally to support the Crown Act. The Crown Act is a law that would stop schools and businesses from discriminating against people based on the style of their hair.

**AMIRA:** Crown stands for creating a respectful and open world for natural hair. Elected officials in more than a dozen other states have already passed similar kinds of laws.

**JOY:** OK, time's a wasting. Let's hit the road.

**AMIRA:** Oh, cool. Is this a special time travel car where we will jump in and out of the past and learn about the history of cornrows?

**JOY:** I wish. It's my 2004 Honda Civic, and we need to hurry because traffic is terrible at this time of day. We could talk about the history on the way. Come on, let's go.

**BOTH:** Road trip.

**JOY:** All right, seat belts?

**AMIRA:** Check. Snacks?

**JOY:** Check. Ooh, you got my favorite super sour tongue destroyers. Eat enough of these and you won't be able to feel your tongue for a week. Can you pass me my pop?

**AMIRA:** We call it soda.

**JOY:** I call it burp water.

**AMIRA:** Is that a talking bobblehead?

**JOY:** Oh, yeah, that's braids. They come on all my car rides. You better believe it. I'm a magical bobblehead with the gift of gab. This Honda Civic is my traveling castle, baby.

**AMIRA:** Braids. I love your tiny body and giant head with its beautiful cornrow braids.

**JOY:** Thanks. Riding with Joy is awesome because she hits so many potholes and speed bumps, and every time, it makes my head go boingy, boingy, boingy, boingy. Oh, oh, I'm feeling sick. I'll take some pretzels when you have a moment.

**AMIRA:** Sure thing. It's actually great that you're here. We were just about to discuss the history of cornrows and--

**JOY:** Pull over.

**AMIRA:** What? What's wrong?

**JOY:** I just got really excited, and I wanted to say, braids have been a part of so many different cultures for thousands of years. Boingy, boingy. You scared me. But you're right. Humans have been wearing their hair and braids for at least 3,000 years. There are these cave paintings in Northern Africa that show a woman feeding her child, and she had cornrows. Not to toot my own horn, but braids like mine also made an appearance in Greece where you might have seen the halo braids that circle around your head like a crown. Also, braids were popular in Native American culture with two long braid pigtales. And in ancient Chinese culture, young girls would leave their hair braided until their 15th birthday then would unbraided it in a hair unpinning ceremony to show they were coming of age. Boingy, boingy. We can get back on the road now.

There are so many different kinds of braids because how you style your hair is one way of expressing yourself. But for some people, the way your hair was braided was also a message.

**AMIRA:** Like a text message? I'm great at those. OMG, LOL, TTYL.

**JOY:** This was a different kind of message. For African people, it meant you were closer to the gods because it was on top of the head. Men and women used hairstyles to symbolize their place in their community, their religion, and even whether they were married or not. And some of these ancient braiding techniques are still used today. Yeah, these traditions were passed down from the tribal ancestors. In West Africa, there are the Fulani or Fula people who created a version of cornrows with one braid down the middle and a few others on opposite sides. The braid style is now named after them, Fulani braids. If you Google Fulani, you'll see celebrities wearing this hairstyle.

**AMIRA:** Like Gabrielle Union or Lupita Nyong'o from *Black Panther*.

**JOY:** The women of Congo in Central Africa wear their hair in a braided crown, a style that has been passed down from generation to generation. Sometimes they would add shells, beads, or flowers to express themselves. What would you too add in your hair?

**AMIRA:** I don't know. I probably would add beads or something, maybe.

**JOY:** At this moment, I would add some pretzels. Pass them over. I'm hungry. Boingy, boingy, boingy.

**AMIRA:** All of these hairstyles required a ton of work.

**JOY:** Men and women would spend hours or even days maintaining their hair. Long, complicated hairstyles showed everyone in the community that you were a hard worker, and that you knew how to care for yourself. Boingy, boingy. They'd only allow close family members to touch their hair. Pull over.

**AMIRA:** What? Why?

**JOY:** Because we have to talk about something serious. You're right. There's also a darker side to the history of braids. Beginning in the 1400s, millions of African people were kidnapped and sold into slavery.

**AMIRA:** And this deeply impacted the future of hair care for Black people, because the first thing enslavers did was shave their heads.

**JOY:** Imagine growing and caring for your hair for years and taking so much pride in it, and then having it cut off in a matter of minutes. Africans were not only separated from their communities, their families, and their lives, they were also separated from their own individual identity and sense of self. And for enslaved people brought to the US, the working conditions were so hard. Most didn't have the time or energy to care for their hair.

**AMIRA:** And they didn't have the same tools they used in Africa to comb and brush their hair. People got scalp diseases and lice. Hair breakage and baldness were also common.

**JOY:** Enslaved African-Americans started wearing headrags to protect themselves from the sun and flies, and the shame of their now ruined hair. That's how the headrag became a universal sign of slave culture.

**AMIRA:** So for many enslaved people, cornrows became a quick and easy way to keep their hair looking tidy and protected from the elements.

**JOY:** So when my mom gave me cornrows, it was really to protect my hair. It was her way of showing she cared about me. Oh, thanks, mama. OK, I'm ready. I think we can get back on the road. Great. Do you mind if I turn on a podcast. I've been listening to this amazing show called *The tales of Bencos Bioho*. It's based on a true historical figure.

**AMIRA:** Ooh, put it on.

**MAN:** Tonight's drama, the unbelievable Bencos Bioho. We begin with a king, a comb, and a dream. The 16th century, there were no cars, Leonardo da Vinci had just painted the *Mona Lisa*, and there were no cell phones.

[SCREAM]

There weren't even telephones. People had to write letters.

[SCREAM]

Hey, will you cut that out?

**BENCOS:** It is I, King Bencos Bioho. I want to help free enslaved people. I want them to escape as I did.

**MAN:** King Bencos Bioho in a village in the swamplands of Northern Colombia. He has escaped slavery and founded this new land with 29 others he escaped with. But now, this great King is at an impasse.

**BENCOS:** How can I help my fellow Africans escape this horrific life of slavery? I'm just one man.

**MAN:** He would learn all he needed was what he already knew.

**BENCOS:** Think, Bencos. Think.

**MAN:** And, as he scratched his head, it came to him.

**BENCOS:** I've got it-- cornrows.

**MAN:** King Bencos Bioho would lead enslaved people to his refuge in Palenque using cornrow braids as a secret map. This map would lead them to their freedom. He encouraged the women to take seeds and gold, and hide them in their braids.

**BENCOS:** Now you see it. Now you don't.

- Oooh.

**MAN:** They used the seeds and gold to farm and take back the wealth that was taken from them. King Bencos Bioho helped found the first free Black community in all of the Americas.

**BENCOS:** Now we have a new home together.

**MAN:** A new home, a new life, a new opportunity.

[SCREAM]

Hey, that's a good thing. You really have to stop that.

**AMIRA:** That screaming was giving me a headache.

**JOY:** Boingy, boingy. Tell me about it. Are we there yet? Not yet. With all this stopping, it's going to take us forever to get there. I'm having fun. We've learned how our hair can signify your place in society, and that radio drama was really into-  
- Pull over. No, I'm not doing it. Pull over right now.

**AMIRA:** Do it, joy.

**JOY:** Goodness, OK. What is it now, braids? "There's a roadside attraction just over there." That's why you had me stop again? We really don't have time for that.

**AMIRA:** Come on, we'll be quick, and we can stretch our legs. Let's walk over.

**JOY:** Do you want to learn about hair culture or not? Wow, look at all the swag. I'm going to get a hat and a mug. And ooh, look, a rainbow hair bear. I read about this. You can style their hair any way you want. And check out that giant statue. That one's got to be at least 20 feet tall. Let's take a selfie. Boingy. Do you know who you're taking a picture with?

**AMIRA:** Whoa, where did you come from?

**JOY:** I was behind the statue. This is the statue of the Madam CJ Walker, the first Black female, self-made millionaire, and she did it with hair and flair. Madam CJ Walker, she invented a ton of hair products for Black women, and she opened schools to teach people how to do their own hair and start their own business so they could build their own wealth as well. That's right. I trained to be one of her sales agents. Are you interested in being a Walker agent? No, thanks. I've got this great gig with *Forever Ago*, but I'm flattered. Thank you so much. Madam CJ Walker is an icon. That she is. Did you know she was actually named Sarah Breedlove when she was born in 1867?

**AMIRA:** 1867? That was just a couple of years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. It declared that all enslaved people in the United States were free.

**JOY:** Right. Both her parents had been enslaved. Luckily, Sarah a.k.a future Madam CJ Walker was born into freedom, but she still had a hard life. She was an orphan by age seven and grew up in poverty, working in the fields and doing laundry.

**AMIRA:** I bet that's how she came up with the idea for washing hair.

**JOY:** Bathing was definitely a luxury back then. Remember our soaps and baths episode, Amira. If you were not bathing regularly, your hair was susceptible to bacteria and all kinds of icky stuff. Even Madam CJ's hair was falling out. And after the Civil War, Black people were trying to find their way in the world. There were very few jobs or opportunities for them, and most big companies didn't think of them as customers. But Madam CJ Walker did. She started her own business going door to door selling Madam CJ Walker's wonderful hair grower. You mean Madam Walker walked door to door? Boingy.

In the early 1900s, Madam Walker was creating her own hair products for Afro-textured hair. She encouraged women to use a hot comb that would get rid of all the kinks and curls. Having straight hair was a way for them to blend into society. But there were some critics. Some Black people thought that because Madam Walker encouraged them to straighten their hair, she was saying their kinky hair wasn't pretty.

**AMIRA:** Or that it was wrong, and it should be straight.

**JOY:** Which is weird because that's how I felt growing up. When I did sports or theater, the teachers would always have a puzzled look on their face when it was time to deal with my hair because they didn't know how to style it. Nowadays, there are a variety of hairstyles that you can have, straight, kinky, coily, curly. Our hair can really be anything it wants to be. It can even be boingy.

**AMIRA:** Joy, I don't mean to be rude, but we better get back in the car. We have to get going to the Prince and Dance, Shake It For Your Mama Hair Gala Rally.

**JOY:** That's right. Walker agent, thanks so much for your knowledge. You're welcome. And you know, I'm something of an inventor myself. I tweaked madam's formula and added a pinch of magic to make my own majestic mane hair growing formula. Have a bottle on the house, or should I say, on the head.

**AMIRA:** Thanks, I can't wait to try it.

**JOY:** Heads up, I'm still working out the kinks. So if your hair grows super fast or starts talking, just go with it. Bye. That was so fun. We should start more often. Wait, pull over. We haven't even reached the car yet. I have to go party. Well, braids has a wee. Why don't we play first things first. It's the game where we try to put things in order from oldest to newest. Today's items are scrunchies, hair dye, and hair dryers. Now we have to guess which one came first, which came second, and which came most recently in history. So Amira, what do you think?

**AMIRA:** I think that hair dye came first, surprisingly.

**JOY:** Hair dye?

**AMIRA:** Yeah, hair dye, because I feel like, I don't know, I feel like people could color their hair back in the day because there's these different things, because, I don't know, I feel there's some prehistoric version of hair dye or something. But blow dryers, I think, they came more recently, since it's more like, I don't know, like, electric and stuff.

**JOY:** Oh, yeah, because you got to plug it in.

**AMIRA:** Yeah.

**JOY:** Yeah, that makes sense.

**AMIRA:** And then scrunchies because they became really popular in like 2016 when there was all those VSCO girls and stuff.

**JOY:** Oh, yeah. That's right. That's right. Yeah, and like scrunchies were really popular, I think, in the '80s too. People used to have big colorful scrunchies. No, I think the '90s as well. So if I hear you correctly, we have hair dye, because there's lots of natural things you could dye your hair with. Dryers because of electricity. And scrunchies because of the '80s and the 2016s. Is that the right order?

**AMIRA:** Yeah.

**JOY:** I vote for that as well. We'll hear the answers in just a bit. We love it when you send us ideas for this show because it turns out, there's cool history all around us. So we're going to explore some topics picked by you, our listeners. It's time for Did You Know?

**MAN:** Did you know that in the old Norse language, the word for an important meeting was thing?

**ERIC:** Morning, Bjorn. I'm going out fishing on the fjord. Want to come?

**BJORN:** Oh, hey, Eric. Sorry, I can't. I have a thing.

**ERIC:** Wait? What day is it?

**BJORN:** It's Wednesday.

**ERIC:** Ah, then I too have a thing.

**MAN:** The original meaning of thing as a meeting or discussion was also used to describe personal possessions, something that was often argued about at these meetings, which sounds confusing. From there, thing eventually came to mean object, and that meaning eventually made its way into English, which is how we use it today. So when you use the excuse, I can't come to book club today. I have a thing, you're part of a long, long tradition.

- Oh,  
attention,  
everyone.  
I would  
like to call  
today's  
thing to  
order.

**JOY:** Thanks to our listeners for sending in great suggestions. Send yours in at [foreverago.org/contact](http://foreverago.org/contact).

**AMIRA:** We'll be right back.

**JOY:** All right, amira. It's time to reveal the first things first segment. All right, Amira. Let's reveal which of our first things first is actually the oldest.

[VOCALIZING]

Drum roll, please. Amira, I'm so sorry to tell you that you got them all right. All of them. You did it. Good job. Yeah, you're absolutely right. So the oldest in history was hair dye. Hair dye goes way, way back. Archeologists have found that prehistoric humans, more than 60,000 years ago, use natural dyes to color their hair, including a red mineral found in dirt called iron oxide. So you're right. There were things around that you could use to change your hair to different colors.

**AMIRA:** Ooh.

**JOY:** Later, ancient Egyptians started using henna to dye their hair, but not when it was on their heads. Usually they would shave their heads, dye the hair, and then weave it into a wig. That sounds like a lot of work. Then in the mid 1800s, an English chemist named William Henry Perkin accidentally created the first synthetic dye while trying to make a cure for malaria out of coal tar. Instead of making medicine, he accidentally made a pinkish dye instead.

**AMIRA:** Wow.

**JOY:** Yeah, in 1907, a French chemist created the first commercial hair dye. It was just called Aureole, but he later changed the name to L'Oreal. Have you heard of L'Oreal?

**AMIRA:** Oh, my gosh. I get so many annoying ads for it every time.

**JOY:** Yeah, but I've heard of them. I know their makeup and their skin care lines and everything. So it goes way back-- 1907. And then you're correct on the second one as well. Hair dryers was next up in 1888. So in 1888, a French hairstylist and inventor, Alexander-Ferdinand Godefroy, released his hairdressing device in a French salon. It was basically a big bonnet you would put over your hair, connected by a pipe to a stove. It kind of looked like a giant vacuum cleaner. Would you ever do that?

**AMIRA:** I don't know. They're putting your hair in the stove. I don't think that's safe. I think it would catch on fire.

**JOY:** Yeah, it sounds Godefroy. Hairdryer. Hair dryers didn't really take off in popularity until the early 1920s when handheld models became available, but they were also heavy and took a lot longer than modern hair dryers. Some models even came with pedestals because your arm would get tired holding them up. That sounds really Godefroy. That's the last one. That's the last one.

**AMIRA:** I can't. I can't. I can't.

**JOY:** Scrunchies. You were right with the last one. Scrunchies, that's the most recent in history. That came in 1963. The scrunchie was actually invented in 1963, but it didn't catch on at all. But in 1986, nightclub singer and pianist, Romy Revson, was looking for a gentler alternative to metal hair ties, and created her own version of the scrunchie. She later said that she was inspired by the waistband of her sweatpants. Oh, that's genius. By 1987, it was officially patented. It was originally named scrunchie after Revson's pet poodle, but the name was later changed because of the way the fabric scrunches up around the elastic. So out of those three facts, what do you think is the most interesting fact out of all of that?

**AMIRA:** I think that's so weird, how they took their-- they shaved their heads, and then just made a wig. Like, I don't know, wigs can fall off your head.

**JOY:** Yes.

**AMIRA:** So I think, I think you should just put the dye on there.

**JOY:** Straight on the head, yeah.

**AMIRA:** Yeah, and it was probably not super unnatural how hair dye is now or your hair will bleed.

**JOY:** How much money would it take for you to shave your head and then have someone die it and then put it back on your head? How much would that cost?

**AMIRA:** I don't know. Like, 500 million.

**JOY:** Good for you. Good for you. That's the right answer.

**AMIRA:** Welcome back. Today we're learning all about the history of braids, cornrows, and natural hair. Whoa, Joy, slow down.

**JOY:** Sorry, I'm trying to make up for lost time. We stopped so many times because of a certain bobblehead who will remain nameless. Boingy. But I think we'll get there in time. You're right. There's no need for speed.

**AMIRA:** Plus I want to try out some of this magic hair grower formula. I wonder if it works.

**JOY:** Whoa, Amira, look in the mirror.

**AMIRA:** My hair, it's huge. It's a giant afro. I kind of love it.

**JOY:** I love an Afro too. But did you know, for a long time, that wasn't considered appropriate hair? In Madam Walker's time, Black women bought her products to make their hair smooth and straight rather than big and curly, like your afro. And as more women back then entered the workplace, they wanted to look professional. But white people were still the ones defining what that meant. In magazines, advertisements, and on TV, you've never see Black people with their natural hair. For decades, Black people would associate their nappy or loose hair with being dirty, unprofessional, or untidy. Lots of money was spent going to salons to keep their hair straight. That is until we got to the groovy 1960s.

**MAN:** Far out, dude.

**AMIRA:** Who said that?

**MAN:** It is I, the afro on your head, Amira.

**JOY:** We're used to weird stuff around here. I mean, I'm a talking bobblehead with braids. Boingy.

**MAN:** It appears I have arrived at the perfect time.

**JOY:** Yes, you have. The 1950s and 1960s was a huge time for the Civil Rights movement. Black people were tired of being mistreated, and they began to organize and protest.

**MAN:** And big afro hair was a statement. Instead of trying to tame their kink, thin curls, Black people started letting it all hang out the way it was supposed to be, like a glorious halo of hair. That is where the afro fad of the '60s came from.

**AMIRA:** In a way, they were saying to the world, nothing is wrong with my hair the way it is, and nothing is wrong with my Blackness.

**JOY:** Right, but it was an uphill battle. In 1976, a Black woman named Beverly Jenkins won the right in court to wear her natural afro to work. Although folks were starting to understand the importance of afros and natural hair, people with cornrows and braids still faced hair discrimination.

**AMIRA:** And it's still happening today.

**JOY:** I talked with my friend, Ashanti Sakina Ford, who is an artist and playwright. Turns out, her experience with her hair was pretty similar to mine.

**ASHANTI:** Oh, yeah. Yes, all through growing up because I felt like my hair was wrong. I felt like I was supposed to have softer, curlier, voluminous hair. If my hair wasn't done, I wouldn't go to school, I wouldn't participate in things.

**JOY:** Ashanti didn't like going to school unless her hair was braided and styled, and even if it was styled, it would be ruined quickly.

**ASHANTI:** Gym was the first hour I had in the day. So I'd go to school with my hair pressed or how I wanted it done, and people wanted me to get in a swimming pool, and didn't understand when I was like, I don't want to dunk my head under the water. I just did my hair.

**JOY:** After swim class, all of that careful styling would be wrecked. She tried to wear a head wrap, but it was against the rules.

**ASHANTI:** Oh, yeah. They would tell me it was against the rules because I could have weapons hidden in there. It wasn't appropriate.

**JOY:** Ashanti and many other people across the US have experienced something similar. Students have been blocked from graduation, kicked out of sports events, and some professionals, to this day, have been forced to leave their jobs or were fired because of their hairstyles. Pullover.

**AMIRA:** No.

**JOY:** But we're here. Oh, man. All of a sudden I'm feeling nervous about my speech at the Shake It For Your Mama Hair Gala rally.

**MAN:** Wow, that's a long name

**AMIRA:** Don't worry. We can do it together.

**JOY:** Yeah. Pick me up, and let's all go and make our case. My fellow dancers, I humbly stand before you today with my friend Amira, her magical talking afro, and my sentient bobblehead, braids. We had a long, long, long, weird car ride where we discussed the history of afro-textured hair.

**AMIRA:** Our African ancestors treated their braids with pride and care. Hair was more than a style. It was who they were.

**JOY:** And it is who we are today. Although slavery tried to cut our connection to our culture, Madam CJ Walker and the people that fought in the Civil Rights movement showed us that we are beautiful.

**MAN:** It's important that we are able to express ourselves however we want without fear of being judged or mistreated.

**JOY:** That's why we're here to talk about the Crown Act, a law that would make it illegal to discriminate against someone based on their hair. This law would protect my hair and also my sense of who I am and my connection to my ancestors. I can enter my church--

**AMIRA:** My school.

**JOY:** My favorite sports arena.

**MAN:** My job.

**JOY:** Without fear of being turned away. And although my hair doesn't look like my friend's or the people I see on TV, it's mine. It's just for me, and I love my hair.

**AMIRA:** I love my hair.

**JOY:** I love my hair. Boingy.

**MAN:** I love myself.

**JOY:** Now let's turn the music up and get on down.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Oh, OK. Oh, oh, OK. Oh, yeah.

[LISTING HONOR ROLL] This episode was written by me,

This is our last episode of this season, and we've loved every minute of it. But don't worry, we'll be back next year with a brand new season. If you have ideas for future episodes, please send them to us at [foreverago.org/contact](http://foreverago.org/contact).

**AMIRA:** Thanks for listening.

**JOY:** Godefroy.

[MUSIC PLAYING]