

Case #7: Marie Louise Moreau

Marie Louise Moreau wondered whether she was the only student in her chemistry group who had read the assignment before coming to class. As her partners debated how they would do a titration, Marie sat on a stool and flipped a tiny braid over her shoulder impatiently. She had expected more when she had taken a plane from Haiti to study at a prestigious college in the United States. This modern chemistry lab with its new equipment, white walls and ceiling, and modern lighting system was fancy enough, but the students expected everything to be spoon-fed to them. It was ridiculous.

Joe Tickham, the unspoken leader of her lab group, was concerned. He was not sure how they would be able to carry out the titration successfully. "I just don't know how we're going to do this," he said. Joe didn't like to admit that he didn't have the answer – but, this time, he was stumped.

Marie looked around the room and saw that they were lagging behind the other groups, who were already mixing their solutions. She spoke up. "Well, when I was doing the reading," she said, "there was a note in the sidebar that said that when you're doing a titration, you should add titrant slowly near the endpoint. That way, when the solution changes color, it is easier to tell how much titrant was added."

Joe looked at her with doubt. Could she be right? He didn't want to rely on Marie's word alone. She had many ideas, but they weren't always good ones. "Adam!" he called to their TA.

Adam finished talking with another group and walked across the white-tiled floor towards Joe. "Do you have a question?"

"Well," said Joe, "We read in the book that we should add titrant slowly near the endpoint, so that when the solution changes color, we can accurately determine how much titrant was added. Is that true?"

"Good memory, Joe," said Adam, clapping Joe on the shoulder. "That's right. You're an asset to your group." He turned towards the other members of the group. "It's always important to pay attention when you're reading. Now, you need to get started with the titration in order to finish before the end of class. Let me know if you have any other questions."

The two other students in the group, Anna Lee and Brandon Peck, looked at each other uncomfortably as the TA left. Joe had just stolen credit for Marie's answer. It wasn't the first time he had done this.

Marie was furious. This was just another example of the old boys' network she thought. She stood up and began to gather their titration equipment together. "So," she said, turning towards the rest of the group, "let's get started. We'll do the titration slowly, like I said." She looked pointedly at Joe.

"Yeah, let's get started," Joe said brusquely, ignoring her gaze. He didn't know what she was glaring at him for. If he didn't take charge, nothing would get done. Anna was too passive, Brandon wasn't interested in school work, and Marie just didn't know enough about chemistry to make good decisions on her own.