

Who Am I? Identity Poems

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading, Writing, Language, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills
MS	HS		



Web Related Connections

LESSON PLANS

[Bellen Woodard, Identity and "Crayon Activism"](#)

[Diverse Books Matter](#)

[Identity, Hair and Seeing Myself](#)

Key Words

(See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).)

acrostic
characteristics
comparison
ethnicity
identity
metaphor
stanza

LESSON OVERVIEW

Reading and writing poetry can provide an opening for young people to explore the various aspects of their identity, including their name, race and ethnicity, physical characteristics and more. April is National Poetry Month and a good opportunity to explore poetry with your students. Because poetry does not require strict sentence structure or the usual grammar rules and conventions, young children are often very open to and interested in experimenting with poems.

This lesson provides an opportunity for children to learn about poetry, understand the role of metaphors and comparisons in poetry and reflect on aspects of their identity in order to write an acrostic poem about themselves.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn how to write a simple poem using interesting words.
- Students will understand the role of comparison and metaphor in constructing poetry.
- Students will reflect on identity poems they read aloud.
- Students will reflect on different parts of their identity in order to develop an acrostic poem about themselves.
- Students will increase their understanding of personal and cultural identity.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Small Ball or Stuffed Animal
- [Word Bowl Words and Phrases](#) (cut into individual strips and set aside)
- [Words I Like Worksheet](#) (one for each student and complete one for yourself or an imaginary person)
- [Who Am I? Worksheet](#) (one for each student)
- Blank sheets of lined paper, pencils or pens, crayons (for grades 2–3), highlighters (optional)

PROCEDURES



Warm Up: Something about Me

Create a circle in the center of the classroom with all the students (if space allows). Have students pass around a small classroom object (ball, stuffed animal, wand, etc.) and when a student gets the object, have them say something about themselves that most people in the class do not know. Tell students they should share to their level of comfort and they can share something large or small. If you can't make a circle, simply go around the room with each child sharing one thing.



Writing Activity: Using a Word Bowl

- To get students warmed up to writing poems, write an assortment of interesting words that you create as a class and place them in a "word bowl." Students will use these words to construct poems. You will want a good list of several hundred words. You can create the word bowl using one or a combination of the following techniques:
 - Prior to the class, go through poetry books, children's books, magazines, nature books, cookbooks, etc. and find words that are rich and compelling. Type those up and cut them out as individual words and phrases to be placed into the word bowl (see [Word Bowl Words and Phrases](#) for beginning your list).
 - Have students determine words they like by using the [Words I Like Worksheet](#) to write words for each letter. They can complete the worksheet for homework by going through books, talking with parents/guardians/family members, adding to the list. In addition, they can cut out words from magazines. In class, write all the letters of the alphabet on pieces of paper and hang around the classroom and have students add their words. Compile and type the words and cut them out as individual words and phrases to be placed in the word bowl.
 - Use the word wall in your classroom to get additional words and type them up and cut them out as individual words and phrases for the word bowl.

Encourage students to include adjectives and words about identity because later on in the lesson, students will be writing poems about their identities.
- When you have all the words you need, place them in a large bowl and have each student pick out 10–15 words and phrases from the bowl. Using at least ten of the words, have students create a poem. If they need to add in a word or two, that is okay. You can demonstrate by picking out ten words and with the students, create a poem together on the board. Encourage students to be playful and not worry about grammar and punctuation, although the poems need to make sense.
- Have some of the students read their poems aloud.

Using Comparisons and Metaphors

- Explain to students that making comparisons between things and using metaphors is often used in poetry. This is because when we write poems, we want to communicate strong emotions and paint a vivid picture to share in the poem. It is helpful to use the most descriptive language possible to get the person who is reading the poem to really feel and understand what you are trying to convey. A good way to do this is to use comparisons and metaphors.
- Ask students: *What does it mean to compare one thing to another?* Share this example: If you want to communicate that a person is very sweet, you might say "Sandra is sweet like vanilla fudge ice cream" or instead of saying a potato chip is salty, you might say "the potato chip tasted as salty as my tears."
- Similarly, ask students if they know what a metaphor is. Explain that a **metaphor** is a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar. An example would be: "Life is a rollercoaster." Life is not literally a rollercoaster yet it can be compared to one because it has ups and downs like a rollercoaster does. It sounds better and more descriptive to say that it is like a rollercoaster rather than saying it has highs and lows.
- Brainstorm a list of comparisons and metaphors and record them on the board.

**Reading Activity**

1. Tell students that they are going to be writing poems about identity. Ask students: *What is a person's identity?* Come to a definition of **identity** as the qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.
2. Read aloud the following poem about identity for inspiration before moving to the next activity where students will write their own identity poems.

Narcissa

by Gwendolyn Brooks

Some of the girls are playing jacks.
Some are playing ball.
But small Narcissa is not playing
Anything at all.

Small Narcissa sits upon
A brick in her back yard
And looks at tiger-lilies,
And shakes her pigtailed hard.

First she is an ancient queen
In pomp and purple veil.
Soon she is a singing wind.
And next a nightingale.

How fine to be Narcissa,
A-changing like all that!
When sitting still, as still, as still
As anyone ever sat.

3. Use these questions to generate a large group discussion:
 - How did you feel while listening to the poem?
 - What can you tell about Narcissa by reading the poem?
 - Does the writer use metaphors or comparisons in the poem? What were the metaphors/comparisons and did they work for you?
 - How does the poet use punctuation, grammar and stanzas in the poem?

**Writing Activity: Acrostic Poems**

1. Explain to students that they are going to write acrostic poems. Acrostic poems use the first letter of each line to spell out a word or phrase, which can be a name, feeling, place or thing. Each of the lines in the poem needs to relate to the overall topic. Acrostic poems do not need to rhyme and each line can be as short or long as they like. For these acrostic poems, students will use their names (first name or full name) to write poems about who they are—their identities.
2. Distribute the [Who Am I? Worksheet](#) to each student and go over each section, explaining what each of the sections means, asking for and giving an example for each. (Prior to the lesson, fill one out for yourself or an imaginary person and be prepared to share that with the students.) The categories include: my name, my physical characteristics, my race/ethnicity/nationality/heritage, my likes and dislikes, my family and family life and my community/neighborhood. Instruct students to fill in each box, using words, phrases, thoughts and feelings that connect with the topic of each box. They do not have to write complete sentences and encourage them to use metaphors and/or comparisons as discussed earlier.

For younger students (grades 2–3), you can eliminate a few of the categories or have the students choose only four of the six to complete. They may draw pictures if that helps them to express themselves, but they should be sure to write some words and phrases.

3. Emphasize to students that everything they write on the worksheet is private and will not be shared. Give students 10–15 minutes to complete their worksheets.
4. After they have completed their worksheets, give students an additional few minutes to reflect on the words, phrases and metaphors they recorded. Have them underline or highlight the words they feel are most important to include in a poem about themselves and add other words and phrases under “Other Important Things about Me.”
5. The next step is to write the acrostic poem. Distribute lined paper and instruct students to write the first letters of their first name (or first and middle or last name, or nickname, if they have a short first name) on the left side of the page, like this:

O
L
I
V
I
A

6. Explain to students using their worksheets and reflecting on what they most want to convey in their poems, they are to now write poems using the information about their identity. The first line of each poem must begin with the letter of their name, but they can write it however they want, using several or few words in each line. They should work in the things that they think are most important about themselves in their poem.

Explain to students that poems:

- Do not have to rhyme.
 - Do not have to use correct grammar or complete sentences.
 - Often use metaphors and comparisons.
 - Use descriptive language.
 - Can use punctuation but it is not required.
7. If you feel that your students need an example to be able to write their own poem, use the following as an example. However, be careful not to give an example that will lead them in a particular direction because you do not want the poem to formulaic, but rather you want them to find their own voice.

Olive skin, brown eyes, short kinky hair

Likes many things including macaroni and cheese, skateboarding, going on trips, minecraft

Include my best friend and brother in most things

Veterinarian someday, that is my dream

Interracial Family makes me who I am

Animals are always on my mind

8. After students have completed their poems, have a discussion, asking the following questions:
 - How was it to write the acrostic poem about yourself?
 - What parts of your identity did you highlight and why?
 - Did you learn anything new about yourself?
 - Do you feel that your poem reflects who you are?
9. You may also want to provide an opportunity for students to conference with you or each other about their poems and then revise them based on that feedback.

Closing

Ask students for volunteers to read their poems aloud. Post all of the poems on a class bulletin board or display, or compile them in a class poetry book.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [Celebrate National Poetry Month](#) (Scholastic)
- [Poems for Kids](#) (Poets.org)
- [The Children's Poetry Archive](#)
- [Materials for Teachers](#) (Poets.org)
- *Beyond Words: Writing Poems with Children* by Elizabeth McKim and Judith W. Steinbergh
- *Writing Poetry with Children* by Jo Ellen Moore

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
R5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
Writing
R4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Language
L3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

Word Bowl Words and Phrases

PUDDLE	BROTHER	WATER LILIES
RADIO	PLANET	ADOPTED
SANTA CLAUS	COCONUT	PLAYING JACKS
ORANGE	NIGHTMARE	SISTER
MENORAH	HOT FUDGE SUNDAE TOPPING	UNIVERSE
CURLY	FRECKLES	WEDDING
BALLOONS	IMMIGRATED	TWINKLE
MEXICO	PLANE RIDE	SWEET DREAMS
HALLOWEEN	MY COUSIN	GRANDMA
PRESIDENT OBAMA	SNOWFLAKES	AT THE LAKECANOE
BELLS	PURPLE	ENVOIOUS
BIRACIAL	DREAMING	IN MY BED
UNDERSTANDING	TYPING	SUMMER CAMP
GUJAR	SWIMMING POOL	I DON'T KNOW
BROWN	CHICKEN SOUP	GREEN
MOUSTACHE	TAMALES	DOMINOES
SNOWFLAKES	CHERRIES	UNDERNEATH
SUSHI	TRADITION	BARNYARD
COLLARD GREENS	STRIPES	WHY
BRAIDS	BLUE	TELEPHONE
SUNSHINE	BEADS	HURTING
LUNAR NEW YEAR	NIGHTMARE	JUST BECAUSE
DOCTOR	BELLY ACHE	SCRAMBLED EGGS
TRACK	PUMPKIN	GRANDMA'S HOUSE
BESIDES	CROOKED HATCHED CHICKENS	CALICO CAT
SUBWAY		SNOW

RUNNING	ROAD TRIP	SLED
POLKA DOTS	BLUES	CANDY STORE
SWINGING	FORTUNE	MISMATCHED SOCKS
MANGO	LOOSE CHANGE	PLEASE
COWS	SLEEPING BAG	BUBBLES
PARADE	POPSICLE	SUSHI
EASTER BONNET	ANGRY	RAMADAN
BASEBALL	DUMPLINGS	HOLI
SWIMMING	OUCH	SPRINGTIME
ONLINE	CRYING	ROAD TRIP
BEARD	SLIDE TIPTOED	MY ANCESTORS
COUSIN	SLEEPING BAG	BLACK EYED PEAS
SCHOOL BUS	BUTTER	SHABBAT
JUMPING	DEAD OF WINTER	TELL ME WHY
SLEEPY	HAMSTER	
SUBWAY	TRICKLE	
STRIPES	WHY DON'T YOU	
LONG HAIR	EYES	
AFRO	LIPSTICK	
CURLS	PUPPY DOG EYES	
RAINY DAY	RED	
CRYING	LAUGHING	
CAMPFIRE	WALK TO SCHOOL	
MY UNCLE	GRANDPA	
BAND-AID	RED RIDING HOOD	
CRUTCHES	SPRING	
MONKEY BARS	SINGING	
FIREFIGHTER	RAINING CATS AND DOGS	

Works I Like Worksheet

A	B	C	D	E	F
G	H	I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X
Y	Z				

Who Am I? Worksheet

Instructions: In the space below, write information about yourself.

My Name Name, nickname, original and meaning of name	My Physical Characteristics Hair color/texture/length, eyes, complexion, height, body shape, birthmarks
My Race, Ethnicity, Heritage, Nationality Black, White, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Multiracial, country of origin, where ancestors are from	My Likes and Dislikes Hobbies, interests, food, games, sports, technology, animals, music, etc.
My Family and Family Life Family structure, siblings, where family is from, activities/traditions my family has	My Community/Neighborhood People in my neighborhood/community, size, stores, services, urban/rural/suburban, what it's like

Other Important Things about Me: