

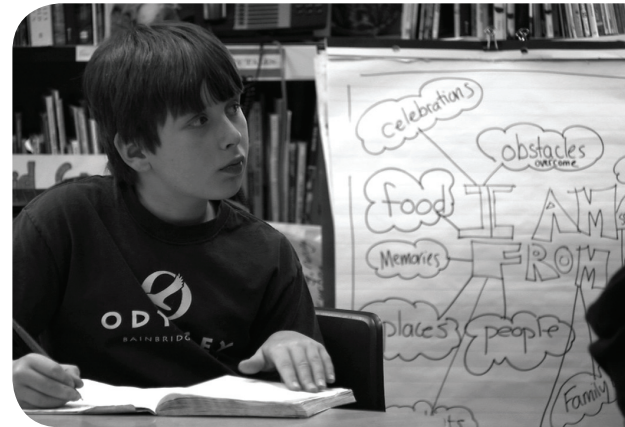
I Am From

Sample Guiding Questions

How does reflecting on our own lives help us empathize with theirs?

Lesson Overview

Students create a poem based on their lives, hobbies, interest, cultures and experiences as a way to build relationships and trust with their classmates and teachers. Students are encouraged to reflect on their lives and the life of a person featured in a film, and write a poem to share with others.



Notes:

Grade Level

4–8 Grade

Time

120 minutes

Materials Needed

- Film
- Sample “I Am From” poem, copies for students
- Place holder paper

Special Considerations

Encourage safety during Part I, reminding students not to push or run, and to stay inside the circle.

Strategies Used

- Cooperative Learning
- Empathetic Learning
- Reflective Learning

Skills Targeted

- Writing
- Speaking
- Listening
- Cultural Diversity
- Self-esteem
- Creative Thinking

Set Up

You will need to take some time to create your own “I Am From” poem to use as a model for the class. You will also want to create a classroom experience where the students feel comfortable sharing their lives with others. Starting each day by asking students something about their hobbies or interests helps to garner this type of classroom community.

Part I of this lesson is intended to help students reflect on their lives, hobbies, interests, traditions, languages, and cultural backgrounds in order to prepare them for writing their poem. Part II allows students to focus on the lives of people represented in a film as a way to compare the student’s lives to those in the film. For Part II, you will need to find a clip in the film that has rich audio that conveys a character’s emotion. The clip should be approximately 2–3 minutes in length.

Part I: I appreciate my neighbors who. . .

Procedure

1. Have the students stand in a circle facing each other. Hand a piece of paper or a safe object to each student and have him or her set it down on the floor directly behind them; this piece of paper represents their place holder. The teacher should stand in the middle of the circle without a placeholder. As a variation, you can also do this activity with chairs in a circle (one less chair than the number of students).
2. Explain that the person in the middle does not have a placeholder (or chair). The person in the middle is going to think of their favorite food, hobby, or interest and say the following sentence out loud to the rest of the circle. “I appreciate my neighbors who...” and then say something they like to do. For example, if the teacher likes to play a musical instrument then the teacher standing in the middle of the circle should say, “I appreciate my neighbors who like to play musical instruments.” If others in the circle like to play a musical instrument too, they will need to move from their placeholder and find a new placeholder to stand in front of.
3. Explain that the object of the game is similar to musical chairs and that a person cannot move to the placeholders directly to their left or right or return to the same placeholder once they move. They have to find a new placeholder to stand in front of. If there are not any left, that person is the new person in the middle of the circle. The new person standing in the middle should think of something to share and repeat... “I appreciate my neighbors who . . . and then try to find a place holder to stand in front of.
4. Repeat this until each student has had a chance to stand in the middle and share something. You may want to limit the number of times a person can be in the middle and ask them to choose someone else who has not had a chance.
5. Gather them up in a circle and ask them to share one new thing that they learned about someone else in the class.

Part II: I am From: Poem

Procedure

1. Begin this lesson by asking the students if the game helped them to think about their lives. Have a few students share with the class to help spark the others memories.
2. Tell students that they are going to watch a film and focus on the story of a particular character in the film. Everyone has a story, just as they do. In groups, students will have an opportunity to write a poem about a person from the film and then each student will write a poem about where they are from. Explain that this is a very special poem that follows a pattern, each line starts with “I Am from.” The remainder of the line is something that recalls a memory, a hobby, a phrase, or an experience related to their life.
3. Cue the film clip. Turn the television away from students so they are only able to hear the clip, but not see it. Ask them to listen to the words, sounds, and tone of voice, and to identify an emotion they associate with the clip. After listening to the clip, give students a few minutes to jot down their impressions and focus their thoughts. Then ask students what their impression of the character is based on the emotional quality of what they heard. How do we connect emotionally? With our eyes, ears, other senses? You will most likely need to play the clip twice, as students are probably unfamiliar with this type of listening.
4. Ask the students to watch the film in its entirety (both audio and video) and list things such as personal items belonging to the character, things he/she says to others, living and non-living things in his/her natural environment, skills he/she possesses, types of music and languages that they hear, names of relatives and mentors, and his/her favorite pastimes on a piece of paper.
5. Break students into groups of four (or retain groups from the viewing) and provide a sample “I Am From” poem. Encourage them to be creative and put themselves in the place of the character(s) in the film. What would they want to tell people? Who are they? What is important to them? They may refer to their first impressions from the audio clip and the emotion they associated with the film. You may want to share the objective of this exercise, which is instilling the habit of empathy. Discuss what empathy means.

Below is an example of an “I Am From” poem

I am from a household of females caring, daring, and stubborn.
Three thickheaded women “don’t you steal my thunder.”

I am from sun tea, canned peas, macaroni and cheese,
Sunday morning pancakes; “pass the syrup please”?

I am from every other weekend away, packed my bags for an adventurous stay.
I always treasured my Dads weekend away.

I am from music, dancing, and Saturday cartoons.
From swimming, softball, soccer, and the occasional macaroon.

I am from homemade dresses and plenty of messes.
Sewing, singing, and windows made of stained glasses.

I am from Ukrainian foods, cheap shoes and pants already used. A loving grandma who always kept me amused.
I am from female strength and words of wisdom, family foes and “you better get an education.”

—Janelle Shafer

Part II: I am From: Poem

Procedure

6. After the students are finished writing the draft of the film poem, ask them to sit in a circle and have a representative from each group read their poem. Encourage the students to listen to each group's poem and identify phrases or strategies that they would like to use to write their personal "I Am From" poem.
7. The next phase of the lesson personalizes the process by asking students to list items found in their homes, sayings they often hear from family members, names of foods or dishes, type of music and languages that they hear at home, names of relatives, and their favorite pastimes on a piece of paper. Have a few students share their list with the class to help the students think of their own lives.
8. Once they are finished with their lists, explain that each student will write an "I Am From" poem about himself or herself. Encourage them to be creative with their words and make the poem rhyme. Remind them to incorporate elements from their character poem into their own poem.

Wrap Up

9. Once the students are finished, return to the circle and share their poems. You may want to share a few a day over the course of a week.
10. Ask students to do a journal jump on the guiding question.
11. Display each student's poem in the classroom to celebrate their work and their lives!

Adapted and Modified from Linda Christensen: Where I'm From: Inviting Student's Lives into the Classroom