



WHO AM I? IDENTITY POEMS

April is National Poetry Month, which can be 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 more 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.

Grade Level: grades 2–5

Time: 45 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Language

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.

Material:

- Small Ball or Stuffed Animal
- [Word Bowl Words and Phrases](#) (for teacher only)
- [Words I Like Worksheet](#) (one for each student)
- [Who Am I? Worksheet](#) (one for each student)
- Blank sheets of lined paper, pencils or pens, crayons (for grades 2–3), highlighters (optional)

Advanced Preparation:

Cut out [Word Bowl Words and Phrases](#) into individual strips and set aside and complete a [Who Am I? Worksheet](#) for yourself or an imaginary person.

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL's "[Glossary of Education Terms](#).")

- Acrostic
- Comparison
- Identity
- Stanza
- Characteristics
- Ethnicity
- Metaphor

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 disclose something large or small. If you can't make a circle, simply go around the room with each child sharing one thing.

WRITING POEMS ACTIVITY: USING A WORD BOWL

1. To get students warmed up to writing poems, have them write poems using an assortment of words that you create as a class and place in a "word bowl." After compiling many interesting words to use, students will use those 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 and siblings, 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.

2. 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.
3. Have some of the students read their poems aloud.

USING COMPARISONS AND METAPHORS

1. 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.
2. 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.”
3. 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.
4. Brainstorm a list of comparisons and metaphors and record them on the board.

READING POEMS ABOUT IDENTITY

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 pigtails 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. You can use these questions (after reading each poem) 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 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. First, have students think about different aspects of their identity by discussing and completing the [Who Am I? Worksheet](#).
3. 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.

4. 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.
5. 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.”
6. 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, if they have a short first name) on the left side of the page, like this:

O
L
I
V
I
A

7. 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
8. 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

9. 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?
10. 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)
- [Popular Poets for Kids](#) (PBS for Parents)
- [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 ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 4: 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.
Standard 5: 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
Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Language
Standard 3: 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.
Standard 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

WORDS 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				

WORD BOWL WORDS AND PHRASES

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

JUST BECAUSE	LONG HAIR	SLEEPING BAG
SCRAMBLED EGGS	AFRO	BUTTER
GRANDMA'S HOUSE	CURLS	DEAD OF WINTER
CALICO CAT	RAINY DAY	HAMSTER
SNOW	CRYING	TRICKLE
RUNNING	CAMPFIRE	WHY DON'T YOU
POLKA DOTS	MY UNCLE	EYES
SWINGING	BAND-AID	LIPSTICK
MANGO	CRUTCHES	PUPPY DOG EYES
COWS	MONKEY BARS	RED
PARADE	FIREFIGHTER	LAUGHING
EASTER BONNET	ROAD TRIP	WALK TO SCHOOL
BASEBALL	BLUES	GRANDPA
SWIMMING	FORTUNE	RED RIDING HOOD
ONLINE	LOOSE CHANGE	SPRING
BEARD	SLEEPING BAG	SINGING
COUSIN	POPSICLE	RAINING CATS AND DOGS
SCHOOL BUS	ANGRY	SLED
JUMPING	DUMPLINGS	CANDY STORE
SLEEPY	OUCH	MISMATCHED SOCKS
SUBWAY	CRYING	
STRIPES	SLIDE TIPTOED	

WHO AM I? WORKSHEET

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

<p>MY NAME Name, nickname, original and meaning of name</p>	<p>MY PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS Hair color/texture/length, eyes, complexion, height, body shape, birthmarks</p>
<p>MY RACE, ETHNICITY, HERITAGE, NATIONALITY Black, White, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Multiracial, country of origin, where ancestors are from</p>	<p>MY LIKES AND DISLIKES Hobbies, interests, food, games, sports, technology, animals, music, etc.</p>
<p>MY FAMILY AND FAMILY LIFE Family structure, siblings, where family is from, activities/traditions my family has</p>	<p>MY COMMUNITY/NEIGHBORHOOD People in my neighborhood/community, size, stores, services, urban/rural/suburban, what it's like</p>

Other Important Things About Me:
