Identity and Place (6-12)

Pre- and Post-Visit

Overview:
Student will explore the relationship between place and identity. This lesson includes ideas for both pre-visit and post-visit activities and provides an opportunity for collaboration between language arts and visual arts teachers.

As a pre-visit activity, this begins discussions about how people explain and explore their own identity in relation to the place where they were born or live.

As a post-visit activity, students will explore aspects of their personal identity and build on their visit to Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art.

Pre-visit activity: Language Arts

Begin by leading the class in conversation, asking:

- What characteristics might suggest where you were born, or grew up? (accent, dress, foods you eat, ideas about the world, etc.)
- What does it mean to be from a specific place or region?
- Are certain places/regions viewed differently? Positively or negatively? How so?

Next, introduce the poem Where I’m From by George Ella Lyon and read it together as a class. Explain that artists and writers draw upon their childhoods as content for their craft.

Next, lead the class in a discussion about the poem, asking:

- Based upon the clues given, where is Lyon from?
- How do we know?
- What does this poem say about being from a specific place?

Next, explain that each region of the US is different and unique. The American South is often explored through its unique literature, cuisine, and music. Many artists represent or explore the South through symbols connected to its past.

Next, using Lyon’s poem as a template, student’s will create their own Where I’m From poem.
Finally, encourage students to share their finished poems with a partner or with the whole class.

Post-visit activity: Visual Arts

Begin, by leading the class in a discussion about what works they saw on their visit to the Nasher Museum. Ask:

- What types of visual symbols did you see in the artwork?
- What did these pieces communicate about the individual artist’s identity?
- What symbols were used to express “Southerness”?

Next, ask students to create a list of “symbols” they might use to describe themselves (food, landscapes, vehicles, people, etc). Look back to the poem for additional examples.

Next, provide magazines, newspapers, books, etc. to students. Encourage them to find and cut out images that reference their list. Students could also print images from the internet and/or bring their own source material from home.

Next, while students are gathering images, bring students in groups of two to an overhead projector. Have each student take turns sitting in profile to the projector, while the other traces their profile onto oversized paper. The drawing should be life-size or bigger.

Next, have each student cut out their profile and paste it to a contrasting piece of construction paper.

Then, have each student create a collage of their images and symbols within their profile.

Finally, display the finished poem (from the pre-visit activity) and the finished collage together.
Where I'm From

By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
  (Black, glistening,
   it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
  the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
  as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
  and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restores my soul
  with a cottonball lamb
  and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger,
  the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
  spilling old pictures,
  a sift of lost faces
  to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments—
  snapped before I budded—
leaf-fall from the family tree.
Where I’m From – Template

I am from...
Adapted by Levi Romero
Inspired by Where I’m From by George Ella Lyon

I am from ____________ (an everyday item in your home) from ____________ and ____________ (products or everyday items in your home)

I am from ____________ (description of your home)
_________ (a detail about your home – a smell, taste, or feel)
I am from the ____________ (plant, flower, natural item) The ____________ (plant or tree near your home) whose long limbs I remember as if they were my own.

I’m from ____________ and ____________ (a family tradition and a family trait)
from ____________ and ____________ (family members)

I’m from ____________ and ____________ (family habits) and from ____________ (family habit).

I’m from ____________ and ____________ (things you did as a child) and ____________ (a song or saying you learned as a child)
I’m from ____________ (a family tradition)

I’m from ____________ (place of birth) and ____________ (family ancestry, nationality or place) ____________ and ____________ (family foods)
From ____________ (a story about a family member) ____________ (detail about the story or person)
_________ (description of family mementos, pictures, or treasures) ____________ (location of mementos – under my bed, on the wall, in my heart) ____________ (more description if needed)

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