

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 "Southernness"?**

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 restoreth 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)

_____.