



WHERE I'M FROM: FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND POETRY

Suggested Grade Level: 4 – 6

Length of Time: 3 sessions of 45 minutes

Goal

- To build community and a more welcome classroom environment by learning about one another through poetry.

Objectives

- To use descriptive language in poetry to help others understand their lives.
- To make connections between students.

Academic Standards

- CCSS SL 4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. Also SL 5.1, 6.1.
- Social Studies Strand 4: Individual Development and Identity – examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development, and actions including family, peers, culture, and institutional influences.

Educators' Notes

This would be a good lesson to use near the beginning of the year both for you to get to know your students and for your students to get to know each other. This will help create community in your classroom. It can also be used before a back to school night if you post them on a wall in your room. This lesson could also be used as a part of a poetry unit. Reading or looking at the book such as *Families* by Susan Kuklin prior to this poetry activity can help your students feel more comfortable including references to their families in what they write.

Materials Needed: Copy of the book *Families* by Susan Kuklin or another book with photographs of families such as *Families* by Ann Morris, copies of the “Idea Sheet” for each student. Copy of the poem, “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyons.

Setting the Context

- Read a couple of sections from the book *Families*. Or, show a number of families that are featured in the book and summarize who is in their family and mention some things said by the kids who are interviewed in the book. Depending on the composition of your class you may choose different sections to highlight. Looking at this book helps give your class a context of the diversity of families around them. It may help them feel more comfortable sharing about their families and homes when they write their poems.

Beginning the Poetry Activity

- Ask the students, “Where are you from?” Allow a few students to answer. Most students will say the place or location where they were born or the place they live in currently. Explain that people are from more than just a place. They are from the people, the words, and the life around them.
- Read the poem, “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyons.
- Ask students to name some of the images/words that she uses to describe where she is from.
- Talk with your students about writing their own poems about where they are from.
- Ask your students, what are some other ways they could describe where they are from besides saying the location? You can give them examples like, “I am from lunch on Sundays with my Grandma” or “ I am from the smell of fresh corn tortillas.” Give your students a chance to say a sentence like that.

Pre-Writing

- Hand out the “Idea Sheet.” This is a pre-writing exercise that helps the students collect their thoughts. Depending on your class, either give students time to work on their own to work on the “Idea Sheet” or you can talk your students through each section. Ask your students what images do they see or words do they hear under each heading. Go through each one while your students write down their thoughts.

Writing

- Reread the poem “Where I’m From.”
- Have students pull out their “Idea Sheets” to use when they write their own poems. Tell them that they don’t have to use all their ideas, but try to use 7 – 10 of them. Let them know that they are not limited by what they wrote on the think sheet. New ideas may come to them as they start writing the poem.
- Talk about adding exciting or descriptive words. Ask them to try to paint a picture or create images in the readers mind. Encourage the students to end their poem with a sentence that sums up their thoughts.
- Give students time to work on writing their own poem.

Revising and Editing

- Have the students pair up to share each other’s poems. Ask the students if they understand the other student’s poem? Do they get images of where they are from? Could they use more descriptive adjectives?
- Individually, have students make revisions to their poems based on the feedback and to edit their poems for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- Finally have them write neatly or type their final draft.

Sharing

- Sharing the poems with other students in the class will help build community in your classroom. Options for sharing:
 - Read aloud to the whole class.
 - Divide the class into small groups. Have each student read their poem aloud to the small group.
 - Post the poems around the walls of your classroom. Have students walk around to read each other's poems.
- While they are sharing their poems ask them to look for connections with other students or interesting things they find out about their classmates.

Extension

- The poems could be put on display for a family night or back to school night.
- The poems could be posted in the hallway near the classroom to share with others in the school.

Assessment and Evaluation

- Did they convey vivid images with their word choices?
- In the final draft are grade appropriate words spelled correctly? Is the grammar and punctuation correct?
- Use an exit card for students to write down a new connection with a classmate that they made from reading or hearing the poems.

WHERE I AM FROM POEM IDEA SHEET

Think of things that could help create pictures in your reader's mind.

Name some objects around your home.

Things you like to do with your time, what you like to play, sports, music, arts, reading...

Images that come to mind when you think of where you are from.

Important events in your life.

Special foods you like or that you eat with your family.

Sounds you might hear in your home or near where you live.

Smells that remind you of home.

Phrases you hear at home.

Town or street names.

Describe your pet (if you have one) or a favorite stuffed animal that you have or used to have.

Favorite Stories or Songs from home.

Names of adults important who have been important to you as you've been growing up.

Descriptive images that come to mind when you think about those adults.

Other thoughts or images that come to mind when you think about where you are from.

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.

<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>