



We Are Storytellers Who I Am



Writing activity

For this activity, kids will write short poems that explore their own personal thoughts about who they are and where they came from.

Individual: each child works independently on their poem.

Supplies

- Notepad or paper, pen or pencil
- Drawing paper and drawing tools: colored pencils, markers, or watercolors (optional)

Let's get started

Tell the kids that they will be writing short poems about who they are — their dreams, their fears, [vivid](#) memories, how they're unique, their families, where they're from — anything they want to express.



We Are Storytellers

Who I Am

Adults can look at the **three poem options offered on the following pages**, and select one or more for your kids to try. Explain that they will be using a model to guide their writing. They won't have to think as much about the poem's structure, so they can focus on their ideas and finding the right words to express those ideas. These poems do not need to rhyme.

Encourage the kids to open their minds as they think and write. You might even try some mindfulness breathing exercises before starting on the poems.

Children who speak another language in addition to English can write their poems in their home language, or write them in both languages.

Sharing our work

Once the personal poems are completed, gather everyone together in a circle and invite your young writers to read their poems out loud. Kids can also choose to memorize their poems and present them without notes — in keeping with the oral storytelling tradition. Some kids may not be comfortable sharing their poems in front of others, and that's okay.

Try this!

This Is Me: Encourage the kids to create portraits of themselves to go along with their poems. They can draw their face on a regular-sized sheet of paper. Or they can make a life-sized portrait: have a friend trace around them as they lie down on a big piece of kraft paper, the back side of wrapping paper, or even a few pieces of newspaper taped together. Then they can color in their faces and clothes, if they want to — or write their poem in the torso of the body.

Another option is to have kids make a collage of things that reflect themselves or are mentioned in their poems.





We Are Storytellers Who I Am

Portrait poem #1

(Adapted from Art Belliveau)

I am (first name)

Son/Daughter of (I've also used brother/sister of...)

Who needs ...

Who loves ...

Who sees ...

Who hates ...

Who fears ...

Who dreams of ...

Who has found poems of

Resident of (I've seen people list here everything from their address to "the small blue green planet third from the sun") ...

(last name)



We Are Storytellers Who I Am

Portrait poem #2

(Adapted from Art Belliveau)

First section

I am (two special characteristics you have)

I wonder (something you are actually curious about)

I hear (an imaginary sound)

I see (an imaginary sight)

I want (an actual desire)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Second section

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)

I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)

I touch (an imaginary touch)

I worry (something that really bothers you)

I cry (something that makes you very sad)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Third section

I understand (something you know is true)

I say (something you believe in)

I dream (something you actually dream about)

I try (something you really make an effort about)

I hope (something you actually hope for)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)



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"Where I'm From" poem

In this project, kids will write and share an autobiographical poem using George Ella Lyon's 'Where I'm From' poem as the inspiration.

Kids will build their poems by thinking about the people, places, things, and events that makes each of them unique. The template on page 15 may be helpful in guiding kids.

Read the original 'Where I'm From' by Lyon to the kids (see the next page), or let them watch the [video](#) or listen to the [audio](#).

Talk with the kids about the language they hear in the poem. Lyon's poem has some words that may be difficult for kids to understand. Remind them that their poems will be written in *their* words, and that a very powerful and personal poem can be written with simple yet expressive words.

Here are two excerpts from a ['Where I'm From' poem crowd-sourced by NPR](#):

I am from marbles
From empanadas cooking in the street
I am from orchids and mango trees
I am from la torta tres leches and ruana
I am from happy and serious
From hard work and sweat

—

I'm from grit, respect, and discipline.
from big family reunions and endless laughs.
I am from houses never locked
from the projects in Brooklyn
and dominoes in the park
I am from salsa and the car horns blaring

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 am 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 poem template

Adapt the template as needed for younger children. Not all the lines need to be filled in.

Your Name _____

I am from _____

(a specific item from your home)

from _____

(two objects from when you were very young)

I am from _____

(a phrase describing your home)

and _____

(more description of your home)

I am from _____

(a plant, tree or natural object from your neighborhood)

I am from _____

(two objects from when you were very young)

from _____

(two family names or ancestors)

and from _____

(two family traits or characteristics)

from _____

(another family trait or characteristic)

I am from _____

(a religious memory or family tradition)

from _____

(two foods from your family history)

from _____

(a specific event in the life of an ancestor)

and from _____

(another detail from the life of an ancestor)

(a memory or object you had as a child)

I am from the moments... _____

(continue this thought or repeat a line or idea from earlier in the poem)