



Where I'm From...

**A short integrated unit for
contextualizing writing for
Adult Basic Education
Students**



Studying the Poem and Author

Day 1

- Students read *Where I'm From* by George Ella Lyon
- Class discussion about the poem:
 - Clarify/define vocabulary
 - Talk about images (have students use their senses to think about the images in the poem)
 - Brainstorm where the poem takes place and what it looks like
 - What do we know about the author from the poem?
- Have students take time to research the author
 - Check out her website: <http://www.georgeellalyon.com/>
 - You can even have the students listen to her read her poem.








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.





Writing Together



Day 2

- Read a short children's book to students to use as an example for the activity.
 - Pick a book with an interesting main character and one with lots of details about the family and life events. (Some possible books: *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco (poem about her as the author), *Back Home* by Gloria Jean Pinkney, *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* by Margaree King Mitchell, *Freedom on the Menu* by Carole Boston Weatherford)
 - Have students listen for information about the main character as you read (They can even jot down words and events if old enough)
- As a class, brainstorm images that students have from the story - make a list on the board of their suggestions.
 - What are the main events?
 - What words describe the main character?
 - Who are the people and what are the things that are significant for the main character?
- Give students a template sheet and have the template written on large chart paper in the front for you to write on.
- As a class, write a *Where I'm From* poem for the main character of the book using the images and words from the brainstorming list.





The *WHERE I'M FROM* Template



I am from _____ (specific ordinary item), from _____ (product name)
and _____.

I am from the _____ (home description... adjective, adjective, sensory detail).

I am from the _____ (plant, flower, natural item),
the _____ (plant, flower, natural detail)

I am from _____ (family tradition) and _____ (family trait),
from _____ (name of family member) and _____ (another family name) and _____
(family name).

I am from the _____ (description of family tendency) and _____ (another one).



From _____ (something you were told as a child) and _____ (another).


I am from (representation of religion, or lack of it). Further description.

I'm from _____ (place of birth and family ancestry), _____ and
_____ (two food items representing your family).


From the _____ (specific family story about a specific person and detail),
the _____ (another detail), and the _____ (another detail about another family
member).

I am from _____ (location of family pictures, mementos,
archives and several more lines indicating their worth).





Writing About Oneself



Day 3

- Brainstorm with students and have them write down either a word or image that they think of when you say the following:
 - Important people in my life... My home...Christmas morning...other holidays... My birthday... My childhood memories... My best Friend... Family Vacations... My Family members... Aunts and uncles, siblings, parents, grand-parents... Family get-togethers...
 - Then ask them to think about smells, sounds, and tastes associated with certain places like home, grandparents or an aunt or uncle's house, their favorite places...holidays... etc.
 - Next, have them write down favorite foods, songs, family traditions, past-times, memories.
- Then have students use the template to write their own *Where I'm From* poem.
- As they write, have them refer to their brainstorming list for ideas, words, images to include in their poems.
- Ensure good poetry by reminding them that this is a draft and they shouldn't worry about spelling right now.





Reflecting on Their Poetry: Editing and Revising



Day 4

- Have students work with a partner. They will share their poem with one another by reading it aloud.
- Next, students will take the hard copy of their partner's poem and read it again. As they read they should do the following:
 - Highlight any misspelled words
 - Underline images or words they like
 - Write a sentence (or more) at the bottom about what they learned about their partner from reading his/her poem
- Students get their poem back for reflections and revisions
 - Students will see ways that they were able to tell about themselves
 - Students will see what needs fixing in their poem
- Students work on revising their poem and writing or wordprocessing it for publication and presentation. If you have students who enjoy expressing themselves artistically, let them illustrate their poem.





Sharing Who We Are



Day 5

- Have a “Poet Chair” centered in the room with students seated around as the audience.
- Have students introduce their editing partner (from day 4) as the next poet. They should use something they learned about the poet from editing the poem the day before in their introduction.
- Students will share their poems with the class.
- **With students’ permission**, poems can then be posted on a bulletin board, on a classwide drop-box or Moodle or other class website, or the class could publish a class book called: *Where We’re From*.

