Intended for Grades: 4-12  Estimated Time: 45-60 min.

Lesson Title: I AM FROM - Exploring Culture Through Storytelling

Lesson Purpose: Students will:
* Use a writing template that encourages exploration of their cultural heritage
* Interview family members & co-write a cultural heritage poem using same template
* Practice presentation skills by reading aloud their poems
* Explore diverse mediums of expression for sharing their poems with an audience

Materials & Preparation:
* Word Bank templates - print two per student if sending home (See below)
* “I Am From” poem template - print two per student if sending home (See below)
* Copy of Where I’m From, by George Ella Lyon, or other example (See below)
* Plain or lined paper for final drafts

Background Information:
This lesson can be applied to all cultures and heritages within the classroom. Students spend time reflecting on their own expressions of culture. With this information, they are then able to create meaningful poetry within an easy to use framework. Reading their poems aloud provides students the opportunity to practice public speaking skills.

Steps:
1. As a group, brainstorm the elements of life that define culture. The list will probably include: place, language, beliefs, foods, clothing, music, jokes, stories, etc.
2. For older students, read aloud the poem by George Ella Lyon and/or other examples of poems about cultural identity. See below for a simple example for younger students.
3. Identify and discuss the details that illustrate unique family and cultural communities.
4. Have the students complete the Word Bank template.
5. Students can then use their Word Bank with the “I Am From” template to complete their own, original “I Am From” poem. Encourage students to write a clean, final draft.
6. Share poems. Invite students to rewrite their template poem, encouraging symbolic decorations.

Collaborative Writing / Extended ‘Ohana Activity:
7. Have students choose a family member to interview about their personal and cultural heritage. Details that can be included: their birthplace, description of their home, names of family members, languages they heard and spoke, everyday items, everyday foods, foods for special occasions, songs, and family stories.
8. Using the word bank and “I am From” poem templates, the student and family member will co-write a second poem.
WORD BANK DESCRIPTORS

1. **Things that can be found around your house**: Items that hold some significance or special meaning for the author, their family, and/or home. (ex. ipu, poi pounder, toy trains, fishing supplies, portraits on the walls, etc.)
2. **Things that can be found in your yard**: Items that are constantly or commonly present around the author’s yard. (ex. dry box, nets, pooper scooper, folding chairs, tires, etc.)
3. **Things that can be found in your neighborhood**: Things the neighborhood is known for (old cars, mango trees, manapua wagons, people walking, kids riding bikes, etc.)
4. **Names of the people in your family**: Special people in the author's life. In the poem there are a couple of spaces to write these names, so select the most important on the list. Many times parents top the list.
5. **Sayings you hear a lot**: Phrases family members say a lot, like “stand up straight”, “The grass is always greener on the other side”, “I love you.”, etc.
6. **Foods/dishes that are common at your family gatherings**: Things your family regularly cooks & eats on special occasions, like fish and poi, Chantilly cake, Andagi (Okinawan donuts), Sari Sari (Filipino soup), etc.
7. **Place where you collect your memories**: Items or ways you help yourself retain experiences and thoughts (i.e.: diary, box of pictures, computer, head/mind, souvenir shelf, family videos, etc.)
8. **This space is provided for the students to add a final thought.**

**Reflection Questions:**
What was something /important that you learned from writing this poem? How can this information help you, today as well as in the future?

**Resources:** [www.georgeellalyon.com](http://www.georgeellalyon.com)

**Example:**

**I Am From**

*(Anonymous)*

I am from mix match dishes, the rice pot steaming, and a big pune’e with lots of soft pillows.

I am from Grandpa’s old garden pots, spare car junk, and Plumeria trees.

I am from lawns with old bushes, small country stores, and giant mango trees as big as clouds.

I am from Michelle and Manny - M & M; from Tutu Lei, Papa Tim, Gramma Rose and Grandpa John.

I am from do your best and sit there till you finish your food…

From roast pork, spaghetti, and Sunday morning French toast cooked by Dad.

I am from my small red journal and the Old, leather falling apart photo album made lifetimes ago.

I am from many big hearts…
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 cotton ball 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
Name: _______________________________          Date: __________

“I AM FROM…” WORD BANK

1. Things that can be found around your house: ______________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Things that can be found in your yard: ______________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Things that can be found in your neighborhood: __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. Names of the people in your family: ______________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Sayings (What the adults in your house always say): _____________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. Foods/dishes that are common at your family gatherings: __________________

________________________________________________________________________

7. Place where you collect your memories: ______________________________

________________________________________________________________________

8. Place where author can add anything they like.: __________________________

________________________________________________________________________
“I Am From” Poem Draft Template

1. I am from ____________________ and from ____________________
   (Things that can be found around your house)

2. I am from ____________________ and from ____________________
   (Things that can be found in your yard)

3. I am from ____________________ and from ____________________
   (Things that can be found in your neighborhood)

4. I am from ____________________ and from ____________________
   (Names of people in your family)

5. I am from ____________________
   and from ____________________
   (sayings).

6. I am from ____________________ and from ____________________
   (foods/dishes).

7. I collect my memories ____________________

8. ____________________

By ____________________
(First and Last Name)