

Lesson 1

“I am From” Poem

“Where I’m From: Inviting Students’ Lives Into the Classroom” by Linda Christensen, Rethinking Schools

Objective:

- Students will further the POV activity by reflecting on the origins of their perspective.
- Students will reflect on how they’ve developed their POV by examining their personal lives/relationships/culture/language etc. through the creation of an “I am” Poem.
- Student’s lives and voices will be invited into the classroom by the reading/presentation of the poems.

Introduction:

- Point of View helps students look at the complexity of history. How do we develop our perspective? Our experiences: our history, our age, our parents, community, language, religion.
- Students will be instructed to create their own “I am From” poem.

Teaching Strategy:

(Taken Directly from Linda Christensen’s teaching instruction, Rethinking Our Classroom, Volume 2 – portions have been modified by me to fit my pacing guide.)

1. Students are provided with a series of sample poems to read on their own. As a class we read one or two aloud as a group.
2. Focus on: “I am From Soul Food and Harriet Tubman” by Lealonni Blake.
3. We go line by line through the poem. I ask students to notice the detail Lailonni remembers about her past.
4. After we read I ask students to write lists that match the ones in Leilonnis poem and to share them out loud. This verbal sharing sparks memories and also gives us memories to share as we make our way through the lesson:

- Items found around their home: bobby pins or tacks of newspapers, grandma's teeth, discount coupons for a Mercedes. (They don't have to tell the truth).
- Items found in their yard: broken rakes, dog bones, hoses coiled like green snakes. (I encourage them to think of metaphors as they create their lists).
- Items found in their neighborhood: the corner grocery, Mr. Tate's beat up Ford Fairline "the home base" plum tree.
- Names of relatives, especially ones that link them to the past: Uncle Einar and Aunt Eva Claude, the Christensen branch.
- Saying: "If I've told you one..."
- Names of foods and dishes help recall family gatherings: lutefisk, tamales, blackOeyed peas.
- Names of places they keep their childhood memories: Diaries, boxes, underwear drawers, inside the family Bible.

5. We share the lists out loud as we brainstorm. I encourage them to make their piece "sound like home," using the names and language of their home, their family, their neighborhood. The students who write vague nouns like "shoes" or "magazines" get more specific when they hear their classmate shout out, "Jet", "Latina", "pink tights crusted with rosin".

6. Once they have their lists of specific words, phrases and names, I ask them to write their poems. I give them various formats they can use, see attached.

7. Once students have written their final drafts , we "read around" in an ordered shared circle. This is an opportunity for students to feel "significant and cared about," in the words of Rethinking Our Classroom, Volume 1, as they share their poems.