



Title: Where I'm From

Grade: 9

Career Development Model:

Self-Awareness

Nebraska Career Readiness Standards:

- Models ethical leadership & effective management
- Works productively in teams and demonstrates cultural competence
- Manages personal career development
- Manages personal career development
- Attends to personal & financial wellbeing

Objective:

- Students will analyze ways in which their family history, culture, ethnicity, and environment has helped shape who they are today.
- Students will reflect and judge the amount of influence the past has their current goals for the future.

Materials and Supplies Needed:

- George Ella Lyon's poem, "Where I'm From" – handout (copies needed)
- "Where I'm From" - brainstorming assignment - handout (copies needed)
- "Where I'm From Poem" Template – handout (Optional) (copies needed)
- Sample, "Where I'm From Poem" – handout (copies needed)

Class Instructions:

Part 1

1. Direct students' attention to the George Ella Lyon poem, "Where I'm From." Read the poem aloud to the students while students follow along. After reading, ask students for their reactions to the poem. Possible questions to initiate and deepen conversation include: What does this poem tell us about the speaker? How does this poem tell the story of the speaker's life? Why are the specific and concrete details of this poem important?
2. The classroom conversation proceeds by asking students about how our family backgrounds—the stories, the unique details, the good and bad times have all shaped who we are today and who we will become. It is important to note that not all of the experiences the speaker of the poem shares are positive—the difficult

times (the accidents, the tragedies, the disappointments) are also a part of who we are and where we are from.

3. Distribute the "Where I'm From Brainstorming Assignment." Explain how each of us has a unique and interesting history to share and that these worksheets will help identify the specific details of their own experiences.
4. Students complete "Where I'm From Brainstorming Assignment." Teachers may need to assist and encourage reluctant students. They may not initially feel as though they have any "unique" family characteristics, so the teacher might ask questions such as, "Does anyone in your family have an interesting nickname?" or "Is there anyone in your family famous for something they always say?" Teachers should encourage students to be as specific as possible, using brand names, proper names and concrete details whenever possible.
5. When students are finished with their charts, teachers can ask if anyone would like to share details from their worksheets.

Part 2

1. Instruct students to write their own "Where I'm From" poems. They can use the George Ella Lyon poem as a model, but they should be encouraged to make their poems their own. They should have their "Where I'm From Brainstorming Assignment" on hand. If students are struggling, the teacher may want to have the student(s) utilize the Template handout.
2. Once students have completed a rough draft the teacher may want to ask if anyone would like to share their draft with the class.

OPTIONAL PROCEDURE: This activity could be extended into a larger project by asking students to create a collage that includes a typed final draft of their poem along with pictures, clip art or illustrations that correspond with the specific details used in their poems. These collages could then be displayed in the classroom or presented in class. This collage could also be created in a digital format and a class collection of poems could even be created perhaps utilizing PowerPoint or similar software.

3. Have students reflect on the following questions. How have the details of where you are from shaped who you are today and what impact will this history have on your future? Are there any patterns you would like to change? Any traditions you will definitely keep?

Credits/Sources:



“Making my Future Work: A College and Career Readiness Program”, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

<https://www.csuohio.edu/cehs/mmfw/making-my-future-work-0>

SAMPLE "WHERE I'M FROM POEM"

Mrs. Perez
English-Honors-1
4 November 2012

Where I'm from

I'm from the crispy chicken made from the stove in my kitchen,



I'm the cheesy girl made from the macaroni.

I mash up my thoughts like mashed potatoes,

I'm from the steamy hot steak like when I'm mad on a bad day.



I'm from the chicken parmesan with the red sauce and loopy noodles.

I'm from the mom, who makes memories every day,



I'm from the sister who takes my happiness away.

I'm from the cousin who loves me the most,

I'm from the friends who share the moments of hope.



I'm from the grandpa, who taught me art and ideas,



I'm the 6 from my volleyball team.

I'm the tied up bow for the tied up life I have today,



I'm from the pictures like the ones that show pain.





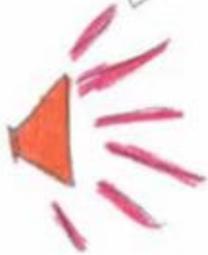
I'm from the noises in classrooms on weekdays,

I'm from the parks I live by for happiness and joy.

I'm from Cleveland Ohio where I was born,

I'm from Marne Ave where I grew up through my years.

I'm from the funniness to hide my pain and tears.



Where I'm From by George Ella Lyon

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

As Kentucky's 2015-2016 poet laureate, George Ella wants to collect a "Where I'm From" poem [from every county in Kentucky](#).

Kentucky's 'Where I'm From': A Poetry of Place" is the central theme of a project that will touch all 120 of Kentucky's counties. Find more information, and how to submit poems, [on the Kentucky Arts Council website](#).

Where I'm From

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.

“Where I’m From” grew out of my response to a poem from **Stories I Ain’t Told Nobody Yet** (Orchard Books, 1989; Theater Communications Group, 1991) by my friend, Tennessee writer Jo Carson. All of the People Pieces, as Jo calls them, are based on things folks actually said, and number 22 begins, “I want to know when you get to be from a place.” Jo’s speaker, one of those people “that doesn’t have roots like trees,” tells us “I am from Interstate 40” and “I am from the work my father did.”

In the summer of 1993, I decided to see what would happen if I made my own where-I’m-from lists, which I did, in a black and white speckled composition book. I edited them into a poem – not my usual way of working – but even when that was done I kept on making the lists. The process was too rich and too much fun to give up after only one poem. Realizing this, I decided to try it as an exercise with other writers, and it immediately took off. The list form is simple and familiar, and the question of where you are from reaches deep.

Since then, the poem as a writing prompt has traveled in amazing ways. People have used it at their family reunions, teachers have used it with kids all over the United States, in Ecuador and China; they have taken it to girls in juvenile detention, to men in prison for life, and to refugees in a camp in the Sudan. Its life beyond my notebook is a testimony to the power of poetry, of roots, and of teachers. My thanks to all of you who have taken it to heart and handed it on. It’s a thrill to read the poems you send me, to have a window into that many young souls.

I hope you won’t stop there, though. Besides being a poem in its own right, “Where I’m From” can be a map for a lot of other writing journeys. Here are some things I’ve thought of:

Where to Go with "Where I'm From"

While you can revise (edit, extend, rearrange) your “Where I’m From” list into a poem, you can also see it as a corridor of doors opening onto further knowledge and other kinds of writing. The key is to let yourself explore these rooms. Don’t rush to decide what kind of writing you’re going to do or to revise or finish a piece. Let your goal be the writing itself. Learn to let it lead you. This will help you lead students, both in their own writing and in their response as readers. Look for these elements in your WIF poem and see where else they might take you:

- a place could open into a piece of descriptive writing or a scene from memory.
- your parents’ work could open into a memory of going with them, helping, being in the way. Could be a remembered dialogue between your parents about work. Could be a poem made from a litany of tools they used.
- an important event could open into freewriting all the memories of that experience, then writing it as a scene, with description and dialogue. It’s also possible to let the description become setting and directions and let the dialogue turn into a play.
- food could open into a scene at the table, a character sketch of the person who prepared the food, a litany of different experiences with it, a process essay of how to make it.
- music could take you to a scene where the music is playing; could provide you the chance to interleave the words of the song and words you might have said (or a narrative of what you were thinking and feeling at the time the song was first important to you (“Where I’m Singing From”).
- something someone said to you could open into a scene or a poem which captures that moment; could be what you wanted to say back but never did.
- a significant object could open into a sensory exploration of the object-what it felt, sounded, smelled, looked, and tasted like; then where it came from, what happened to it, a memory of your connection with it. Is there a secret or a longing connected with this object? A message? If you could go back to yourself when this object was important to you, what would you ask, tell, or give yourself?

Remember, you are the expert on you. No one else sees the world as you do; no one else has your material to draw on. You don’t have to know where to begin. Just start. Let it flow. Trust the work to find its own form.

Where Are *You* From?

"If you don't know where you're from, you'll have a hard time saying where you're going." Wendell Berry, among others, has voiced this idea that we need to understand our roots to know our place in the world. A poem by George Ella Lyon is called "[Where I'm From](#)." I first heard it read by Appalachian poet Rita Quillen. Six months later, we used it as a writing assignment in a class taught by my friend Elizabeth Hunter at the Campbell Folk School in North Carolina. The poem lends itself to imitation and makes a wonderful exercise of exploration in belonging.

I'd like to suggest that you give it a try. The prompts have a way of drawing out memories of the smells of attics and bottom-drawer keepsakes; the faces of long-departed kin, the sound of their voices you still hold some deep place in memory. You'll be surprised that, when you're done, you will have said things about the sources of your unique you-ness that you'd never considered before. What's more, you will have created something of yourself to share--with your children, spouse, siblings--that will be very unique, very personal and a very special gift.

I'll give you the template here. You can search on "where Iâ€™m from" and find many others who have taken the time to do this valuable exercise. More often than not, one person having completed it, will encourage all their brothers and sisters to complete the poem template for their parents and each other.

Glad you stopped by. Since posting this in 2005, I've written two books I'd like you to know about: *Slow Road Home* ~ a blue ridge book of days; and *What We Hold In Our Hands: a Slow Road Reader*. Both are described at slowroadhome.com and [can be ordered here](#).

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), _____ (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).

Where I'm From ~ Fred First ~ November 2003

I am from the peaceful banks of a creek with no name; from JFG, toast and blackberry jam and home-made granola.

I am from "a house with double porches," a room filled with good ghosts and creek laughter in the mornings before first light.

I am from Liriodendron and Lindera, butterfly bush and mountain boomers

I am from Dillons and Harrisons, Betty Jean and Granny Bea-- frugal and long-lived, stubborn and tender, quick to laugh. Or cry.

I am from a world whose geography my children know better than I, from a quiet valley where I am the proprietor and world authority of its small wonders.

From barn loft secret passwords and children who can fly if they only try.

I am from oven-baked Saran Wrap and colds caught from jackets worn indoors.

I am from pire in the blood Baptists, from the cathedral made without hands, the church in the wildwoods, the covenant of grace.

I'm from the Heart of Dixie, son of Scarlett O'hara. From War Eagle, Wiffle, UAB and PT, from Walnut Knob's blue ridge and the soft shadows of Goose Creek.

From a "fast hideous" dresser and a home body from Woodlawn, from a grandfather I never knew that I can blame for my love of nature and my stubbornness, they tell me.

I am from fragments, the faint smell of wood smoke, and familiar walks among trees I know by name, from HeresHome and good stock. A man can hardly ask to be from more.

Name: _____

“WHERE I’M FROM”

BRAINSTORMING ASSIGNMENT

Instructions: Complete the chart below with details from your own family experience. Try to be as concrete and specific as possible. Including brand names, proper nouns and concrete details will make your list stronger and really unique to you!

Food, Snacks, and Favorite Recipes	Notorious Nicknames	The Storytellers (and their stories)	My Environment (street names, places you’ve lived, the hospital where you were born.	Things People Say . . .	Clothes, Shoes and Household Items