

"I Am" Poem

Overview

In this activity, students will examine their individual identities, considering all of the elements that make us who we are. Students will then create an "I Am" poem that they share with the group, thus leading to a deeper and shared understanding of each other, as well as a cohesive sense of a classroom community.

Grades

4-8

Activity Type

Individual

Materials

- Paper and pencil; art supplies (optional)

Duration

1 hour

Instructions

1. Ask the class to brainstorm what makes up a person's identity, and chart answers where everyone can see. (As a facilitator, you are looking for participants to mention things such as personality traits, parents, family, background, experiences, community and surroundings, education, class, race, likes and dislikes, etc.) Encourage students to expand on their answers by asking questions such as:
 - What determines our personality?
 - Why are individuals so different? What societal influences determine who we are and who we become?
 - How might _____ specifically affect a person's identity? (ask this question upon referring to a specific answer given in the brainstorm list, such as "education")
2. Encourage the group to reflect on their own individual identity. Ask them to privately think about questions such as:
 - Who are you? What type of person do you consider yourself to be?
 - In regards to your personality, what are you most proud of? What do you need to improve on?
 - What are your likes and dislikes? What are your dreams and aspirations?
 - What are you afraid of?

Continue asking students questions to prompt their thinking and inform them to create a brainstorm of their identity on a piece of notebook paper. Tell students that they can list words or phrases, draw pictures, write quotes, etc. that expresses their identity.

3. Once students have had ample brainstorming time, explain that they will be reflecting on their identity and personality by creating a poem called, "I Am". The poem is a short, structured format to capture the essence of each participant by outlining certain information and characteristics to be filled in. An "I Am" poem consists of 11 lines (write the outline where all group members can see):

Line 1: First name
Line 2: Four characteristics that describe you
Line 3: Your role in the family
Line 4: Who loves...
Line 5: Who feels...
Line 6: Who needs...
Line 7: Who fears...
Line 8: Who gives...
Line 9: Who envisions...
Line 10 Resident of...
Line 11: Last name

*Teachers should change the number of lines and characteristics to be filled in as they see fit.

4. With the whole class, complete a sample "I Am" poem, soliciting their feedback for how each line could be filled in. Make sure all group members know what the various lines mean, and that lines can be completed in many different ways, literally and figuratively (i.e. "Resident of... Raleigh, NC" or "Resident of... my mother's heart").
5. At this point, teachers should model the expected outcome by sharing their own "I Am" poem. A finished product might sound like this:

"I Am"

Shelley

Creative, caring, generous, and kind
Granddaughter, daughter, and sister
Who loves reading while the sun sets over the ocean
Who feels hope for the world around her
Who needs to be surrounded by laughter and joy Who
 fears missing out on her dreams
Who gives love, understanding, and an open minded ear
Who envisions a world where war is a thing of the past
 Resident of her day dreams
 Davis

6. Allow students 20-30 minutes to create their own "I Am" poem, explaining ahead of time that they will be reading these out loud. Allow students to make their own decisions in terms of punctuation, design, etc. You may also extend time to allow participants to decorate their poem with artwork that represents them.
7. Once the class is finished writing and/or decorating their poems, review expectations for being a respectful audience member by asking, "How do we want to be treated when we are reading our poems?" Students need to understand that many people feel nervous when sharing their personal writing, and it is important that everyone feel safe and respected. Sample expectations may include:
 - Listen to the reader.
 - Show support by nodding, smiling, and keeping your eyes on the reader.
 - Be respectful and kind.
 - Clap loudly when the reader is finished.
 - Think of a positive comment that you can offer the reader when finished.
 - Absolutely no teasing, gossiping, etc.
8. After each student reads their poem, the rest of the class should applaud and offer positive comments about

the poem and their fellow classmate.

Follow Up Activities

- Invite family and community members for an evening of poetry, where students can present their work.
- Use this activity as a beginning point for a community service project. For example, arrange for your group to travel to a local retirement community. Have students interview elderly residents and share their "I Am" poem with them. Students can then teach the elderly residents how to create their own "I Am" poem.
- Use this writing activity to explore poetry further and use it to create cheerful greeting cards for people in need (i.e. contact Meals on Wheels and arrange for a card created by your students to accompany meals that are delivered.)