



## WHERE I'M FROM: FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND POETRY

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**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** 4 – 6

**LENGTH OF TIME:** 3 sessions of 45 minutes

### GOAL

- To build community and a more welcoming classroom environment by learning about classmates' families through poetry.

### OBJECTIVES

- The students will use descriptive language in poetry to help others understand their lives.
- The students will make connections amongst one another.

### ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also SL.5.1 and 6.1)
- Social Studies Strand 4: Individual Development and Identity – examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development and actions including family, peers, culture and institutional influences.

### EDUCATORS' NOTES

This would be a good lesson to use near the beginning of the year, both for you to get to know your students and for your students to get to know each other, which will help create community in your classroom. It can also be used for a back to school night if you post the poems on a wall in your room.

Reading or looking at [diverse family books](#) such as *Families* by Susan Kuklin prior to this poetry activity can help your students feel more comfortable referring to their families in their writing.

This project centers the concept that all families are unique and different. This activity is designed to be inclusive for all; be sensitive to the individual needs of the students in your classroom.

Your students may have families with two moms or two dads, stepparents, a transgender parent, adoptive parents or foster parents. It is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. If, for example, you have only one student in your school with same-gender parents, then be mindful not to put that student in the position of teaching other children about their family. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

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## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Copies of the *Idea Sheet* for each student
- Copy of the poem, “*Where I’m From*” by George Ella Lyons
- [Children’s Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

- Read about and share examples of diverse families with your students using our booklist [Children’s Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#). Depending on the composition of your class, you may choose different texts to highlight. Looking at books will help your class build awareness about the diversity of families in their school and the larger community. It will help create a climate where students feel more comfortable sharing about their families and living situations when they write their poems.

## BEGINNING THE POETRY ACTIVITY

- Ask the students, “Where are you from?” Allow a few students to answer. Most students will say the place or location where they were born or the place they live in currently. Explain that people are from more than just a place. They are from the people, the words, and the life around them.
- Read the poem, “*Where I’m From*” by George Ella Lyons.
- Ask students to name some of the images/words that she uses to describe where she is from.
- Talk with your students about writing their own poems about where they are from.
- Ask your students, “What are some other ways you could describe where you are from besides saying the location?” You can give them examples like, “I am from lunch on Sundays with my Grandma” or “I am from the smell of fresh corn tortillas.” Give your students a chance to say a sentence like that.

## PRE-WRITING

- Hand out the *Idea Sheet*. This is a pre-writing exercise that helps the students collect their thoughts. Depending on your class, either give students time to work on their own to work on the *Idea Sheet* or talk them through each section. Ask your students what images they see and/or words that they hear under each heading. Go through each one while your students write down their thoughts.

## WRITING

- Reread the poem “*Where I’m From*.”
- Have students pull out their *Idea Sheets* to use when they write their own poems. Tell them that they don’t have to use all their ideas, but should try to use 7 – 10 of them. Let them know that they are not limited by what they wrote on the think sheet. New ideas may come to them as they start writing the poem.

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- Talk about adding exciting or descriptive words. Ask them to try to paint a picture or create images in the reader's mind. Encourage the students to end their poem with a sentence that sums up their thoughts.
  - Give students time to work on writing their own poem.

### **REVISING AND EDITING**

- Have the students pair up to share each other's poems. Ask the students if they understand the other student's poem. Do they get images of where they are from? Could they use more descriptive adjectives?
- Individually, have students make revisions to their poems based on the feedback and edit their poems for spelling, punctuation and capitalization.
- Finally, have them write neatly or type their final draft.

### **SHARING**

- Sharing the poems with other students in the class will help build community in your classroom. Options for sharing:
  - Read aloud to the whole class.
  - Divide the class into small groups. Have each student read their poem aloud to the small group.
  - Post the poems around the walls of your classroom. Have students walk around to read each other's poems.
- While they are sharing their poems, ask them to look for connections with other students or interesting things they find out about their classmates.

### **EXTENSION**

- The poems could be put on display for a family night or back to school night.
- The poems could be posted in the hallway near the classroom to share with others in the school.

### **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

- Did they convey vivid images with their word choices?
- Use an exit card for students to write down a new connection with a classmate that they made from reading or hearing the poems.

### **DIVERSE AND UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS**

[Children's Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Lesson Plans to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Embracing Family Diversity School Resources](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

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## WHERE I AM FROM POEM IDEA SHEET

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**Think of things that could help create pictures in your reader's mind.**

Name some objects around the place where you live.

Things you like to do with your time, what you like to play, sports, music, arts, reading...

Images that come to mind when you think of where you are from.

Important events in your life.

Special foods you like or that you eat with your family.

Sounds you might hear in the place where you live or near where you live.

Smells that remind you of the place where you live.

Phrases you might hear the people who love and take care of you say.

Town or street names.

Describe your pet (if you have one) or a favorite stuffed animal that you have or used to have.

Favorite Stories or Songs from the place where you live.

Names of caring adults who have been important to you as you've been growing up.

Descriptive images that come to mind when you think about those caring adults.

Other thoughts or images that come to mind when you think about where you are from.

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# 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.

Credit: [www.georgeellalyon.com/where](http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where)