

LESSON PLAN

Authoring My Identity

Essential Question: What makes me, me? What story do I want to tell about who I am and what matters to me?

Guiding Questions:

- Who am I? What are the many factors that make me, me?
- What stories about myself do I choose to share with others, and what do I keep private?

Overview

A key part of identity development throughout a person's life is storytelling. The stories we tell ourselves about what we've seen, heard, and experienced help us to construct our own identities—our unique answer to the question, "Who am I?" They also allow us to communicate who we are to others. These stories form what psychologist Daniel McAdams calls "narrative identity," an individual's life story that blends memories from the past with the present and an imagined future.¹

In this lesson, students will start by creating personal identity charts and reflecting on the many factors that make them the unique individuals that they are. Then they will watch a powerful spoken-word performance that will help them reflect on how the stories we tell about ourselves can shape how we understand our own identities, as well as how others may perceive us. They will also consider the risks and rewards that come with sharing aspects of who we are with others, both in person and online. Finally, students will draw connections between the spoken-word poem and an informational text about narrative identity in order to explore how stories we tell ourselves can help us to construct our own sense of self.

Texts and Materials

- Video: [My Honest Poem](#) (02:38)
- Reading: **My Honest Poem**
- Reading: **Authoring Identity**

¹ Dan P. McAdams, "Identity and the Life Story," in [Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self](#), ed. Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2003), 187.

- Reading: **Authoring Identity (Adapted Version)**
- Handout: **Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World**
- Handout: **My Honest Poem Sentence Starters**

Teaching Strategies

- [Identity Charts](#)
- [Think Aloud](#)
- [Rapid-Fire Writing](#)
- [Read Aloud](#)

Pacing

These activities are designed for two class periods. Introduce the concept of identity with identity charts and “My Honest Poem” on the first day and then read and discuss “Authoring Identity” in the next class period.

Activities

1. Reflect on Personal Identity

Follow the first step of the [Identity Charts](#) teaching strategy by having students generate a list of the many factors that make up an individual’s identity. To model [identity charts](#) and to cultivate classroom community, create your own identity chart during a “think-aloud.” Then have students make their own in their journals. Use the following journal prompt to help students reflect on the activity. Let them know that they will not be sharing their responses: *Review your identity chart. What parts of your identity do you choose to share with others? Which parts of your identity do you keep private? How do you decide what to share and what to keep private?*

Debrief the process of creating identity charts in small groups or as a class. Consider using the following questions: *How did it feel to make an individual identity chart? In what ways do you think the chart does a good job of representing your identity? How do you think it falls short or fails to represent your identity?*

2. Consider the Visible and Hidden Aspects of Identity

Show the video [My Honest Poem](#) (02:38). Then distribute the **text version** so students can read it to themselves. Invite them to make personal connections by choosing a favorite line for a journal reflection. The following prompt can help get them started:

The line that stands out to me is _____ because . . .

- . . . of something about who I am. (What in particular?)
- . . . it reflects human nature or how people are in the world. (What human characteristics or ways of being?)

- . . . of how the poet, Rudy Francisco, expressed the idea. (What did he do that makes you feel this way?)²

Divide the class into small groups to discuss the connection questions that follow the poem in the reading. To build in accountability, have groups assign the following roles: a *facilitator* to guide the discussion, ensure that everyone contributes, and keep time; a *note-taker* to record notes in their notebooks or in a Google Doc; and a *summarizer* to share key ideas during a class debrief that follows the small-group discussions.

Poetry is a powerful way to explore identity, and many students will feel inspired by Francisco's performance to create their own "honest poem." This could be an activity they work on in class or at home. Teaching strategies like [Rapid-Fire Writing](#) help students generate ideas. For students who benefit from structure, the **My Honest Poem Sentence Starters** handout provides a template to help them organize their thoughts.

3. Learn about "Narrative Identity"

Explain to students that in his spoken-word poem, Rudy Francisco tries to make sense of the public and private aspects of his identity. Next, they will read a text that will help them understand how their brains use storytelling to make sense of the world and the ways we all make choices about the stories we tell ourselves and others. Choose a [Read Aloud](#) strategy for the reading **Authoring Identity** or **Authoring Identity (Adapted Version)**. After reading the text, give students time to reflect on their TQEs (thoughts, questions, epiphanies)³ before dividing them into small groups to discuss the connection questions.

Since there are a number of questions, you might have all of the groups answer the first two together and then assign or let groups choose one or two other questions to discuss.

Invite students to synthesize new ideas and make personal connections to the texts using the **Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World** handout. Collect the handouts if you want to check for understanding and look for any concepts you might need to reteach.

² David N. Perkins, *Future Wise: Educating Our Children for a Changing World* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2014), 126.

³ Adapted from Jennifer Gonzalez, "[Deeper Class Discussions with the TQE Method](#)," *Cult of Pedagogy* website, August 26, 2018.