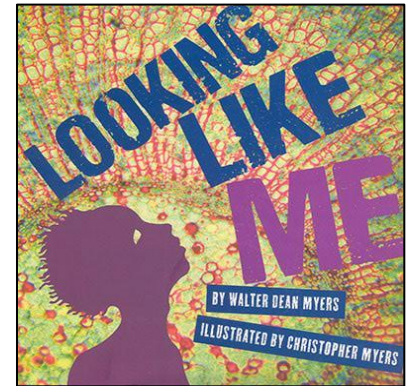## CREATING COMMUNITY IN YOUR CLASSROOM: "I AM ME" POEMS

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 3 – 5

LENGTH OF TIME: 3-4 sessions of 40 minutes

GOALS

- To help students share and explore their identities through poetry.

- To have students' identities be seen by classmates and teachers.

- To build community by learning about one another through poetry.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will write a poem and create a visually appealing display.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL 5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also SL 3.1 and 4.1)

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.5.4.B: Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate and expression on successive readings. (Also RF.3.4.B and 4.4.B)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

This lesson involves reading the book *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers and having students write short poems, modeled after the ideas in the book. *Looking Like Me* is a great read aloud, as it looks at the many ways the main character is seen in his world. He's a brother, son, writer, city kid, artist, dancer, talker, runner and dreamer. This activity allows students to express who they are to everyone in your class and be seen for the many ways that they identify. It also provides opportunities for students to make connections with each other.

Writing an "I Am Me" poem is a great activity for the beginning of the school year as it will help you to get to know your students and for your students to get to know each other. The activity provides opportunities for students to make connections. Students may find unexpected similarities and/or differences between themselves and others in the class. This can open discussion and help create community in your classroom.

This lesson could also be used before a back to school night if you post the poems on a wall in your room as a way to highlight student work and share with families.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers

- Either colored pencils/markers and paper or computers/tablets and a printer

- Copies of the template for the "I Am" Poem

- Music video *I Am Me* by Willow Smith

READ AND DISCUSS THE BOOK

- What are some of the ways that Jeremy sees himself?

- What are some of the ways that others see Jeremy?

- How does Jeremy feel when people give him a "bam"?

SHOW THE MUSIC VIDEO *I AM ME* BY WILLOW SMITH

- Show the music video *I Am Me* by Willow Smith before writing the poems

  - Do not tell your students the artist's name or gender pronouns prior to showing the video.

  - This is an opportunity to teach your students not to assume gender identity based on Willow's gender expression.

- After the video:

  - Ask, "Does anyone know who this is?"

  - Let your students know that this is Willow Smith. She is the daughter of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith. Willow uses the pronouns she/her/hers. She is the younger sibling of Jaden Smith, who is a well-known model and cultural icon.

PREWRITING

- Consider sharing an "I Am Me" poem that you have written before asking students to write their own pieces. If you share about yourself, students will be more comfortable doing the same.

- Depending upon the grade level, you may want to walk your students through the template allowing students time to think and write as you go along or you could allow time for students to fill it out on their own.

- Have students write at the top of a piece of paper, "I Am Me" with the name they want to be called written just below.

REVISING AND EDITING

After students have completed the "I Am Me" template, allow additional time in class or as homework for your students to revise and edit.

FINAL DRAFT—CREATIVE PRESENTATION ACTIVITY/PUBLISHING

- Look at the book again with your students. Discuss the way the book looks. Notice the way the words are written in different fonts, some are grouped together in different ways and some are at different angles.

- Working with a computer:
  - Have students create a final version of their poem using different types of fonts, different sizes of fonts or different colors (if you have the capacity to print in color).
  - Students could add an image that represents something about them in the background of their poem. They could insert images creatively by choosing to wrap/layout behind their text.
- Working with colored pencils or markers:
  - Have students write a final version of their poem using different colors and different sizes of writing for each word. They could also decorate their paper with drawings.

SHARING THE POEMS
- Sharing the poems with other students in the class will help build community in your classroom.
- Options for sharing include:
  - Students could read aloud to the whole class.
  - Divide the class into smaller groups of 4 – 6. Either you could choose who is in each group or students could count off to create opportunities for students to get to know classmates beyond their immediate friend circles.
  - Post the poems around the walls of your classroom. Have students walk around in groups of 2 – 3 to read each other's poems and discuss.
- While listening to the poems, ask your students to look for connections with the student reading the poem.
- After each student reads their poem, have the other students in the class or the small group give an appreciation to that student.

EXTENSIONS
- Mount the poems on construction paper and post on wall of your classroom or in the hallway near your classroom.
- Use the poems as locker tags at the beginning of the school year.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
- Use an exit card for students to write down a new connection with a classmate that they made from reading or hearing the poems.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS
Lessons to Understand Gender

Books that Look at Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students

Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools

Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students

Professional Development Training

Template for Your "I Am Me" Poem

I am _____

    Full name that you want to be called

I am a _____

    Ways that people might see you

I am from _____

    What do you like doing? What are you good at?

I am a _____

    Name relationships to people important to you

I am from _____

    People who are important to you, family, people who take care of you, close friends

I am from _____

    Family traditions or customs

I am from _____

    Favorite foods or special foods you like from home

I am from _____

    Important things that have happened in your life

I am from _____

    Names of books or types of books you like

I am from _____

    Names of movies, TV shows or video games you like

I am from _____

    Name of the place you live

I am _____

    Full name that you want to be called

SAMPLE "I AM" POEM USING THE TEMPLATE

I am Elena Juarez Cohen.

I am a writer, a soccer player, a student.

I am from eating ice cream with friends to baking cookies.

I am a daughter, a good friend, a cousin.

I am from my grandmother, Mema, and from Dad.

I am from matzoh ball soup at Passover and buñuelos at Christmas.

I am from chocolate chip cookies and ginger snaps.

I am from jumping into lakes and canoeing down a river.

I am from the WARRIORS CAT Series.

I am from *The Voice* and Super Mario.

I am from West Roxbury.

I am Elena Juarez Cohen.