

LESSON: Social Construction of Identity**GRADE:** 10th-12th**TIME:** 50 minutes**SUMMARY**

In this lesson students will listen and analyze a poem about identity will learn about the idea of social construction of the self. They will consider the question “How do our experiences shape who we are?” They will then write a poem or essay about the layers of their own identity and what shaped them most.

OBJECTIVES**Social Studies**

- **SS.9-12.BS.6** Understand the process of how humans develop, learn, adapt to their environment, and internalize their culture.

Literacy

- **RH.9-12.1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Copies of the poem “I Am” by Mary Pipher (see below)
- Paper and writing utensils for each student
- White board or flip chart to take notes that students can see

PRESENTATION

1. Read aloud Mary Pipher’s poem “I Am” which is about the experiences, people, places and traditions that made her who she is. This is a poem about social construction of the self.
2. After you finish, ask students what they think the poem is about. Write down students’ ideas on the board or flip chart and facilitate a discussion to come to some agreement on the purpose of the poem.
3. have students read the poem again in pairs.



DIRECTIONS

1. Ask students to work with their partner to decipher what they think Pipher is referring to in each line of the poem. ASk them to use the ‘close reading technique’, prompting them to move past figuring out what the text says literally, to interpreting what the text means in a more abstract way. Have students mark up their copy of the poem with questions and notes to themselves.
2. After students have enough time to sift through the poem and interpret her meaning, ask them to come back together as a group to share their interpretation (make sure they support their assertions with textual references). Keep a list the things students bring up.
3. As students share, ask them if they agree that the things Pipher’s saying she’s ‘from’ (like places, music, parents, and the way we speak) really determine who we are?
4. Introduce the term ‘social construction’, which is the concept that we become who we are not automatically but through the experiences of our lives and the meaning that we attribute to these experiences.
5. It can be helpful to ask students how they’d be different (or what they would not know or believe) if they:
 - had different parents
 - had parents who raised them differently
 - if they had never read their favorite book
 - grown up in a culture where men’s and women’s roles were more traditional
6. Keep a record of the discussion on the flip chart or board as students share.
7. Ask students to look at the list they made of the different influences in their lives that shape/construct them. Ask if there are any they think are missing that have contributed to making them who they are. Add to the list.



REFLECTION/JOURNAL PROMPT

After analysis is done and students feel comfortable with the concept of social construction, have them write poems or essays about their own identities and where they are 'from' in both the figurative and literal sense. Have them use the Pipher poem as a model if it's helpful.

The goal is to create a poem about the forces that have shaped how they think, behave, and see the world. (If you want to give them more structure for this writing task: Challenge them to work at least 10 forces/influences into their poems. This helps them focus on content rather than length.)

Make sure to leave time for students to share their poems with the class or in small groups.





I Am

By Mary Pipher

‘I am from Avis and Frank, Agnes and Fred, Glessie May and Mark.
From the Ozark Mountains and the high plains of Eastern Colorado,
From mountain snowmelt and lazy southern creeks filled with water moccasins.
I am from oatmeal eaters, gizzard eaters, haggis and raccoon eaters.
I’m from craziness, darkness, sensuality, and humor.
From intense do-gooders struggling through ranch winters in the 1920s.
I’m from “If you can’t say anything nice about someone don’t say anything” and
“Pretty is as pretty does” and “Shit-mucklety brown” and “Damn it all to hell.”
I’m from no-dancing-or-drinking Methodists, but cards were okay except on
Sunday, and from tent-meeting Holy Rollers,
From farmers, soldiers, bootleggers, and teachers.
I’m from Schwinn girl’s bike, 1950 Mercury two-door, and West Side Story.
I’m from coyotes, baby field mice, chlorinous swimming pools,
Milky Way and harvest moon over Nebraska cornfields.
I’m from muddy Platte and Republican,
From cottonwood and mulberry, tumbleweed and switchgrass
From Willa Cather, Walt Whitman, and Janis Joplin,
My own sweet dance unfolding against a cast of women in aprons and barefoot
men in overalls.’