

Where I'm From: Inviting students' lives Into the Classroom

Directions: Read the poem and choose your favorite line. Discuss why that particular line stood out for you.

WHERE I'M FROM

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 am from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-all
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.

-George Ella Lyon

I AM FROM SOUL FOOD AND HARRIET TUBMAN

By Lealonni Blake

I am from get-togethers
and Bar-B-Ques
K-Mart special with matching shoes.
Baseball bats and BB guns,
a violent family is where I'm from.

I am from "get it girl"
And "shake it to the ground."
From a strict dad named Lump
sayin' "sit yo' fass self down."

I am from the smell of soul food
cooking in Lelinna's kitchen.
From my Pampa's war stories
to my granny's cotton pickin'.

I am from Kunta Kinte's strength,
Harriet Tubman's escapes.
Phyllis Wheatley's poems,
and Sojourner Truth's faith.

If you did family research,
and dug deep into my genes.
You'll find Sylvester and Ora, Geneva and Doc,
My African Kings and Queens.
That's where I'm from.

I AM FROM PINK TIGHTS AND SPEAK YOUR MIND

By Djamila Moore

I am from sweaty pink tights encrusted in rosin
bobby pins
Winnie-the-Pooh
And crystals.

I am from awapuhi ginger
sweet fields of sugar cane
green bananas.

I am from warm rain cascading over
taro leaf umbrellas.
Crouching beneath the shield of kalo.

I am from poke, brie cheese, mango,
and raspberries,
from Marguritte
and Aunty Nani.

I am from speak your mind
it's o.k. to cry
and would you like it if someone did that to you?

I am from swimming with
the full moon,
Saturday at the laundromat,
and Easter crepes.

I am from Moore and Cackley
From sardines and haupia.
From Mirana's lip Djavan split,
to the shrunken belly
my grandmother could not cure.

Seven diaries stashed among
Anne of Green Gables.
Dream of promises
ending in tears.
Solidifying to salted pages.

I am from those moments of
magic
when life remains a
fairy tale.



I AM FROM....

By Ortha Storey

I am from bobby pins, doo-rags
and wide toothed combs.

I am from tall grass, basketballs and
slimy slugs in front of my home.

I am from prayer plants that lift
their stems and rejoice every night.

I am from chocolate cakes and deviled
eggs that made afternoon snacks just right.
I am from older cousins and hand me downs
to “shut ups” and “sit downs.”

I am from Genesis to Exodus
Leviticus too.
Church to church, pew to pew.

I am from a huge family tree,
that begins with dust and ends with me.

In the back of my mind there lies a dream
of a good “soul food” and money trees.
In this dream I see me on top makin’
ham hocks, fried chicken
and smothered porkchops.
I am from family roots and blood,
Oh, I forgot to mention love.



I AM FROM SWINGSETS AND JUNGLE GYMS

By Debby Gordon

I am from jars for change collections,
cards from grandma,
and chocolate milk.

I am from swing sets and jungle gyms
rusted metal mounted in dirt
used by many kids,
well broken in.

I am from the cherry tree,
and the pudgy faces climbing out on the branches
for a piece of juicy red fruit.

I am from the tattle-tales,
keep-it-froms,
and “shut-up and listen to me.”

I am from Rice Crispy Treats,
and pretty rings,
from Melvin and Earline.

I am from Will and Sharon’s long branch,
chunky Peanut Butter and Jelly,
from the house we lost to fire,
and surgeries we all have had.

I am from the old scrapbooks,
where pictures,
remind me of days that live only in the minds
of those of us who were there.

I am from people who paved a way for me,
I am from the best that could be,
and I am the best I could be.

Brainstorm lists for the I Am from...

- Items found around your home
- Items found outside/yard
- Items from your neighborhood
- Names of friends/family
- Sayings, “If I told you once....”
- Food you grew up with
- Specific names of places
- Use home language (Spanish, Mandarin, etc.)

Try and be as specific as possible!