

MINNESOTA WRITING PROJECT
DEMONSTRATION LESSON

Title: "Where I'm From"

Demonstration Lesson - Scott D. Hall

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Grade appropriate:

I have taught a poetry portfolio unit to English as a Second Language (ESL) students in the intermediate and advanced levels. I have also taught the poem, *Where I'm From*, to mainstream students in 9-12 grades.

Approximate length of time to complete lesson:

The poetry unit is approximately two- three weeks long. In this unit, students analyze, write and present a portfolio of 8-10 poems.

We work on each poem that the students create for two class periods. At the end of the unit, students perform their poetry in a "Poet's Café" celebration.

Objective (s) to be covered:

Students will create and share a poem that expresses their unique cultural heritage by borrowing "starter" lines from the poem *Where I'm From* by George Ella Lyon.

Specific standards addressed:

In many poems we examine a poetry technique such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, simile, metaphor and onomatopoeia. I then encourage students to incorporate these techniques into their own poetry.

Where I'm From is one of the most challenging of the formula poems but also one of the favorites.

Brief summary/outline:

(1) Oral Reading of *Where I'm From*

- T reads aloud while Ss listen
- Ss are assigned a line and each practices the line to themselves
- T helps Ss with pronunciation where needed
- Class reads the poem together with each student reading his/her line
- (Hint: When assigning lines, mix up the numbers so that voices chime in from different parts of the room.)

(2) Analysis of *Where I'm From*

- Ss guess at where the author is from—
- citing evidence in the poem
- Ss categorize where the information came from such as
 - Things found in the backyard
 - Trees, flowers and other plants
 - Favorite and traditional foods
 - Relatives with funny nicknames
 - What parents yelled at the kids
 - What you learned in church
 - Painful life experiences
 - Places where special things were kept
 - Favorite hiding place

(3) Creation of own poem

- Ss fill in graphic organizer to brainstorm ideas
- Ss share their ideas with a partner - are the ideas specific enough?
- Ss write an individual poem using the starter sentences attached
- Ss to share their poem in groups of four

(4) Creating a classroom poem

- Ss in groups of four each choose their two favorite lines from their personal poem
- In a roundtable fashion, Ss write their two favorite lines using "Where We're From." to create a joint poem
- Each group to share their poem with the entire class

Additional Comments:

- T should participate in the process by making lists, writing a poem and contributing a line to the class poem.
- This is a variation on a lesson featured in the publication *Rethinking Schools*, Winter 1997/98, page 22-23
- Christensen, Linda, *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*, Milwaukee, Rethinking Schools, Ltd. 2000.

Check out the web page of poet George Ella Lyon (<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>) for more on her poem, "Where I'm From."