“I Am From” Memoir

Part of the LitWorld and Storyvoice Storymaker circle: An Exploration of Memoir

Stories are such an important part of what makes us human. They help us to make sense of the world, to explore and dissect our experiences, and to connect with others. Stories help us discover all the incredible ways that our experiences are different, and perhaps more importantly, all of the beautiful ways they are the similar. LitWorld and Storyvoice have launched the Storymaker circle to inspire and gather stories from young people all over the world. Inspired in part by the work of author George Ella Lyon’s, “I Am From” memoirs are an expiration of all that makes us who we are.

Use the resources below to complete your own “I Am From” memoirs with your students. Go to www.litworld.org/storyvoice to upload your memories to the padlet and contribute to a worldwide collection of stories!

“I Am From” Memoir

Suggested Age Range:
● All ages! *Please see age specific scaffolds in directions

Duration
● Apx 30-45 mins

Materials
● Optional: Printed “Where I’m From” memoir examples
● Optional: Printed “Where I’m From” prompts
● Paper or notebooks for students to draft “Where I’m from” memoirs
● Pencils/Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers

Preparation
☑ Optional: Print copies of the “Where I’m From” memoir examples for students to explore.
☑ Optional: Print copies of the “Where I’m From” prompts. These may be particularly helpful for younger students.

Instructor Directions
Step 1: Read Some Examples of “Where I’m From” memoirs aloud.
Pick one or two examples from the included “Where I’m From” memoir examples, find an example of an “I Am From” memoir online, or use the “Where I’m From” prompts to draft your own version of a “Where I’m From” memoir. “Where I’m From” memoirs are usually characterized by the repetition of the phrase “I am From…” Encourage students to think about the many ways the authors complete that phrase.
You may ask:
- What do you learn about the author from this memoir?
- What do you have in common with the author?
- In what ways are your experiences different?

*For younger students, you might want to print the memoir examples or write them on a board or chart paper. Underline the phrase ‘I Am From” however often it comes up so that the pattern of the memoir is clear.

Step 2: Decide upon templates for your own “Where I’m From” memoirs and write
Explain that “Where I’m From” memoir the experiences and moments that have make us who we are. Memories, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects--these things all might be described in a “where I’m from” memoir. Brainstorm with students some of the different experiences and moments they might include in their own “I Am From” memoirs, moments and experiences that impact them and who they are (for example: important family memories, special cultural celebrations, familiar and comforting sounds, smells, or tastes, object that hold special significance…). Allow students time to draft their own “I Am From memoirs.

*You may encourage older students to come up with their own template or set of prompts for completing an “I Am From” memoir or create a template together as a class. Younger students may benefit from a set of prompts that they can simply fill in. See the resources below for sample “I Am From memoir prompts.

Step 3: Celebrate and Share your “Where I’m From” memoirs
Have students share their “I Am From” memoirs with each other! Have students record themselves reading their memoirs aloud on video or audio or take pictures of their work. Upload them to the Storymaker padlet at _______

Share the Storymaker gallery with your students! Encourage them to think about the similarities and the differences they see in their memoirs and the “I Am From” memoirs submitted by other students from all over the world!
“WHERE I’M FROM”

Memoir Examples

Where I’m From
By George Ella Lyon
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-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from perk up and pipe down.
I’m from He restoreth my soul
with 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.

Source:
http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/professional_development/workshops/writing /george_ella_lyon.pdf
Where I’m From
By Melanie Poonai

I am from a life filled with colour,
From the chocolate brown that is my skin.
I am from the sunshine yellow of my mother’s laugh,
From the red and white of my brother’s favourite football shirt.
I am from the crisp new white pages of a book,
From the miserable grey of the street I live on.
I am from green, pink and yellow; My garden in summer filled with flowers,
From the terrifying black of the nightmares that haunt me.
I am from the ginger orange of my buried cat,
From the blue and gold of my ever-short school tie.
I am from the dark oak of my grandmother’s coffin,
From the golden “Aum” pendant around my neck.
I am from every pink scar etched into my body,
From the red, orange and brown of a hot curry.
I am from every identical colour of the twins I love,
From the blue and green of a hospital ward.
I am from all that has happened,
And all that will be.

Source: https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/where-im-from/

Where I'm From
By Cheyenne Salley

I'm from first born, young love, careful or you'll fall
Small town, bike rides, backyards playing ball
I'm from small wallets, big hearts, believing you can do it
High school Diplomas, minimum wage to a Teaching Certificate
I'm from dinner at the table, home-made ice cream, watermelon outside
Church pews, Amazing Grace, repentant tears cried
Strong faith, family ties, “in the sweet by and by”
I'm from high school sweet hearts, 20 years, three dirty boys’ smiles
Rough and tough cowboys, big semi-trucks, dirty laundry piles
I'm from guitar strings, piano keys, Hallelujah to the King
Patchwork quilts of memories, lives torn and tattered
Fervent hope and stories to tell about the things that matter

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Source: https://iamfromproject.com/poems/
“WHERE I’M FROM” Memoir

Brainstorming Topics

a. Parent's names and significant relatives
b. Special foods or meals
c. Family specific games or activities
d. Songs that bring back memories
e. Stories, novels or poetry that you'll never forget
f. Phrases that were repeated often
g. The best things that you were told
h. The worst things that you have been told
i. Ordinary household items
j. Family traditions
k. Family traits
l. Religious symbols or experiences
m. Specific story/stories about a specific family member that influenced you
n. Accidents or traumatic experiences
o. Losses
p. Happy moments
“WHERE I’M FROM” Memoir

Sample Template

I am from... (the climate of my country/state/city)
  Ex: Hot Summer, Crip Autumnns, Frigid Winter and Wet springs

I am from... (the best things about where I'm from)
  Ex: all night bodegas, art and culture and life, and never being alone

I am from... (the sounds that best describe my location)
  Ex: Honking horns, blaring ambulances, the rhythmic beat of a backyard party, the soulful call of the mourning dove

I am from... (your favorite holidays)
  Ex: quiet christmases, adventurous thanksgivings, and crazy halloweens

I am from... (your favorite foods)
  Ex: Jumbo crab legs, and my mothers mac and cheese and the perfect vanilla cupcake

I am from... (your favorite family activity)
  Ex: Making fun of movies, dancing to made up songs, debating everything and never being wrong.

I am from... (things you love doing)
  Ex: Crochet, and reading, and traveling the world

I am from... (your favorite memories)
  Ex: my first lost tooth, being held by my grandmother, being silly with my sister.

I am from... (your hopes and dreams)
  Ex: A world where everyone gets what they need, and every child is cared for.