

Name:
Date:

Period:
Ms. Lopez

“WHERE I’M FROM” POEM

According to Wendell "If you don't know where you're from, you'll have a hard time saying where you're going." Wendell Berry, among others, has voiced the idea that we need to understand our roots to know our place in the world.

A poem by George Ella Lyons called “Where I’m From” lends itself to imitation and makes a great exercise for introducing yourself to the class. To prepare to write, complete the prompts to draw out memories of people, places, and events. Next, select your favorites, and follow the stanza outline. Then, decorate your poem in a way that reflects your personal style. When you're finished, you will have said things about the sources of your uniqueness and created something of yourself to share with others.

Brainstorming Prompts:

- « Parents’ names, significant relatives, descriptions
- « Special foods or meals
- « Family specific games or activities
- « Nostalgic songs
- « Stories, novels or poetry that you'll never forget
- « Phrases that were repeated often/that you grew up with
- « The best things that you were told
- « The worst things that you have been told
- « Ordinary household items
- « Family traditions
- « Family traits
- « Family tendencies
- « Religious symbols or experiences
- « Specific story(ies) about a specific family member that influenced you
- « Accidents or traumatic experiences
- « Losses
- « Joys
- « Important places
- « Games you played

Format:

First Stanza: Should be about childhood memories using “I am from” at least four times

Second Stanza: Should be about family using “I am from” at least four times

Third Stanza: Can be about any combination of your favorite people, places, and events using “I am from” at least three times

Fourth Stanza: Should be closure, a significant object from your life and then end it with your relation to your family/your “role” in your house

Variations: You could sometimes use comparable phrasing such as “Raised with” or “Created from” or “Forged by.” Creativity is encouraged!

SAMPLE #1 – THE ORIGINAL POEM

Where I'm From by George Ella Lyons

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the black 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'm 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 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.

SAMPLE #2 – AN ORIGINAL POEM

I am from No Frills brand food,
from cardboard box duplexes, and climbing trees.
I am from seeing the playpen not as a prison but as an escape.
I am from Barney Beagle, "Thumbelina," and the World Book encyclopedia, yearbooks and all
(they were worth every penny, Mom and Dad).

I am from Mrs. Clean and Mr. Neverhome,
raised on "family comes first" and "inside, outside, day off."
I am from Thanksgivings for thirty that run like a well-oiled machine,
the family that has its own original song: "Off-Key Jamboree,"
and endless hours of picking up leaves, acorns, and itchy-balls.

I am from balanced meals of processed foods and miga in the rain
from drive-in movies, showers in a bucket, watermelon wars, and shoeless summers
I am from Queens, Rockaway, Westbury, and "the country."

I am from a family with a long story
Where I am one small but colorful chapter