

Ilkani

Unit II:

Discovering  
a

Sense  
of

Place



## UNIT II. LESSON A.

# POETRY AND SENSE OF PLACE

*This activity designed by Linda Christensen has been adapted from the CARTS web site. If students would like to share poems about where they are from, they can do so by submitting an e-mail to [cartsnetwork@citylore.org](mailto:cartsnetwork@citylore.org).*

In the book Beyond Heroes and Holidays, English teacher Linda Christensen\* describes a writing project using George Ella Lyon's poem "Where I'm From" to encourage her high school students to probe for details of their own sense of place and to write using specific detail. Christensen finds that by inviting students to write about the worlds they come from, the class builds community and the work prefigures a world where students can hear the diverse "home languages" of one another.

**OBJECTIVE:** To encourage students to explore their own sense of place, to probe for the details of this place, and to write using details by examining a poem about place and writing their own.

**NOTE:** you may wish to teach / review / introduce several literary elements before this lesson such as: metaphor, repetition, rhythm, alliteration, phrasing, dialogue, exaggeration, etc. Reading additional poems and pulling out these elements will help reinforce these literary skills.

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### STEP 1: PREWRITING ACTIVITY

**READ** "Where I'm From," by George Ella Lyon, aloud as a class. **UNPACK** the poem to see what the author has put into it:

- Categories of experiences
- People
- Sensory details (*smells, tastes, textures, sounds, sights*)
- Poetic elements (*repetition, rhythm, alliteration, phrasing, etc.*)

Ask students to brainstorm lists of details about their place, matching hers, and share them out loud to spark memories and ideas. As students share, encourage them to make their lists "sound like home." "Out of the chaos, the sounds, smells, and languages of my

students' homes emerge in poetry, " Christensen writes. Categories can include the following:

- Items found around the house
- Items found in the yard
- Items found in the neighborhood
- Names of relatives
- Sayings
- Names of foods
- Names of places where they keep childhood memories
- Activities that people engage in regularly

### **STEP II. DRAFTING**

After students have lists of specific words, phrases, and names, ask them to start writing a poem using a phrase like "I am from...." This phrase will begin the poem and could later link lines of different poems together to form a group poem. Encourage students to end their poems with lines tying their present to their past.

### **STEP III. "READING AROUND"**

Elicit feedback by asking students to sit in a circle and read their draft poems. Have listeners write the names of writers on a piece of paper and record specific comments as they read their drafts aloud. For example, does the writer use *lists*, a *metaphor*, *humor*, *dialogue*, *exaggeration*? What words or phrases make a piece work well? After reading, the writer calls on classmates for comments and directs discussion.

### **STEP IV. REVISE AND PUBLISH.**

Find some space on the wall to post completed poems

### **STEP V. GROUP POEM AS A CULMINATING ACTIVITY**

Have students select one or more lines or phrases that stand out from their personal sense of place poems to be included in a group sense of place poem capturing life in that village.

### **STEP VI. EDITING**

An individual editor or an editing team collects submissions from each participant and arranges them for performance.

### **STEP VII. PRESENTING**

As a group, decide how to present the collective poem. People may read their own lines or take the lines of another person. The group may recite together, or people may add music.

\*Christensen, Linda. "Where I'm From: Inviting Student Lives Into the Classroom." Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development. Edited by Enid Lee, Deborah Menkart, and Margo Okazawa-Rey. Washington, DC: Network of Educators on the Americas, 1998, pp. 391-394, adapted with permission.

**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.

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"Where I'm From" appears in George Ella Lyon's *Where I'm From, Where Poems Come From*, a poetry workshop-book for teachers and students, illustrated with photographs by Robert Hoskins and published by Absey & Co, Spring, Texas, 1999.

The book can be purchased at [www.absey.com](http://www.absey.com).

The poem is reprinted with permission from the author and the publisher.

## UNIT II, LESSON B

# TOPICS AND CONTACTS

**OBJECTIVE:** (students will be able to)

1. Identify what is unique to their village by brainstorming lists and sharing them.

**STEP 1:**     **POST** the following question on the board, “*What makes \_\_\_\_\_ (your village) unique?*”

**STEP 2:**     Ask students to pretend that a tidal wave washed their community away and that they are the only survivor. The next day someone comes around and wants to know what the place was like. They ask you to list 10 things that best described what made your home different from anywhere else.

You may want to list these possible categories to get them going:

- BUILDINGS
- CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WEATHER OR THE LAND
- OCCUPATIONS
- ASPECTS OF LIFESTYLES – HOW PEOPLE LIVE
- HOW PEOPLE TALK
- ACTIVITIES PEOPLE ENGAGE IN ON A REGULAR BASIS
- CEREMONIES OR CELEBRATIONS
- PARTICULAR INDIVIDUALS WHO “REPRESENT” THE AREA
- SPECIFIC OBJECTS IN THE COMMUNITY
- SOUNDS THAT ARE COMMONLY HEARD

Students should create their lists individually.

**STEP 3:**     **SHARE** these lists with the group.

**RECORD** their ideas on a piece of butcher paper.

- Leave plenty of room after each topic so that we can insert names of people to contact about them later.

**STEP 4:**     Now go through the list as a class and **IDENTIFY** names of people who would be knowledgeable about each topic.

- This will serve as a master list of possible article topics and contacts to explore.
- Keep it posted so that when students work on choosing their topics they can refer to it.

## UNIT II, LESSON C.

# CHOOSING AND NARROWING A TOPIC

*“Whom would you like to interview? What are you interested in finding out? Do you know of anyone who might want to tell their story? These are the key questions to ask yourself as you set off in search of a narrator.”*

~ Cynthia Stokes Brown, Like it Was

### OBJECTIVES: (students will be able to)

1. See the range of possibilities for articles by reviewing a project example.
  2. Choose a topic to pursue by examining the master list and exploring the topic in-depth.
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#### STEP 1:

Use the example of basketmaking as a general topic.

**SHOW** how the general topic of basketmaking could be used as an entire class project. (each student could choose a sub-topic for the content of an entire article). The general topic of basketmaking is too big for any one article. Therefore the topic must be dissected into specific sub-topics.

Walk through the attached example. Ask students if there are any other sub topics they might add to the topic of basketmaking.

#### STEP 2:

Have the class **CHOOSE** one of the topics from the master list. As a class, diagram this topic on the board into sub topics.

#### STEP 3:

**EXPLAIN** that generally no more than 1 or 2 sub-topics should be covered in any one article unless it is going to be a very lengthy article.

#### STEP 4:

**DISSECTING TOPICS:** Students choose their topics from the list and dissect them on a piece of notebook paper.

#### STEP 5:

If you have time, it may be valuable to share their sub-topics with their classmates for feedback and further dissection.

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**NOTES:**

You may want to read through the list of oral history project options (appendix IX) yourself or with your students. Taken from Oral History: A guide for teachers (and others). By Thad Sitton.

Your class may want to focus on one general topic or activity (such as fishing, buildings, or school life), or your students may want to pursue their own individual topics. This is up to you and your class.

It is up to you if you would like your students to work in groups or individually.

Generally speaking, however, it is good to limit the group size to 3.

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General Topic: **Basketmaking**

Sub-Topics:

- **Grasses:** where they are gathered. When they are gathered. How they are dried and stored. How they are dyed.
- **Styles of baskets:** Significances of designs.
- **Uses of baskets**
- **Step-by-step construction** of a basket.
- **How and where the contact learned to weave.**  
How her baskets differ from those made by her mother, her grandmother, the neighbor next door.
- **Ornamentation:** How is seal gut utilized?

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Taken from: Chamai, by Ann Vick, (p86).

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# Sample dissected list of topics for a common schools project.

This detailed list was the guide for an entire class project, not just one student interview. Individual student projects will not be this long. However, it is an excellent example of a detailed shopping list of information to be gathered orally.

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- Earliest student experiences in the first school attended.
- Description of early teacher(s)
- Attitudes toward school and teachers(s)
- Physical description of the school
  - External appearance
  - Internal layout
  - Classroom layout
  - Arrangement of desks
- Instructional materials provided
- Cloakrooms, toilets, water
- Transportation to the school
- Methods of instruction used by the teacher
  - Opening of school day
  - Methods of Instruction
  - Teacher adjustments to multigrade classrooms
  - Grading procedures
  - Management and discipline procedures
- School / Community relationships
  - Athletic and/or academic competitions
  - Plays, programs, cake walks, box suppers, dances, Friday recitations, school closings, etc.
  - Other community uses of the school premises

Sitton, Thad, George L. Mehaffy, & O.L. Davis Jr. Oral History: a guide for teachers (and others). University of Texas Press: Austin, TX: 1983, p89.

## UNIT II, LESSON D.

# PROJECT PROPOSAL

**OBJECTIVE:** (students will be able to)

1. Complete a written project proposal outlining the oral history project they wish to pursue.

**STEP 1: DISTRIBUTE** the project proposal assignment.

Use the sample project proposal as an example of how to write up a proposal from the list of topics that have been dissected.

It is up to you if you would like them to work in groups or individually. The only important thing is that the students should have a strong interest in the topic. It is a lot of work, and if they don't have enthusiasm now, it will be difficult for them to follow through.

**STEP 2: EXPLAIN** that the proposal should only include 1 or 2 sub-topics. The focus should be narrow. The narrower the better at this point. The project will naturally expand, and it is a continual struggle to keep it a manageable size.

**STEP 3: ASSIGN** the project proposal for homework, or have them do it in class.

**TO BE TURNED IN:  
WRITTEN PROJECT PROPOSAL  
TOPIC DISSECTION LIST**

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# Oral history

## PROJECT PROPOSAL

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*"If you want to write something historical, something about how people used to live or how to do something that is no longer done by many, you should choose an older person. People between the ages of 55 and 80 have lots of experience to describe and analyze; many are eager and able to do it. Individuals vary a great deal in their ability to recall; for many, the distant past becomes especially vivid as they grow older."*

~ Cynthia Stokes Brown, Like it Was

**Directions:** Look over your list of project ideas. Decide on one that you feel would be valuable to produce. **MAKE SURE YOU CHOOSE A TOPIC OF INTEREST TO YOU.** You will be spending a considerable amount of time working on this project.

Once you have decided upon a topic, work on writing up a project proposal. Your proposal should include the following parts:

1. A full explanation of the topic you wish to pursue.
  2. Who would you like to interview?
  3. The general topic you wish to cover along with sub-topics
  4. The Research question you are trying to answer through your interview.
  5. Why do you feel this topic should be published for other people to read?
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# SAMPLE PROJECT PROPOSAL

1. I would like to learn more about basketweaving in my village. I don't really want to do a step-by-step explanation. The sub-topics I'm really interested in finding out are what the baskets were used for and how my contact learned the skill herself. I want to explore the connection between basketweaving and mother – daughter relationships.

2. I would like to interview \_\_\_\_\_ about the importance of basketweaving in her relationship with her mother and grandmother because I have heard her talk about them in the past, and I have seen some of her baskets.

3. **General Topic:** Basketmaking

**Sub-Topics:** Uses of baskets  
Importance to mother-daughter relationships

4. **Research Question:** What role did basketmaking have in family relationships and how has it changed over time?

5. There are not many people who make baskets in the traditional way anymore. I know there are some people who teach classes, but not many people know about the importance of basketweaving to mothers and daughters.

# Iluani: program Oral history

K.I.B.S.D.

## PROJECT PROPOSAL

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# PROJECT PROPOSAL RUBRIC

Your project proposal will be graded on the following scale. If you receive an INCOMPLETE, you will need to revise it until it is clear.

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- \_\_\_ Topic is fully explained
- \_\_\_ Research question is specific enough to guide the student through the interview process.
- \_\_\_ Possible people to interview are identified
- \_\_\_ Specific reasons for choosing these people are stated
- \_\_\_ At least 2 specific reasons for why this topic should be explored and recorded are explained

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- \_\_\_ Student made some effort to explain the topic
- \_\_\_ Research question is relevant to the topic and will be helpful in guiding the student through the interview process
- \_\_\_ Possible people to interview are identified
- \_\_\_ Reasons for choosing these people are stated
- \_\_\_ At least one specific reason for why this topic should be explored and recorded are explained

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- \_\_\_ Student made some effort to explain the topic
- \_\_\_ Research question is relevant, but may be too broad, or too specific
- \_\_\_ Possible people to interview are identified
- \_\_\_ Reasons for choosing these people are weak, confusing, or vague
- \_\_\_ Reasons are given for why this topic should be explored and recorded, but they are not specific

**Incomplete**

- \_\_\_ Topic is unclear
- \_\_\_ Research question is too simple or without focus
- \_\_\_ Possible people are not mentioned
- \_\_\_ Reasons for choosing these people are weak, confusing, or vague
- \_\_\_ No reasons are given for wanting to interview this/these people



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