

### Literacy Narrative: Creating the Self as a Character

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**Grade Level:** University

**Time Frame:** 50 minutes

**Objectives:** Students will draft a literacy narrative poem, modeled on Lucille Clifton's poem "lucy one-eye," in which they create themselves as literary characters. This lesson is designed as an introductory activity for a unit on literacy narrative and/or memoir.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** None required.

**Required Materials:** Recording and hard copies of Lucille Clifton, "lucy one-eye" (excerpt from "my poem"); computer with Internet access and audio/video playback capability. Poem text is available [here](#); recording is available on [voca](#), the Poetry Center's online audio/video archive (use the 1975 recording).

#### Sequence of Activities

**Introduction:** 10 minutes

Ask students if they have ever heard a poet read his/her own poems, and why it might be valuable to listen to a poet read. When students volunteer the idea that the poet's reading invests the poem with the poet's individual personality, invite them to consider the question from the writer's perspective: how do poets create persona in poetry? Why might a poet choose to use an "I" in a poem that is not autobiographical? Conversely, why might a poet choose to tell a personal story in the third person?

Have students listen to Lucille Clifton's poem "lucy one-eye" on [voca](#) (use the recording of Clifton's reading from October 22, 1975). Have students pair up, give each pair of students a copy of the poem (text available [here](#)), and ask students to discuss the following questions with their partners: Why does Lucille Clifton use the third person in this poem? What revelations about herself does Clifton make in her poem, and where does a turning point occur? Finally, what is one problem you encounter as you write about yourself? Ask some of the students to share their answers with the class.

**Writing Activity:** 30 minutes

Point out to students that in the commentary Clifton gives before she reads the poem, she mentions how difficult it is to be honest when you are writing about yourself as an "I." Ask students to experiment with this idea by giving them the following directions:

1. First, I'd like you to think about your first memory of reading or writing. Write down an account of that occasion in which you describe yourself as "I." Try to be as concrete as possible: What colors were you wearing? Where were you? Who was in the room with you? Do you remember a particular sound or smell associated with this memory?
2. Next, give your childhood self a nickname. Clifton calls herself "lucy one-eye." If you could give yourself a

nickname along these lines, what would it be? Why did you choose this nickname?

3. Write down one thing that changed for you during this experience. This change can be “large” (*I realized that books were fun*) or “small” (*I shifted my foot a little to the left*).
4. If someone had been watching you closely throughout this experience, what might they have seen? Describe yourself from this outside perspective.
5. Draft a poem that tells the story of your first memory of reading or writing *in third person*, using the nickname you created. Use as many of the concrete sensory details from the first account as possible. Include a reference to the change that you noted in step 3, and try to incorporate the outside perspective you explored in step 4.

**Conclusion:** 10 minutes

Ask students how the story changed as it shifted from prose to poetry and from first to third person. What changes did students observe in the central character of the story in the two versions they wrote down?

Ask for volunteers to share their writing with the class.