

My Voice Matters

by Eva Sierra

Education level: Any

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: 1 hour

Objectives: Engage with topics of identity by creating a collaborative circle map, and display understanding by constructing a poem that improves self-esteem.

Prior knowledge and skills: None

Required materials: Pen and paper. A white board, projection board, or shared sheet for brainstorming.

Literary model: None

Sequence of activities:

Introduction (5 minutes):

This lesson is suitable for all age groups. Younger groups may require more examples and need more help understanding the initial concept of the lesson, but will be excited to contribute once they are on board!

Begin by asking the class: *What is identity?*

Invite students to share their ideas, thoughts, and definitions.

After spending some time discussing the idea, share a definition of identity. Here is the one I use:

Identity refers to our sense of who we are as individuals and as members of social groups. It also refers to our sense of how others may perceive and label us.

Next, ask students to take a moment to silently ponder what *words* they would use to “identify” themselves. I share personal examples: “Teacher, poet, Mexican, sister...”

Brainstorming (10-20 minutes):

NOTE: This lesson can be adapted for a range of ages and for a variety of classrooms with different specific needs. For example, at Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind, the brainstorming took place while sitting at a table, on a single sheet. I wrote answers down on the page as students contributed, periodically repeating the entire list to remind everyone what we had written so far. This model can feel more intimate, and is also helpful when working with younger students or with a smaller group. In other instances, it might be helpful to write contributions on a whiteboard or a projection board.

Create a circle map on the board or the sheet labeled: “Identity.”

Invite students to share single words they identify with and add them to the circle map. Students might be shy with contributing at first, so you may want to begin with writing down some of your own examples.

First, ask students to contribute answers that reflect their social identity: age, gender, cultural background, etc. (*Examples: Sonorense, Egyptian, young person, student*)

Next, invite students to contribute answers that reflect their personality, skills, and personal interests, and things they are proud of. (*Examples: nail artist, barber, fashionista, boxer*)

You can also welcome responses that are silly, and any other ideas they have. (*Examples: dog mom, foodie, no sabo, friend, cousin*)

Try to gather as many contributions on the map as possible. In moments where ideas slow down, repeat out loud contributions that you find interesting: chances are it might inspire other ideas!

After the class feels satisfied with their list, ask students to take a few moments to look at the answers the class generated, or repeat the shared list out loud. Ask students to take time to ponder the list, and think about which contributions they relate to.

Writing Exercise (10+ minutes):

Students will write a poem using the refrain “My voice matters because _____.”

Using items from the list, they will fill-in-the-blank and repeat using as many ideas relating to identity as they can think of. Invite students to expand upon each idea, or simply repeat the refrain with a single phrase if they wish. They are also welcome to add new ideas that are not on the collaborative map. (*Example: “My voice matters because I am a poet. / My voice matters because I am a sister.”*)

Ask students to try to write without stopping. Remind them that this is a draft, and that it is best to let their ideas out and worry about tidying the piece up later. Remind students to give the poem a title (in this case it can be “My Voice Matters”). Ask students to be honest about their feelings and experiences.

Let them know they will be writing for ten minutes. If at ten minutes the class is still writing, silently extend the time by 3-5 minutes.

Sharing (5 minutes):

If there is time, call upon students who volunteer to share their work.

Set a **class guideline of confidence** to not repeat any personal or sensitive topics after this lesson or outside of the classroom. Before sharing, ask performers to be loud and confident and ask the class to be attentive and respectful.

Sometimes there may not be many volunteers to share. In this case, ask if there is anyone who would allow you to read their poem out loud on their behalf. This usually invites more students to share.

Student Examples:

My voice matters because I am a musician.

My voice matters because I am a boy.

My voice matters because I am a singer.

My voice matters because I am blind.

-Yovey D

My voice matters because I'm Mexican

My voice matters because I'm a son

My voice matters because I'm a uncle

My voice matters because I'm a brother

My voice matters because I'm a leader

My voice matters because I'm a inmate

My voice matters because I'm a believer

My voice matters because I'm a dreamer

My voice matters because I'm smart

My voice matters because I'm a young person

My voice matters because I'm a caring

-Derick H