



Who am I? Identity Exploration Activity

Purpose: To expand students' view of identities, reflect on the many parts of students' own identities, and choose what story they want to tell about themselves. [Research](#) shows students grounded in their identity and culture have higher attendance rates, healthier connections, and improved academic outcomes.

Activity Summary: Students work up to writing an I Am poem about their identities after discussing an example poem, learning about the complexity of personal and social identities, and making a personal Identity Wheel. The sequence carefully builds trust within the group so students feel more comfortable sharing and being vulnerable.

Grades: 6-12	Length: Three 45-minute sessions.
Setting: Classroom, after school, summer program, postsecondary advising, etc.	Materials: pencils, sticky notes To Print: Who am I handout (one per student)
Student Success Criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can list 8 things that I think are important parts of my identity. ● I can explain how my identity is shaped both by how I see myself and how the world sees me. ● I write an I Am poem with at least 10 lines. 	Alaska Cultural Standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cultural Standards for Students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Culturally-knowledgeable students are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community. ● Cultural Standards for Curriculum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. A culturally-responsive curriculum reinforces the integrity of the cultural knowledge that students bring with them.

Facilitator Prep:

1. Consider your own assumptions around identity that you bring into this activity, particularly if your race, ethnicity, and/or culture are different from your students. Reflect on how you view your own identities and how you believe others see you.
2. Make your own Identity Wheel and I Am Poem to share with students ([see examples](#)).
3. Highly recommended: Invite Culture Bearers and/or community members to participate in your sessions to share about their identities and offer perspectives that may be more relevant to students' experiences. These guests should be paid honorariums or compensated in some way.

Session 1 - 45 min

Connect (20 min)

1. Introduce the purpose of this activity: to expand students' view of identities, reflect on the many parts of students' own identities, and choose what story they want to tell about themselves. [Research](#) shows students grounded in their identity and culture have higher attendance rates, healthier connections, and improved academic outcomes.
2. Build trust and community between students and guests: go around in a circle and have everyone share their name, pronouns, grade, where they and their family are from, and something they like to do for fun.
3. Facilitator or guest shares their own I Am poem. *Tip: Print copies or put on a screen so students can follow along. DO NOT SHARE THE EXAMPLE MOOSE POEM.* By doing this exercise yourself, you're being vulnerable and building trust with students. Explain students will work towards writing their own I Am poem.
4. Full group discusses the example poem. Sample questions: *What lines stand out? What did you learn about the author you couldn't tell by looking at them? What parts of the author's identity are important to them? Do you have questions for the author? Has anyone written this type of poem before? When? If so, this is a chance to consider what may have changed since you last wrote one.*

Explore (25 min)

1. Pass out the [Who am I handout](#). Read and discuss "Exploring the Concept of Identity" excerpt together. *Tip: You may need to simplify or break down this excerpt for younger students.*
2. Ask "what makes up people's identities?" and capture these ideas in a list on the whiteboard. Include things like birth order, culture, hobbies, experiences, gender, personality, appearance, religion, etc.
3. Invite guests to share important and diverse parts of their identities.
4. Facilitator or guest makes their own [Identity Wheel](#) in real time on the whiteboard (think about the examples you share beforehand).
 - Identity Wheel Directions: Put your own name in center, add identities around it, add arrows to indicate if: you see yourself that way, if others label you that way, or if they are in agreement
5. Students make their own Identity Wheels on handout. Challenge them to fill in all 10 circles.
6. Close by letting students know they will talk about their Identity Wheels with partners in the next session. Collect worksheets to be used in the next sessions.

Session 2 - 45 min

Connect (15 min)

1. Remind students of this activity's purpose, and explain they will continue thinking about their identities today.
2. Have each student write on a sticky note three words their friends would use to describe them. Post these sticky notes in a central place for everyone to look at. Discuss them as a group.

3. Pass out worksheets. If these words are not already included in students' Identity Wheels, prompt students to add them.

Discuss (15 min)

1. In partners: share your Identity Wheels. What are parts of identities that are important to you? What are parts that have arrows going out? Arrows going in?
2. Dig into the complexity of identity in a full group discussion. Sample topics/questions:
 - *What are examples of personal identities? (arrows out, how you see yourself (ex: hobbies))*
 - *What are examples of social identities (arrows in, how others see you (ex: race))*
 - *What are examples of identities we get to choose? Society gives us?*
 - *When are these in tension? (ex: gender)*
 - *Some identities stay the same through life, others are fluid*
 - *Examples of these (static: race, birth order; fluid: hobbies, jobs)*
 - *There can be a disconnect between the identities we have for ourselves and the identities the world says we have. We don't have to identify with everything others believe about ourselves, since only we know our true selves and everyone else sees what we want them to see.*
 - *Facilitator or guest shares story about when their identities were in tension (ex: racially misidentified, family tells them to be one thing but they want to be something different)*

Explore (15 min)

1. Explain that in writing their I Am poems, students get to choose what story they want to tell about who they are. We all get to choose what we share with others, what we carry forward, and what we leave behind.
2. Facilitator or guest shares a part of their identity that they choose to carry forward and a part they choose to leave behind.
 - a. Examples of leaving parts of your identity behind could include: not letting negative experiences or circumstances solely define you, focusing on things you like to do or want to learn about, or choosing to make different decisions than the people around you. Acknowledge that this can be really difficult. *Tip: Be prepared to help students access mental health resources if needed.*
3. Silent reflection: look back at your Identity Wheel. Put a plus sign next to parts you want to carry forward. Put a minus sign next to parts you want to leave behind.
4. Close by reminding students they'll use their Identity Wheels to write their I Am poems in the next session. Collect worksheets.

Session 3 - 45 min

Connect (10 min)

1. Remind students of this activity's purpose, and explain they will be writing and sharing their I Am poems today.
2. Pass out worksheets. Pair share: what is one part of your identity you want to carry forward?

Explore (15 min)

1. Give time for students to write their I Am poems. They will share at least one line (can share the full poem) with the group. Key directions:
 - First line and last lines are “I am _____ (preferred name).”
 - Use Identity Wheels to help
 - Aim for at least 10 lines
 - No right or wrong
 - See staff examples and example lines in the handout

Discuss (20 min)

1. Get into a circle. Discuss how to be respectful/refer to group agreements. Name that sharing about yourself can be scary. Remind everyone they will share at least one line. Ask for volunteers who want to read their full poem to share first (this encourages other students to share more than one line).
2. Make sure everyone has a chance to share.
3. Write these questions on the board and give students time to silently reflect.
 - a. *How difficult was it to write this poem?*
 - b. *Did anything surprise you about yourself during this activity?*
 - c. *What would be different about your poem if you wrote it 5 years ago? Last month? How might it be different in a year from now?*
4. Debrief these questions as a group. *This may be another time where students need help accessing mental health resources.*
 - a. Mention how we are expected to talk about ourselves in interviews, on applications, etc.
5. Close: Praise students for participating. The most important thing is that you are comfortable with who you are. There’s no “right” identity. And identities change! Students can hang their poems on the wall, share them with friends or family, put them in their journals, etc.

Extension Ideas:

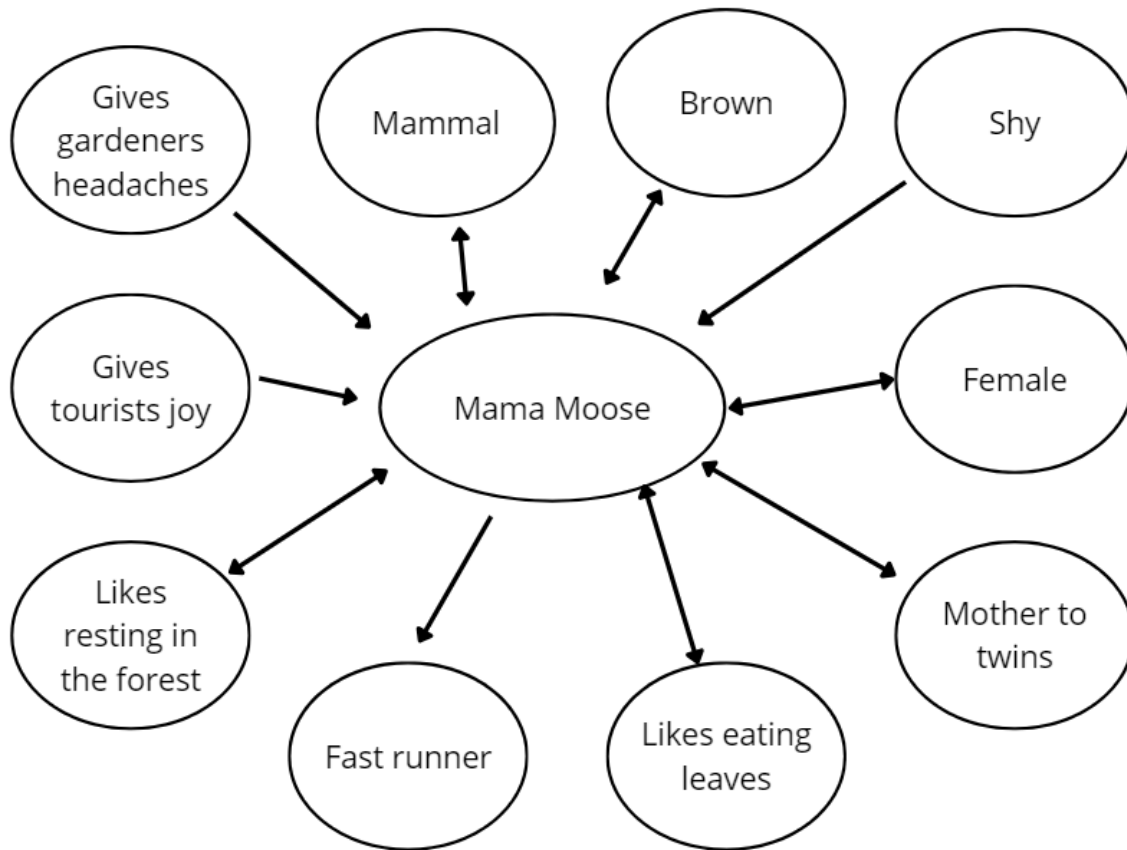
1. Students make a time capsule with objects related to their poems and Identity Wheels. Have students revisit their time capsule after several months or at the end of the year. Discuss if/how their identities have changed over this stretch of time.
2. Students design an emblem or other visual that represents who they are.

Credits and Additional Resources: This activity was informed by and adapted from a variety of sources and theories including [Bridging to the Future Framework](#), [Facing History and Ourselves](#), the [Art of Hosting](#), and Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models by Kate Berardo and Darla K. Deardorff. Special thanks to facilitators Emily Brockman, Suzuk Huntington, and Chohla Moll whose authentic participation in this activity influenced this written version.

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Examples (for facilitator)

Identity Wheel



Arrows going out from Mama Moose are things she identifies as

Arrows going in are things people identify her as

Arrows going both ways are things both she and people identify her as

I Am Poem

I am Mama Moose.

I come from the forests of Alaska, lazy summers, and harsh winters.

My brown fur helps me blend into the trees and keep warm.

I spend my days munching on willows and birch trees.

I bring many people joy when they see and photograph me.

I bring some people headaches when I eat their delicious gardens.

I can run fast, swim across churning waters, and defend myself with my strong legs.

I protect my calves fiercely and show them how to navigate this world.

I hope they will one day become parents of their own calves.

I am Mama Moose.

Who am I?

The Complexity of Identity

The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether?

Beverly Daniel Tatum, "The Complexity of Identity: 'Who Am I?'," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Sexism, Anti-semitism, Heterosexism, Classism and Ableism*, ed. Adams et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 9–14.

My Identity Wheel

The diagram consists of a central oval containing the text "Your Name". Surrounding this central oval are ten empty circles arranged in three rows: the top row has four circles, the middle row has two circles on the left and two on the right, and the bottom row has three circles.

I Am Poem Directions

- First line and last lines are "I am _____ (preferred name)."
- Use your Identity Wheels to help.
- Write at least 10 lines.
- There's no right or wrong. It is ok to write lines that do not match this format.

Examples lines:

- I am _____ (identity labels)
- I am _____ (personality characteristics)
- I am from _____ (your village or town; places you have lived)
- I am from _____ (something that shapes you: your culture, people in your life, place that holds significance to you)
- I give _____ to the world
- I'm knowledgeable about _____
- I hope to _____
- I am inspired by _____
- I enjoy _____
- When I _____ (significant event in your life), I realized _____
- I think _____ is important
- I am good at _____
- I care about _____
- I value _____

Write your poem here: