

Lesson Plan: The ID Project

Exploring Identity Through the Lens of Culture and Religion

Grades

6-12

Subjects

Civics, American History, Language Arts, Media Studies, Social Studies, Global History

Overview

In this lesson, students will define “identity” and consider how it (a) can be shaped by religion and culture and (b) can shape morals, values, and social interactions.

Materials Needed

- *This Is Where I Need To Be* - Chapters 5, 14, 16, 18, and 20 connect most strongly to this theme. Other related chapters are 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 23.
- Reproducible: “Identity Chart”

Activities/Procedures

1. WARM-UP/CONVERSATION STARTERS:

Write the word “identity” on the board and ask students to brainstorm its meanings. Keep track of students’ responses with a concept or mind map. Students will most likely begin to call out answers that fall into the following categories, among others:

- possessions or material objects
- interests
- people/family
- community
- character traits
- personality
- goals
- ethnicity
- religion
- geography

A question you might ask is whether identity is just another word for asking, “Who am I on the inside? Who am I on the outside?” Using this question as a springboard, have students explore what identity means for someone like President Barack Obama (of course, there are many prominent and well-known figures you might use for this activity).

Ask students to call out attributes of President Obama’s identity by thinking about the question: What makes Barack Obama who he is on the inside and the outside? Make a list on the board. Some answers that might come up may include: bi-racial, Hawaii, Kenya, Indonesia, his love of basketball, his hometown of Chicago, politician, lawyer, father, husband, Harvard graduate and now President. Through your questions, you’re making clear to students that all these are parts of Obama’s identity.

Wrap-up the activity by sharing the following definition of identity with students:

Identity is our sense of who we are. It is formed by a combination of many factors, including social ties such as our connections to a family, an ethnic group, a religion, a community, a school, or a nation. Our personal experiences also affect our identity. So do our values and beliefs.

Share with students that they are going to be reading and discussing oral histories where identity plays an important part in people's views of and interactions with the world.

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A concept or mind map is an organizing and brainstorming device where single words are enclosed in a rectangle and are connected to other concept boxes by arrows. Major concept boxes will have lines to and from several other concept boxes generating a network.

2. QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION:

As a class, read and discuss the related chapters of *This Is Where I Need To Be*, focusing on the following:

- a. Pick two oral histories from the book and compare the factors or characteristics the writers most associate with their identities. What do they have in common? How are they different? (Note to teachers: You may wish to use a Venn diagram for this question.)
- b. How do religion, culture, and world events shape the identities of the authors featured in the book? Why do you think this is so? What about you? How do these factors impact or shape your identity?
- c. What do these stories tell you about the impact of the world on people's identities? Does society or community change the way people perceive themselves? Find a passage from one of the oral histories to support your answer.
- d. On page 73, Nurah Ahmad recounts her experiences at both a public school and a Muslim private school. How do you think her time spent at both institutions strengthen her identity?
- e. Do these stories lead you to conclude that identity is static or ever-evolving? Multifaceted or one-sided? Explain your answer by using examples from the oral histories for support.
- f. Did you see aspects of yourself reflected in these stories? Do you better understand someone or yourself after reading these stories? Why or why not?

3. CLASS PROJECT:

Have students use the "Identity Chart" reproducible to map out their own identities. Once they have finished, they should answer the following questions either in their journals or in a group discussion:

- a. Underline or highlight the most important aspects of your identity
- b. How have words or phrases that others use to describe you shaped your identity?
- c. What aspects of your identity are most relevant when it comes to making important decisions such as how you dress, what movies or TV shows you watch, or who your friends are?

Have students repeat this activity by mapping out the identity of one of the authors from *This Is Where I Need To Be*. They should answer the above questions in context of the writer's oral history, using the identity chart and oral history as source material.

Wrap up this activity by having students discuss how dissecting identity made them view themselves, their classmates, and the authors of *This Is Where I Need To Be* differently.

4. HOMEWORK OR LONGER-TERM ASSIGNMENTS:

- a. Ask students to use the words they generated in their "Identity Chart" to write an "I Am From" poem both for themselves as well as for an author from *This Is Where I Need To Be* (preferably, the author's whose identity they have already mapped out using the "Identity Chart"). See a sample "I Am From" poem by poet George Ella Lyon and instructions for how to write it at www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html.
- b. Have students create a website or exhibit titled "Islam 101." Their exhibit should include the following:
 1. What are the Five Pillars of Islam?
 2. Who is the main figure in Islam?
 3. What is the main language in Islam?
 4. Some moral teachings, quotes, or sayings from Islam.
 5. Who are Muslims? A pie chart showing the countries of origin of American Muslims.
 6. Photographs of Muslims in America that show dual identities.
 7. Images of American mosques.

Engage students in a class discussion about how these factors shape the identity of an American Muslim.

- c. Have students read and discuss the following personal essays by Muslim Americans from the NPR series, "This I Believe":
 1. "We Are Each Other's Business" by Eboo Patel
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4989625>
 2. "The Right to be Fully American" by Yasir Biloo
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6608111>

Ask students to write their own "This I Believe" essays about their identities.

- d. Ask students to list any seven nations that have Muslim majorities, beginning with the nation with the largest Muslim population. They should research the languages spoken there and list their neighboring nations. Then, students should investigate how religious identity can be impacted by one's culture, citing examples from the oral histories in *This is Where I Need to Be* as evidence.
- e. Have students read "*The Koran, punk rock and lots of questions*" by Erika Hayasaki. This article in the November 19, 2008 issue of *The Los Angeles Times* takes an in-depth look at Muslim American youth's search for identity. It is available online at <http://tinyurl.com/6b5wab>. After students have read the article, ask them to write an essay comparing it to the oral histories in *This Is Where I Need To Be*. What are the common themes and issues faced by the youths featured in both works?
- f. Explain to students that they will be investigating the idea of identity and what it means in the context of African American Muslims. Provide them with the following articles from

Common Ground News and divide them into small groups to discuss how identity and faith co-mingle in the African American Muslim community.

1. "A Royal Heritage" by Sheik Anwar Muhaimin
An article about how an African Muslim used his faith and African heritage to keep from indulging in the "blame game" and instead taking responsibility for his own actions and related outcomes.
<http://tinyurl.com/689lrk>
2. "African Americans Help Diminish Islamophobia" by Faheem Shuaibe
Having faced derisive stereotyping before, the author elaborates on why he feels African American Muslims can stem the tide of Islamophobia.
<http://tinyurl.com/6la47b>
3. "African American Muslims refute the clash of civilizations" by Dawud Walid
This article chronicles the ways in which the Civil Rights Movement and African American Muslims paved the way for Muslim immigrants to America.
<http://tinyurl.com/6syk5v>

After they have read these articles, ask students to write a paper on ways in which the Civil Rights Movement and African American Muslims have paved the way for Muslim immigrants to America. When students have completed their assignment, reconvene as a large group to review their conclusions. To wrap up the activity, ask students to highlight the dual identities that Muslims in *This Is Where I Need To Be* have and how they perceive themselves.

Related Resources

The following materials offer more information on identity and the Muslim American experience.

"The Koran, punk rock and lots of questions," by Erika Hayasaki

A compelling feature article and photo essay (November 19, 2008) from *The Los Angeles Times* about Muslim American teenagers search for identity.

<http://tinyurl.com/6b5wab>

Islamic Learning

This photo essay from *Time* magazine takes us inside an Illinois school where "two worlds" meet.

<http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/muslimschool/>

Muslim in America

An intimate portrait of America's Muslim community, also from *Time* magazine.

<http://tinyurl.com/6ymoas>

To Be Muslim

Boston Globe photographer Christopher Churchill's photo essay of Muslims from across the Boston area, with text and audio about their conversations ranging from women and independence to peace and violence to the role of religion in their lives.

<http://tinyurl.com/5shwva>

Muslim American: A New Identity? By Ruhi Hamid

An article from BBC News about what it means to be Muslim and American in a post 9/11 world.

<http://tinyurl.com/6s6pag>

Muslim Girl

This magazine explores identity, culture, fashion, and religion for Muslim girls in the West.

<http://www.muslimgirlworld.com/>

Islam Overview

A brief overview on Islam from CNN.

<http://tinyurl.com/6a2fl5>

Islam

MSN Encarta article on Islam

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761579171/islam.html

Reporting on Religion: A Primer for Journalists

Religion Newswriters provides a thorough introduction to Islam for religion journalists. This may also be helpful in the classroom.

<http://www.rnasecure.org/guide/islam.html>

U.S. Religious Landscape Survey

Based on interviews with more than 35,000 American adults, this extensive survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life details the religious makeup, religious beliefs and practices as well as social and political attitudes of the American public, including the Muslim community.

<http://religions.pewforum.org/>

Does My Head Look Big in This, by Randa Abdel-Fattah

In this novel (Scholastic, 2008), 16-year-old Amal makes the decision to start wearing the hijab and must deal with the all the reactions—from her parents, her teachers, her friends, people on the street.

<http://www.amazon.com/Does-Head-Look-Big-This/dp/043992233X>

Muslims in Metropolis, by Kavitha Rajagopalan

A thorough and insightful examination (Rutgers University Press, 2008) of the identity formation and experiences of three very different Muslim families in the West – in London, New York, and Berlin. This is a good read for college and adult audiences, but excerpts would work in the classroom as well because of the author's journalistic style.

<http://www.amazon.com/Muslims-Metropolis-Stories-Immigrant-Families/dp/0813543444>

Assessment

Teacher evaluation of classroom participation. Teachers may wish to develop additional rubrics and measures for class projects and longer-term assignments.

National Standards

These academic standards are drawn from the *Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning's "Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education: 3rd and 4th Editions."*

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- Behavioral Studies Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.
- Behavioral Studies Standard 2: Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function.
- Language Arts Standard 1: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

- Language Arts Standard 7: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts.
- Language Arts Standard 8: Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning.
- United States History Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Key Terms

identity, Islam, multi-cultural, diversity, teens, Muslims in America, African American Muslims, ethnocentrism