

Becoming | Part I

Art lessons for identity formation, historical understanding, and youth empowerment

Created by Kristen Brown for
the Baltimore United Viewfinders



Dedicated to the Junior Viewfinders—
who taught me what it means to be a teacher.

Thank you.

Day 1: "I Am From" Poetry Writing

Day 2: "I Am From" Graphic Design

Day 3: What's In a Name?

Day 4: What's Going On?

Day 5: Build Soapbox

Day 6: Hero Scavenger Hunt + Collages

Day 7: Photo Transfers

Day 8: Photo Transfers

Day 9: Performance Development

Day 10: Perform

SCHEDULE

CONTEXT

This set of lessons was developed for the Baltimore United Viewfinders, a youth driven organization using the arts to explore their own definition of self and place. Specifically these lessons were created for youth grades 4th-8th, but they are meant to be adapted to work in a variety of contexts.

The youth in Viewfinders all participate by choice. Facilitators are there to guide and support youth in their interests, and as much as possible, the youth are encouraged to take leadership roles in their learning experience. An exchange of learning is constantly taking place between youth and facilitators. Together we strive to support and model critical thinking, engagement in the community, academic achievement, artistic skill-building, and sharing the work with others.

In this unit, youth explore their own identity, societal expectations, and leadership through photography, construction, and performance work. The set of projects is broken up into three phases: exploration, art-making, and civic engagement. By the end of the unit, youth will be able to identify racism and speak to this a performance using a handmade soapbox.

This unit is the first of a longer series of projects all pertaining to similar questions and investigations, culminating in site-specific murals throughout communities within East Baltimore, Maryland.

Day 1 | "I Am From" Poetry Writing

What makes you unique?

Objective: Youth write a poem exploring their unique identity.

Total time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Materials you will need:

- Posters with categories written on them (hung on wall)
- Youth Sketchbooks
- pen/pencil
- Powerpoints: Soapbox history/ I Am From examples

Vocabulary:

- Stanza | a set of lines in a poem (verse)
- Identity | who you are

Agenda

10 minutes | Talk Show (from Drama-Based Instruction)

Youth decides a character that the facilitator will know (i.e. famous person [can be fictional, alive, or dead] the group will know). The facilitator interviews the youth as if they are on a talk show. After their conversation, the facilitator tries to guess who the character is. More questions can be asked to determine who the character is. The round ends once the character is guessed. Switch roles so the youth can guess characters as well.

10 minutes | Unit Introduction

Facilitator introduces the new unit: "For our new project we are going to be exploring who we are and how our identities can be shaped by the world around us. Our identities are who we are. We are going to be developing performances for our own, hand-built soapboxes about our identities." The facilitator shows a Power Point about the history of soapboxes.

5 minutes | Lesson Introduction

Facilitator introduces the days lesson: "Today we are going to be writing poetry about ourselves, using a format called "I Am From." Let me show you some examples of other youth poems. Facilitator shows examples of I Am From poems/photos."

15 minutes | Categories

Youth see the following categories on different pieces of large paper hanging in the room:

- names of sayings
- names of food/dishes they recall from family gatherings
- names of relatives
- items found in your home
- items found in your yard/on your stoop

- *items found in your neighborhood*
- *names of places that hold memories (literally—like boxes) (figuratively—like Disney World)*
- *names of brands or organizations you like*

Youth brainstorm and fill in as many answers as they can on the posters.

20 minutes | Write Poems

Youth spend time individually writing their poems. Facilitator guides youth as they work. Instrumental music can play in the background. Youth must write at least three stanzas, using the phrase I Am From at least one time in each. A stanza is a set of lines in a poem.

10 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the days activities.

Facilitator Reflection

*Guiding questions: What did you notice? What worked well?
What would you change if you did this lesson again or for day 2?*

Day 2 | "I Am From" Graphic Design

What makes you unique?

Objective: Youth incorporate their "I Am From" poem into a graphic.

Total time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Materials you will need:

- Camera
- Canva loaded on computer (<https://www.canva.com>)

Agenda

5 minutes | Read Aloud

Youth may read their poem aloud if they desire, asking for feedback from the audience.

20 minutes | Take Photograph

Youth takes images to accompany their "I Am From" Poems. Youth should take at least 5 photos to choose from and can be self-portraits or otherwise significant. The facilitator can assist in helping the youth take portraits.

10 minutes | Canva demo

Facilitator gives a demonstration of how to use Canva, a free, online graphic design software. The facilitator should go over:

- Importing a Photo
- Filters/Transparency
- Inserting Text
- Formatting Text

25 minutes | Create design

Youth work on computers using Canva to design their images. Each youth should finish with an image + the text of their poem incorporated onto the design.

5 minutes | Share to social media

Facilitator works with youth to upload their designs onto an desired social media outlets.

5 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the days activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 3 | What's in a Name?

How are our names significant to our identities?

Objective: Youth are interviewed about their names and assumptions people make about them (or don't) based on their name.

Total Time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Materials you will need:

- Interview Handout
- Pens/Pencil
- Video Recorder (smart phone will work)
- Audio Recorder (smart phone will work)

Vocabulary:

Assumption | things people think about you before knowing you well, or think they know about you before knowing you at all

Race | a way humans in power have historically grouped one another based on skin color and other physical features

Class | a group of people who share similar amounts of wealth

Gender | a social construct of organizing people based on their identity of being a man or woman

Agenda (adapted from Kai Miles)

10 minutes | Stand Up

The facilitator reads the following prompts. If youth agrees with the statement, they will stand up. If they do not, they remain seated.

1. *I think my name is Beautiful.*
2. *I don't like my Name.*
3. *My name is special because of its origin in my history?*
4. *People have at one time in my life mispronounced my name?*
5. *I think my name expresses clearly who I am?*
6. *My name implies something about my class?*
7. *My name implies something about what race I am?*
8. *I have a nick name?*
9. *I have at one time in my life changed my name?*
10. *I don't think my name is very interesting?*
11. *I think my name implies my gender/ sex?*
12. *My name has hindered me in some aspect of life?*
13. *My name has benefited me in some aspect of my life?*
14. *My name is a family name?*

15. *My name is common in my community?*
16. *I have made assumption about someone base on their name?*
17. *I have mispronounced someone's name?*
18. *I have made fun of someone's name?*

15 minutes | Spoken Word

Youth watch the following video twice: *To All the Little Black Girls with Big Names* (<http://youtu.be/JbS8LPkohCc>). The first time they simply watch and listen to what is being said. The second time, youth are instructed to write down phrases or words that stick out to them. After watching the piece, youth shares what stood out to them? What did they learn? What do they think?

40 minutes | Interviews

Youth receives a handout with interview questions on it. The facilitator interviews the youth, and then they switch roles. Questions include:

1. *How did you get your name?*
2. *What do you like about your name?*
3. *What don't you like about your name?*
4. *Name one assumption others place on you because of your name?*
5. *Do you think your name and the assumptions attached to your name are oppressive and how?*
6. *What do you want people to know about you before they make assumptions about your name?*

5 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the days activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Name: _____

Interview Questions

1. *How did you get your name?*
2. *What do you like about your name?*
3. *What don't you like about your name?*
4. *Name one assumption others place on you because of your name?*
5. *Do you think your name and the assumptions attached to your name are hurtful and how?*
6. *What do you want people to know about you before they make assumptions about your name?*

Day 4 | What's Going On?

How does racism effect society?

Objective: Youth learn from their neighbors by interviewing people about racism.

Total time: 1 hour, 40 minutes

Materials you will need:

- *The Sneetches* by Dr. Suess
- Video Recorder
- Audio Recorder

Vocabulary:

Discrimination | unfair treatment of certain groups of people (actions)

Prejudice | preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience (thoughts)

Racism | prejudice or discrimination directed against someone of a different race; can be personal or systemic

Agenda

15 minutes | *The Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss

Facilitator reads The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss, and follows with a short discussion about what the book is about. Vocabulary words should be covered here, helping youth understand the difference of discrimination, prejudice, and racism.

10 minutes | Project Introduction + Construct Interview Questions

Facilitator explains what the days project is: "Today we are going to interview people in the street about their experiences with discrimination, prejudice, and racism. It is important to listen to others about their experiences, and learn from others because the media does not always give us accurate information about these topics. Let's think of some questions we want to ask people."

Example questions:

Have you experienced racism? How did it feel?

Why do you think people are racist?

How do you think racism effects our neighborhood?

15 minutes | Role Play Interview

Youth practices their role in the interview. Will they hold the camera? Will they ask the questions? Whatever they decide is the best role for them, they should practice. The facilitator can act as the subject, and when in the streets can perform any needed role. Depending on what you intend to do with the footage, you may need to create a consent form for participants to sign, giving you their permission to use the footage.

45 minutes | Street Interviews

Youth go out in their neighborhood to interview community members. They may practice different roles if they want. Try to interview at least 3 people.

10 minutes | Debrief

Facilitator leads a conversation about how the interviewing experience went. Guiding questions:

How did that feel?

What surprised you?

What did you learn?

Why is asking people questions important?

5 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the day's activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 5 | Build Soapboxes

Objective: Youth constructs their own soapbox.

Total time: 1 hour, 5 minutes

Materials:

- 1 2' square of plywood
- 4 1"x6"x23.5" mitered walls
- 12 screws
- Masking Tape
- Wood Glue
- Power Drills
- Countersinking Drill Bits
- Safety Glasses

Vocabulary:

Drill | a power tool used to screw two pieces of wood together

Drill Bit | tip that goes into a drill

Countersink | allows a screw to flush with the wood

Screw | a piece of hardware with grooves to

Miter | wood cut at an angle so it can form a 90 degree angle with another piece of wood

Agenda

10 minutes | Safety

Facilitator outlines safety procedures for the day, including:

- Wear safety glasses at all times.
- When using the power drill, don't put hands near the tip.
- Screws get very hot after being drilled, so do not touch them immediately after drilling.
- Drills only can be used to screw into the wood. They are never to be pointed at another person.
- At any given time, always listen to the facilitator.

45 minutes | Build Soapbox

Youth work to build a soapbox. Facilitator guides youth through building process one-step at a time, by building their own soapbox as well.

- Step 1: Line four walls up edge to edge, so that they create one long horizontal line. The 45-degree, mitered edges should align to create a 90-degree angle when folded together.
- Step 2: Rub wood glue onto all mitered edges.
- Step 3: Create box walls, using masking tape to hold the corners together.
- Step 4: Line plywood top onto the four walls.

- *Step 5: Pre-drill one corner with countersinking bits.*
- *Step 6: Drill screw into corner.*
- *Step 7: Repeat steps 5-6 in opposite corner.*
- *Step 8: Pre-drill the rest of the holes (3 on each wall).*
- *Step 9: Drill screws into all holes.*
- *Step 10: Have one youth stand on the box, while the other drills screws in as far as they go.*

10 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the days activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 6 | Hero Scavenger Hunt + Collages

Objective: Youth learn about significant figures in Black history, consider what makes a hero, and choose one hero whom they admire.

Total time: 1 hour, 25 minutes

Materials you will need:

Printed Photographs of Heroes
Envelopes with clues
Prize
Camera
Posterboard
Markers
Computers + Printers
Tape
Scissors

Agenda

15 minutes | A-Z Game: What Makes a Hero?

Facilitator hangs a poster-sized sheets of paper, with the alphabet written in columns on it. Youth are divided into 2 teams and are instructed to write an attribute of a hero for each letter (in order). Youth is timed to see how quickly they can complete the game.

30 minutes | Scavenger Hunt

Youth completes a scavenger hunt. Facilitator should create clues and choose heroes that are relevant to the identity of the youth. Below you will find an example of clues and heroes to get you started.

30 minutes | Photo Collage

Facilitator shows youth images of completed hero collages. Youth choose a hero that they admire and find an image of them on the internet. They then photograph themselves posing as their hero (facilitator can take photo). Lastly they cut, fold, and tape the images together. This will show the facilitator how they want the image to look, which then can be digitally collaged.

10 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the day's activities.

Scavenger Hunt Clues

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR | *Couch*: I was a preacher who was inspired by the non-violent activism of Mahatma Gandhi. I delivered many speeches about human rights. One of my most famous speeches had an audience of about 250,000 and was called "I Have a Dream." Who am I? Find the next clue where you might dream.

MALCOLM X | *Stairs*: I was a Muslim minister and civil rights activist. I gave a famous speech in 1964, where I said, "'We declare our right on this earth...to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.'" Who am I? Find your next clue where move up, by any means necessary.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS | *Soapboxes*: I bravely fought for the cause of the abolishment of slavery in the United States. He escaped from slavery in Maryland. Who am I? Find your next clue in the place where you speak up.

ROSA PARKS | *Red chair*: I refused to move when a white man insisted that I give up my seat on a bus. My simple action sparked a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama that lasted over a year. Who am I? Find the next clue where you might like to sit.

HARRIET TUBMAN | *Sadeeq's locker*: I was born a slave, beaten by masters, and suffered most of my life from a severe head injury due to one of those beatings. I escaped to Philadelphia and freedom and served as a "conductor" in the Underground Railroad, helping more than 300 slaves escape to freedom. When the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 sought to recapture slaves who had escaped to northern states, I assisted many to cross the border to Canada. Who am I? Find the next clue in an area where you often hide.

SOUJOURNER TRUTH | *SOZA Room*: I grew up a slave in NY and spoke Dutch until I was 9 years old. I changed my name after I became free and gave many speeches about the rights of women and African Americans, including my most well-known speech "Ain't I a Woman?" Although I could not read, I memorized the Bible and quoted from scripture. Who am I? Find the next clue where you might find a religious object or read about religious beliefs.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON | *Walls*: I was born a slave but was emancipated at the age of nine. I Went to school and college and believed that people could gain equality by demonstrating "industry, thrift, intelligence, and property." I wrote 14 books and improved relations between the black and white communities. Who am I? Find the next clue where two areas come together.

MAYA ANGELOU | *Bookshelf*: I am one of the foremost figures of the Civil Right Movement, but most people know me as a writer and poet. I published 7 autobiographies, three books of essays, and several books of poetry. I am known around the world. Who am I? Find the next clue where you might read.

NINA SIMONE | *Gallery*: I was one of the foremost singer/songwriters and Civil Right activists of my generation, revolutionizing the music genre as well as the African-American voice. Who am I? Find the next clue in a place where singing happens once a month.

LANGSTON HUGHES | *Angel*: I gained fame as a poet and playwright during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. I was one of the earliest innovators of the literary art form called jazz poetry. Who am I? Find the next clue with your teacher that writes poetry.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 7 | Photo Transfers

Objective: Youth decorate soapboxes using the method of photo transfer.

Total time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Materials you will need:

- Mod Podge/ Gel Medium
- Computers/inkjet printer/paper
- Paintbrushes
- Sketchbooks
- Pencils
- Scissors

Vocabulary:

Collage | a combination of various materials to create one piece of art

Photo Transfer | a process of applying an image to a piece of wood

Agenda

5 minutes | Explanation of Lesson

Facilitator describes today's agenda: "Today we will decorate our soapboxes using a method called photo transferring. This is how a photo transfer looks when it is finished (show example). It is a two-day process. Think of ways you can collage images relevant to our discussions onto your soapbox."

10 minutes | Photo Transfer Demonstration

Facilitator demonstrates how to successfully complete a photo transfer onto wood, by following these steps:

1. Choose an image. If there is text on the image, it will need to be flipped horizontally in photoshop.
2. Print the image.
3. Cut the image out.
4. Apply an even coat of gel medium or mod podge to the front of the printed image. Make sure to apply it to the edges as well.
5. Flatten and press down the image where you want it to go on the soapbox.
6. Repeat with as many images as you desire.

45 minutes | Photo Transfers

Youth work to place all their desired images onto their soapbox.

10 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the day's activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 8 | Photo Transfers

Objective: Youth finish photo transfers and decorating their soapboxes.

Total time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Materials you will need:

- Rags
- Water/Buckets
- Paintbrushes
- Paint
- Permanent Markers
- Varnish/ mod podge

Agenda

10 minutes | Rubbing off transfer Demonstration

Facilitator demonstrates how to successfully rub off the paper to complete the photo transfer by:

1. Wet a rag and lay it on top of the image for 2-5 minutes.
2. Using the rag, rub the paper in small circles with medium to firm pressure. Slowly the white paper should come off, leaving the inked image behind.
3. Continue rubbing the paper until it is completely gone.

1 hour | Finish Transfers/Decorating

Youth rub off all paper from their soapbox. Once completed, they may paint their soapbox or decorate empty spaces with permanent marker if desired.

15 minutes | Coat Soapboxes with Mod Podge

Facilitator Once the soapbox is complete and dry, youth can coat the entire box with varnish or mod podge.

10 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the days activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 9: Performance Development

Objective: Youth create a performances of their choice inspired by their hero.

Total Time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Materials you will need:

- Soapbox
- Paper
- Pen/Pencil

Agenda

5 minutes | Performance Overview

Together, facilitator and youth brainstorm different styles of performance. Ex: poetry, spoken word, a speech, an action, dance, rap, etc. Write these styles down on a piece of paper so it is visible for the youth.

1 hour | Performance Development

Youth develops and practices a performance inspired by their hero. This could mean the perform as their hero or their performance could inform viewers about their hero. The facilitator should guide the youth, but ultimately encourage the youth to make decisions about their performance. Depending on the context, is their a space this performance can be seen by others? Would it be best to film it? Is it enough for the youth to practice performing it for the facilitator? Discuss these questions with the youth. Consider costumes and props as well. If possible, incorporate the youth's soapbox.

10 minutes | Clean Up

Youth must clean up any mess that was made from the days activities.

Facilitator Reflection

Day 10 | Perform

Objective: Youth shares performance with desired/decided audience.

Total Time: dependent on performance

Materials you will need:

- Dependent on performance

Agenda

**This agenda is largely dependent on the style/structure of the performance, and should be adapted to fit the appropriate context.*

Set up

Facilitator helps youth prepare for their performance physically and mentally.

Perform

Youth performs.

Celebrate/reflect

After the performance is complete, some celebration should take place. While celebrating, discuss how the youth felt like the performance went. What do you think went well? What would you change for next time? How did it feel? How do you feel now? Etc.

Facilitator Reflection

Questions? Comments? Feedback?

Get in touch with us at BaltimoreViewfinders@gmail.com.