

Fitting in, belonging and standing out

In line with the current curriculum developments for languages, and to reach citizenship goals, literature can be included at all secondary school levels to make room for each and every individual student, in an integrated skills lesson. Sources used are the poem and online project *Where I'm from*, and a selection of shorter literary works. Examples are the poems *Telephone conversation* by Wole Soyinka and *Warming her pearls* by Carol Ann Duffy. Delving into the poems gives students an opportunity to relate to people with different backgrounds. A follow-up task is writing and even reciting, if students feel sufficiently comfortable, a poem along the lines of George Ella Lyon's *Where I'm from*, engendering empathy and a sense of shared humanity. In this way students get a chance to belong to a group and stand out at the same time.

show the picture of the statue with the violin case



ask students to write down what they associate with this picture (to foster creative thoughts, Anouk ten Peze, *Creative writing: thinking beyond the standard text: Teaching high school students to write original texts*, 2024)

share some of our thoughts

picture is a way in to introduce ourselves succinctly

ask the students to contribute to the mind map on the whiteboard starting from the word **identity** (link to Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997))

ask students to choose a poem (autonomy)

depending on the size of the group,

- each student a different poem
- or form groups of 3 and ask them to read the same poem together,

ask the students to discuss the question of what this poem reveals about the character's identity / characters' identities

form different groups, each with their own poem to share as an expert (e.g. preferably 4 or 5 different poems per group, counting students 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 so groups will automatically consist of the different poems), ask the group to share the contents of their poems and to find the common denominator in those poems

briefly discuss the common denominators

listen (shared reading exercise, first only focus on the way the poems affects students, not so much on the contents, source: Van Hout, A. Wat een literaire tekst doet. Naar een meer affectieve benadering van literatuur via het Shared Reading Model, Levende Talen Magazine 2024/2) to the poem *Where I'm from* by George Ella Lyon [Where I'm From \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

listen again, while reading along

discuss contents in general, providing explanations / translations of difficult words

ask students to write their own poem, using the template provided in the handout

ask students to recite their own poem

discuss what feelings this task engendered, focusing on the differences in background and identity we all have

Mother's Day by Lorianne Daux

I passed through the narrow hills
of my mother's hips one cold morning
and never looked back, until now, clipping
her tough toenails, sitting on the bed's edge
combing out the tuft of hair at the crown
where it ratted up while she slept, her thumbs
locked into her fists, a gesture as old
as she is, her blanched knees fallen together
beneath a blue nightgown. The stroke

took whole pages of words, random years
torn from the calendar, the names of roses
leaning over her driveway: Cadenza,
Great Western, American Beauty. She can't
think, can't drink her morning tea, do her
crossword puzzle in ink. She's afraid
of everything, the sound of the front door
opening, light falling through the blinds—
pulls her legs up so the bright bars
won't touch her feet. I help her
with the buttons on her sweater. She looks
hard at me and says the word sleeve.
Exactly, I tell her and her face relaxes
for the first time in days. I lie down

next to her on the flowered sheets and tell her
a story about the day she was born, head
first into a hard world: the Great Depression,
shanties, Hoovervilles, railroads and unions.
I tell her about Amelia Earhart and she asks

Air? and points to the ceiling. Asks Heart?
and points to her chest. Yes, I say. I sing
Cole Porter songs. *Brother, Can You Spare
a Dime?* When I recite lines from *Gone
with the Wind* she sits up and says Potatoes!
and I say, Right again. I read her Sandburg,
some Frost, and she closes her eyes. I say yes,
yes, and tuck her in. It's summer. She's tired.
No one knows where she's been.

Dorianne Laux, "Mother's Day" from *The Book of Men*. Copyright © 2011 by Dorianne
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Source: *The Book of Men* (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 2011)

Wole Soyinka: Telephone conversation

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. "Madam", I warned,
"I hate a wasted journey - I am African."
Silence. Silenced transmission of pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
"HOW DARK?"...I had not misheard...."ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?" Button B. Button A.
Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar.
It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfoundment to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis-
"ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT" Revelation came
"You mean- like plain or milk chocolate?"
Her accent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted
I chose. "West African sepia" _ and as afterthought.
"Down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness chaged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece "WHAT'S THAT?" conceding "DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS." "Like
brunette."
"THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?"
"Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but madam you should see the rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of
my feet.
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused-
Foolishly madam- by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black- One moment madam! - sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears- "Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't you rather
See for yourself?"

STACEY WAITE

The Kind of Man I Am at the DMV

“Mommy, that man is a girl,” says the little boy pointing his finger, like a narrow spotlight, targeting the center of my back, his kid- hand learning to assert what he sees, his kid- hand learning the failure of gender’s tidy little story about itself. I try not to look at him

because, yes that man is a girl. I, man, am a girl. I am the kind of man who is a girl and because the kind of man I am is patient with children I try not to hear the meanness in his voice, his boy voice that sounds like a girl voice because his boy voice is young and pitched high like the tent in his pants will be years later because he will grow to be the kind of man who is a man, or so his mother thinks.

His mother snatches his finger from the air, *of course he’s not*, she says, pulling him back to his seat, *what number does it say we are?* she says to her boy, bringing his attention to numbers, to counting and its solid sense. *But he has earrings*, the boy complains now sounding desperate like he’s been the boy who cries wolf, like he’s been the hub of disbelief before, but this time he knows he is oh so right. The kind of man I am is a girl, the kind of man I am is push-ups on the basement floor, is chest bound tight against himself, is thick gripping hands to the wheel when the kind of man I am drives away from the boy who will become a boy except for now while he’s still a girl voice, a girl face, a hairless arm, a powerless hand. *That boy is a girl* that man who is a girl thinks to himself, as he pulls out of the lot, his girl eyes shining in the Midwest sun.

WILFRED OWEN

Disabled

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and plea sure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,—
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands;
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join.— He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
That's why; and may be, too, to please his Meg;
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in Institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?
1917

Warming Her Pearls

by Carol Ann Duffy



for Judith Radstone

Next to my own skin, her pearls. My mistress
bids me wear them, warm them, until evening
when I'll brush her hair. At six, I place them
round her cool, white throat. All day I think of her,

resting in the Yellow Room, contemplating silk
or taffeta, which gown tonight? She fans herself
whilst I work willingly, my slow heat entering
each pearl. Slack on my neck, her rope.

She's beautiful. I dream about her
in my attic bed; picture her dancing
with tall men, puzzled by my faint, persistent scent
beneath her French perfume, her milky stones.

I dust her shoulders with a rabbit's foot,
watch the soft blush seep through her skin
like an indolent sigh. In her looking-glass
my red lips part as though I want to speak.

Full moon. Her carriage brings her home. I see
her every movement in my head.... Undressing,
taking off her jewels, her slim hand reaching
for the case, slipping naked into bed, the way

she always does.... And I lie here awake,
knowing the pearls are cooling even now
in the room where my mistress sleeps. All night
I feel their absence and I burn.

A Martian Sends a Postcard Home - Craig Raine, 1979

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings--

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on the ground:

then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the properites of making colours darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside --
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt
and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves --
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

Day and Night in Virginia and Boston by Anne Winters

After three months, Virginia is still a frontier.
Late at night, I close the door
on my husband practicing Mozart, the dishpan fills
and the network affiliates sign off one by one.
Now the country stations, tuning up like crickets
on radios in scattered valley kitchens:
Har yall this evenin folks!
(Wanting to say 'I'm real fine' I whisper 'Wow.')*Got your Green Hill chicory perkin'?* An army
of women, straightened and ironed and blued
like Picasso's ironer—jerking coffeecups
back with one gesture, hips pressed to sinks.
Their suspended husbands are reading—the paper? the Bible?
And it's *Jesus for you and for me*, till midnight—the anthem—
and one soaped hand jerks out, and their lighted lives recede
to kitchens on the moon's dark side, Mozart rising . . .
Daytimes, in post office, gas station, greasy spoon,
I don't see them anywhere, it makes me nervous.
Black faces down here look "colored."
I am afraid of the other, red faces.

Take my first job in Boston,
the outgoing typist said, 'You've got
to know the foms, we use so many foms.'
And I said *O why farms?*
I thought law firms had *torts*.
A tort, I thought, was like *vous avez tort*.
But I was wrong about the farms,
and after the Cardinal's Vietnam speech
one of the girls said, 'Think you're smat with that accent?'

Still, nothing soothes me, sometimes,
like American voices, softened with distance,
with nearness, as murmurs in a darkened Greyhound:
'It sure has been a scorcher.' 'Where you folks from?'
I keep yawning, lightworlds off in the dark . . .
Sometimes my lonesome standard English sleeps:
The varied and ample land, the North and South in the light,
and the voices of Earth and Moon swell in my helmet
with prairie inflections, soft twangs of outer speech—
'You're looking real good,' says Earth
'—ain't that somethin?'
'Roger. No sweat. Out.'

Anne Winters, "Day and Night in Virginia and Boston" from *The Key to the City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). Copyright © 1986 by Anne Winters. Used by permission of the author.

Source: *The Key to the City* (The University of Chicago Press, 1986)

"American Football"

BY RICHARD KATROVAS

That I would even use the phrase suggests
A false yet useful worldliness, a scope
Far greater than my caste would indicate.
The phrase signals, "I've lived abroad! I've watched
The Premier League in European pubs!"
In fact I hate the game; its ethos rests
On boring strategies and rules that *cope*,
Merely, with competition's link to fate,
How luck and skill dovetail in every botched
Clear kick on goal, and every header rubs

Against the grain of what is beautiful
In sport, at least to my Yankee Doodle eyes.
Give me smashmouth football over soccer.
Give me concussions, shattered bones, ripped muscles,
Strategies of season-long attrition.
Give me huge men heaving their bountiful
Frames against each other with such grace that size
Seems incidental to the role of stalker
Of fleet backs and fleeter ends, men who bustle
Along the line of scrimmage on a mission.

A hundred and sixty-pound defensive end,
I was the scourge of JV quarterbacks.
I blitzed on every down, so spent the game
With most the action at my back; the coach
Didn't seem to care; he was drunk on power
And vodka, said my job was to defend
Right flank from sweeps and register some sacks.
Helter skelter, I dreamed of gridiron fame.
Much less than mediocre, I could not broach
The fact of pain, the realm where bruises flower.

Where I'm From
By George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.
I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments—
snapped before I budded –
leaf-fall from the family tree.

I Am From Poem

Use this template to draft your poem, and then write a final draft to share on blank paper.

I am from _____ (specific ordinary item)

From _____ and _____ (two product names)

I am from the _____ (home description)

_____, _____, _____
(adjective) (adjective) (sensory detail)

I am from _____, (plant, flower, natural item)

_____ (description of above item)

I'm from _____ (family tradition) and

_____ (family trait)

From _____ and _____ (two names of family members)

I'm from the _____ and _____
(description of two family tendencies)

From _____ and _____ (two things you were told as a child)

I'm from _____,
(representation of religion or lack of), (further description)

I'm from _____
(place of birth and family ancestry)

_____, _____
(two food items that represent your family)

From the _____
(specific family story about a specific person and detail)

The _____
(another detail of another family member)

(location of family pictures, mementos, archives)

(line explaining the importance of family items)