

Global Jewish
Peoplehood
Learning Series

Where I'm
From.

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Explore Your Heritage - I AM FROM poem and discussion guide.

Inspired by a "Where I'm From" poem by George Ella Lyon.

<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>

It is impossible to travel the sites of Jewish Poland without constantly asking: where I am from? Could this be my family that walked on these streets? Prayed at this synagogue? Perished in a similar place? Everything about the journey – the smells of food I remember from my home in Kiev Ukraine, visiting the city of Lodz where my grandfather was born, reawakened intuitive understanding of Polish language, meeting Israeli students on the streets of Warsaw and much more – made me reconnect with my own past and sharpened the understanding of the present. Many of us were talking how essential this experience and how important it is for the students to be interested in their own past in order to understand what Poland used to be and is today.

Educational rationale:

The aim of this exercise is to engage students in a deep conversation about their belonging, identity and Jewish heritage in unexpected and creative way. "I am from" poem template guides students in creating poems from your own experiences and personality. When those poems are shared, the group could reflect on one's early life, family and values as well as on common denominators, both Jewish and universal, found in those stories.

I think there are two ways to approach this exercise:

- a) Hand it out as "homework" to students who take part in group process.
- Or
- b) Facilitate an entire session around this exercise, in a very intimate and relaxed setting. In that case, some students might need 30-45 minutes to write it down.

Note to the facilitator:

The facilitator can start with sharing the original poem by George Ella Lyon or by talking about importance of "know where are you from". Because some individuals will include very personal information, some may be hesitant to read their poems, even in small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their poems first. Consider sharing your poem before asking students to write their own pieces.

In order to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share her or his story, you might consider breaking the group into diverse small groups, if necessary.

If you're using this as a final activity, not much processing is necessary. Encourage applause and thank students for sharing their poetry. If you use this activity as part of the preparation to the delegation/topic, consider using the processing questions included in this exercise.



Directions to the participants:

Think about what makes you YOU. Take 20 to 30 minutes to write a poem called “I am from”. To do so, fill in the blanks of the attached poem template, in handwriting.

Where I’m From

I am from

_____ *(a specific item from your childhood home)*

from

_____ *(two products or objects from your past)*

I am from

_____ *(a phrase describing your childhood home)*

and

_____ *(more description of your childhood home)*

I am from

_____ *(a plant, tree or natural item from your past)*

whose

_____ *(personify that natural item)*

I am from

_____ *(two objects from your past)*

from

_____ and _____
(a family name) (another family name)

I am from

_____ and _____
(a family trait or tendency) (another family trait or tendency)

and from

_____ *(another family trait, habit or tendency)*

from



(another family trait, habit or tendency)

I am from

(a religious phrase or memory)

I am from

_____ and _____

(an ancestor) (another ancestor)

from

(two foods from your family history)

from

(a specific event in the life of an ancestor)

and from

(another detail from the life of an ancestor)

(a memory or object you had as a child)

I am from those moments

(conclude by finishing this thought or by repeating a line or idea from earlier in the poem)

Questions for discussion:



- How did it feel to write this poem? How did it feel listening to others?
- What did you discover about yourself or other group members?
- What were some commonalities across poems? Did any of this surprise you?

After the activity:

This exercise can bring the group closer together and assist them in exploring their own Jewish heritage prior to their visit to Poland. Its result will be unique, very personal. Beyond the group, it can be shared with family members or exhibited on your building/ campus as a standalone or combined with photographs from the delegation.

This activity also can be an excellent closing activity, upon your return from Poland. It can allow students to re-connect at a self-defined and human level at the end of an experience which may have helped them to discover additional layers on their own personal stories.

Advanced activity mode: As someone with keen interest in exploring digital storytelling, I believe that those poems, if prepared thoughtfully, could be transformed into a brief 2-3 min digital stories. Essentially, those are simple multimedia movies that combine photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and often a narrative voice. A comprehensive resource on digital storytelling can be found here: <http://courseweb.lis.illinois.edu/~jevogel2/lis506/howto.html>.