

American Writers Museum “My America” curriculum outline

Preparing for the exhibit (to be completed on your own)

Time needed: About 15 minutes

Student learning objective: To activate and build background knowledge related to the themes students will explore while watching the videos online on our website

Instructions

- 1) Have each student review the four themes: motivation, identity, influences, and the meaning of “American”. **Start exploring videos at:** my-america.org/exhibit
- 2) Optional: Students may also explore the additional themes such as languages, process, “othering”, journey, community, duality and home.
- 3) Have each student write about the opening question suggested for each theme, with a focus on activating prior knowledge and making personal connections.

Opening questions for each theme

Motivation: What motivates you and your friends to share stories that reveal personal experiences?

Identity: What terms would you use to describe your own identity and why?

Influences: Who or what has most influenced your opinions about people and the world?

Meaning of “American”: How would you describe what it means to be “American”?

Encountering and responding to the videos

Viewing and noting responses

Student learning objective: To watch selected author videos purposefully in order to gather responses that will later be synthesized in writing.

Time needed: About 40 minutes

Instructions

- 1) Have students watch four to six video clips of authors addressing each theme (Motivation, Identity, Influences and Meaning of “American”).
- 2) Have students write a response to the question related to each theme, using the final portion of the graphic organizer.

Writing questions for each theme

- **Motivation:** What are the most important motivations these authors have for writing about their experiences of coming to the United States from another country?
- **Identity:** In what ways did coming to the United States from another country shape the way these authors think of their identities?
- **Influences:** What were the most important influences on their own writing that these authors shared?
- **Meaning of “American”:** How did these authors describe how they define being “American” and how they see themselves in relationship to that idea?

Additional questions:

- **Identity:** What other factors influenced these authors to write?
- **Influences:** Are there cultural influences like music, food, film or art that influence the authors’ writing?
- **Home:** What does “home” mean to you? Do you share aspects of home with any of the authors featured in the videos?
- **Language:** Describe how the authors’ writing is influenced by speaking or understanding multiple languages

Further exploration (if an online discussion board is available for the class)

Shared Inquiry discussion

Student learning objective: To synthesize and evaluate ideas in response to the exhibit by reading others' reactions, supporting them with specific details.

Class time needed: 30-45 minutes

Instructions

- 1) Choose one of the suggested focus questions on the facing page, and ask students to write a brief response to it. Encourage students to look back at the notes they made while watching the videos to find specifics that will help them explain their ideas.
- 2) Share the following discussion guidelines with students:
 - Support your ideas with details from the videos, so everyone can follow your points.
 - Listen to other participants and respond to them directly.
 - Expect the leader to focus on asking questions.
- 3) Ask follow-up questions such as those suggested on the facing page to help students develop ideas, give evidence, and respond to each other. To keep the focus on students' thinking, avoid giving your opinion or praising specific answers.

Suggested discussion focus questions (choose one):

- What are the most important ways immigrants have shaped American literature?
- How has experiencing this exhibit expanded or changed your ideas about writing and immigration?

Sample follow-up questions:

- What in the videos made you think that?
- Can you share a quotation from an author that supports that idea?
- When you write [word or phrase], what do you mean?
- Why is that idea important?