

**American Writers Museum
American Identities
Teacher Material**

Prior to Attendance with AWM

1. Description of Museum

Mission: The American Writers Museum will:

- Educate the public about American writers – past and present
- Engage visitors to the Museum in exploring the many exciting worlds created by the spoken and written word
- Enrich and deepen appreciation for good writing in all its forms
- Inspire visitors to discover, or rediscover, a love of reading and writing

Through elaborate virtual exhibits, as well as compelling programming, the American Writers Museum strives to educate, enrich, provoke, and inspire the public.

Located at 180 N Michigan Ave, AWM is on Chicago's Cultural Mile. Its galleries offer visitors a sweeping history of United States literature from Native American storytelling traditions to today's innovative works through interactive, digital touch-screen exhibits, reading spaces and encounters with familiar and unfamiliar works.

2. Description of American Identities

Themes are a central point of any written piece. Various themes are woven throughout American pieces to highlight important events or topics of the time. This exploration, American Identities, will ask students to critically think about these essential questions: What does it mean to be an American? How has the American identity changed over time? What does the American Identity look like today? Students will explore the virtual exhibit with a focus on a subtheme of the American Identity: race, religion, gender and national origin.

Starting as a whole class, introduce the essential questions provided to identify students' prior knowledge to the themes and content in the virtual exhibit. Next, either individually or in small groups, students will explore the virtual exhibit while focusing on one sub theme of the American Identity. Students will read through the various written pieces and explore the content to find examples of their given subtheme. Additionally, students will create their own writing piece with a prompt given at the beginning of the page. This can be added on the blog as an option or another form of sharing digitally.

American Identities is ideal for students in 8th-12th Grade levels. Many of the activities, both the virtual content and the extension activities, can be adapted to varying classrooms within this age group.

Time Frame:

We suggest using at least 2 class sessions or 1-hour block to review the virtual exhibit content as well as going through the educational material.

Standards: Common Core Standards (Grades 9-10)

- **RL.9-10.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RL.9-10.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in details its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text
- **W.9-10.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

3. Recommended Classroom Extensions Prior to AWM

- Discuss the theme of identity and how it has been seen throughout already read novels, poems, etc.
- Define and identify examples of sub themes focused within the virtual exhibit (race, religion, gender, and national origin.)
- Read and analyze a variety of written works.
- Compare two perspectives of an event or theme
 - Example: Compare poems “I hear America Singing” and “I too hear America”

Classroom Extensions After American Voices virtual exploration

Below are classroom activities that can be completed after visiting the AWM. Feel free to use these extensions in your own classroom using the materials completed during the virtual exploration.

- Retell or create a story read in class, but write with the focus on perspective of the sub theme explored in class.
 - Example: Retell a portion of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* with an emphasis on the subtheme of national origin identity.
 - Example: Create a story that highlights the theme of American Identity of race.
- Find current events related to the sub themes and discuss the current day American Identity. Possibly extend this to comparing it to examples of written pieces from the virtual exhibit.
- Focusing on an American author seen in the virtual exhibit, discuss a current or historical event and identify the author’s perspective on the event. Assign students or small groups various authors to have them present or discuss the author’s perspective.