Objective: The main objective of Where I’m From is to get the students comfortable: with each other, with writing, with finding topics that matters to them. I am careful here to be much more of a cheerleader than an editor; I want them to get their ideas out, and I want them to feel comfortable taking risks in their idea-formation and their writing. I also hope that this class helps to begin building a year-long tightly-knit writing community.

Supplies: blown up Graphic Organizer for my own “I am From,” markers, my “I am From”, Ipod, speakers. Students should have journals and pens.

Scripted Lessons

Where I’m From

Welcome! How’s everybody doing today? Let me start by asking you guys a question. Has anyone ever felt like people saw them differently than they really were? Or, more narrowly than they really were? Let me give you an example...maybe you’re the “smart” one, or the “tough’ one, or the “athletic” one. Yeah?

So I’m going to ask you guys to do something challenging today...it’ll be fun, but you’re going to have to step out of your comfort zone a little bit. I want to get to know all of you, and I know that your classmates want to get to know you. More importantly, we all have this need to let the people in our lives know who we really are, don’t we?

So today we’re going to do an activity called “I am From.” I’m going to read mine, then I’m going to ask you to create your own....maybe some of you have written poetry or raps before, maybe some of you are great artists....maybe some of you haven’t written at all. That’s OK.

Let me read mine first. (Read my “I am From”)

Now I’ll read some examples by other young people in Philadelphia. (Reference relevant examples from Writers Matter)

OK. So what is I am From? Let’s take a look at this graphic organizer here. What makes you who you are today? People, family, friends, school, neighborhood, talents, interests, music, important experiences, favorite T.V. shows, movies, dreams, and anything else that makes up you! You can do it artistically, or you can do write it in the style of a poem, or you can write it like a rap. Make it unique to you.

If you want, you can start by doing a graphic organizer. Take your time...if you only get a few lines, that’s OK. The next time I see you, we’ll start to share with the group (we may begin that process today, in fact!)
I’m going to play a song called “Where I’m From” by Digable Planets and “Philadelphia” by Kev Michael for those of you who are more comfortable thinking musically/rhythmically.

(Provide the rest of the class period for quiet writing. Circulate, check in, and offer support and feedback. Try to touch base with all students. Pull students who are struggling aside for longer periods to probe/ask questions that will get them started).

When we come back together next time, we’ll share our I am From’s. If you’re shy, you can certainly ask another student or me to read it for you! I’m excited to see them!

**Give students the time they need to finish a good draft of their I am From’s in their journals (a week seems to be a good amount of time for this).

Day 2:
Objective: As many students share their I am From’s as possible.

Supplies: Paper, Markers. My “Where I’m Going” graphic organizer and poem. Students should have journals and pens.

Let’s share! I encourage everybody to read at least part of theirs, so we can get to know you! Any brave souls want to begin?

Where I’m Going

Remember what you did for Where I’m From? I’d like for you to take it a step further. “Where I’m Going” is asking you to imagine your life in the future....what activities are you doing in high school? What college are you going to? What is your job going to be? Where are you going to live? Be as creative with this as possible!

Again, I encourage you to use a graphic organizer. Take a look at mine! See how I have different categories, and then a few ideas in each of the categories? I may not use all of them, but they give me a “bank” of ideas I can go to when I’m stuck.

Let me read my Where I’m Going poem to you.

Ok, now it's time for you to get started on your own. I will make my way around the room to check in with each of you and help any of you who are stuck. Have fun!
I’m from double vision and double trouble,
our parents’ first children, me and my brother.
I’m from my sister’s ravenous reading and brilliant piano playing,
from my Dad’s jokes, sage advice and example
to my Mom’s tough, persistent, unconditional love.

I am from the Great Northeast to Manayunk,
Olney to Germantown.
I’m from T.G.I.F. to sports all weekend,
Saved by the Bell to Q102 and Y100.
I’m from “Sike!” and “That’s Decent,”
To “It’s did well, not did good.”

I’m from Catholic school through and through,
from a classroom observer to a classroom facilitator.
I’m from Resso, Judge, and Scranton.

I’m from the Dave Matthews Band and The Roots,
Talib Kweli and Mos Def, Robert Randolph and John Butler,
Common and Eric Clapton.
I am from 90’s music.

I am from David Foster Wallace and Kurt Vonnegut to
reading and reading and reading to
writing and writing and writing.

I’m from those dear to my heart,
Including the ones that I’ve lost,
my Grammy and my student Katina,
my Grandmom and my friend Brendan.
I’m from them and for them.

I’m from living in the shape of a question, like
“Where am I going?”

Where I’m Going by Steve Clark
I'm going to the land of my dreams
Somewhere over the Rainbow
And beyond

Playing guitar and saxophone solos
Dancing around, singing my songs
on a big stage
The fans (my fans) want more

I'm writing novels
and plays
passing to Lebron
shooting on goal with Landon Donovan

I'm playing with my kids in my humongozoid backyard
I'm holding hands with my beautiful wife
My friends live on my block
We hang out every night

I'm going to a place
where Global Warming has cooled down
Everybody has the job they want
We all laugh (I mean really laugh)
at least 10 times a day

Hey, Steve
Are we there yet?