



Visual Art

“Where are YOU from? Using Art to Celebrate Your Unique Students”

All Grade Levels
Lesson by Noemi Hernandez-Balcazar

This lesson may be adjusted according to grade level and is recommended to be done over the course of 3 to 5 one hour sessions.

Objectives

To explore the narrative qualities of art by identifying our own unique traits and creating a narrative tree sculpture based on us. Just like trees, the branches we grow are done through the acquisition of new skills and experiences. Students should realize how extraordinary they are in their core and how that shapes their “tree.”

Background

In many cultures across the world, trees represent life and how nature’s forces come together to create balance and harmony. Just like these Trees of Life, humans seek balance and harmony. Our lived experiences shape our tree, much like nature shapes trees. Trees are also a sign of rebirth and renewal. After winter is done, trees bud and bloom again, much like us after our own periods of winter.

We are all one extended family, shaped by life into our tree. No matter where we are from or what language we speak, we are growing and helping shape ourselves and others into a beautiful tree.

Where Are You From? by Yamile Saied Mendez is a children’s book that helps young people understand that they are much more than just the question, “Where are you from?” We are our experiences and our passions, as well.

Utah Core Standards

Utah Visual Art Core:

Standard 1.1.V.CR.6: Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.

Standard 1.3.V.CR.3: Experiment, plan, and make multiple works of art and design that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.

Standard 7–8.V.P.4: Express meaning through the presentation of artistic work by comparing and contrasting, viewing, and experiencing collections and exhibitions in different venues, actual and virtual; and by analyzing why and how an exhibition or collection may influence ideas, beliefs, and experiences.

Standard 1.1.V.P.3: Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.

Standard 1.1.V.R.2: Analyze how one’s understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

Standard 7–8.V.CO.3: Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses.

Standard 1.1.V.CO.2: Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Standard 1.2.V.CO.2: Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts, making connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

Standard 1.3.V.CO.1: Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

Standard 1.3.V.CO.2: Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society.



David Smith Harrison, *El Olivo, Granada*, 1996, intaglio/etching

Materials

- 8x12 cardboard or matboard sheet
- Hot glue, glue stick, and/or Elmer’s glue
- Aluminum foil and aluminum foil tape
- Paper clips
- Beads, rice, buttons, etc. (small decorative objects)
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Writing and coloring utensils (pens, colored pencils, crayons, etc.)



Theodore Milton Wassmer, *Springtime Ballet*, 1949, oil on canvas



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Lesson Plan

This lesson is best split up between multiple days, one hour each day:

- Session 1: Writing an “I Am” poem, identifying who we are and how that shapes our tree.
- Session 2: Planning our tree
- Session 3 (or more): Making our 3D tree



Wilson Ong, *Judgement of Tokyo*, 2002, oil on canvas

Session One

Crafting “I Am” Poems

These poems are a creative way for students to start thinking outside of the box in regards to things that define them. This is meant to be a free-writing type activity. No wrong answers, just creative thinking.

Here are some questions to help students while writing their “I Am” poems:

- What do you consider your core values?
- Which element of nature do you identify best with?
- What type of music represents you best today?
- What is your horoscope symbol? Do you feel like your horoscope represents you well?
- What are three things that are constant and repetitive in your life? (family, objects, animals, etc.)

Example of an “I Am” poem:

I am from Dark Chocolate and Hot Peppers
I am from Spaniards and Female Aztec Warriors
I am spicy, sweet, and complex like Mole

Session Two

Sketching and Planning Our Tree

After students have thought about what makes them unique, it’s now time to take those words and thoughts and construct a sculpture. But first we need to sketch and plan.

Introduce the idea of a Tree of Life. Explain that this is a narrative sculpture that will represent each student’s core values and experiences. Encourage creativity and imagination; it doesn’t need to look like a real tree.

Here are some questions to help students while sketching what their tree will look like:

- What do you think is a tree of life?
- What values will be represented as the core of your tree?
- Is the shape of your tree realistic or stylized?
- How can a tree of life represent you?
- How can you take the poem you wrote and turn it into a sculpture?



Wilford Wayne Kimball Jr., *The ODD (but seldom discussed) Green Bear Tragedy*, 2017, lithograph



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Session Three (or more)

Making Our Tree

After sketching and planning, the students should be ready to construct their tree. The trees will be made of aluminum foil and mounted on 8x12 cardboard or matboard sheets. Follow these steps with your students:

1. Give each student a sheet of cardboard or matboard, as well as some aluminum foil.
2. Cut and shape the aluminum foil as if you were making a broom.



3. Twist each of the skinner pieces and shape them into branches.



4. Attach the shaped tree to the cardboard or matboard sheet.
5. You can make leaves out of paper clips and aluminum tape.



6. Add other embellishments to the tree, like words, buttons, or any other materials you may have.

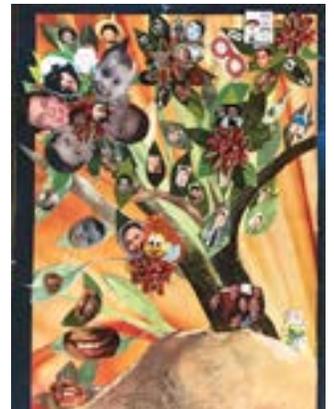


Student Examples



I am from caramel and sweet bread
 I am from Europeans rescued by Native Americans
 I am a sibling of the Popo and the Ixtla
 The smell of wet earth and cempasuchiltl revives me
 So does the idea of our traditions, the sound of guitars and mariachis, the fantastic stories of my parents and the singing of mermaids and lloronas in a full moon

I am from my family.
 My ancestors, son, and friends
 My people's soul is where I am from
 I am from land with aroma of coffee
 Green land and happy faces
 I am from eye care, glasses, lenses, clear vision and good future.
 It is where I am from...
 I am a poem
 I am not alone, I am from my ancestors, and a wild green place.
 I relate with others through being a daughter, a mom, and a caregiver.
 I am service.
 I share my talents and abilities.
 I am happy. I am Amanda.





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Conclusion

Ask students to evaluate their work and the work of their peers. You can have them present their work or just let them take a walk around the room and see the art themselves.

Prompt them with questions like:

- How is my tree similar to others?
- How is my tree different?
- Why is my tree similar or different?
- What did you learn about yourself or your classmates?

Adaptations

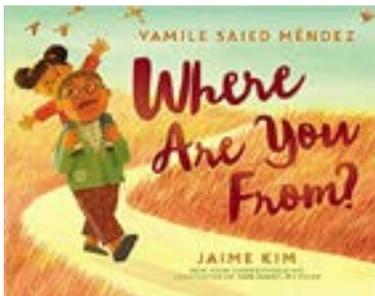
Trees can be made from any material, not just aluminum foil. You can make 2D trees with paper and colored pencils/markers. You can make full 3D trees with clay. You can make collage trees with different types of paper. Please utilize what is best for your classroom and budget.

Students can synthesize what they learned into a write-up to help them further their development in visual literacy.

For younger students, this can be done as a group or class activity.

Additional Resources

- *Where Are You From?* by Yamile Saied Mendez
<https://www.amazon.com/Where-Are-Yamile-Saied-M%C3%A9ndez/dp/0062839934>



- Information about the traditional Celtic Tree of Life, the Crann Bethadh
<https://irisharoundtheworld.com/celtic-tree-of-life-symbol/>

- Information about the traditional Mexican Tree of Life
<https://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/tree-of-life.html#.YTeW0o5KiUk>

- Short podcast from NPR about “I Am” poems
<https://www.npr.org/2019/08/19/748776222/memories-of->

Assesment

Student should now be familiar with the concept of Trees of Life. Students should be able to identify traits within themselves that they can translate to a visual narrative. Students should be able to identify what makes us all unique, and how that strengthens us as a whole human family.



Susan Deborah Madden, *The Last Leaves of Autumn*, 2009, fiber

Images from the Museum Permanent Collection

David Smith Harrison, *El Olivio Granada*, 1996, intaglio/etching

Theodore Milton Wassmer, *Springtime Ballet*, 1949, oil on canvas

Wilson Ong, *Judgement of Tokyo*, 2002, oil on canvas

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