



being me

On film, Dean Atta shows there are many ways to be a poet. After reading and discussing his poem I Come From, which raises interesting questions about identity, students collaborate to tell their own stories.

being me

AIMS

- To understand that we all have human rights
- To read and discuss poems about identity
- To celebrate and write about our identities

HUMAN RIGHTS FOCUS

Freedom of expression and identity

YOU'LL NEED

PowerPoint, speakers and internet access
Highlighter pens
Strips of paper, sheets of paper, sticky tack
Notebooks or folders (for students to keep their poetry in)

Film clip	How To Be A Poet by Dean Atta (on PowerPoint)
Poem	I Come From by Dean Atta (one per student)
Extension	Song of Myself by Walt Whitman

STARTER

Discuss who poets are.

- Can you name any? • What image comes to mind when you think of a poet?
- Are you a poet? (The answer is yes!)

Watch How To Be A Poet by Dean Atta (slide 2).

- Why should poets be free to express themselves?
- What do you think about poets and poetry now?

ACTIVITY 1

Ask students to read I Come From by Dean Atta. Encourage them to highlight or circle words and phrases that stand out as important or powerful, even if they don't know why, and to note down thoughts or questions.

Allow time for students to discuss their thoughts before asking:

- Tell me about this poem.
- What do you like/dislike?
- Is there anything that puzzles you?
- Do you notice any patterns? Pace? Rhythm?
- What does the poem tell us about the poet?
- What experiences is he trying to convey?
- How have the different parts of Dean's life contributed to who he is?
- Do you get a sense of the person he is?
- Does it trigger any feelings in you?
- Do you relate to anything in the poem?

Ask the class to think about what has shaped who they are. This could be a special memory, person, relationship, place, object, food, music, sport, fear, desire or formative experience – things that have played a part in their growing. You can model or encourage mind mapping for support if necessary.

On a strip of paper, ask each student to write 'I come from...', and complete the sentence (slide 3).

Divide the class into groups of four. Ask them to organise their strips of paper into the verse of a poem, adding extra strips if needed. This creates a collaborative poem which embodies and values who they all are as individuals. Stick the strips onto a piece of paper.

As a class, ask groups to read out their poem. Stick them on the board and discuss a sequence to create a class poem.

- Does it work?
- Why?
- What feeling does it leave the class with?

ACTIVITY 2

Ask students to write their own ‘I Come From’ poems. Model or encourage mind mapping for support if necessary.

While students are writing, create your own poem on the board or using a visualiser so that they can see you being a poet too. Show that crossing out, editing and rewriting is part of the writing.

Ask how the students felt writing about themselves and their identity. Share your experience. Did it feel safe or create a sense of vulnerability?

Look again at your poem and Dean Atta’s poem. Can you identify any human rights being enjoyed and denied in them? How does this make you feel?

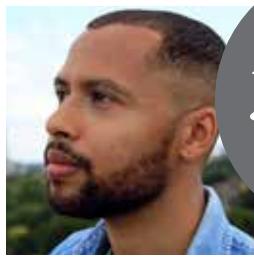
Hand out notebooks/folders for students to keep their poetry in.

EXTENSION

Ask students to read Song of Myself by Walt Whitman, then write a short poem starting with Walt’s first line ‘I celebrate myself, and sing myself’. The poem should use the first person and the present tense and celebrate who they are.

I COME FROM

By Dean Atta



POEMS

I come from shepherd's pie and Sunday roast
Jerk chicken and stuffed vine leaves
I come from travelling through my taste buds but loving
where I live

I come from a home that some would call broken
I come from D.I.Y. that never got done
I come from waiting by the phone for him to call

I come from waving the white flag to loneliness
I come from the rainbow flag and the union jack
I come from a British passport and an ever-ready suitcase

I come from jet fuel and fresh coconut water
I come from crossing oceans to find myself
I come from deep issues and shallow solutions

I come from a limited vocabulary but an unrestricted imagination
I come from a decent education and a marvellous mother
I come from being given permission to dream but choosing to wake up instead

I come from wherever I lay my head
I come from unanswered questions and unread books
Unnoticed effort and undelivered apologies and thanks

I come from who I trust and who I have left
I come from last year and last year and I don't notice how I've changed
I come from looking in the mirror and looking online to find myself

I come from stories, myths, legends and folk tales
I come from lullabies and pop songs, Hip Hop and poetry
I come from griots, grandmothers and her-story tellers

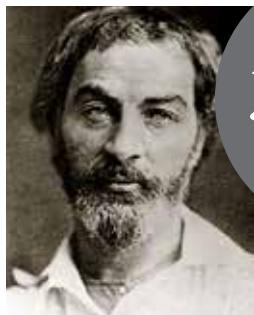
I come from published words and strangers' smiles
I come from my own pen but I see people torn apart like paper
Each a story or poem that never made it into a book.

(from) SONG OF MYSELF (1892 version)

By Walt Whitman

1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.



POEMS

I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.
Her mother shook out
The bed-clothes to find her –
But couldn't glimpse a wisp or a toe
All that rolled out was a great big zero.