

Name:

Date:

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Unit 1: Identity and Voice

Goal:

Explore who you are and how you can express yourself through writing, speaking, and creative work. You will be marked according to the rubric on the last page.

Part 1: Pre-Reading – Thinking About Yourself

Before you read or watch any text, answer:

- What does “identity” mean to you?

- Write down three words that describe you.

- Think of one story, song, or poem you’ve seen that connects to identity. What did it teach you?

Part 2: Reading / Viewing

Texts to Read or Watch: (poem and memoir found on pages 3 and 4)

- Poem: “*Still I Rise*” by Maya Angelou
- Short Memoir: “*Fish Cheeks*” by Amy Tan
- **Optional:** Spoken word video or song lyrics about identity

Instructions:

As you read or watch, answer these questions:

Comprehension Questions: Title: _____

1) Who is speaking in the text?

2) What challenges or experiences does the speaker face?

3) What message or lesson is the author trying to share?

Still I Rise

By Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Copyright Credit: Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise" from *And Still I Rise: A Book of Poems*. Copyright © 1978 by Maya Angelou. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Source: The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou (1994)

Fish Cheeks

Amy Tan

I fell in love with the minister's son the winter I turned fourteen. He was not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger. For Christmas I prayed for this blond-haired boy, Robert, and a slim new American nose.

When I found out that my parents had invited the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried. What would Robert think of our shabby Chinese Christmas? What would he think of our noisy Chinese relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but Chinese food? On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu. She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns. The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their backs crisscrossed with knife markings, so they resembled bicycle tires.

And then they arrived – the minister's family and all my relatives in a clamor of doorbells and rumpled Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.

Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them. My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert grimaced. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. "Amy, your favorite," he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear.

At the end of the meal my father leaned back and belched loudly, thanking my mother for her fine cooking. "It's a polite Chinese custom to show you are satisfied," explained my father to our astonished guests. Robert was looking down at his plate with a reddened face. The minister managed to muster up a quiet burp. I was stunned into silence for the rest of the night.

After everyone had gone, my mother said to me, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame."

And even though I didn't agree with her then, I knew that she understood how much I had suffered during the evening's dinner. It wasn't until many years later – long after I had gotten over my crush on Robert – that I was able to fully appreciate her lesson and the true purpose behind our particular menu. For Christmas Eve that year, she had chosen all of my favorite foods.

Vocabulary Check:

Choose **5** new words or phrases you don't know. Write:

- The word
- Its meaning
- A sentence using it

Reflection:

1) How do the experiences in the text relate to your own life?

2) Did anything surprise you or make you think differently about yourself?

Part 3: Writing Activity – My Story

Task: Write your own personal narrative, poem, or short reflection. You can use one of the prompts below or create your own:

Prompts:

- “I Am From...” – describe your family, culture, hobbies, or community.
- “A Moment That Shaped Me” – a short story about a meaningful experience.
- “What Makes Me Me” – a poem or paragraph about your strengths, interests, or personality.

Steps:

1. Brainstorm your ideas (use the box below).
2. **Draft** your story or poem.
3. **Revise** for clarity and flow.
4. **Optional:** Add a drawing, collage, or short video to enhance your work. (Bonus – teacher discretion)

Brainstorm Box:

Topic / Idea	Details / Memories	Feelings / Thoughts

Part 5: Visual Identity Map

Task: Create a visual identity map showing your personality, interests, family, and dreams using words, drawings, or images.

Instructions:

1. Write your name or a symbol in the center of your page.
2. Draw 4–6 branches for different parts of your identity, such as:
 - Family & Friends
 - Interests & Hobbies
 - Personality & Values
 - Culture & Background
 - Dreams & Goals
3. Add words, pictures, or symbols to each branch to show who you are.
4. Write 3–5 sentences explaining your map: what it shows about you and what you learned.

Tip: Be creative! There's no right or wrong way—make it personal.

Explanation of your Map:

Visual Identity Map

Assessment Rubric:

Criterion	Excellent (9–10 Points)	Good (7–8 Points)	Satisfactory (5–6 Points)	Needs Improvement (1–4 Points)	Points
Part 1: Pre-Reading & Self-Awareness	Responses are insightful , mature, and demonstrate a highly sophisticated understanding of "identity." The descriptive words are specific and well-chosen, and the connection to the external text/song is analytical and deep.	Responses are clear and thoughtful. Good self-awareness is shown in the definition and descriptive words. The connection to the external text/song is logical and fully explained.	Responses are general or brief, showing a basic level of self-awareness. The connection to the external text/song is vague or simple, or one element is missing.	Responses are superficial, incomplete, or lack a clear definition of identity or connection to the required elements (words/story).	/10
Part 2: Comprehension & Reflection	Comprehension questions are fully answered with specific, detailed evidence from the texts. Vocabulary is complete and used correctly. The personal reflection shows deep, nuanced connection and insight.	Comprehension answers are accurate and relevant to the texts. Vocabulary is mostly complete and correctly used. The personal reflection is thoughtful and clearly relates the texts' themes to the student's life.	Comprehension answers are correct but brief or lack specific detail. Vocabulary is partially completed or contains errors. Personal reflection is vague or lacks depth.	Comprehension answers are inaccurate, or the section is incomplete. Vocabulary is missing or poorly attempted. Personal reflection is superficial or irrelevant.	/10
Part 3: Writing Activity – My Story	The narrative/poem is highly engaging, original, and effectively uses descriptive language and a strong voice. It clearly addresses the prompt. It shows evidence of a thorough revision process with significant improvement between the draft and revised copy.	The narrative/poem is clear, well-structured, and addresses the chosen prompt effectively. The revision shows noticeable and logical improvement in clarity or flow from the draft.	The piece is completed, but the writing is generic, lacks engaging detail, or has frequent mechanical errors. The revision is minimal or indiscernible.	The piece is incomplete, unpolished, or does not clearly address the chosen prompt. The writing process steps are absent or not followed.	/10
Part 4: Visual Identity Map	The map is highly creative, visually organized, and includes 4–6 detailed, distinct branches with well-chosen symbols/words. The accompanying explanation is insightful and details what the map shows and what was learned.	The map is clear, complete with 4–6 relevant branches and uses appropriate visuals/words. The explanation is accurate and clearly addresses what the map shows about the student.	The map is basic or cluttered, with some branches lacking detail or relevance. The explanation is brief, generic, or only covers a few components of the map.	The map is incomplete (fewer than 4 branches), lacks visual effort, or the explanation is missing, irrelevant, or fails to connect the visuals to the student's identity.	/10