

Writing Spaces

Assignments & Activities Archive

Intersectional Identity Photo Essay

Jackie Mohan

This assignment is a selection from the *Writing Spaces* Assignment and Activity Archive, an open access companion resource to the Writing Spaces open textbook series.

To access additional selections, visit: <http://writingspaces.org/aaa>.

Assignment and activity selections © 2024 by the respective authors. Unless otherwise stated, these works are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) and are subject to the Writing Spaces Terms of Use. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>, email info@creativecommons.org, or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. To view the Writing Spaces Terms of Use, visit <http://writingspaces.org/terms-of-use>.

All rights reserved. For permission to reprint, please contact the author(s) of the individual articles, who are the respective copyright owners.

Intersectional Identity Photo Essay

Jackie Mohan

Overview

In this assignment, students craft a photo essay about their identity, through which they hone basic writing skills, understand genre, and develop an understanding of voice, tone, and style. Intersectionality refers to how we can better understand each person's lived experiences in the world by examining how the different parts of their identity interact (Crenshaw). The idea of intersectionality helps students think about which aspects of their identity feel the most defining, how those aspects relate to each other, and how to convey this to their audience. In this essay, students focus on five parts, or facets, of their identity, relying on their own unique voice and experiences.

In their photo essays, students include a title, introduction section, each facet of their identity represented by a photo (may be a photo of their own or a stock photo) and written explanation, before they wrap up their essay with a concluding section.

In the written explanation for each facet, students address the following: Why is this facet an important, defining part of yourself? How does it relate to, or intersect with, other parts of your identity? How does it relate to the larger society in which you live? Consider connections to communities, culture, background, and privilege.

Students should choose the facets that feel most defining at this point in their lives, such as gender identity, racial group, religion, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, culture, ability/disability, language, hobbies, fandoms, family, etc. Since students are discussing their own identities, this assignment provides a venue to discuss the importance of linguistic diversity and validating students' own voices in telling their stories (Baker-Bell).

Although this essay is primarily in the genre of memoir writing, students will also find it necessary to bring in conventions of descriptive writing, definition writing, and narratives as they explain their facets and illustrate them with moments, memories, and anecdotes in this multimodal, hybrid assignment.

Time Commitment

3-4 weeks

Materials

Students can use any platform as long as it incorporates both text and photos and the final product is shareable and accessible. Platform options include Wakelet, Adobe Creative Cloud Express, Canva, Google Sites, Wix, or Wordpress.

Assignment Process

- Students will first be introduced to the basic conventions of writing within the genres of memoir, descriptive, definition, and narrative compositions. Students use memoir conventions like reflection to focus on writing about their lives, narrative conventions to hone skills in storytelling as they bring in memories and experiences, and descriptive and definition conventions to expand the sections on each facet of their identity with specificity and detail.
- Next, students read a variety of both instructional readings and identity narratives. Instructional readings should relate to the genres and/or the importance of linguistic diversity and students incorporating their own voice as they write about their identities. Examples of instructional readings include “Workin’ Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing” by Sarah P. Alvarez, Amy J. Wan, and Eunjeong Lee and “Storytelling, Narration, and the ‘Who I Am’ Story”

by Catherine Ramsdell, both from *Writing Spaces*. The identity narratives provide examples for students, and also a basis from which to see how professional writers incorporate conventions from different genres. Identity narratives may include texts such as the short essays “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan and “Superman and Me” by Sherman Alexie.

- Finally, students begin the writing process with a variety of prewriting activities, including freewrites brainstorming facets of their identity, then cluster maps to help them specify memories and details for each facet. This prewriting leads into composing their first rough draft. Students then work on peer review and revision in small groups for one week before submitting final drafts.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this assignment will:

- Hone skills in and learn the conventions of writing for specific genres and rhetorical situations, with focus is on memoir writing supported by descriptive, definition, and narrative genres
- Experiment with writing in the medium of a photo essay, choosing photos to support and enhance their writing
- Think critically about, analyze, and reflect on different facets that compose their identity, then convey those thoughts clearly to an audience
- Construct a narrative of their identity, using techniques and tools observed and analyzed in assigned readings
- Learn about the prewriting, drafting, and revising stages of the writing process

Learning Accommodations

- Students may choose their own medium for this assignment, as long as the platform allows them to create a shareable, accessible file or link and incorporate both photos and text. I find it helpful to demonstrate one platform as an option in class, along with written instructions and a video tutorial for asynchronous reference.
- To accommodate student privacy, I recommend including a disclaimer similar to the following: “Writing about your identity is very personal. Be aware that you will be sharing your work with classmates for peer review, with myself for grading, and potentially with other instructors for assessment purposes. Please do not include anything you are not comfortable sharing.”

Works Cited

- Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. Routledge, 2020.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “The Urgency of Intersectionality.” *TEDWomen*, October 2016.
https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en

Further Reading

- Alexie, Sherman. “Superman and Me.” *The Most Wonderful Books: Writers on Discovering the Pleasures of Reading*, edited by Michael Dorris and Emilie Buchwald, Milkweed Editions, 26 August 1997.
- Alvarez, Sara P., Amy J. Wan, and Eunjeong Lee. “Workin’ Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing.” *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, volume 4, edited by Dana Driscoll, Megan Heise, Mary Stewart, and Matthew Vetter,

Parlor Press, 2022, 1-17.

Chen Chen. "Poem in Noisy Mouthfuls." *When I Grow Up I Want to be a List of Further Possibilities*, BOA Editions, 2017.

Giovanelli, Laura. "Strong Writers and Writing Don't Need Revision." *Bad Ideas About Writing*, edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe, WVU Libraries, 2017, 104-108.

Lamott, Anne. "Shitty First Drafts." *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*, edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs, Macmillan Learning, 1994, 527-31.

Ramsdell, Catherine. "Storytelling, Narration, and the 'Who I Am' Story." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, volume 2, edited by Charley Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky, Parlor Press, 2011, 270-285.

Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue." *The Threepenny Review*, no. 43, 1990, 7-8.