

## LESSON PLAN TITLE: What Are You Made Of?

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**Writer-in-Residence:** Reynaldo Hinojosa Jr

**Grade Level:** High School

**Model Works Used:** Biracial Hair by Zora Howard

**Literary Learning objective(s):** Students will be able to determine symbolism, imagery, metaphor, cultural identity, and alliteration.

**Themes:** biracial identity

**MDE/SEL Standards:** Labeling one's emotions, regulating emotions, communicating clearly, perspective, knowledge of language

**Materials Needed:** Pencil and paper, internet and computer

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### Opening Activity (3 - 5 min)

Most of the time we associate an emotion with a color, but what about a sound, a texture, or scent? Let's use our five senses to express how we're feeling. Be vivid, be large, or be small, but be clear with your image, sound, texture, scent, or taste. Choose at least three.

For example:

I feel like burnt ash

I am feeling like a soft whisper this morning

I feel like sandpaper in the evening

### Pre-Discussion

We are more than just a name. We are a series of things, events, experiences, and communities. When we identify ourselves, we are not just saying a name, we are admitting to a long history of people that came before us. Some fought to be here, some died to be here, and others took from those that had been living here already. You are not you without the many people that came together to give you a place in this world. Think about where you come from. Think about who you came from. Think about all the little things that make you today, all the things you like or enjoy, all the dreams you hold, all the failures and successes. Think about the physical objects that define you and the non-physical experiences or moments that shaped you. Remember, you are more than just a name, show me who you are and what you are made of.

### Model Poem Discussion (5 - 10 min)

Keeping these thoughts in mind, let's follow along the poem "Biracial Hair" by Zora Howard. Listen to how she describes one aspect of her identity and how deep it goes into expressing who she is and where she came from. Listen to the imagery, the sounds she

uses, and the history she builds to create this poem. Also, take note of the duality in which she is made of: the physical and non-physical attributes that define her.

Youtube Link: [26 Bi-Racial Hair](#)

### **Bi-Racial Hair**

By Zora Howard

I have bi-racial hair  
Pantene Pro-V waves on the top  
Easy to comb style rock  
Until I encounter my naps  
I'm not talking about those cute detangle with the spray naps  
I'm talking about those slave naps like  
No comb brush or man can handle the naps I am naps like  
No way you are touching my hair naps like  
Back 10 feet up or we can dance naps  
Those naps like-  
DAMN!  
I have bi-racial hair  
Those smooth side silk threads hanging all through my mane  
Until you get to the back and encounter the jungle in which you can find Tarzan and Jane  
In the front you forget and relax in pleasure  
Until you get to the back and remember pain  
Baby soft baby hair slicked back with that good 4 dollar pomade  
That goes roots and biscuits and tangles  
Soaked with that same olive oil in that spaghetti sauce mom made  
I have bi-racial hair  
Combs attracted to run freely in my fine breezy split it with the most stressing parts you  
Can make until it gets to the back and  
Breaks  
I have bi-racial hair  
Like-  
Mama said all she could do it that was 2 big braids  
And sometimes that was too much  
So she left half of it free  
Hours in the mirror  
Hours in the mirror  
Convincing myself I looked just like Alicia Keys  
I have bi-racial hair  
Because I have bi-racial blood

I'm not talking about that cute they met then fell in love blood  
I'm talking about that slave raped six times by the master  
Birthing 6 mixed babies later hung blood  
I'm talking about that cross burning in the mud blood  
And you call me a mud blood  
Slit my wrist  
My blood does not excrete in black and white  
I dream in verse and in red  
Like what dripped from Emmett Till's lips when he was killed for breaking down color lines  
Bi-racial never dares question the story told by her middle school  
Bi-racial who succumbs to the abuse of the kids in her middle school  
Cause her lack of roots had them calling her an Oreo  
"But her skin isn't that dark so more like a cinnamon vanilla wafer  
More mulatto, that's more I like it, a reverse mulatto"  
I AM NOT A FUCKING COOKIE OR A BERRY!  
My roots are deep too  
My bi-racial roots are not blind  
Or more than cotton soft  
Because my blood were in the sun picking cotton too  
A thousand times discredit for my race  
Discredit from my history y'all never get  
Cause there's no captions about my truth in textbooks  
Let textbooks be your truth  
And sprinkle the ashes of your history into streams  
I scream for a day someplace where  
Maybe y'all all accept me  
Maybe we need to wake up and get a new point of view  
Like something new  
Or maybe it's time for me to make up my own race  
Fill up my high yellow belly bare hip scanty fingers  
No cheek having and bi-racial hair  
Maybe I'll be green cause my people drove me there  
Ya'll people drove me there  
With my tender heart  
Tender head  
And bi-racial hair

Mulatto - a person of mixed white and black ancestry, especially a person with one white and one black parent. (offensive term)

Emmett Till - was a 14-year-old African American who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, after being accused of offending a white woman in her family's grocery store.

### Prewriting (10 min)

Let's start with a list of 1) objects, 2) experiences, 3) feelings, and 4) things you enjoy. Write at least five and begin with "I am" for each. Be specific and descriptive if possible! I provided examples for each category.

#### Objects:

1. I am stone and earth
2. I am
3. I am
4. I am
5. I am

#### Experiences:

1. I am Fiesta and Tejano music
2. I am
3. I am
4. I am
5. I am

#### Feelings:

1. I am melancholy, nostalgic
2. I am
3. I am
4. I am
5. I am

#### Things you enjoy doing:

1. I am sleep and reading books
2. I am
3. I am
4. I am
5. I am

### Writing Prompt (10 - 15 min)

Now we have a collection of images, moments, experiences, and pieces of you, let's piece them together. Let's begin a stanza with "I am" and build a poem connecting the pieces with at least three instances from each category. This is where your creativity comes in. Expand them. Connect the pieces to make your lines. For example:

I am a stone in the earth where songs of Selena *bailar esta cumbia*  
In nostalgia I remember my earth, I remember the melancholy of my ancestors  
on the field of tears and blood  
Here, I carry my books to sleep and dream of more lives I lived

Think about rhythm, listen to the sound of your words, read what you have aloud. Remember Zora Howard's use of alliteration, repetition (I have bi-racial hair), rhyme, historical context, metaphor/simile, and vivid use of imagery.

**Share / Reflect (5 min)**

Remember, this is just a rough draft and the beginning of an idea. But it should be clear enough to get a sense of who you are, where you come from, and what you are made of. If you feel comfortable enough to share with someone, be it family members, friends, or the class, feel free to do so.

If you want feedback, let me know.

Some things to consider:

What was challenging about writing this poem?

How did writing this poem make you think about you and your community?

How did writing this poem make you feel?

**Check/Highlight all that apply**

- Text by a contemporary/diverse author
- Translated text
- Visual Thinking Strategies
- Close reading or other analysis
- At least one step of the writing process
- Planning & Reflection Strategy
- New device, concept or theme
- Social-Emotional Learning
  - Self-Management
  - Social Awareness
  - Relationship Skills
  - Responsible-Decision Making
  - Self-Awareness