
Where I'm From

— A Unit on Identity —

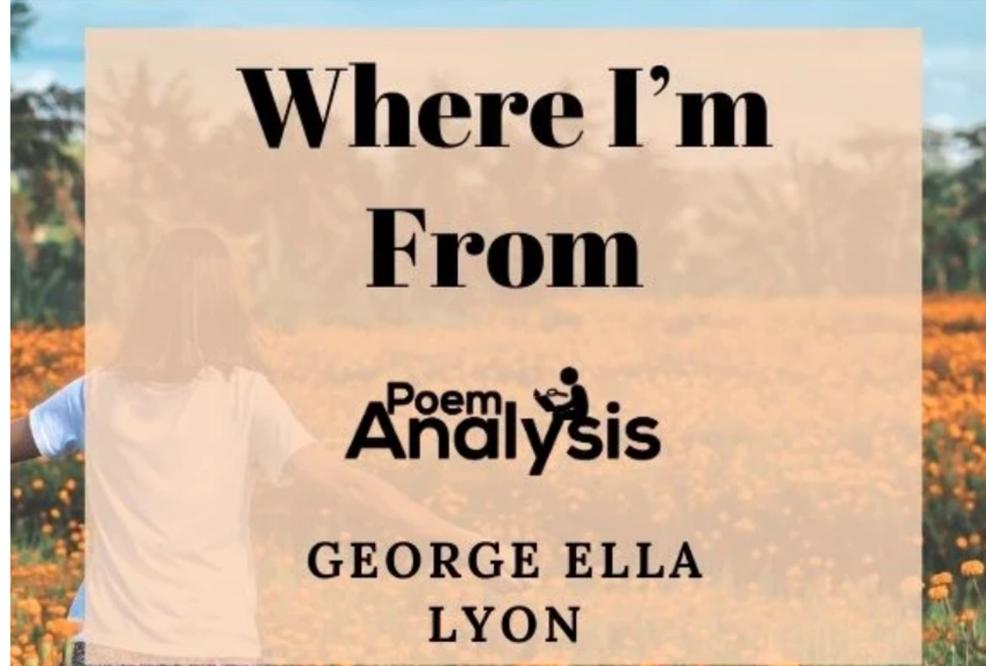
From Tommy Buteau and Dionne Douglas, via

Edutopia

George Ella Lyon

George Ella Lyon (1949 -) is the author of award-winning children's books, including *Catalpa*, a book of poetry that won the Appalachian Book of the Year award, and the novel *With a Hammer for My Heart*.

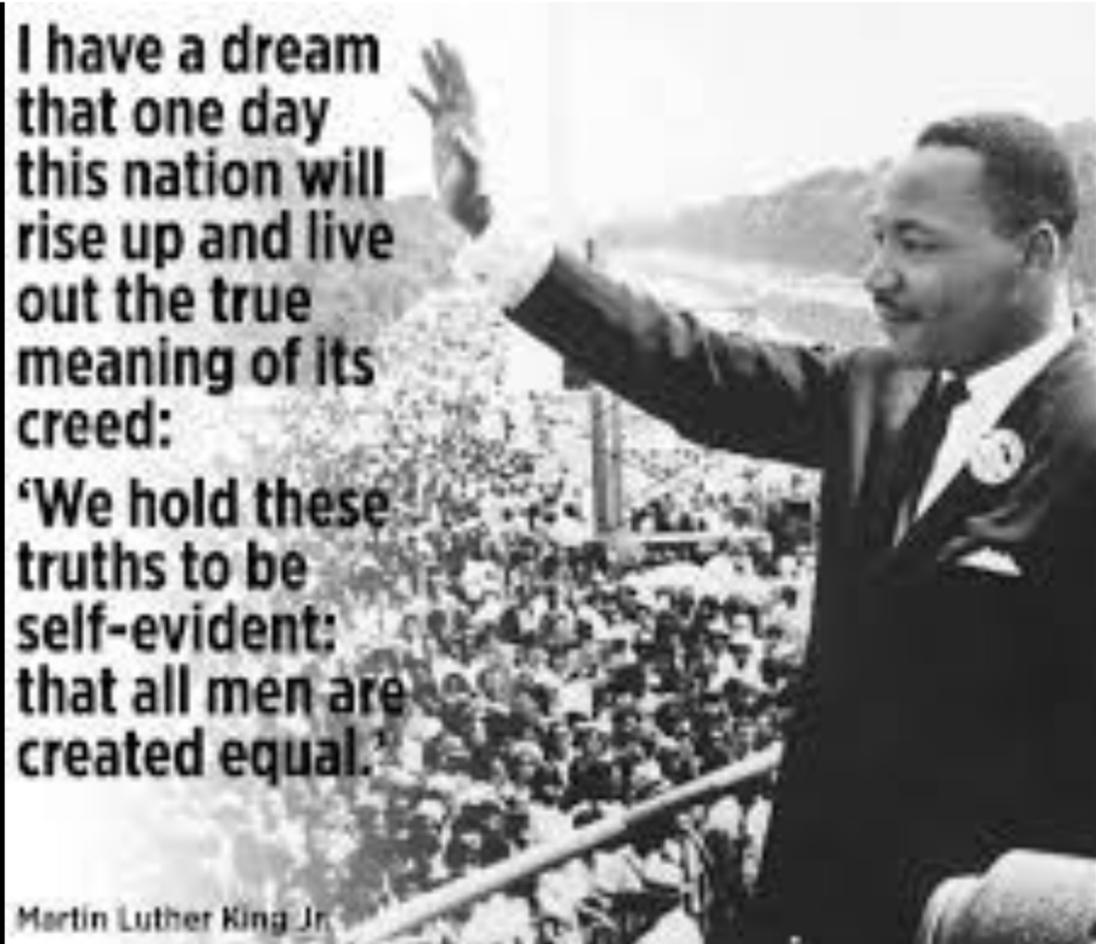
Lyon is often asked about her unusual first name. On her website, she explains that she was named after her uncle George and her aunt Ella.



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Anaphora

Notice the writer's use of anaphora—the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a line. Lyon repeats “I am from” (or “I’m from”) in each stanza. This repetition creates a pattern that emphasizes her thematic idea—her origins and history. Each use of the phrase “I am from” reveals something about her identity.



**I have a dream
that one day
this nation will
rise up and live
out the true
meaning of its
creed:**

**‘We hold these
truths to be
self-evident:
that all men are
created equal.’**

Martin Luther King Jr.

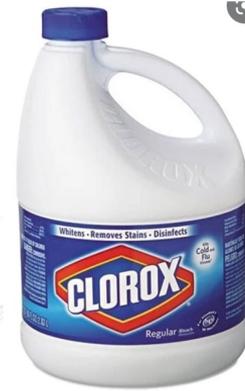
While Reading

Writers of fiction and nonfiction use imagery to paint pictures in the reader's mind. As you read the poem on the next page, mark the text for images that Lyon uses to show where and what she is from.

Where I'm From

by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothes-pins
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch Elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

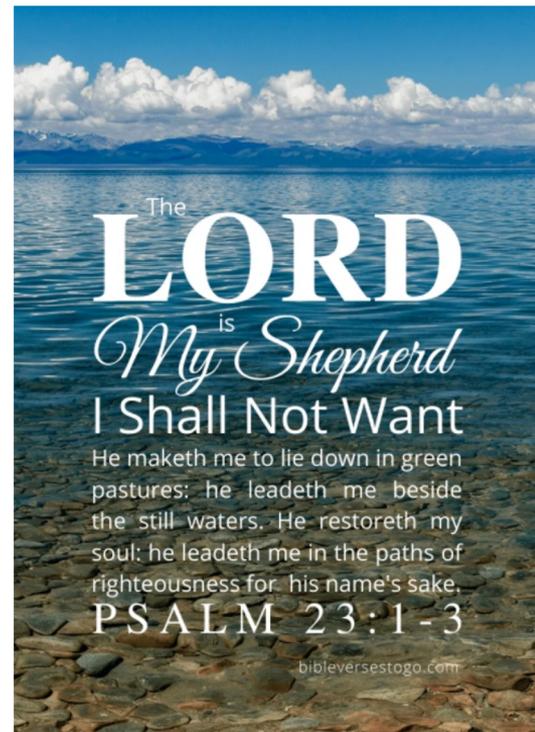


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I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul

15

with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.



I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces

25

to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments—
snapped before I budded—
leaf-fall from the family tree.



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After Reading

1. Annotate in groups what sensory details the narrator include to show her family culture?

Tactile (touch), Visual, gustatory (taste), auditory (sound), olfactory (smell)

2. How do the repeated elements of this poem provide structure to the free verse?

3. How do the stanzas provide structure? Write your ideas here and then share with a partner or group.

Day 2

Thoughts on the Poem

This is not about a specific location. It is a mixture of images that she remembers as important from her childhood.

It is interesting to see the structure organization as well (Self, Others, Reflective Stanzas). It moves from I am from to I'm from, to From, to nothing.

Culture

Structure

Convey Through Senses

Things that help the poem gain life:

Sensory detail

Important People

Foods

Locations

Important messages you remember

Neighborhood characters

Important items.

Scars

Writing Prompt

Write your own “Where I’m From” poem, emulating the style of George Ella Lyon. Consider using anaphora to create rhythm. Use an effective pattern to convey aspects of your culture.