

## Where I'm From Poetry Assignment

Mr. Coia

8<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts

Assignment: Do you ever get annoyed when people ask, "Where are you from?" For you, this may have a variety of answers. This assignment will answer that question not with places, but with moments and memories. Following the examples of Lauryn Hill's song and George Ella Lyons's published poem, you will create your own poem to explain where you are from.

### Part I: Creating a List

- Listen to Lauryn Hill's "Every Ghetto, Every City." Underline interesting phrases that describe her childhood.
- Read "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon; underline vivid images.
- Read student examples.
- Brainstorm a list of your own childhood memories.
- Put in a list of the five senses.
- Next, go beyond places. Describe colors, people, and objects.
- Then, try to remember sayings from others.
- Be as specific as possible.
- Try a rough draft of your own poem.

Prompts to help spark your memory and creativity:

- ⇒ items from around the house
- ⇒ items from the yard
- ⇒ items found in the neighborhood
- ⇒ names of relatives
- ⇒ sayings by parents/friends
- ⇒ names of foods, dishes that recalls family gatherings
- ⇒ names of specific places

### Part II: Converting into a Final Copy

- Find the lines that you find particularly interesting and creative.
- String them together in any order you'd like, remembering to have stanza breaks throughout.
- Vary the length of your lines. This creates a powerful effect in writing.
- Include the line "I am from those moments" somewhere near the end of your work.
- Type up your work to include:
  - An original title (*Where I'm From* is not original!)
  - Your name, period, and date
  - Your final poem will be about 20-30 lines

### Standards Addressed

E2c: The student produces a narrative account (fictional or autobiographical) that:

E2c.4: includes sensory details and concrete language to develop plot and character

E2c.8: provides a sense of closure to the writing

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Lauryn Hill "Every Ghetto, Every City"

I was just a little girl  
Skinny legs, a press and curl  
My mother always thought I'd be a star  
But way before my record deal,  
The streets that nurtured Lauryn Hill  
Made sure that I'd never go too far  
Every ghetto, every city and suburban place I've been  
Make me recall my days in the New Jerusalem  
Story starts at Hootaville grew up next to Ivy Hill  
When kids were stealing quartervilles for fun  
"Kill the guy" in Carter park  
Rode a Mongoose 'til it's dark  
Watching kids show off the stolen ones  
Every ghetto, every city and suburban place I've been  
Make me recall my days in New Jerusalem  
You know it's hot, don't forget what you've got  
Looking back,  
Looking back, looking back, looking back  
You know it's hot, don't forget what you've got  
Looking back  
Thinking back, thinking back, thinking back  
A bag of Bontons, twenty cents and a nickel  
Springfield Ave. had the best popsicles  
Saturday morning cartoons and Kung - Fu  
Main street roots tonic with the dreds  
A beef patty and some coco bread  
Move the patch from my Lees to the tongue of my shoe  
'Member Freling - Huysen used to have the bomb leather  
Back when Doug Fresh and Slick Rick were together  
Looking at the crew, we thought we'd all live forever  
You know it's hot, don't forget what you've got  
Looking back  
Thinking back, thinking back, thinking back

## Where I'm From by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,  
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.

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 with a cottonball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.  
I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,

You know it's hot, don't forget what you've got  
Looking back  
Thinking back, thinking back, thinking back  
Drill teams on Munn street  
Remember when Hawthorne and Chancellor had beef  
Moving Records was on Central Ave.  
I was there at dancing school  
South Orange Ave. at Borlin pool  
Unaware of what we didn't have  
Writing your friends' names on your jeans with a marker  
July 4th races off of Parker  
Fireworks at Martin stadium  
The Untouchable P. S. P. , where all them crazy n\*\* be  
And car thieves got away through Irvington  
Hillside brings beef with the cops  
Self - Destruction record drops  
And everybody's name was Muslim  
Sensations and '88 attracted kids from out - of - state  
And everybody used to do the wop  
Jack, Jack, Jack ya body  
Nah, the Biz Mark used to amp up the party  
I wish those days, they didn't stop  
Every ghetto, every city and suburban place I've been  
Make me recall my days in New Jerusalem  
You know it's hot, don't forget what you've got  
Looking back  
Welcome back, welcome back, welcome back  
You know it's hot, don't forget what you've got  
Looking back  
Thinking back, thinking back, thinking back  
Thinking back, thinking back, thinking back

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  
to drift beneath my dreams.

I am from those moments—  
snapped before I budded—  
leaf-fall from the family tree

## Student Examples

## **What My Dad Built**

Where I'm From  
Amber L.

I am from warm rain and salty air  
from "Because I said so" and "Comb your hair"

I am from the torment of grasshoppers, a small earthquake in my fist.  
From the hidden strawberry bushes,  
holding hands, my first kiss.

I am from the classic Goofy Movie, raccoons, Chucky and "please help me!"  
I am from climbing on the roof, three brothers, rug burns, and scraped knees.  
From the cold hard wood floors, my friend Tessa that no one else had ever seen.  
I am from the smell of wood chips, the heavenly taste of homemade clam dip

I am from the tire swing hung at the church, with my little brother screaming, "Superman!!!"  
From my dad saying, "I'll be fine."  
But with the blood, I didn't understand.  
I am from the hand-built deck by my dad, fresh paint glistening in the sun.

From the now peeling and worn look,  
the way it used to be is now gone and done.

## **The Mexico Not on the Travel Brochures**

Where I'm From  
Alicia G.

I'm from a green house that my grandmother use to live in, in Mexico  
From where my knees were always skinned  
I'm from mango trees behind my house  
From seeing my brother getting bit by our neighbors dog  
From being poor  
I'm from a broken down roof

From a lady giving us free food, but my mom would find ways to pay her back  
I'm from an uncle who would always come home drunk with no money to feed us

From taking cold showers and heating the water on a gas stove  
I'm from the stairs that scratched my face, arms and legs when I fell  
From the tile floors that were always cold  
I'm from learning to ride my bike for the first time on gravel

I'm from a mother who did anything to have food on the table  
From a sister who would always rebel

I'm from a stove that rat was hiding behind and my brother and I would try to catch it.  
From watching my mother wash clothes by hand in a concrete sink outside and then hanging them up on a rope out side.

I'm from having birthday parties and having everyone come that we knew  
From being grateful for what you have that is what my mother use to say in Spanish to all of us

I'm from those moments  
In Vera Cruz, Mexico a country that offers so little to their people

Where I'm From  
Lauren N.

I'm from baths in the kitchen sink,  
From Downy and Mom's perfume  
I am from flowers by the fence (yellow and springy  
they tasted like crayons).  
I am from the ivy crawling up the house,  
The baby tree whose sturdy trunk shot from the ground  
A mirror image of my planted feet.

I'm from sprinkles and plastic table donut shops  
From Bert and Ernie  
I'm from stupid heads and dot dot I got my cootie shot  
From "don't touch this" and "don't touch that."  
I'm from Hymn No. 96 and why is this piece of bread so small?  
And Bible crafts made from neon pipe cleaners.

I'm from Bill and Darlene's branch  
From hot soup and freshly baked corn bread  
From the Well, when I was little's and the snowy games  
Told to me by Green Bay Packer season ticket holders  
In the storage room are boxes  
Overflowing with shiny, color-coated memories  
Bundles of dreams kept alive  
To ask my mother about.

I am from those moments  
A leaf changing color with the weather  
Time only strengthens the branch that holds me.

### ***Where I'm From* excerpts from student poems**

I am from legalistic hippies  
I am from meatloaf surprise to banister races,  
I am from streets known not by name,  
But by the friends who lived there.  
Kristen M.

I am from the trains under the Christmas tree  
I am from wrenches and sockets, to spatulas and silver wear  
Jordan B.

I am from legalistic hippies  
I am from meatloaf surprise to banister races,  
I am from streets known not by name,  
But by the friends who lived there.  
Kristen M.

I am from SLUGS, mushrooms, Oshkosh, finger paint and curly hair.  
I am from Strawberry Shortcake and broken legs  
Ashley J.

I'm from riding my bike to school without asking.  
I'm from sounds of my parents fighting,  
and from worrying of what is going to happen next  
Brandon T.

From forts made of blankets.  
(that were never worth the clean up)  
Heather K.

Always more complicated, and yet still never finished.  
Heather K.

I'm from the fireworks, always with high hopes to ignite the fuse.  
I'm from the forts, a place of privacy, shielding me from much more than the rain at times.  
Alex M.

And beating up girls i just so happened to like  
Blake J.

I'm from Christmas eve traditions and lighting the menorah 8 days a year.  
I'm from tap-dancing in the garage as the rain pours down outside,  
Kelsey M.

The cow always jumped the fence no matter how high it was.  
Jonathan M.

Where memories are stored in huge file cabinets.  
Lindsey H.

I'm from hot summers in my small organized room  
Lakecia H.

From riding bikes to playing with slugs  
From marshmallows in my hair,  
to my mom singing me to asleep.  
Tanya K.

At night going to sleep meant listening to the freeway all night instead of music.  
I'm from when my dad got home from work I had to get out of his comfy green chair.  
I am from those moments  
a branch that everyone climbs all over  
Towers B.

From the hidden embarrassment from being the last to be picked up, again and the smell of happiness,  
the smell of mom.  
From stories read nightly and the triumph of reading a book by myself.  
Morgan S.

I am from the 88 Plymouth Voyager with the broken air conditioning  
Jordan S.

I'm from the squishy orange chair, which smelled like dead flowers and peppermint.  
Natalie G.

To cutting my finger cutting my first mango  
Brian Vu

I am from neighbors with everlasting garage sales  
Kory B.

The streets with the house with the biggest basement  
I'm from going to grandmass and always eating Top Ramen and skinned apples in the dining room with the old fuzzy  
wall paper  
Jill P.

## **Springfield Street**

Where I'm From poem  
Ron Coia

I'm from Springfield Street, walking distance to the projects  
from where Richard and Terri lived down the road  
Richard with a burnt face that I never dared to ask what happened  
from where the forbidden Fantasia brothers lived, Ricky and Mario  
We were secret friends until I punched Mario in the eye

from stealing toys from Zayre, from sitting in the security office waiting for Dad  
from the orange Pinto that my sister was ashamed to ride in  
and I was too young to realize that I should be, too  
from Catrina, my Portuguese girlfriend  
I talked to her three times

I'm from a \$21,000 fixer-upper  
later foreclosed  
shag carpeting and paneling  
a carpeted pool turned into a coffee table

from Hailing Mary to bowing before Our Father in Holy Cross  
from the frightening confessional  
pleading with God over a stolen art room eraser  
Glory Be

from Lucky, the untrained labrador  
Dad said we were lucky to have her

from a field infested with rats and one in the dryer  
a basement that floods from a leaky bulkhead  
a bar that Dad never quite finished

I'm from "Take your brother with you"  
and "Buy me a pack of Old Golds"

I'm from The Greatest American Hero, A-Team  
and Three's Company  
Suzanne Somers, my first kiss  
Sorry, Catrina

from a plastic, blue skateboard and a ten-speed  
no hands  
a green, metallic jeep that we fought over  
the Star Wars guys fit snugly in

I'm from those moments  
from Rhode Island  
a small state with a tight grip

