

Where Are You From? by Yamile Saied Méndez, illustrated by Jaime Kim

Identities & Themes

- Latinx/e/o/a (Argentinian and Puerto Rican)
- Bi/Multiracial identity or relationships
- Immigration/Migration
- Multigenerational relationships
- Feelings
- Identity safety
- Identity affirmation

Teacher Reflection Questions

1. Which of your identities might be subjected to microaggressions and why?
2. Which students in your classroom/school might experience daily microaggressions?
3. How can you interrupt and reframe microaggressions directed at you, your colleagues, and your students when you hear them?

Background Information for Teacher

The girl in the story, born in the United States, gets asked about where she's from, where she's really from. This is so common for second generation American immigrants, biracial/multiracial children, and transracial adoptees.

Many are asked "What are you?" or "Where are you from?" in regards to their race/ethnicity. These types of questions are microaggressions. This is not only an invasion of privacy but can make children, adolescents and even adults feel that they must justify their existence and, in some instances, choose which race/identity/culture they

identify with the most. Being bi/multiracial and bi/multicultural can cause students to feel uncomfortable with their complex identities. It is important to recognize and support students in all of who they are. See also the **Racial Identity/Racial Bias Primer** in the back of this guide.

Microaggressions: "The everyday slights, indignities, put-downs, and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations, or those who are marginalized, experience in their day to day interactions with people. Microaggressions often appear to be a compliment but contain a metacommunication or a hidden insult to the target groups in which it is delivered. People who engage in microaggressions are ordinary folks who experience themselves as good, moral, decent individuals. Microaggressions occur because they are outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrator." (Derald Wing Sue, What Is a Microaggression? <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/what-is-a-microaggression>)

The author's first name, Yamile is pronounced sha-MEE-lay. It's important to review and practice pronouncing names before reading them aloud to students. Learning to pronounce names from another culture is a form of respect and can teach children to honor the languages and cultures of those who are different from them. For an audio pronunciation of her name and some background about her name, you can listen to this: <https://www.teachingbooks.net/pronounce.cgi?aid=33448>

Vocabulary

These words and names appear in the story. Discuss their meanings with students before and during your reading, as they help tell the girl's story.

- **Pampas:** a tall, perennial grass native to Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Mature plants can reach up to ten feet tall
- **Abuelo:** Spanish for grandfather
- **Gaucha:** skilled, nomadic horsemen or cowhands of Argentina and Brazil
- **Señor Cielo:** Mr. Sky
- **Copper warriors:** refers to copper coins that have Aztec warriors on them

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- ☒ Empathy & Understanding
- ☒ Healthy Complex Identities
- ☒ Respect Across Differences
- ☒ Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- ☐ Responsiveness & Action

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- ☒ Self-Awareness
- ☐ Self-Management
- ☒ Social Awareness
- ☐ Responsible Decision Making
- ☐ Relationship Skills

Vocabulary (continued)

- **Southern Cross:** a constellation of four stars in a bright portion of the Milky Way, seen in the Southern Hemisphere and used in navigation like the North Star.
- **25 Mayo 1810:** refers to the revolution (also referred to as the May Revolution) in Buenos Aires against their colonizers, the Spanish. The revolution was the first successful one in the South American Independence process and the Argentine War of Independence followed.

Read this to the students before reading the book:

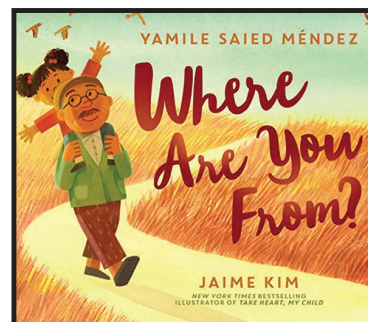
A young girl is asked where she is from—where she's really from. These questions make her unsure of her identity (who she is and where she came from). She goes to her abuelo (grandfather) for advice and answers about where she's from. His responses are different from the answer she expected, and he helps her realize that where we are from is so much more than a physical place.

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. **Why do others think that the girl can't be from here and insist on asking, "No where are you really from?"**
2. Why does this upset her so much?
3. Why does the girl ask her abuelo for help in answering where she's from?
4. How is the girl in the story different from her peers that ask her where she's from?
5. **What are some of the answers Abuelo gives her about where she's from? What do these responses mean or represent?**
6. Why do you think Abuelo doesn't give his granddaughter a more specific answer to her question?
7. When have you asked a question to an adult and didn't get a specific answer? Why do you think they weren't more direct in giving you an answer? What did you figure out from their response?
8. **If we have questions about each other's differences, how can we talk about them without hurting each other's feelings?**

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Draw or write about where you are from that includes more than just a place. Include the things that make you who you are.
2. **Geography Connection:** Look up where Argentina (where the author is from) and Puerto Rico (where the author's husband is from) are on a map. Discuss how the author's own experiences may have influenced the story.
3. **"I Am From" Poem:** Guide students in writing their own "I Am From" poems, using words and pictures to describe more than just a place. Provide and discuss example poems to help inspire your students.



Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Personal narrative
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast settings
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe setting
- Describe characters/ Character development
- Character point of view
- Use illustrations/pictures/ photos to gain information
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Vocabulary in context