

# Lesson 1 Who's Who?

## Aim:

What can a writer's style or point of view tell us about who he/she is?

## Do Now:

Prewriting: (preferably in journals!)

What can people tell about you from the way you talk? From what you say?

1. Students respond to the Do-Now, writing for three to five minutes. As students write, you can write the categories on the board.

The categories are

- American Pulitzer Prize Winner
- Controversial Comic
- Pioneer Female Dramatist
- Irish-American Poet
- NYC High School Senior

2. Have a few students share their responses. You can take notes on the board; you might try two columns, one for responses on style and one for responses on content or point of view.

3. Use your notes as a segue into the activity, explaining that we can look at writers in the same way, figuring out who they are by looking at the way they speak or what they say. Explain the game — you and several students will read excerpts from selected writings and the students will try to guess what “type” of writer wrote the piece, using the categories you've written on the board. (Note — we find it effective to have the categories up on the board, rather than on handouts; if you want to hand out the categories, you can use the attached handout, perhaps offering one per group of students.) The writing will be in one of four genres — poems, short stories, drama and personal essay. (If you haven't already, briefly go over the definition of each genre.) To heighten the tension, tell students to pay close attention — it can be very difficult! And remind them that they shouldn't share their answers; this is a competition!

4. Have students number a blank sheet of paper from 1-8. Read the excerpts one at a time. After each excerpt, stop and ask students to think about the kind of author that must have written the piece. You might want to read over the list in between some of the excerpts. Ask students to write the POV/type of author next to the appropriate number on their sheets of paper. Keep it moving, only giving the students enough time to record their first impression after listening to each excerpt.

5. Note — You can either read most of the excerpts yourself, or hand out some of the excerpts and ask students to read them. You can even give them out the day before and ask students to practice them for the next day — without telling them what it's for! To make sure that all students get to participate in the activity, just give one excerpt per student; that way, even the readers will be able to keep up with the activity. You should make sure that scenes are read by two people. Keep the genders consistent with the intention of the piece, as follows: 1-male, 2-female, 3-male/female, 4-male, 5-female, 6-male, 7-female, 8-male/female.

6. Review the selections one at a time. You might want to use a few words or outstanding characteristics as a reminder of the piece, e.g., “That was the personal essay where the writer was thinking about his father” before asking students, “Who's Who?”, in other words, which category they picked. Keep trying until someone comes up with the correct answer.

7. After all the answers have been given, ask for a show of hands for the number correct, e.g., “Who got none right? Who got one right?”, etc. If you wish, offer a prize or bonus points for the student(s) who got the most right.

8. If you have time, discuss today's activity by returning to the Aim. You might also want to discuss the different genres students saw today, asking how different genres serve to illuminate different voices or styles.

## Extensions

- Ask students to write a first draft of a piece in one of the genres used today.
- Ask students to write a piece using the voice of someone else — for example, write as if you were your mother, a cop, a character from Hamlet, etc.
- Ask students to write in the style of an author you are studying, or to try writing the same scene in the style of two different authors — e.g., a man and his wife having breakfast in the style of Hemingway and then in the style of Piri Thomas.

# Who's Who **Categories Handout**

- American Pulitzer Prize Winner
- Controversial Comic
- Pioneer Female Dramatist
- Irish-American Poet
- NYC High School Senior

# Who's Who Attachment #1

It was cold. It was dark and cold and damp, and he could not open his eyes. He was in pain. He had fallen down; that was it. He was lying face down on the ground, and it was cold and there was a roaring of the sea in his brain and there was a fog rolling in from the sea. The pain was very great, and his body throbbed with it; his mind rattled and shook, wobbling now out of a spin, and he could not place the center of the pain. And he could not see. He could not open his eyes to see. Something was wrong, terribly wrong. When he awoke, he tried to move; he was numb with cold, but the effort to move brought new pain, sharp, then massive pain. It was so great that he fainted, and the next time he knew better than to move suddenly. The effect of the alcohol was wearing off. In another moment he began to retch, his whole body contracting, quaking involuntarily, and again the pain mounted and his mind was slipping away. He wanted to die.

## Who's Who Attachment #2

Fruit — it's forbidden  
in a way that only the  
sweetest things are,  
like the apple  
plucked for Eve, wrapped  
in emerald scales.

Or the pomegranate  
sitting on a marble table  
waiting for Persephone,  
or even the longevity  
peaches  
the moon goddess took  
that sent her up to heaven  
alone.

In the same way I see you  
pointing at the  
blackberry bush  
daring me to steal a  
handful of dark gems.

The summer sun burns  
the grass yellow, and my  
throat dry even though we sit  
in the shade of the barn.

Later, wine-colored stains  
around my mouth and fingers  
I think of those women  
so tempted  
and wonder what I have  
lost.

## Who's Who Attachment #3

**MORTY**

What do you want, Marsha?

**MARSHA**

A spec of the past.

**MORTY**

What was so great about the past...

**MARSHA**

I miss it so much... And before...

**MORTY**

And before what?

**MARSHA**

Oh, never mind.

**MORTY**

NO. And before what?

**MARSHA**

And before we used to have a great love life.

**MORTY**

Ohhh, there it is... Our love life — it isn't good for you anymore.

**MARSHA**

There's nothing left to be good anymore.

**MORTY**

I don't think it's gotten that bad.

**MARSHA**

I'm still young. (pause) You make me feel old.

**MORTY**

Marsha, you're a forty-four year old woman, for GOD'S...

**MARSHA**

That's the thing, Morty — I'm only forty-four. But I've been feeling this way since I was twenty-nine. Twenty-nine is still young.

**MORTY**

So what, (pause) I make you feel this way?

**MARSHA**

No. Bill Clinton makes me feel this way. Yes. You make me feel this way.

**MORTY**

I make you feel your age and you're complaining. You got two kids married and you complain you can't go horsin' around like a high school cheerleader?!

**MARSHA**

Forget it, Morty.

## Who's Who Attachment #4

She put the cigarette between her lips and took out her lighter. It was still drizzling slightly and little, glistening raindrops were stuck to her fuzzy, light blue sweater... He stood there smiling at her as she fumbled with a cheap lighter. Suddenly the cigarette slipped out from between her lips and fell to the ground... She bent down and picked it up, and without looking at it, placed it back in her mouth...

He thought about the sidewalk. He thought about the bottoms of everyone's shoes in the whole damn city. He thought about the germs on the sidewalk and the germs on the shoes and the germs on the cigarette and he saw them spreading over her lips and covering the inside of her mouth. He lifted his hand and took the dangling cigarette from her lips... They stood there, eyes locked, him with the cigarette, her with the lighter. Finally, he leaned in and kissed her.

# Who's Who Attachment #5

... I am terribly bored  
sometimes it is like seeing a bad movie  
other days, more often, it's like having an acute disease of the kidney  
god knows it has nothing to do with the heart  
nothing to do with people more interesting than myself  
yak yak  
that's an amusing thought  
how can anyone be more amusing than oneself  
how can anyone fail to be  
can I borrow your forty-five  
I only need one bullet preferably silver  
if you can't be interesting at least you can be a legend  
(but I hate all that crap)

## Who's Who Attachment #6

It might be a lie when I tell you; I was born on the same day that some wishful fellow died. I sometimes wonder if I displaced him. I will begin now — as I walk, brooding, with the comical stride of this pompous Black man, tense and forever reserved, conspicuous and unaffected, timing and numbering smiles, paying enough attention to assure that I am simply looking past, not through, the engaged. Had that invisible man stepped aside for me? Had he knowledge of my arrival or had I suddenly superimposed him? Up to this point there has been a distinct collection of rules, ideals, obligations, and presumptions, wishes, that might be said to affirm my existence. But hush, I say, because this story has been told before. Nevertheless, my father taught me in his presence and tests me in his absence. For this I must [love] him, as I walk painfully, unerringly, to wherever it is I think I'm going.

## Who's Who Attachment #7

My vision mathematically calculated the numbers on the highway signs. U.S. 101... PENN. 42 (101 plus 42 is 143). Peripherally I read the impersonal directions: TRUCK ROUTE; DETOUR; GO SLOW; SCHOOL ZONE. Did the guys who had painted those signs wonder where they would be placed?

How tragically ironic that most of these signs are made and painted in prisons, perhaps by life-termers who would never have the opportunity to see their handiwork in "action."

How sweet and truly Christian it would be if every priest, minister and rabbi would be responsible for a lifer and take him out for just one day so he could see his artwork on a sign or perhaps on a license plate and be able to say to himself: "I made that." Just one day out of his cage.

## Who's Who Attachment #8

**GEORGE**

O.K.... O.K., whatever you say...  
Look, we've had a nice evening;  
let's not spoil it, huh?

**BENEATHA**

I'm trying to talk to you.

**GEORGE**

We always talk.

**BENEATHA**

Yes — and I love to talk.

**GEORGE**

I know it and I don't mind it sometimes...  
I want you to cut it out, see — The moody  
stuff, I mean. I don't like it. You're a nice-  
looking girl... all over. That's all you need,  
honey, forget the atmosphere. Guys aren't  
going to go for the atmosphere — they're  
going to go for what they see. Be glad for  
that. Drop the Garbo routine. It doesn't go  
with you. As for myself, I want a nice — simple  
— sophisticated girl... not a poet — OK?

**BENEATHA**

Why are you so angry?

**GEORGE**

Because this is stupid! I don't go out with  
you to discuss the nature of "quiet  
desperation" or to hear all about your  
thoughts — because the world will go on  
thinking what it thinks regardless —

**BENEATHA**

Then why read books?  
Why go to school?

**GEORGE**

It's simple. You read books — to learn facts  
— to get grades — to pass the course — to  
get a degree. That's all — it has nothing to  
do with thoughts.  
(pause)

**BENEATHA**

I see. (pause) Good night, George.

# Who's Who Answer Key

**1. Pulitzer Prize Winner**

N. Scott Momaday,  
House Made of Dawn (Fiction)

**2. NYC High School Student**

Cynthia Chin,  
Summer Child's Memory (Poetry)

**3. NYC High School Student**

Rami Shami,  
The Waning of a Bensonhurst Moon (Drama)

**4. NYC High School Student**

Daniel Migdal,  
A New Day (Fiction)

**5. Beat Poet**

Frank O'Hara,  
Yesterday Down at the Canal (Poetry)

**6. NYC High School Student**

LaMarr J. Bruce,  
Wishes for Sons (Personal Essay)

**7. Controversial Comic**

Lenny Bruce,  
How To Talk Dirty and Influence People (Personal Essay)

**8. Pioneer Female Dramatist**

Lorraine Hansberry,  
A Raisin in the Sun (Drama)