As I Am: Personal vs. Public Identity  
Activity Three: Enduring Understanding

Note  
This project is a culminating activity on the study of Phillis Wheatley as a significant figure in the history of African American literature. Although Wheatley is important for her literary contributions, her most enduring qualities reflect her emphasis on heritage and diversity, as well as her role in calling to question the identity of a writer. While this assignment is best suited for an English III classroom, it is easily adapted to any grade level and/or unit of study.

Essential Questions  
What is identity?  
What factors in society impact the construction of identity?  
How does a poet’s identity influence the reading of his or her work?

North Carolina Standard Course of Study
Goal 1: The learner will demonstrate increasing insight and reflection to print and non-print text through personal expression.  
Goal 5: The learner will interpret and evaluate representative texts to deepen understanding of literature of the United States.  
Goal 6: The learner will apply conventions of grammar and language usage.

Objectives  
The student should be able to:  
1. Define identity.  
2. Analyze what factors shape personal identity.  
3. Evaluate the concept of public vs. private identity.  
4. Assess the manner in which Wheatley’s identity is shaped and presented to the reader.

Materials  
• Project Handout * attached  
• Students will need: Poster board, photos, art supplies, pens/pencils

Time Required  
This project that should be completed outside of class while studying Phillis Wheatley

Procedures  
1. After beginning a unit of study on Phillis Wheatley, emphasize the importance of Wheatley’s identity. Make sure that students are aware that the Wheatley we see/read may be different from who she really was.

2. Explain to students that Wheatley’s work was influenced, edited and approved by her owners and other white slaveholders. This fact may have greatly impacted her identity, not only as a poet, but as a person as well. The idea is that Phillis Wheatley, as we know her, may have actually had very different opinions, beliefs and ideas from what we see in
the majority of her work. This is evident in the subtle undertones and double meanings of some of her poetry.

3. Considering this information, this project asks students to reflect upon their own identity. They are to create a collage that represents how people see them and write a poem that represents who they really are. The goal is that students will, not only, practice writing poetry but that they will also have to ponder their identities, just as Phillis must have had to struggle with her own.

4. Use the following questions to guide class discussion of Wheatley as a unit and to introduce the project assignment. These questions will help to provide cohesiveness to the unit, as students will be able to connect the construction of identity with the life of Phillis Wheatley.

- What is identity?
- How do individuals construct their personal identity?
- How much influence, if any, do outside forces have on personal identity? What are those forces?
- Explain the concept of public vs. private identity? Why might people appear to be different from what, or who, they actually are?
- Describe Phillis Wheatley’s identity.
- What factors influenced our reading of her poetry?
- Did Wheatley create her own identity or was it created for her?
- In your opinion, is the poet Phillis Wheatley the same as the person Phillis Wheatley?
As I Am

Personal Identity Project

In our study of Phillis Wheatley, we have already discussed her significance as a poet and her literary contributions. In doing so, we cannot ignore her internal conflict in representing herself and establishing a personal identity.

In this project, you will create a collage with images, photos, etc. that represent how people see you. Using a large poster board, cut out the shape of the capital letter “I”, as this is a representation of who you are. On the front, use words, images, photos, magazine clippings, etc to create a collage of how you believe people see you. On the back, write a poem, of at least 15 lines that tells who you really are. You will present your work in class and grades will be calculated as follows:

Due Date: __________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>4 (16-20 pts)</th>
<th>3 (11-15 pts)</th>
<th>2 (6-10 pts)</th>
<th>1 (0-5 pts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention to Theme</td>
<td>The student gives a reasonable explanation of how every item in the collage is related to the assigned theme of identity.</td>
<td>The student gives a reasonable explanation of how most items in the collage are related to the assigned theme of identity.</td>
<td>The student gives a fairly reasonable explanation of how most items in the collage are related to the assigned theme of identity.</td>
<td>The student's explanations are weak and illustrate difficulty understanding how to relate items to the assigned theme of identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Construction</td>
<td>The collage shows considerable attention to construction. The items are neatly trimmed. All items are carefully and securely attached to the backing. There are no stray marks, smudges or glue stains. Nothing is hanging over the edges unless intentional.</td>
<td>The collage shows attention to construction. The items are neatly trimmed. All items are carefully and securely attached to the backing. A few barely noticeable stray marks, smudges or glue stains are present. Nothing is hanging over the edges unless intentional.</td>
<td>The collage shows some attention to construction. Most items are neatly trimmed. All items are securely attached to the backing. A few barely noticeable stray marks, smudges or glue stains are present. Nothing is hanging over the edges unless intentional.</td>
<td>The collage was put together sloppily. Items appear to be just &quot;slapped on&quot;. Pieces may be loose or hanging over the edges. Smudges, stains, rips, uneven edges, and/or stray marks are evident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Overall presentation was interesting, well-prepared and logically presented.</td>
<td>Overall presentation was interesting but lacked some characteristics of a 4</td>
<td>Presentation of either the collage or the poem was not prepared or well thought out</td>
<td>Presentation lacked items for a 2</td>
</tr>
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