

LESSONS

Superhero Persona Poems

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GRADES 5–12

TYPE

POETRY

When was the last time you felt like a superhero? In this lesson, students will reflect on that moment and write a poem that shows off their inner strengths.

SESSION 1 : SUPERHERO PERSONA POEMS

BEFORE YOU START

- This prompt encourages students to reflect on their identity and their power. When introducing the prompt, be mindful that students will exhibit a wide range of self-awareness. You know your students best—if you sense students are struggling with an activity or prompt, invite them to write about what they feel comfortable sharing and to take risks when they feel ready. All students should feel welcome to participate.
- In this lesson, students will imagine themselves as superheroes in the genre of poetry. We suggest redirecting students away from using weapons and physical violence in their writing and encourage them to explore more creative, original, and fantastical possibilities.

This lesson aligns with the following CASEL Competency:

- Self-Awareness

- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets

HOW TO BEGIN

Ask students to close their eyes—if they feel comfortable—and imagine a superhero. Once they have an image in their head, ask them to look past the character’s physical characteristics and focus on their internal traits—the invisible superpowers that aren’t always seen until the superhero springs into action— like bravery, cunning, or compassion. Then, ask students to open their eyes and share one of the traits they identified. Write these traits on the board.

Then, tell students that it’s these invisible superpowers that they will identify within themselves to help them create their own superhero persona.

2 minutes

On a piece of scrap paper or in their writing journal, ask students to number their paper, 1-10. Ask students to spend two minutes creating a list of times they’ve felt like a superhero. From quiet moments, like figuring out a tricky problem in math class, to tougher challenges, like helping out a friend, all experiences are welcome.

Encourage students to keep their pencils moving for the whole two minutes, even when they can’t think of anything to write! If they can’t think of something to write, they can write their name, “I don’t know,” a snippet of their favorite song lyric. . . anything to keep their pencil moving and their mind working. Eventually, they will think of an item to add to their lists. Students can keep adding to their list if they’ve reached 10 before time is up.

8 minutes

Ask students to choose one of the experiences from their list and spend the remaining eight minutes freewriting everything they can remember about that moment, including what they did that made them feel like a superhero.

Next, display the mentor texts on pages 1-3 of the [Superhero Persona Poems — Handout](#) and ask for volunteers to take turns reading each poem:

- “Black Boys Have Superpowers Too” by Jeremiah Borgella, Grade 7, 826NYC
- “Marshmallows” by Athena, 826NYC
- “Owl Girl” by Athena, 826NYC

As students listen to the poems, ask them to focus on the ways each piece talks about the main character of the poem, as well as any fantastical elements found in each. Once they have read the texts, ask students to share their thoughts: What superpowers can they identify in each poem? Which internal traits stand out to them and why?

Ask students to return to the mentor texts “Owl Girl” and “Marshmallows.” One thing that makes these poems special is the way they blend fantasy elements (“I am from a family of owls”) with the writer’s reflections on their identity (“She is a force for the good, great, and the extraordinary”).

Pass out pages 4 and 5 of the handout. On page 4, students reflect on parts of their identity. Remind students that, in this case, *identity* refers to their many unique characteristics and the experiences and perspectives that have shaped who they are. On page 5, they begin imagining a part of their identity as a superpower.

We recommend completing this activity alongside students, sharing parts of your identity as needed to model both the level of critical thinking and the vulnerability you’re looking for from students. Let students know that the answers on this handout will not be shared with others, unless they choose to. Encourage them to think deeply and respond openly to the questions.

When students finish, ask for volunteers to share one of their statements with the group. Remind students they can decide if and what to share at this time.

Ask them to circle any pieces of their identity that they think helped them feel like a superhero in the story they freewrote about in STEP 1.

Then, pass out pages 6 and 7 of the handout. Here, students use the Superhero-O-Matic to help them create their superhero persona. The Superhero-O-Matic is an imaginary machine that designs new superheroes based on the information that it's given! From the design of their uniform to the variety of different superpowers they possess, students should have a strong idea of their superhero persona after completing this handout.

Finally, students write their superhero persona poem. Below are a few prompts, if students need a place to start:

- Retell the story you freewrote about in STEP 1 and highlight some of the strengths you brainstormed with the Superhero-O-Matic. Don't forget to use the superhero name you created! You can either keep this written as prose or turn it into a poem.
- Write a poem inspired by "Black Boys Have Superpowers Too" that combines some of the ("The way my hoodie zips is a superpower") with the ones everyone can see ("The way this fro grows upon my head is a superpower").
- Write a poem inspired by "I Am a Phoenix" that uses metaphors and similes to describe a single trait.
- Write a poem inspired by "Marshmallows" that starts with your superhero costume and digs deeper with each layer, until you reveal your core strength.

When students are happy with their draft, it's time to revise! We recommend dedicating at least thirty minutes, or an extra day, on revision if possible. Feel free to use whichever structures for revision you may have in place, or students can try one or more of these revision tips:

Revision Tips:

- Add dialogue to your poem. What might this dialogue reveal about your character?
- Add hyperbole to exaggerate an important or powerful trait (e.g., “my brown skin is a masterpiece, I glow from within”).
- Replace stale, overused verbs with vivid ones (e.g., “fly” might become “soar,” “flitter,” or “glide”).
- Pass out the [Revision Bingo for Poetry—Handout](#) and challenge students to choose at least three poetry revision strategies to complete a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal row.
- For more ideas, see 826 Digital’s [Guide to Revision](#).