What is Me?

Developed by Stephen McQuaid
Suggested Length Five 40 minute classes
Suggested Grade Level(s) 7, 8, 9
Subject Areas Visual Arts, Social Studies, Language Arts

Overview
Students will have an in-depth look into who and what they are, examining factors that influence their attitudes and beliefs and considering alternative views. They will focus on names and their meaning, astrological signs, symbols, and personal crests.

Links to Curriculum Outcomes
Students will (be expected to)
- explore the factors that influence one’s perceptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs (social studies)
- demonstrate acceptance of self and others by considering alternative views and strategies for coping with situations that arise from conflicting values and beliefs (social studies)
- invent and incorporate unique visual symbols to create personal meaning in their art (visual arts)
- use a range of strategies in writing and other ways of representing to explore and reflect on their feeling, values and attitudes (language arts)

Links to Telling Stories: Themes / Key Words
- Symbols of identity
- Sources of symbols
- Searching for your roots

Related Artwork
- The Banjo Boy, Robert Harris, CAG H-86
- Bessie in The Studio At Bolton’s, London, Robert Harris, CAG H-92
- Untitled, Robert Harris, CAG H-1775-a-n
- The News Boy, Robert Harris, CAG H-84
- His Honor The Recorder, Robert Harris, CAG H-525
- The Lonely Hours That Harbour Quiet Thoughts, Robert Harris, CAG H-15
- Old Chelsea Pensioner, Robert Harris, CAG H-2168
- Group Portrait, Robert Harris, CAG H-7513
Lesson #1:  *What’s in a Name?*

**Objective**  Students will investigate and consider different meanings of their names.

**Materials**
- paper
- pencils or pens

**Activities**

1. Ask students to think about any known meanings of their given names. Invite students to share what they know about these meanings with the class. Also ask students if they know which part of the world their surname comes from, as well as any meaning(s) it may have. Again, if any students claim to know some meaning(s), have them share what they know or assume.

2. Students now research first, middle, and family names. When they have found all the meanings of their own names, have the students organize them on a sheet of unlined paper. With each name (be it beside or below), have them place the name’s meaning(s).

3. When the students come back together as a group, have them to share their name posters / plates and the meanings they discovered.

4. Suggest to students that, when they arrive at home, they could question their parents / guardians as to why they were given the names that they were. Do their names have any special meaning within the family?

**Ideas for Assessment**

You may wish to have the students do a brief write-up on how they did their research, and what sources they used. Also, you may have them write their findings.
Lesson #2: *Astrological or Abominable?*

**Objective**  
Students will do research into their astrological signs, and give opinions about their usefulness / truthfulness.

**Materials**  
- paper  
- pencils or pens  
- copies of some horoscopes

**Activities**  
1. View with students Harris’ pictures of each astrological sign. What media /styles / techniques did he use?

2. Ask students to help you make a list of the twelve astrological signs, and order them on the board (prompt as needed). In a brief discussion, ask students if they put any belief or faith in their horoscopes. Why or why not?

3. Read the day’s horoscopes to the class. Question students as to whether anything holds any truth as of that moment in the day.

4. At this point, have the students do some research on the history of these signs. Also, have students research the supposed characteristics of people under their own sign.

5. Have students form groups of three and discuss the merits or faults of the descriptions of each sign that they have studied. Have the two other people in each group comment on whether they see a relationship between the third person and their sign’s description.

6. Once they have discussed these, and looked at them from their own and others’ points of view, have students write a position piece as to why they feel their sign suits them or not. Have them clearly state their position, and give explanations for it.

7. Also, ask the students to comment in their writing on how they would interact with a person who felt differently on this issue than they do. For example: if someone was very against the whole notion, how would they talk (or not) about it with someone who very much believed in it? You may also wish to use this topic as an in-class debate or “town hall” discussion.
Lesson #3: *Symbolization*

**Objective**  
Students will study the use of outward symbols that represent someone or something of value.

**Materials**  
- paper  
- pencils or pens

**Activities**
Encourage students to view the Robert Harris works referenced above that show people with items that are part of their representation. Some examples are the people with pets, musical instruments, or specialized tools, like a geographer’s compass.

1. To spark a brief discussion, ask the students:
   - Why would these people or Harris have chosen to include these items in the paintings?
   - What is their importance?
   - How could items like these help to act as symbols for these people?
   - What do these items say about the people they are pictured with?

2. Have students brainstorm some ideas regarding symbols of their country. For example, as Canadians, some symbols might include hockey equipment, canoes, beavers, mountains, etc.

3. Individually, have students choose ten symbols that they feel could be used to symbolize themselves, so that someone looking at their symbols might get a sense of what each student is like. Encourage students to list a mix of symbols – things that may represent values, things of personal interest, etc.

4. Once the lists of ten or so items have been made, encourage students to create posters of their symbols. An alternate way to display the symbols might be to illustrate them in a grid (twelve would be a good number for this), and colour every second one on each row, creating a checkered look.
Lesson #4: Crest for Success

Objective  Students will combine their symbols and names to create a personal crest.

Materials
• paper
• pencils
• paints (water colour or tempera)
• markers, coloured pencils, crayons, etc.

Activities
To begin this lesson, have a brief discussion with the class about some other things which may help to form a person's identity. Some examples for your students might include changes in their lives and their families' lives, how they have grown, their interests, hobbies, etc.

1. Now that students have explored their personal identity and symbols of it, have them create a crest or coat-of-arms that might be used to represent themselves. Show students some examples of these and the explanations of the meanings within them. For example, in P.E.I.'s coat of arms, the foxes represent the importance of fox farming to the province's past. The eight-pointed star is a symbol that has been used by the Mi'kmaq people for centuries to represent the sun, and these people were the earliest known inhabitants of the region.

2. An idea for a simple crest framework for students to follow would be to create an outline of a shield / crest, and divide it into four sections. In the top left section might be symbols for the student names. In the top right might be symbols of where they live. In the bottom right section you might find symbols of what the student has done / enjoys doing up to this point. And in the last space, students might place symbols of what they believe or hope their future holds for them.

3. Once all the crests have been completed, you may wish to put them on display within the classroom, on its outside wall, or perhaps in the school lobby.

A suggested alternative activity would be to have students create masks based on their own view of their identity.
Ideas for Assessment

Have students write responses to questions such as:

- What have you learned about your own attitudes, beliefs, and values through this activity?
- How do you imagine that your crest / mask might change 20 years from now? How do you imagine it may change if you lived in another country?