I AM FROM

The Basics

This exercise gives people time to reflect on who they are, share with each other, and also can help participants feel comfortable being creative. If it's important for people to get a sense of who you are, do the activity as well so people can learn about you.

Group Size: Any size, really, although 10 to 20 is probably ideal. Any larger, you adjust the final step.

Location: A room large enough to accommodate the expected number of participants, with comfortable spaces for people to write.

Time: 30 – 60 minutes

Materials:

- Pens and/or pencils – one per participant
- Copies of the "I Am From" poem worksheet – one per participant
- Additional blank paper

Set-Up: Arrange the meeting space so that each participant has a good place to write.

Facilitation Instructions

1. **Explain** to the group that they are going to do a fun poem-writing exercise. You might introduce the exercise by saying something like this: "Over the next 10 minutes or so, each of us is going to write a poem that will be beautiful, entertaining, revealing, provocative, and profound. But don't worry, we have a tool that will guarantee success."

2. **Hand out** the "I Am From" poem worksheet.

3. **Ask** participants to take about 5 minutes to fill in the blanks. Tell them not to think too hard about it, and if they can't think of anything, just write down the first word that comes to mind. If they look nervous, you can also reassure them that they won't be forced to share their poem.

4. After 5 minutes or so, **check in** with the group and see if people need a couple more minutes to finish.

5. When it looks like most people are done, **ask** participants to take another 5 minutes to read over their poem-in-the-making and make any changes they want to make. They can change the words they filled in, re-write a sentence or two, add new lines, or make any other tweaks.

6. After 5 minutes or so, or when it looks like most people are done, **ask** if anyone is willing to read a few of their favorite lines from any part of their new poem.

7. Continue asking for volunteers to share parts of their poem until everyone who wants to share has had an opportunity. You can also ask everyone to post their poem to share on a wall – anonymously or not.

Source: This exercise is from D.A. Bullock.

I AM FROM POEM

I am from _____
(specific ordinary item)

From _____ and _____
(product name) (product name)

I am from the _____
(home description)

_____ , _____ , _____
(adjective) (adjective) (sensory detail)

I am from _____ ,
(plant, flower, natural item)

_____
(description of above item)

I'm from _____ and _____
(family tradition) (family trait)

From _____ and _____
(name of family member) (another family name)

I'm from the _____ and _____
(description of family tendency) (another one)

From _____ and _____
(something you were told as a child) (another)

I'm from _____ , _____
(representation of religion or lack of) (further description)

I'm from _____
(place of birth and family ancestry)

_____ , _____
(a food that represents your family) (another one)

From the _____ .
(specific family story about a specific person and detail)

Original Poem:	Model Poem:
Where I'm From, by George Ella Lyon I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.) I am from the forsythia bush the Dutch elm whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my own. I'm from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair. I'm from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from Perk up! and Pipe down! I'm from He restoreth my soul with a cottonball lamb and ten verses I can say myself. I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments -- snapped before I budded -- leaf-fall from the family tree.	**Where I'm From, by Ms. Vaca** I am from bookshelves, from vinegar and green detergent. I am from the dog hair in every corner (Yellow, abundant, the vacuum could never get it all.) I am from azaleas the magnolia tree whose leaves crunched under my feet like snow every fall. I'm from puzzles and sunburns, from Dorothy Ann and Mary Christine Catherine I'm from reading and road trips From "Please watch your brother" and "Don't let your brother hit you!" I'm from Easter sunrises and Iowa churches at Christmas I'm from Alexandria and the Rileys, Sterzing's potato chips and sponge candy. From my Air Force dad's refusal to go to Vietnam, from my mom's leaving home at 17. On a low shelf in my new house is a stack of photo albums, carefully curated by my faraway father, chronicling my childhood. I am from these pages, yellowed but firm, holding on to me across the country.