Who am I?

Understanding Identity

The following selections deal with issues related to the construction of identity and how it shapes our interactions with the world by exploring the issues of race, gender, and sexuality.

“One Person Wonder” – Ashley Birt, p. 26
“Lost Heritage” Brianna Kline Costa, p. 43
“Untitled” – Shane Creepingbear, p. 45
“Anomalies: My Struggle for Identity” – Erika Drain, p. 61
“I am Not Wrong: Wrong is Not My Name” Elsa Eckenrode, p. 63
“My Mother Speaks” – Ashley Smith, p. 171
“Co-Ed” – Bridget Re, p. 153
“The Definition of Who I am” – Adam Saad, p. 162
“Breaking the Color Barrier” Themba Searles, p. 167

Themba Searle’s “Breaking the Color Barrier” and Erika Drain’s “Anomalies: My Struggle for Identity” describe the experience negotiating between people’s expectations of you and your own sense of self. “Segregation” by Frances Ruiz, “Lost Heritage” by Brianna Kline Costa, and “Untitled” by Shane Creepingbear explore questions of visibility and belonging. In “The Definition of Who I am,” Adam Saad discusses his father’s decision to lie about his country of origin to avoid discrimination, while Ashley Smith’s “My Mother Speaks” describes her desire to hold onto her culture after immigrating to the United States as a child. In “I am Not Wrong” Elsa Eckenrode confronts other people’s perceptions of her gender and sexuality, while Bridget Re’s “Co-Ed” describes the shame and confusion she experienced as the only girl on her school’s soccer team. Finally, in “One Person Wonder” Ashley Birt rejects the role of spokesperson and declares her desire to be seen and treated as an individual.
Questions for Group Discussion

- How do these authors understand their own racial/sexual/gender identities? How do they “know” who they are, and where does this knowledge come from?
- What kinds of feelings are evoked in these works when the author is unsure or expresses doubt about their identity?
- Based on these texts, what role does a person’s family have in shaping their sense of self? What about friends? Teachers? Strangers?
- How do these authors negotiate their sense of individuality with their racial, sexual, or cultural identities?
- Do these authors present their identities as a source of pride? Why or why not?

Writing Prompt

Consider your own identity and how you define yourself. Have you ever been treated unfairly based on other people's assumptions about your identity, or have you ever been biased against others because of your assumptions about their identity? Write a narrative detailing an experience where these assumptions are confronted, including specific detailed descriptions of people, places, moments in time. Looking back from who you are now and how you see yourself, have your feelings about this experience changed?