

Poets/Writers/Artists Who Are Continuing PWP's Legacy:

Jyoti Rajan Gopal, Author

Supriya Kelkar, Illustrator

American Desi

Lesson Plan by Mona Voelkel

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Questions about connecting different cultures drew Wheatley Peters' attention, as they do for many learners today.

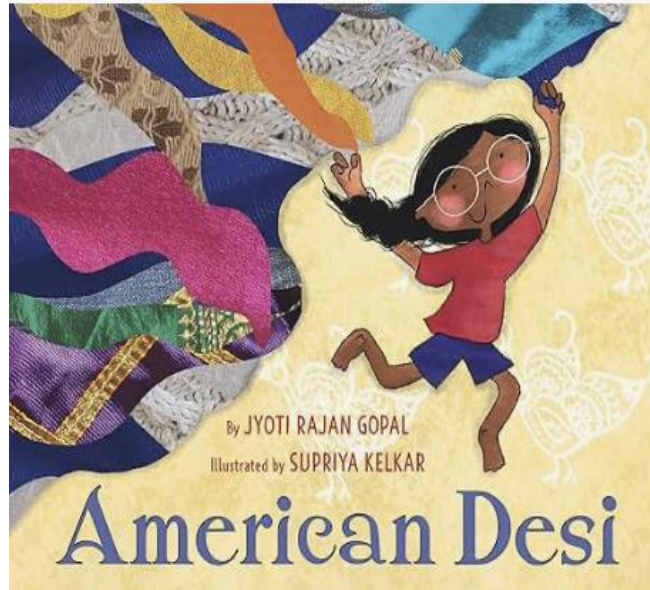


Voelkel, Mona. *Phillis Wheatley MultiMedia Collage*. Fabric Strips and Paper Images Glued to Cardstock with Digital Images Added in Canva, February 17, 2024,

https://www.canva.com/design/DAF8KLNJRJQQ/Sklx6xEsdA7eiNuldh9ZA/view?utm_content=DAF8KLNJRJQQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor

In the picture book, *American Desi*, the main character's wonders, "Which is the color of me?" Is she Indian? Is she American? She wonders how she can define herself between two very different cultures.

This picture book feels worthy to be considered in the canon of modern texts that echo the theme of identity that emerges in Phillis Wheatley Peters' poems and letters, as well as through her life story.



Kelkar, Supriya. *American Desi*. Cover Design by Patrick Collins and Véronique LeFevre Sweet. *American Desi*, by Jyoti Rajan Gopal. Little, Brown and Company, 2022. Front Cover.

At the end of *American Desi*, the main character has a deeper understanding of and appreciation for her multiple identities. During her life, Phillis Wheatley Peters used her pen to speak with authority within a culture that struggled to accept and understand her multiple identities.

Lesson Plan: Who Is Phillis Wheatley?

Intended Grades: 3-5

2-3 45-minute lessons

Objective: Honor the legacy of Phillis Wheatley Peters by reflecting on her multiple identities and our own.

Materials: 7"x 7" watercolor paper or cardstock, glue, assorted fabric to be ripped or cut into strips, various printed or digital images that represent aspects of the student's life and PWP's life.

This lesson plan could be facilitated within a PWP unit of study or as a culminating celebration. Prior to this lesson, students should understand the concept of "identity" and understand PWP's multiple identities (Black, American, British, Poet, Christian, Classical Scholar, Enslaved Person, Friend, Young Girl and Later Woman/Wife/Mother, etc.) within the context of her life and times.

It may be helpful to refer to these excellent resources for Grades 3-5, which include an outstanding selection of picture books:

<http://www.blackwomenrhetproject.com/elementary-grades-3-5.html>

Prior to this lesson, it would also be helpful if students were familiar with clothing in Western Africa, Boston, and Britain in the 1770s. Students should also have previously observed and discussed the clothing PWP is wearing in the [frontispiece](#).

Guiding Questions: What is identity? What factors influence identity? What are the different parts of my identity? What are the different parts of PWP’s identity?

WHAT IS MY IDENTITY? WHO AM I?

1. Read (or reread) the picture book, *American Desi* aloud. After reading, discuss the young girl's exploration of her seemingly separate identities as an Indian and as an American. Scaffold the discussion using the [“Who Am I?” Thinking Routine](#) and imagine how the main character might respond to the questions in this thinking routine using discussion and quick writes. Then, do a picture walk, guiding students to observe each illustration, and discuss how the illustrations and endpapers, especially the fabric, support the themes of identity in the picture book.

2. Using *American Desi* as a mentor text and the [Who Am I? Thinking Routine](#), the facilitator should model his/her/their multiple identities by responding to the Who Am I? Thinking Routine on oversized chart paper in front of the group.

3. Using Think/Pair/Share, students should answer the [Who Am I? Thinking Routine](#) prompts about themselves. Share their answers with their partner, if desired. Discuss what clothing or fabric could best represent each of their identities.

Note: Identity can be a sensitive subject in many contexts so facilitators should be aware and not require students to share responses.

4. Participants should do a **quick write and/or a sketch** to answer the question, **Who am I?** Participants can also write about the clothing that best represents each identity.

5. Using *American Desi* as a mentor text, students can create a **patchwork collage square** (glue on fabric strips and images) that reflects and melds their multiple identities into one piece of art. Feel free to scan the image and add other elements digitally. Display the patchwork square with a final draft of the “Who Am I? quick write and/or creative writing that was inspired by the activity.

Students may take inspiration from Supriya Kelkar's directions on how to create a collage square: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-p_LNW8acc and from the endpapers of *American Desi*: http://www.letstalkpicturebooks.com/2022/07/endpapers-for-end-of-your-week_019145926.html

6. Using *American Desi* as a mentor text, review clothing in colonial Africa, England, and America. What might a young girl have worn in the 1700s in each of these places?

7. Now, adapt the “**Who Am I?**” Visible Thinking Routine to discuss the question, “**Who is Phillis Wheatley Peters?**”

<https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Who%20Am%20I%20-%20Exploring%20Complexity.pdf>

8. **Quick Write: Who am I? In the Voice of Phillis Wheatley Peters.** PWP was not allowed to speak freely during her lifetime. Write for 7 minutes in the voice of Phillis Wheatley Peters (first person

narrative) as she explains the different parts of her identity. **If Phillis Wheatley Peters could time-travel to your classroom, how do you think she would describe herself?** (*Students should feel free to sketch or make diagrams as part of their quick write response.*)

9. Using *American Desi* as a mentor text, create a patchwork square (glue on the fabric or multimedia elements) that reflects and melds Phillis Wheatley Peters multiple identities into one piece of art. Feel free to scan the image and add other elements digitally. (As an extension activity, consider inviting students to select a collage element and explain why they chose to include that element in their collage.)

10. Display your square and the final draft of your “Who is Phillis Wheatley Peters?” quick write or creative writing that was inspired by the quick write. Perhaps final drafts could be displayed along with an author photograph or sketch inspired by the PWP frontispiece/portrait.

Here is my original Phillis Wheatley Peters “patchwork” square (strips of fabric glued to the watercolor paper) with some relevant paper images then glued on top of the fabric.



Later, the square was uploaded to Canva and relevant digital elements (curated in advance) were added.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Tanya Baker, Sarah Ruffing Robbins, and Sandy Zagarell. Thanks also to the National Writing Project and “The Genius of Phillis Wheatley Peters” Project. It has been a gift to learn more about PWP. How I wish I had known more during my teaching days as I certainly would have wanted to expose my students more deeply to Phillis Wheatley Peters and have them consider the American Revolution from her perspective.

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