



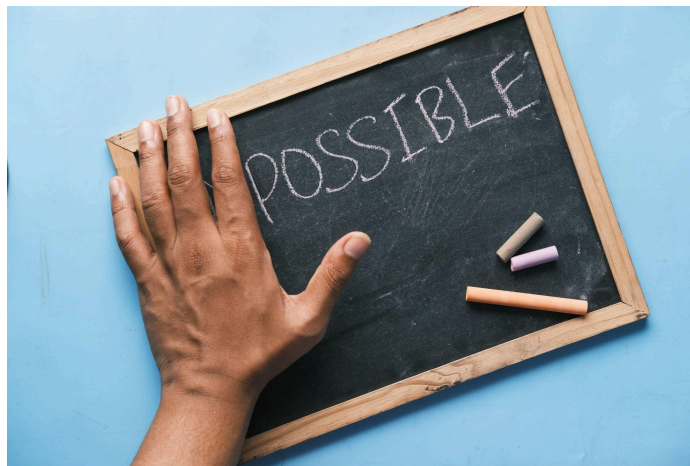
Discovering My Present and Future Self

What it is

Youth define aspirations through an activity focused on identity and self-awareness and practice communicating some of their aspirations for the future.

Why it matters

Aspirations are formed when youth interact with the world around them. Providing opportunities for youth to imagine their futures and to express who they are now and who they want to be in the future, can spark motivation and help build a system of support that helps them achieve their desired futures.¹



Getting started

Time: 45 Minutes

Grade level: 7-11

Delivery mode: In-Person

Materials:

- [Bio-Poem Template](#)
- Piece of paper and writing utensil (1 per youth)
- Whiteboard, poster board or some other visual medium

Facilitator Prep:

- Print copies of the [Bio-Poem Template](#) (1 per youth)

Background

Imagining and reimagining possibilities for their future unlocks youths' abilities and motivation to take action toward aspiration achievement. It is also important to keep in mind that aspirations are tied to individuals' self-concept. When youth imagine their futures, they are making moral claims about who they are now, their current reality, and what they believe are real possibilities for their futures. By critically reflecting on their identities, youth can expand what they believe is possible for themselves and help them

¹ Tzenis, J. (2020, January 22). Make your youth program a pathway to higher education. [Web log post]. *Youth Development Insight*. <https://blog-youth-development-insight.extension.umn.edu/2020/01/make-your-youth-program-pathway-to.html>

recognize the distribution of opportunities they have for aspiration achievement. Thinking about who they are now orients youth to act toward whom they wish to become.²

Words to Know

Aspirations: A process of hoping and imagining what one's life will be like in the future.

What to do

Introduction: Exploring Aspirations (10 minutes)

1. Tell youth that collectively, they are going to create a collection or cluster of words (Word Cloud) based on what they think of or what comes to mind when they hear the term **aspirations**.
2. Ask youth, *"When you hear the word aspirations, what comes to mind?"*
3. Have youth brainstorm their reflections using a piece of paper and writing utensil. Once youth have been given enough time to reflect, ask them to share their words aloud. As they are sharing, write down their responses on a whiteboard or posterboard to create a physical representation of a word cloud.
4. Allow young people a minute or so to reflect on their collective responses. Ask, *"What words stood out or resonated with you?"*
5. Share the following definition of aspirations: *"A process of hoping and imagining what one's life will be like in the future."*
6. Ask youth to reflect on their collective word cloud as well as the shared definition. Have youth turn to a partner and discuss the following:
 - In what ways are your own personal views of aspirations and the shared definition of aspirations the same?
 - In what ways are they different?
7. Have youth think about and share one aspiration they have for their future selves with their partner. Remind them that it's okay if they've never given it some thought until today—the important thing is that they are starting the process.

Activity: Bio-Poem (25 minutes)

8. Explain to youth that alignment to one's aspiration identifies a purpose or direction, a point towards which we can navigate. In order to identify the aspirations we have for the future, it's important to explore and understand who we uniquely are as individuals—the things they love, the things they fear, what brings them joy, etc.
9. Ask youth, *"Why might it be important to understand elements of our own identities?"*
10. Share with youth that a person's individual and social identities can influence how they understand and experience the world—for example, the opportunities and challenges they face, how they view and treat other individuals, and how others treat them. Lacking a strong sense of self can make it

² Shoshana, A. (2020). "I live one day at a time": Future orientation among Muslim high school dropouts in Israel. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 119, 105605

hard to know what they want, forging feelings of uncertainty or indecisiveness for important decisions such as decisions about their future!

11. Ask youth the following questions:
 - Have you heard of a bio-poem?
 - What do you think a bio-poem means?
12. Share with youth that the purpose of a "bio-poem" is to use creative expression to clarify important elements of your identity and to share who you are as an individual.
13. Ask youth to grab a pen and pencil and spend about five minutes brainstorming some of the key elements for their bio-poem. If able, visually share the following bullet points so youth can use them as a guide in their brainstorm.
 - Adjectives that you would use to describe yourself (i.e., adventurous, thoughtful, balanced, curious, reluctant, decisive, outspoken, etc.)
 - Relationships in your life (e.g., friend, brother, daughter, sibling)
 - Things you love
 - Things that instill joy
 - Important moments/memories
 - Fears, worries or anxieties
 - Accomplishments
 - Hopes, wishes or dreams
 - Beliefs and values
 - Special sayings or words
 - Home (location)
14. Once youth have had time to brainstorm key elements of their poem, have youth complete their bio-poems [using the Bio-Poem template](#).
15. Explain that bio-poems follow a fairly simple and predictable format; however, choosing what they want to include on each line is where the creativity and personal touches can come through.
16. Once youth have had enough time to work on their poems, open up the space to see if anyone is willing to share their poem or a few lines from their poem with the whole group.

Reflection (5 minutes)

17. Gather as a large group and facilitate a conversation around these three questions:
 - In what ways is self-awareness helpful as you think about your future?
 - Why might a deeper understanding of our own aspirations be important?
 - How might sharing our aspirations with others be helpful?

Take it further

- Take a look at the following [lesson on "Identity"](#) from the *WeConnect: A Global Youth Citizenship Curriculum*.
- Explore careers that might be aligned with an interest in poetry. Does anything peak your interest or sparks curiosity? Some examples include: copywriter, editor, poetry writer, fiction writing, poetry professor, proofreader, grant writer, technical writer, content strategist, curriculum specialist, journalist, blogger, teacher, copy editor, film maker, editorial assistant, author, librarian

Aspirations ideas and content adapted from: Tzenis, Joanna A. (2020). Youth Aspirations: Imagining and Navigating Futures in Higher Education (2nd Edition). Retrieved from the University Digital Conservancy, <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/214339>.

Authors:

Jenny Cable, Curriculum Project Coordinator, UMN Extension Department of Youth Development

Joanna Tzenis, PhD, 4-H State Specialist, Education & Career Pathways, UMN Extension Department of Youth Development

Reviewer/editor: Jessica Plerson Russo, Extension Professor, UMN Extension Department of Youth Development

Bio-Poem Template

Below is an outline of the key elements of a bio-poem. Bio-poems follow a fairly simple and predictable format, though what you choose to include within each line is up to you!

Line 1: Your name

Line 2: Adjectives/traits that describe you (list 3-4)

Note: If you're unsure, ask someone you trust or someone that knows you well!

- Examples: empathetic, tenacious, sensitive, optimistic, charming, strong

Line 3: Important relationship

- Examples: child of, friend of, daughter of, mentor/mentee of

Line 4: Who loves/lover of

- Examples: pad thai, all that nature has to offer, board games, cozy slippers, reality TV, reading before bed

Line 5: Who feels

- Examples: a strong desire to help others, easily frustrated when things go unplanned, sometimes overwhelmed and anxious

Line 6: Who needs

- Examples: lots of hugs, family and friends, good food and good conversation, a supportive community, puppy cuddles, to spend less time in the comparison trap

Line 7: Who gives

- Examples: support to those who need it, friendship to others easily, her time to food justice

Line: Who learned

- Examples: a new language, that success doesn't equate to happiness, how to tie a knot in kindergarten, that baking soda can be used for more than just cooking

Line 8: Who fears

- Examples: heartbreak, losing someone I love, heights, being vulnerable with others, failure

Line 9: Who wants to experience

- Examples: a sunset in Hawaii, true happiness, a hike in the mountains, skydiving in New Zealand, homemade gnocchi

Line 10: Resident of

Note: This could be where you live now (present) or where you grew up

Line 11: Your last name

Fill out this template below. If you need some guidance or inspiration to get you started, there is a sample poem included on the next page!

(Your first name)

(Adjectives/traits that describe you)

(Important relationship)

Who loves/lover of

Who feels

Who needs

Who gives

Who learned

Who fears

Who wants to experience

Resident of

(Your last name)

Bio-Poem Sample

Ann

Tenacious, charming, resourceful and joy-filled

Friend of Timothy

Lover of Saturdays, cozy slippers and reading before bed

Who feels a strong desire to help others

Who needs good conversation and good food

Who gives friendship to others easily

Who learned the hard way that you can't trust everyone

Who fears rejection

Who wants to experience a day at the library uninterrupted

Resident of Missoula

Doe