

"On Being Told I Don't Speak Like a Black Person" by Allison Joseph

I would like to use this poem with multilingual students to encourage the awareness of language, identity, and stereotypes. I have often taught students who speak languages other than English at home and who live the daily reality of linguistic stereotypes; while their experiences are not the same, I believe they would draw connections with this poem, and it could foster deep analysis and personal reflection.

On your own:

1. Read the poem silently at least two times.
2. What is the tone of the poem?
3. Look at the structure of the poem. Why do you think the poet begins a new stanza? What do you notice about the line breaks? How does the structure impact the reading of the poem?

Discuss the following questions as a group:

4. What is your initial response to this poem? Please discuss briefly in groups (about 3 minutes).
5. How do you all think language plays a role in shaping and reinforcing stereotypes? Can you as a group identify other examples where language influences perceptions of identity?
6. Analyze the use of imagery, tone, and voice in the poem. How do these elements enhance the poem's exploration of identity and race?
7. How can this poem help readers better understand the complexities of racial identity and the impact of stereotypes? What insights does it offer into the experiences of people who are judged based on superficial aspects of their identity?

Recorded personal reflection:

On your own, record yourself speaking your response to the poem in general. Then, put the final stanza into your own words and record yourself speaking it out loud.