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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2016 Volume II: Why Literature Matters

Who Am I?: Culturally Relevant Text and American Identity

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by Mark Holston

Students' aversion to reading often stems from not seeing themselves or their experiences represented in the curriculum; they feel disconnected or disengaged from what is being taught, and this disconnect is profound for students of color. When students can see themselves in the literature they are reading, the literature can be an opportunity to explore their own identity, and explore and understand who they are.

Centering on the culturally relevant text *Catfish and Mandala*, by Andrew Pham, this unit hopes to address the universal theme of selfhood, more specifically, self-identity in the context of American identity. The unit gives students an opportunity to discover their own views of where they fit in as Americans and how these relate to the ethnic and racial cultures that they come from. At the same time, this unit will use Pham's rich prose to develop the skills of analytical reading and writing.

The text *Catfish and Mandala* would be appropriate for students in ninth to twelfth grade. Although designed for 11th grade students, this curriculum unit can be adapted for teaching an appropriate grade level text, and the activities can be modified to match student's grade levels and academic abilities.

(Developed for English 3, grade 11; recommended for English courses, grades 9-12)

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