**Introduction to Pauli Murray**

Pauli Murray (1910-1985) was a poet, a lawyer, a priest, a freight hopper, Eleanor Roosevelt’s friend, arrested for refusing to comply with bus segregation laws, a closeted member of the LGBTQ+ community, a professor, and so much more. Their work has influenced Supreme Court decisions, the Civil Rights movement, and countless individual people.

Throughout the online exhibit, you may notice that Murray is referred to using both she and they. While she was alive, language and gender expressions were different than they are today. We don’t know what pronouns they might choose to use now. During her lifetime, she wrote with the language available, using she and her. However, throughout their life Murray identified sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman, which we would now call gender fluidity. Following the example of the [Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice](https://www.paulimurraycenter.com/pronouns-pauli-murray), the AWM has chosen to use both she and they to better show the complexity of Murray’s gender identity.

**Note to the Educator**

The education materials provided were created within the framework of [Restorative Justice](https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-heck-restorative-justice-heather-wolpert-gawron) in mind. We are human, which means we will make mistakes. If you find yourself overwhelmed or without solutions as you and your students explore this content, that is okay! It is normal to mess up and make mistakes. But it’s also important to take responsibility for our actions when we do and be committed to being better allies in the future. It is okay to verbalize with your students, “I don’t know but let us find out together.” We extend our contact information, [education@americanwritersmusem.org](mailto:education@americanwritersmusem.org) in which you are welcome to ask questions. The writing activities are intended to immerse students in engaging content that will stimulate reflection, creativity, and collaboration. Students may revisit any of the writing produced throughout these activities to develop into longer writing pieces.

Includes Common Core Anchor Standards (CCR) for Writing for 9-12 grade levels. Specific standards are not included to allow teachers across grade levels to tailor the writing activities to the specific standards for their grade level.

**Pre-activities**: The [American Identities Student Materials](https://docs.google.com/document/d/148ZMt6tJRVwHvAl2J-gqppIAQtOWfYpdo8HZLWt71tI/edit) will activate and build background knowledge related to the themes students will explore while engaging with the content of the virtual exhibit.

**Glossary**:

* Ethnicity: Refers to a grouping of humans based on shared social traits such as language, ancestry, history, place of origin, or culture. Examples of different ethnicities include Arab, Jewish, English, Dutch, Korean, Chinese, Nigerian, Tanzanian, Mexican, and Maori.
* Gender: Often defined as a social construct of norms, behaviors and roles that varies between societies and over time. Gender is often categorized as male, female or nonbinary.
* Gender Identity: One’s own internal sense of self and their gender, whether that is man, woman, neither or both.
* Injustice: Lack of fairness or justice; an unjust act or occurrence
* Intersectionality: A term coined by law professor and civil rights advocate Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw. It is a framework that helps us to explore the dynamic between coexisting identities and connected systems of oppression, particularly as it relates to gender and race in the experiences of Black women.
* Nationality: Refers to your country of citizenship, the country on your passport or where you hold legal rights as a citizen. Examples of different nationalities include British, American, Kenyan, French, Australian, Argentinian, and others.
* Race: Refers to a grouping of humans based on shared observable, physical features, such as skin color, facial features, and hair textures. Examples of different races include Black, White, Asian, Native American, and others.
* Sex: Refers to a person’s biological status and is typically assigned at birth, usually on the basis of external anatomy. Sex is typically categorized as male, female or intersex.

**Topic**: Identity and Intersectionality

**Learning Experience**

**Objective**: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

My Home

Have your students read the excerpt from *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family*. (This can be found on the *My Hom*e worksheet.) Have them think about how Pauli Murray describes the sights, sounds and smells of her childhood home. Then, have your students start by answering the following question: What is your home like? Describe details about how you feel there and what sights, sounds, or smells make you think of home. It can also mention where their home is, and if they currently live there. Encourage students to select a genre of their choice and plan an original piece, drafting and revising their work, and working with peers to edit their final composition.

Social Categories

Have students complete the Social Categories self-examination. This is an activity that will have students explore what they already know about their identities. They may learn some things that they didn’t really know before or were not entirely sure about.

Narrative Writing

Drawing inspiration from the quote provided, students will begin writing their own narrative. As they read the quote, consider all the challenges Pauli Murray faced to reach each “plateau” in their life. How did they overcome these challenges? How did they use these adversities as catalysts for their work in social justice?

As they brainstorm, have them consider the following questions to guide their writing:

* Describe characteristics of your own identity. Consider your Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, Gender, Religious affiliations, etc.
* What other important parts of your identity, experiences, personality, likes and dislikes, make up who you are?
* Do you find that some of these characteristics of your identity intersect or overlap with each other?
* Are there any challenges you face based on these identities?
* What practices or actions are you taking to face these challenges? Are you still discovering these aspects of yourself?

**Post-activities:**

Watch [My Name is Pauli Murray Documentary](https://youtu.be/Uh4r95VBU2Q)

Read *Proud Shoes The Story of An American Family* by Pauli Murray

Listen to [Dead Writer Drama, Episode 5: Pauli Murray](https://americanwritersmuseum.org/podcast/episode-5-pauli-murray/)

Listen to [*Dark Testament*](https://sds.lib.harvard.edu/sds/audio/427017741)

Suggested Reading:

**Nonfiction**

*Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* by Pauli Murray

*Pauli Murray: Shouting for the Rights of All People* by Deborah Nelson Linck

*Beyond the Gender Binary* by Alok Vaid-Menon

*Continuum* by Chella Man

*Me and White Supremacy Young Readers’ Edition* by Layla F. Saad

**Fiction**

*The Other Black Girl* by Zakiya Dalila Harris

*The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas

*Watch us Rise* by Ellen Hagan and Renee Watson

*Black Enough: Stories of Being Young & Black in America* by Ibi Zobi, Tracey Baptiste, Coe Booth, Dhonielle Clayton, Brandy Colbert, Jay Coles, Lamar Giles, Leah Henderson, Justina Ireland, Varian Johnson, Kekla Magoon, Tochi Onyebuchi, Jason Reynolds, Nic Stone, Liara Tamani, Renee Watcson, Rita Williams-Garcia