

# Reality's Peace

by Eva Sierra

**Education level:** High School

**Genre:** Poetry (lyrics)

**Time frame:** 1 hour

**Objective:** Explore topics of social inequality and depression, and evaluate these topics by writing a poem about self-love.

**Prior knowledge and skills:** None.

**Required materials:** Pen and paper. Digital projection. Printed copies of the literary model (optional).

**Literary model:** "I" by Kendrick Lamar

## Sequence of activities:

### Introduction (5 minutes):

Before beginning, ask the class to silently ponder the question:

0. What does self-love mean to you?

On a piece of paper for brainstorming, ask students to write down their thoughts.

Invite students to share their ideas. Discuss students' responses as a class. You can follow up with questions like "Do you agree with this idea/definition?" and "Did anyone write something similar?"

### Reading and Discussion (15 minutes):

Project the lyrics to "I" by Kendrick Lamar on the board for the class. It is also helpful for students to have their own printed copies or digital copies. Search for a clean version of the song to play for the class as students read along. The lyrics may need to be reviewed prior to the class. There is a classroom-appropriate version of the lyrics attached at the bottom of this lesson plan.

After listening, invite students to reread the lyrics. Invite students to share which parts stood out to them the most, which parts they like or dislike, and which parts they might have found confusing. Discuss the lyrics as a class. *The themes of the song are self-love and resilience, namely in the face of social disparity and depression.*

Share the following background with students about Hip-Hop and Rap in 2014:

*“I” by Kendrick Lamar was released on September 23, 2014. It was the lead single to Lamar’s third album “To Pimp a Butterfly.” The album gained prominence for its themes of racial inequality, depression, and institutional discrimination.*

*Lamar’s album was a stark contrast to other artists in the genre at the time. It offered a glimpse of hope that was missing in the mainstream of Hip-Hop. It is of note that other top artists that year--Mac Miller, Lil Peep, and Rich Homie Quan--who also wrote about their struggles with depression, have all since passed from accidental drug overdose.*

*The song “I” states “I love myself” 19 times. In retrospect, Lamar’s observance of and resistance to the state of the genre was more pressing than anyone could have imagined.*

**Brainstorming (20 minutes):**

As a class, answer the first two reflection questions.

*Invite students to share their ideas, and come to an agreement as a class. Ask the class “Do you agree with this idea?” “Is there anything someone wants to add to this idea?”*

1. What is the theme or “message” of the song?
2. What are some struggles and trials that the speaker is facing?

The next brainstorming questions will be answered individually on the same brainstorming sheet used for question 0, at the beginning of the lesson.

3. What are some struggles and trials that you have faced or are currently facing?
4. How have your own struggles and trials made you the person you are today?
5. In the song we read, Kendrick gives himself motivational messages such as “*I wear my heart on my sleeve / let the runway start,*” “*one day at a time, sun gon’ shine,*” and “*I’m a do it ‘til I get it right.*” What are some motivational messages you would want to say to yourself?

As students finish answering the questions, ask them to review their answers and circle or underline the parts that stand out to them the most.

**Writing Exercise (10+ minutes):**

Share the writing prompt:

*In verse two, Lamar says “Dreams of reality’s peace.” Take a moment to think about what this means.*

*What does ‘reality’s peace’ look like?*

*What does a reality where everybody loves themselves look like?*

*What does a reality that is fair (economically, socially, politically) look like?  
What needs to change in our current reality, to get to that ideal reality?*

*Answer these questions in a poem.*

Ask students to try to write without stopping. Remind them that this is a draft, and that it is best to let their ideas out and worry about tidying the piece up later. Remind students to give the poem a title. Ask students to be honest about their feelings and experiences.

Let them know they will be writing for ten minutes. If at ten minutes the class is still writing, silently extend the time by 3-5 minutes.

**Sharing (5 minutes):**

If there is time, call upon students who volunteer to share their work.

Set a **class guideline of confidence** to not repeat any personal or sensitive topics after this lesson or outside of the classroom. Before sharing, ask performers to be loud and confident and ask the class to be attentive and respectful.

Sometimes there may not be many volunteers to share. In this case, ask if there is anyone who would allow you to read their poem out loud on their behalf. This usually invites more students to share.

i

***Kendrick Lamar***

“i” was released on September 23, 2014 as the lead single from Lamar's third studio album *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

*This is a world premiere!*

*This is a world premiere!*

I done been through a whole lot  
Trial, tribulation, but I know God  
Satan wanna put me in a bow tie  
Pray that the holy water don't go dry, yeah yeah  
As I look around me  
So many [people] wanna down me  
But an enemigo never drown me  
In front of a dirty double-mirror they found me

And I love myself  
(The world is a ghetto with big guns and picket signs)  
I love myself  
(But it can do what it want whenever it want, I don't mind)  
I love myself  
(He said I gotta get up, life is more than suicide)  
I love myself  
(One day at a time, sun gon' shine)

Everybody lookin' at you crazy (crazy!)  
What you gonna do? (what you gonna do?)  
Lift up your head and keep moving (keep moving)  
Or let the paranoia haunt you (haunt you)?  
Peace to fashion police, I wear my heart  
On my sleeve, let the runway start

You know the miserable do love company  
What do you want from me and my scars?  
Everybody lack confidence, everybody lack confidence  
How many times my potential was anonymous?  
How many times the city making me promises?  
So I promise this

I love myself  
(The world is a ghetto with big guns and picket signs)  
I love myself  
(But it can do what it want whenever it want, I don't mind)  
I love myself  
(He said I gotta get up, life is more than suicide)  
I love myself  
(One day at a time, sun gon' shine)

They wanna say it's a war outside and a bomb in the street  
And a gun in the hood, and a mob of police  
And a rock on the corner, and a line for the fiend  
And a bottle full of lean, and a model on the scene, yup  
These days of frustration keep y'all on tuck and rotation  
I duck these cold faces, post up fi-fie-fo-fum basis  
Dreams of reality's peace  
Blow steam in the face of the beast  
The sky could fall down, the wind could cry now  
The strong in me, I still smile

I love myself  
(The world is a ghetto with big guns and picket signs)  
I love myself  
(But it can do what it want whenever it want, I don't mind)  
I love myself  
(He said I gotta get up, life is more than suicide)  
I love myself  
(One day at a time, sun gon' shine)

Walk my bare feet (walk my bare feet)  
Down, down valley deep (down, down valley deep)  
Fi-fie-fo-fum (fi-fie-fo-fum) (I love myself)  
My heart undone (my heart undone)(I love myself)

The world is a ghetto with big guns and picket signs  
(I love myself)  
But it can do what it want whenever it want, I don't mind  
(I love myself)  
He said I gotta get up, life is more than suicide  
(I love myself)  
One day at a time, sun gon' shine

I went to war last night  
With an automatic weapon, don't nobody call a medic  
I'ma do it 'til I get it right  
I went to war last night  
I've been dealing with depression ever since an adolescent  
Duckin' every other blessin' I can never see the message  
I could never take the lead, I could never bob and weave  
From a negative and letting them annihilate me  
And it's evident I'm moving at a meteor speed  
Finna run into a building, lay my body in the street  
Keep my money in the ceiling, let my mama know I'm free  
Give my story to the children and a lesson they can read  
And the glory to the feeling of the holy unseen  
Seen enough, make a [person] scream, "I love myself!"

I lost my head  
I must've misread what the good book said  
Oh woes keep me, it's a jungle inside  
Give myself again 'til the well runs dry (i)