

What I Would Like to Say Is...

A Lesson on Labels, Identity, and Resilience (Grades 6–8)

The Poem

What I would like to say is...
we are more than the words
written about us.

More than “at-risk.”
More than “marginalized.”
More than “minority.”

I know those are professional terms.
They live in reports and data charts
and school improvement plans.

But words don’t just describe reality.
They help shape it.

Call a child “at-risk” long enough,
and they may begin to believe
that risk is all they are.

Label a community by what it lacks,
and soon people forget
what it carries.

Yes, some groups face more barriers.
Yes, some communities struggle with fewer resources.
And yes, many of those affected
are Black, Indigenous, racialized,
or living in poverty.

But struggle is not an identity.

So I choose a different word.
I choose resilient.

Resilience is not about pretending
life is easy.

It is about recognizing
strength in motion.

It is about rising again
after being pushed down.

It is about claiming space
in places that were not built for you
and saying,
I am still here.

And I am more
than your label.

Student Activities

Part 1 – First Impressions

1. Circle three words in the poem that stand out to you.
2. Why did you choose those words?
3. What feelings does this poem create?

Part 2 – Understanding Labels

A. In your own words, define the following:

- Minority
- Marginalized
- At-risk
- Resilient

B. Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Why do you think schools or governments use terms like 'at-risk'?
2. How could those terms help?
3. How could those terms hurt?

Part 3 – Words Shape Reality

The poem says: "Words don't just describe reality. They help shape it."

1. What does this mean?
2. Can you think of a time when a label affected how someone saw themselves?
3. Have you ever been labelled in a way that didn't feel accurate? Explain.

Part 4 – Identity vs. Circumstance

The poem says: "Struggle is not an identity."

1. What is the difference between a situation and an identity?
2. Why is it important not to confuse the two?
3. Give an example of a challenge someone might face that does NOT define who they are.

Part 5 – Writing Choice Board (Choose ONE)

Option 1 – Rewrite the Narrative:

Write your own poem beginning with: 'What I would like to say is...' Focus on a label you dislike or want to challenge.

Option 2 – Flip the Label:

Choose a negative label (e.g., lazy, troubled, bad, poor, loud, shy, immigrant, different).

Write a paragraph explaining: What people assume, what the truth really is, and what strengths are overlooked.

Option 3 – Spoken Word Response:

Write a short spoken word piece titled: 'I Am More Than...' Include one challenge, one strength, and one message to the world.

Part 6 – Class Discussion (Teacher-Guided)

1. Why do you think certain groups are more often described as 'at-risk'?
2. How can we support people facing challenges without reducing them to those challenges?
3. What is the difference between noticing barriers and defining people by barriers?

Extension Activity (For Deeper Thinking – Grades 7–8)

Research a community or group that has been labeled negatively in history.

1. What was the label?
2. How did it affect them?
3. How did they challenge or redefine that label?

Present your findings as a short speech, poem, poster, or mini-presentation.

Teacher Resource Guide

Lesson Purpose

This lesson builds critical literacy and identity awareness. Students analyze how language influences perception, and they explore the difference between circumstance and identity.

Learning Goals

- Analyze how language shapes identity.
- Differentiate between personal identity and external labels.
- Express voice and perspective through creative writing.

Suggested Lesson Flow (60–80 Minutes)

1. Read poem aloud (teacher or student volunteer).
2. Silent reflection and journaling (5–7 minutes).
3. Vocabulary and discussion (15 minutes).
4. Writing activity (20–25 minutes).
5. Optional sharing circle (10–15 minutes).

Assessment Rubric

Criteria	Level 1 (Limited)	Level 2 (Some)	Level 3 (Considerable)	Level 4 (Thorough)
Understanding of Labels & Identity	Limited understanding shown	Some understanding shown	Clear understanding shown	Insightful and deep understanding shown
Critical Thinking & Reflection	Few ideas developed	Some ideas developed	Clear and relevant ideas developed	Thoughtful and sophisticated ideas developed
Creativity & Personal Voice	Minimal originality	Some originality	Clear personal voice	Powerful and compelling voice
Clarity & Organization	Unclear structure	Some organization	Organized and clear	Highly organized and polished