

# Skin Deep

**Pillar: Positive Social Environments**  
**Division: IV**  
**Grade Level: 10-12**  
**Core Curriculum Connections: English Language Arts**

## I. Rationale:

During the adolescent years, teens strive to fit in with their peers, while attempting to develop their own individuality at the same time. Although individuality and conformity are contradictory, they do share a similar goal: the pursuit of acceptance. Teenagers want to accept themselves as they are, but this self-acceptance is usually contingent upon gaining peer acceptance in order to validate who they are. During this period of rapid physical, emotional, and social change, both peer and family relationships are impacted. Analysing the voice and message of poetry can be a meaningful and therapeutic way for teens to relate to common feelings and issues, helping them to accept and value their own uniqueness and appreciate others' differences as well.

## II. Activity Objectives:

*After completing this lesson, students will be able to:*

- Describe the challenge during adolescence to gain peer acceptance while developing one's sense of self.
- Recognize the influence that peers and the media have on personal choices during the teen years.
- Identify physical and emotional changes that occur during adolescence and describe their impact on relationships within the family.

## III. Curriculum Outcomes:

### English 10-2, 20-2, or 30-2

#### **1.1 Discover possibilities**

**1.1.1 Form tentative understandings, interpretations and positions**

**1.1.2 Experiment with language, image and structure**

#### **1.2 Extend awareness**

**1.2.1 Consider new perspectives**

#### **2.1 Construct meaning from text and context**

**2.1.2 Understand and interpret content**

**2.1.3 Engage prior knowledge**

#### **2.2 Understand and appreciate textual forms, elements and techniques**

**2.2.1 Relate form, structure and medium to purpose, audience and content**

**2.2.2 Relate elements, devices and techniques to created effects**

#### **2.3 Respond to a variety of print and non print texts**

**2.3.1 Connect self, text, culture and milieu**

#### IV. Materials:

- old school yearbooks or class pictures (dating back 2 or more decades)
- copies of the poems: "*The Non-Conformist*", "*Sunglasses*", and "*Mom Says*" by Angela Shelf Medearis (attached)

#### V. Procedure:

##### a. Engaging Interest:

1. Set up a makeshift photo gallery of old class yearbooks and pictures by displaying them in the classroom for students to look at.
2. After all students have had the opportunity to look at the display, have them return to their seats and discuss the differences between the teens in these pictures and themselves. Record comments on the board in regards to hair length and style, clothing, accessories, make up etc.
3. Point out that the teens in these pictures are as similar to one another in their appearance as they are different from students of today. Discuss the following questions with the class:
  - How does a person's physical appearance reveal a desire to be accepted by others?
  - In what way does a person's physical appearance reflect a desire to be different—or to represent one's unique self-identity?

##### b. Poetry Analysis:

1. Tell students that they are going to read three poems that address these and related questions.
2. Pass out copies of the poems, and instruct students to read them individually, in pairs, or read them aloud as a class. As they read, challenge students to identify what each speaker is like, both on and beneath the surface.
3. After students have completed the reading, the following questions can be used as class discussion questions or assigned as individual or group work.

##### c. Follow Up:

1. **Analyzing:** In literature, *irony* is a contradiction between what a character says and what the reader knows is actually true. What is ironic about the capitalized words in "Nonconformist"? What do these words reveal about the speaker's self-identity?
2. **Evaluating:** *Self-image* is how a person sees and feels about himself or herself. Would you say that the speaker in "Sunglasses" has a positive self-image? Why or why not?
3. **Making Inferences:** What do you think the speaker in "Sunglasses" means when he says "no one seems to understand me when I'm talking anyway"?
4. **Summarizing:** In "Mom Says," how has the relationship between the speaker and her mother changed from the time when the speaker was a young child?
5. **Comparing and Contrasting:** Which do you think has a greater impact on the way teens of your generation look and act: the media or one's peers? Explain your response.
6. **Analyzing:** Rate the communication skills of the speaker in "Mom Says" using a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is "Very strong" and 1 is "Very weak." Explain your rating.

#### **d. Literary Response - 4 Options:**

1. **Oral:** Choose the poem that you personally relate to the most and perform it as a monologue. Your voice and gestures will need to be used as a vehicle to expressing the meaning, emotion, and message that the speaker in the poem is trying to convey.

-OR-

2. **Written:** Compose a free verse poem, such as an 'inner thoughts poem', which reflects your own personal struggles with trying to develop or express your sense of self while dealing with the pressure of gaining peer acceptance and approval. Alternatively, students may write a personal response in the form of a journal entry instead.

-OR-

3. **Dramatization:** Write a dialogue that needs to occur between the speaker of the poem and his/her mother in the poem, "Mom Says". Student partners can then perform this for the class.

-OR-

4. **Compare:** Choose one of the poems read in class. Find a popular song or another poem that has a similar theme. Compare the messages and present your findings to the class.

#### **VI. Extensions and Variations:**

- **Electronic Photo Essay or Scrapbook:** Have students create a photo essay or scrapbook that represents own personal identity. This can be a symbolic or a literal representation of their self-image (significant events, activities, experiences, and accomplishments) that occurred over the course of their lives and had a role in shaping who they are today.

#### **VII. Assessment Ideas:**

- Assess each student's selected literary response option.
- [Monologue Rubric](#) - may be used for option 1.
- [Response Rubric](#) - may be used for option 2.
- [Oral Presentation Rubric](#) - may be used for option 3.
- a comparison rubric that focuses on theme would be useful for option 4 or the Oral Presentation rubric could be used to assess the presentation component.

## Student Resource Sheet

### Nonconformist

I don't want to be anybody  
but myself.  
So, I shaved little lines  
in my head and  
died my hair purple  
and green  
(with just a hint of orange)  
and pierced my nose and  
hung a gold earring in it,  
AS AN EXPRESSION OF WHO I AM  
(who am I?).  
I waited until someone else did it first.  
I didn't want anyone to think I'm  
weird.  
You know what I mean?

### Sunglasses

I wear these dark glasses  
because they're really cool  
(and because I don't want you to see  
the fear  
in my eyes).  
I walk like I do  
because  
I'm trying to keep  
from running.  
I try to stay alive with a rap  
style that drives 'em wild  
with what I say each and every day  
because  
no one seems to  
understand me  
when I'm talking anyway.

## **Mom Says**

Mom says

“Be careful!”

“Where are you going?”

“What time are you coming home?”

I say

“I know what I’m doing.”

“Quit treating me like I’m a baby.”

I guess we keep telling each other

the same old things

in the same old way

because

we’re too scared to say

I love you.