“Identity” can be defined as the ways in which an individual describes him/herself or the ways in which a person is described by society. A person can have several “identities” such as: gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, linguistic background, culture, religion, sexual orientation, geographic residence, nationality, creed, familial connections, body size, and other signifiers.

The theme of “Identity” is woven throughout “The Other Wes Moore” and we learn about the different “identities” of both Wes Moores in addition to the identities of their families, friends, and community members.

Through this next series of discussions, activities, writing opportunities, and debates, students will explore the theme of “Identity” that will scaffold their understandings by engaging in discussions with peers, self-selecting the attributes of their own identity, and connecting their personal identities to the individuals from “The Other Wes Moore.”
**Common Core Standards Addressed in this Section:**

- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

- Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, and presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

- Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

- Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

- Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

These discussion questions are designed to encourage students to think deeply about the scenarios and ideas presented in “The Other Wes Moore.” Specifically, these discussions will build students’ reading comprehension skills, allow them to connect the book to their own lives, provide opportunities for them to learn from their classmates, and increase their critical thinking skills.
What does the word “identity” mean? What are some of the ways in which people identify themselves?

Some identities can be seen by others and other identities are only known to others if the individual chooses to share it. What are some of the identities that you can usually “see”? What are some identities that you might not be able to see?

If we see a man in a tailored suit driving a brand new sports car, we might identify him as someone belonging to a higher socioeconomic group. Is that an accurate assumption? What are the benefits of knowing certain identities of others and what can be misleading or harmful about making assumptions about the identities of others?

The cover of the book contains the following statement, “The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my life could have been his.” Given what you already know about both Wes Moores, what do you think this statement means?

On page 94 we learn that Wes was referred to as a “plebe” at the Valley Forge Military Academy. What is a plebe and how does it compare to Wes’s other identities? What does this new identity do to him?

On pages 96–97, Wes sees Captain Hill demand respect from the F Company. What are the identities that Wes sees in Captain Hill? What aspects of Captain Hill’s identity caused Wes to reflect on the ways in which Shea commanded respect?

While he was in South Africa, Wes learned about a manhunt taking place in his neighborhood for a man with his same name. Why is it significant that they both have the same name? What do you think went through Wes’s head when he heard this?

On page 132, Wes reflects on the people from his past and writes, “Aside from family and friends, the men I most trusted all had something in common: They all wore the uniform of the United States of America.” How does this quote relate to the theme of “Identity”?

On page 180 Wes writes, “People who taught me that no accident of birth, not being black, or relatively poor, being from Baltimore or the Bronx or fatherless, would ever define or limit me. In other words, they helped me to discover what it means to be free.” What does this quote mean to you? What does it mean to be free?

What do you think Wes learned about himself by writing this book? Did you learn anything about yourself and/or other people around you or in your neighborhood?
IDENTIFYING OUR IDENTITIES

“The Other Wes Moore” is uniquely organized as a personal memoir written from both the 1st and 3rd person points of view. This activity will establish a foundation for the curriculum by encouraging students to think expansively about their personal identities so that they can engage in the discussions, activities, writings, and debates that follow.

**Teach Prior to Activity:**

**Genre:** This book is a personal memoir. A personal memoir is a genre of literature in which a person writes about their life or the “memories” from their past.

**Objectives:**

- Students will learn about the personal memoir genre and the 1st and 3rd person points of view
- Students will be able to self-select their different identities
- Students will express their own perceptions of those identities
- Students will consider the perceived social underpinnings of their identities

**Point of View** tells us who is telling the story or from what perspective it is being told from. When a story is told from the 1st person point of view, we know that the author is the person telling the story because the author typically uses “I” and “my” in the story. A story written from the 3rd person point of view occurs when the author is not speaking about his/her own experiences. Instead, they narrate a story about other people’s lives and experiences.

**Individual Work:**

1. Write a quote from pages 5–25 that is written from the 1st Person point of view.

2. Write a quote from pages 5–25 that is written from the 3rd Person point of view.

3. Thinking about the pages you have already read and the discussions you had with your class, list your different “identities.” Remember, we all have several different identities, so be sure to include as many as possible in your list.
4| What are your perceptions about your own identities? Complete the top chart with three of the identities you identified in question #3. Try to select those identities that you might have both positive and negative perceptions of.

5| On page 19, Wes writes, “White neighborhoods in Baltimore blockaded their streets, attempting to confine the damage of the Riots to its poorer, darker jurisdictions.” This illustrates how one aspect of a person’s identity, in this case his/her race, can be generalized, misunderstood, or stereotyped by others. Reread the different identities you listed for yourself in question #2. Write the ways that society might perceive each of your identities next to each item on your list.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity: male</th>
<th>Perception: good at sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity: slightly overweight</td>
<td>Perception: lazy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6| Now that you identified the perceptions you have of your identities and the perceptions society might have, complete the bottom chart. Pick three identities and a specific thing you can do to reinforce positive perceptions OR confront/dispel the negative ones for each identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal “Identity”</th>
<th>Action that might reinforce or dispel existing perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE “STORY” OF MY NAME

In “The Other Wes Moore,” Wesley Watende Omari Moore explains the literal and symbolic meanings of his names. In this activity, students will think about the origins of their names and will have the opportunity to share the “story” of their name with peers.

Common Core Standards Addressed in this Activity:

- Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.
- Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
- Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).
- Students will present the story of their name to the class or a partner.

Individual Work:

1| Re-read pages 6–7 and identify the main idea of these paragraphs. Explain what you learned about Wes and Nikki’s names.

2| Think about your first, middle, last, or nickname and consider the following questions: Do any of your names have another meaning in a different language? Do any of your names represent a particular character trait? Were you named after someone else? How did your parents choose your name? Who gave you your nickname? Do you know anything about your ancestors who shared your last name?

3| Prepare a 5 minute oral presentation in which you share the “story” of your name. If you have trouble with this, ask a parent, grandparent, or guardian to help you.

4| With a partner or small group, take turns sharing the “story” of your names. Remember to be active listeners, respectful, and to ask questions of each other.
LETTER TO WES MOORE

When speaking about this book, Wes Moore says that he was haunted by the “Other Wes Moore” and made a decision to write him a letter. In this activity, students will first organize their thoughts and questions in a graphic organizer. They will then write a formal letter to either of the two Wes Moores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Core Standards Addressed in this Activity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).</td>
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</table>

Teach Prior to Activity:
The writing process typically involves three distinct steps: a pre-writing activity, a first draft for editing, and a final version.

A K/W/L chart is a type of graphic organizer that helps students to organize the information they “know,” “want to know,” and “learned” into three columns. See the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>“What I Know”</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>“What I Want to Know”</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>“What I Learned”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Objectives:
• Students will be able to complete a K/W/L chart as a pre-writing activity.
• Students will write the first draft of a letter and edit their work with a partner.
• Students will write a finalized letter to either of the two Wes Moores.

Individual Work:
1| Later, you will be asked to write a formal letter to either of the two Wes Moores. Before you write your letter, first reflect on what you have already read in “The Other Wes Moore” and what you would still like to know. Use the following K/W/L chart to organize your pre-writing thoughts.

2| Now that you have organized your pre-writing thoughts, it is time to write the first draft of your letter. In your letter, be sure to include a greeting, an introduction of yourself, and at least three questions for Wes. Also, make at least three references to “The Other Wes Moore.” When you have finished your letter, work with a partner and edit each other’s work.

3| The third step in the writing process is to write your final version. Use the edits from your previous draft and write/type your final letter to Wes Moore. Be sure to use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“What I Know”</td>
<td>“What I Want to Know”</td>
<td>“What I Learned”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CREATING A VENN DIAGRAM

On pages 52–53 Wes talks about his neighborhood friends and his school friends. He explains the differences between the two groups of friends and says that he doesn’t fit in with either group. In this activity, students will identify other examples from the book that compare and contrast two things.

Common Core Standards Addressed in this Activity:

• Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

• Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

• Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Teach Prior to Activity:

“Compare and contrast” is a literacy skill that helps readers to identify the ways in which two things are similar and the ways in which they are different.

A Venn Diagram is a graphic organizer that consists of two circles that overlap each other in the center. A Venn diagram is typically used to show the features that are unique and shared between two items. See the blank Venn diagram below:

Objectives:

• Students will be able to identify a Venn diagram.

• Students will compare and contrast different aspects of both Wes Moores’ lives.

• Students will complete a Venn diagram to illustrate the similarities and differences between both Wes Moores.
Individual Work:

1| Compare and Contrast the lives of the two Wes Moores. Begin with their childhoods and discuss the circumstances and events that are the same and different. Think about their families, neighborhoods, education, and the decisions they make.

2| Complete the Venn diagram below by including at least five items in each section.

3| Write three shared characteristics between Wes Moore (the author) and you.

4| Write three shared characteristics between The “other” Wes Moore and you.

5| Write two characteristics that you, Wes Moore (the author), and The “other” Wes Moore all share.
Common Core Standards Addressed in these Writing Activities:

• Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

• Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

• Develop claim(s) and counter-claims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.

• Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

• Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

• Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

• Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

• Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

• Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

• Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

This section will increase students’ comprehension of “The Other Wes Moore” through the writing process. Specifically, students will be asked to develop written responses to prompts in different formats, for different purposes, and for different audiences.
1| A persuasive writing piece encourages others to think or act in a certain way. In "The Other Wes Moore," we learn about the different people who had a positive impact on the author’s life. Identify the person who had the biggest impact on Wes’s life. Write three paragraphs to persuade others to agree with you.

• Pre-writing: Think about the people Wes mentions and jot down a few ideas about the important roles they played in his life.

• Draft: Write three paragraphs describing, in your opinion, the most influential person in Wes Moore’s life. Your first paragraph should introduce the person and describe the positive influence they had on Wes’s life. The second and third paragraphs should persuade readers to agree with your position by using specific examples and quotes from the book.

• Final Version: After you have reviewed your draft and received feedback from a peer, parent, or teacher, write a final version of your three paragraph persuasive writing piece.

2| A descriptive writing piece uses details to describe a person, place, or scenario for readers. We learn that Wes Moore receives the Rhodes Scholarship but we do not receive detailed information about Cecil Rhodes, the person the scholarship is named after. Write two paragraphs describing Cecil Rhodes or the Rhodes Scholarship.

• Pre-writing: Search your library or online to gather information about Cecil Rhodes or the Rhodes Scholarship.

• Draft: Write two paragraphs describing Cecil Rhodes or the Rhodes Scholarship.

• Final Version: After you have edited your draft, write the final version of your two paragraphs describing Cecil Rhodes or the Rhodes Scholarship.

Teacher Tips:
• Begin by ensuring students understand the prompt and introduce them to the rubric so that they know what they are striving for in each scoring category
• Use the K/W/L Chart, Venn Diagram, or other graphic organizer of your choice to help students to organize their thoughts in a pre-writing activity
• Give students a few vocabulary words that you would like them to use in their writing
• Ask students to use their pre-writing when they write their first draft. Be sure to ensure that they follow the prompt, use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar
• Partner two students together and ask them to edit each other’s work. Ensure that they know how to give and receive technical and critical feedback
• Set a clear expectation and due date for them to submit their final draft
Common Core Standards Addressed in this Section:

- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

- Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, and presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

- Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

- Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

- Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Now that students have read different passages from “The Other Wes Moore” and have completed various discussions, activities, and written assignments, they will now have the opportunity to engage in a debate with their peers.
“Ad Hominem” means “against the man.” Through this strategy, students should “attack” their opponent’s position or credibility. For example, a student might argue that Wes’s mother made a great decision to send Wes to the Valley Forge Military Academy. Since the opposing position might lack substantial evidence, since Wes experienced great success at the school, they might argue that a family member from the opposing position taught at a military school and therefore they have a biased position. Teachers can also teach students strategies for avoiding this “attack” such as restating the facts from the book supporting their position and directly asking their opponent to provide “hard” facts from the book as well.

A “Red herring” occurs when an irrelevant idea or piece of information is entered into the debate as a “distracter.” For example, if someone holds the position that the police officer should have arrested Wes after he was caught spray painting public property, they might add, “but since the city jails are so crowded, they let him go. This is why we should have more jails in the city.” The opposing position should know that the issue of overcrowded jails, in this case, is a “red herring” because it offers up new information that isn’t directly related to the debate question. This is also an opportunity to teach students to avoid speculation and ways to challenge opponents who offer speculative evidence.

Teacher Tips: • Explain the purpose of the debate to students and model appropriate debate discourse and transitional phrases such as, “I respectfully disagree with that because…” “You make a good point about __________, I hadn’t thought about that before.” “Can you clarify what you mean?” “Your response made me think about __________.” These transitional phrases encourage students to be active listeners, to articulate their own opinion in response to others, and require that they utilize details from the book to support their position.

• Modify the debate format by alternating between partner/small group debates and debates with the whole class.

• For more experienced debaters or in “competitive” debates, teach students about a few debate strategies such as:
The purpose of these debate questions is to increase students’ critical thinking and to strengthen their ability to critique, evaluate, and form an opinion based on the passages they have read.

1| On page 4, Wes talks about the similarities between public schools and prisons. What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree with his position?

2| Early in the book, we learn about the unfortunate circumstances in which the “other” Wes Moore meets his father for the first time. How do you think he felt while he was meeting his father and after he met him?

3| When we learn that Wes and Alicia are having a baby, Wes writes on page 101, “Wes’s nonexistent relationship with his father probably contributed to his seeming indifference about becoming a father himself.” Do you think that was how Wes truly felt about having a baby? Why or why not?

4| On pages 101–102, the “other” Wes Moore confronts his father while he is asleep on the couch. But when his father asks “who are you,” Wes leaves the house and doesn’t answer the question. Do you think he did the right thing? What would you have done if you were in Wes’s place?

5| On page 144, we learn that after his success at the Job Corps, Wes returns to his neighborhood in Baltimore but avoids certain streets because, “He changed. At least he wanted to believe that, and he continued to tell himself that as he walked through the blocks.” Do you think that Wes had really changed at this point in his life? Use evidence from the book to support your position.

6| Wes writes, on page 166, “As I moved closer to the home where my host family lived, I couldn’t stop staring at the shantytown. Living in the Bronx and Baltimore had given me the foolish impression that I knew what poverty looked like. At that moment, I realized I had no idea what poverty was, even in West Baltimore we live like kings compared with this.” Do you think Wes and family live “like kings” in West Baltimore? How did Wes’s experiences in West Baltimore shape his identity?

7| After being sentenced to prison, Wes writes, “The guards placed their hands on Wes and shuffled him away. The hands of the state would stay on him for the rest of his life.” What does this quote mean? Do the “hands of the state” impact the “other” Wes Moore’s identity?