

**Due: Thurs. 2/5. Please bring SIX copies of this exercise to class with you. We will share these exercises for feedback in small groups. Suggested length: 1- 1 1/2 typed pages, double-spaced.**

## **EXPLORING IDENTITY**

This short assignment should help to prepare you for essay #1 or another piece of creative nonfiction or short fiction that you will write during the term. The aim of this exercise is to narrate an individual experience in vivid language and motivate the reader to engage with your writing. If you develop 1.1 into a longer piece, you'll have the opportunity to reflect more profoundly about this experience and connect it with wider human issues.

In this exercise, your goal is to begin to explore the roots of your own identity or the identity of someone you know well. As you begin this assignment, identify what's most important in life to you or your subject (core ethical or religious beliefs, social ideals, personality traits, national, cultural or ethnic identity, goals or commitments, career goals). Write about the roots of your (or your subject's) identity through narrating one experience such as:

- \*a particularly meaningful incident or event;
- \*a specific symbolic moment within a close family or personal relationship;
- \*a meaningful artifact (photograph, family heirloom, sentimental object or keepsake). If you choose a photograph, you may want to append a copy to your exercise.
- \*a special or "sacred" place or meaningful journey.

**Be vivid, detailed and descriptive in your prose; use dialogue when appropriate. Try to recapture the power of lived experience in the language that you use in portraying yourself (or other characters) or depicting a setting. For most writers, this means slowing down your narration so that the reader can vicariously experience the emotion of the piece.**

**POSTSCRIPT** (a few sentences): How might this piece be interesting for a wider public readership or a specific smaller audience (e.g., the MIT community)? How might you shape this piece so that it speaks effectively to your chosen readership? What larger human issues does your experience raise? How can you connect this experience with a central idea or perspective?

**Note:** In this type of writing, it's often best to allow ideas and perspectives (what we might call "argument" in expository writing) to emerge from the experience, rather than fitting an experience to meet the demands of a preconceived idea.