1. Circle the two or three identities that have the strongest effect on how you see yourself as a person.

2. Put a star next to any of the two or three identities you think about least often.

3. Put a question mark next to any of your own identities you would like to learn more about.
Home / Region / Place
What place are you from? How does it shape your thinking, your values, and your sense of belonging? What do you know about someone when they tell you where they come from?

City / Suburbs / Country
City-versus-country is a classic dividing line in American history. Add to these types the growth of suburbs in recent decades. Many scholars suggest that these different types of community promote starkly differing ways of viewing the world. How has living in your type of community shaped your perspectives? How does it shape the attitudes people have about you? How did it affect policy?

Socio-Economic Status
A comedian once quipped that a working class person has their name on their shirt, a white collar person has their name on their desk, an upper class person has their name on the building, and an aristocrat has their name on the street or neighborhood. How deeply does status shape your outlook and values? What are some common preconceptions about class status?

Age / Life-stage
Age can say much about your personal development, thinking styles, and experience in overcoming obstacles. How different societies have talked about the best way to raise a child, the rituals of “coming of age,” and the roles of adults and elders can reveal much about their distinctive cultural traits. It also speaks to the history someone may have experienced. Living through the American Civil War or the Great Depression, for example, might have given you very different ideas and formative experiences than someone raised in the age of Obama and Trump. Your participation in a particular moment in history can be a defining force in your sense of self.

Gender
How different are men, women (and other genders)? This has been a subject of deep debate from the era we are studying down to the present, even as there is some general sense that these differences are consequential. How much does gender matter to your sense of self, your outlook on life, and how people relate to you?

Sexual Orientation
Human Rights Watch defines this as “An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.” Historic communities have varied greatly in their laws, customs, and policies regarding sexual orientation and the privileges or restrictions attached to these orientations. Researchers, public intellectuals, and religious and philosophical traditions disagree about the nature and extent of these differences and what the implications might be for rules and policies.

Ethnicity/Race and National Origin
These are group identities, sometimes defined internally by groups, and other times imposed from outside, to lump together diverse populations for purposes of control. These identities are often associated with a shared belief in a common history, or a purported claim of common behaviors. Concepts of race, ethnicity, and national origin were among the most rapidly-changing and most defining forms of identity in Early North America. They have often evolved greatly over time.

First Language
Language is one of the most common ways of categorizing human populations. As anyone who has studied a foreign language can testify, different tongues represent different ways of thinking, perceiving, and storytelling. Language in early America became a tool of sorting and ranking (“she is refined in her speech, as befits a lady of her social standing”). New languages emerged as a result of encounter, contact, trade, and control. There were (and are) fierce conflicts over how language connects to, for example, citizenship and participation in decision-making processes. How important is language to your sense of self and your sense of shared community?

Religious / Spiritual
What is your relationship to the divine? How important is this devotion to who you are and to those you feel connected to? Questions of religious and spiritual identity, religious conversion, religious conflict, and secular doubt, were a central and dynamic part of the story of Early North America. What is the role of the state in religion? The legacies of those early North American debates and events continue to be profound.

Physical Ability
What does it mean to your sense of self to be able-bodied or to have dis/abilities? How deeply does this shape your own perceptions and the perceptions of those around you? What are some implications for community and belonging? How might these perceptions have evolved over time and across different cultures? How did physical prowess or limits affect social power or marginality?

Introvert / Extrovert
Do you self-define as someone who prefers solitude? Do you like small groups over crowds? Are you the life of the party?

Leadership and Decision-making Preferences
When it comes to groups do you like it best when one person takes a clear and firm leadership role, or do you prefer a more collaborative style where everyone works together equally to complete tasks and develop policies? This is not a question about whether you yourself like being a leader, but rather about how you think groups should operate.

Free / Unfree Status
Are you the legal property of another person, or free? In early North America this would have been a crucial identity trait.