

What Am I?

Somin : I can't really say I feel part of the Korean culture because I'm not exactly familiar with the Korean culture anymore. But I also cannot say that I am Canadian because I am not Canadian. So, sometimes I question, what am I?

Rose-Eva (hosting): Hello and welcome to Unheard Youth. We are a podcast created at Edmonton Centre for Race and Culture focusing on newcomer youth voices all across Canada. We're featuring what Canadian newcomer youth have to say about identity, migration, and belonging. I'm your host, Rose-Eva Forgues-Jenkins. We've started off this episode with some words from Somin Park. Her words inspired the name of this episode, "What Am I?" Exploring identity at North Peace Secondary School. Stay tuned to hear more from the youth at NPSS located in Fort St. John, British Columbia.

I chose "What Am I?" as the title of this episode because I think that Somin's words really tie together all of the themes for the podcast. We see how migration and belonging play an important role in Somin's identity. We're going to hear more from Somin and the other youth from Fort St. John as they talk about what makes them who they are.

We're featuring conversations from four different group discussions. Some youths that you'll hear from have grown up in Fort St. John and some have grown up in different parts of the world. We hear about how this has impacted their relationship to identity, migration, and belonging. This is the second episode where we're featuring youth from Fort St. John. On the first episode, we talked about the time that we spent with the youth recording and how that was set up. On this episode, we dive right into the youths' conversations.

First up, we hear from Tajhmar, Jessie, and Maria. Tajhmar is one of the youngest voices that we have on the podcast. At 12 years old, he has plenty to say about how life in Canada is different than when he lived in Jamaica. And Jessie tells us about growing up on a farm outside of Fort St. John.

After their conversation, we hear from Azaria, Patience, and Shallom.

Maria: Hello. My name's Maria Giesbrecht and I'm currently a Grade 11 student attending North Peace Secondary School. I was born in Fort St. John, B.C., Canada. My sister and I live with our parents half an hour outside of town on a farm where we harvest grain and canola. Some people say that I'm good at school but I might rephrase it to say that I have a passion to learn, something I've always had. Lately, I've been trying to discover my story. In a way, it's as if my story hasn't started yet. I hope to travel the world and experience and learn about as many cultures and countries in my lifetime.

Tajhmar: Hi. I'm Tajhmar and I'm from Jamaica. I've been in Canada for three years. I'm 12 years old.

Jessie: Hello. It's Jessie Copes speaking. I am a Grade 11 student at North Peace Secondary School, located in Fort St. John. I was born and raised on a grain farm 20 minutes outside of

town on the land that has been in my family for three generations now. I'm a very determined person, especially when it comes to sports and school. I very much enjoy participating in sports as well as traveling around the world.

Let's start with a few questions. What makes you who you are and could you explain what has made you the person you are today?

Tajhmar: My friends, my family, and where I'm from because the rules here are really different and the weather's different and yeah.

Jessie: So, you came from Jamaica. How did you feel when you came to Fort St. John?

Tajhmar: I felt very excited because I haven't really been on an airplane before and I was in a new country. But when I got here, it wasn't so exciting because I was hit by this really, really cold like wind and I wasn't wearing a coat or anything because I just came here. And it was like really cold. Otherwise in the weather, I really like Canada because it's really big and there's like more activities and stuff.

Jessie: What was the reason that your family had to immigrate to Canada?

Tajhmar: My family had to immigrate to Canada for better job opportunity and better learning opportunity for us and yeah, we just needed that.

Maria: And Jessie, if you were born in Canada, do you know when your ancestors came over first and why?

Jessie: So, in 1928, I had a great grandpa who came over at the age of 14 years old. His name was Caesar Copes. He came over by himself and everything. He was very young and he actually found land here and started clearing it by himself with the use of horses. And as life went on, you know, started a family, then they started a family and I'm the third generation and we're still farming the same land that he cleared. So, that's kind of cool. So, my ancestors are definitely from Italy because his family never followed him over, so there's still lots of family members over there that I have never met before.

Maria: Could each of you guys tell me a little bit about your family?

Jessie: Well, my mom has seven kids. And I have one brother so the rest of them are all girls. And I'm usually in the house with my family. We like to crack jokes a lot and we play a lot of board game stuff.

Maria: I live in a family of six. I'm the oldest of four kids, which definitely puts a lot of responsibility on me. We're all really fun, though. We joke around. We tease each other. It's kind of like the typical family. We – yeah, we give each other a hard time, which is, I guess, always fun.

Jessie: Even when you're living here in Canada, how do you see your Jamaican culture come out in your new home?

Tajhmar: Well, first of all, we always have our flag sitting on our wall and even though we are in Canada, we still speak our language. We still play our music and we still go to Canada –

Voice: Canada Day?

Tajhmar: Canada Day, yeah.

Maria: And Jessie, what is something that you do in your leisure time?

Jessie: In my leisure time, I love to go horseback riding, quading, swimming in our dugout. We have a zipline that goes right across it, which is a lot of fun for the community. Yeah, I guess just a lot of outside things, but also cooking inside. My sister and me, she – we – I used to have a snack shack when I was younger, but now that I'm older, she opens it up, so I'm responsible for all the baking and getting her organized unless she goes out there, puts a smile on her face, so she sells all the baked goods to the community. So, that's kind of something cool about our hobbies in our leisure time. And stuff like that.

Maria: Can you go into more depth for your snack shack? Is it like a lemonade stand, or where do you guys set that up?

Jessie: So, since we do live out of town there's definitely not a lot of traffic, which means we kind of have to resort to new spots, so whenever we know that there's a pipeline going in down the road, brave Canadian, we always set it up there like six o'clock when the workers are heading back to town and stuff like that. We always try to catch the traffic waves, so pipeline guys definitely always look for my little sister.

Maria: And what is something that you do in your free time?

Tajhmar: Watch Netflix or play video games or play with my friends. I usually like building stuff like I turn my bike into a unicycle but it broke. Yeah, we're kind of creative when it comes to like no electronics but otherwise than that, I'd be in the house.

Maria: Have you had to change or adjust your lifestyle to fit in with your new community in Fort St. John?

Tajhmar: Yes. Like I said before, the rules are different. Everybody speaks English here and it's a different community than where I'm from so you definitely had to change a little bit. We had to change our language. Well, it's not really our language but yeah.

Maria: Has there ever been a time when you feel like you haven't belonged?

Tajhmar: No. Because everybody here I met is really kind. They're really interactive with people and this is really nice place for me because I can hang out with people and play and actually get active. And yeah, that's the reason why I really like Canada.

Maria: This is Maria -----.

Tajhmar: This is Tajhmar -----.

Jessie: This is Jessie ----- and thank you for listening in on our interview.

Shallom: Hello. My name is Shallom ----. I'm an international student from Nigeria currently living in Fort St. John, my final year Grade 12.

Patience: Hi. My name is Patience ----. I'm 18. I'm from Nigeria. I'm an international student currently enrolled in Grade 12 at North Peace Secondary School. I love creativity, I love fashion designing, I love music, I love trying out sports, and I love giving a helping hand to the community and people around me.

Azaria: Hi. I'm Azaria Richards. I am 16 years old and in Grade 11. I've been born and raised in Fort St. John but I've had the chance to travel lots of places and I'm really grateful for that. I'm really involved in the intercultural program at my school and I like art and English and Science and all sorts of things. And I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do, so yeah.

Shallom: Diving in. Have you had a situation that made you question your sense of belonging?

Azaria: Well, for me, I've been pretty lucky. I have a really good group of friends but I went to China with my group of friends and that was the first time I'd really experienced being a minority so, we were walking in the subway station and there was just like we were like the only white people in wherever I could see. And it was a really good experience for me. Because being in Fort St. John, a Canadian city, it's like but we have different cultures, but the majority is white, so that was kind of a different experience. I don't know. Yeah. *[laughs]* So, that's something that I think about often.

Shallom: Patience, you coming from Nigeria. Do you ever question like – do you ever thing there's a different way to cope with your culture and your mindset in Canada?

Patience: Yes, I do, actually. First of all, the number one priority about moving to another country is that you still have to be yourself and at the same time be accepting of other cultures. You have to be very curious of what you see and what you do, and mind what you say around people. And you have to be open-minded and very accepting and accommodating. Like, for me, I embrace diversity so that's very – that's a plus in my book. So, I don't really have a problem adjusting and you know, coping with other people, but if I were to say for someone else, they would have to be very mindful of what they see and you know, learn to accept other people.

Shallom: Patience, like what's the difference between your home city, Nigeria, and Fort St. John?

Patience: The weather is one *[laughter]* big difference. Yes, it is extremely cold out here but you will adjust with time. It's hot in Nigeria. We only have two seasons. Hot and raining. And the food is completely different. It's really amazing that I get to experience and taste different foods here and from other cultures, too. Also, the people are very accepting. It's more quiet here. The houses are different. The settlements, the whole education system is completely different. Because we use British curriculum in Nigeria and here it's American or Canadian.

There are more opportunities here in school compared to what school is like in Nigeria. So, it's a big difference and a change. Especially, the people around me and my classmates.

Shallom: Do you think you fit into the system or like let's say the town? Do you think you fit into Fort St. John perfectly as you've stayed here for over for a year – over a year? Do you think you fitted into the system of everything?

Patience: To a certain extent, I would say yes. Also, because I'm still adjusting and I've only been to some areas in Fort St. John, I'm still get to know Fort St. John and really explore. But yes, to the best of my understanding, I have adjusted and I feel like a Fort St. Johner, too.

Shallom: Surely, during the winters. After high school now, like what do you want to do?

Azaria: So, I would definitely like to go into post-secondary school. Right now, I'm kind of leaning towards UBC. Also, just looking forward to having a little bit of freedom and being able to experience life outside of Fort St. John.

Shallom: I would also want to go to a post-secondary school into teaching, yeah. I am actually leaning towards somewhere in Ontario. Yes. So, I haven't made a choice but I'm leaning towards that area. What of you, Patience?

Patience: Well. Oh, my God, that's a good question. I have so many things I wanted to do. I want to work in public health so first I'm going into nursing or I might later change to dietetics and nutrition because I'm very big on health. I also want to break in the public health sector in Canada and also be able to give an impact on my country, too. I want to become a fashion designer. I want to have my own clothes line. I want to own businesses. I want to own companies. And also, I want to be able to help the youth and create an awareness for younger people, the generation after me, and make them feel good about themselves and stop things like bullying and racism and put an end to all that. So yeah.

Shallom: Speaking about public health in your country, Nigeria, how do you think you'd be able to help the health system?

Patience: First of all, through my stay here for two years, I've seen the way Canadians or Fort St. Johners take care of their elder people. Like, they treat them like royalty and that's one thing I want – I mean, that's something I want to emulate. Like, I feel like Nigerians should be able to

take care of the older people. Just because you have the certain amount of time on earth doesn't mean you can't still live a good life, you know, and in good health. So and also because I'm a strong Christian so I believe in good health and prosperity and also I want to be able to give that voice and create that awareness in Nigeria to people that you know, health is key. Emotional, psychological, but every health that is is key. Even if everything around you is going bad, your health should still be intact.

Because you still need to help people around you. You can't feel down and if someone else is feeling down and we're all feeling down. That's not going to be a good thing.

That's really – I feel like that's also really good because in Nigeria people don't really look at their mental health. They just look at maybe their physical health, and that would help a lot.

Thank you guys so much for talking to me.

Shallom: Yeah, I'm signing out. I'm Shallom-----.

Patience: I'm Patience -----.

Azaria: And I'm Azaria -----.

Shallom: Thank you.

Rose-Eva (hosting): You just heard from two conversations that we're featuring on this episode of the Unheard Youth Podcast entitled, "What Am I?"

Fun fact. Azaria -----, who we heard from in the last conversation, is the youth who designed our logo. So, make sure you get a chance to check it out and admire Azaria's talent. We love the wonderful logo that she created for us.

For the next conversation, you're going to hear what Devin, Jacob, and Earl had to say. In this conversation, we hear about Devin's life growing up in Fort St. John. Afterwards, we hear from Earl about his experience with moving to the city.

Earl: Hello. My name's Earl -----. I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. However, my family was originally from the Philippines. I'm currently living Fort St. John, British Columbia, and currently, I am a student in North Peace Secondary School in Grade 11.

Jacob: My name is Jacob -----. I am a Grade 11 student at North Peace Secondary School. I was born and raised in Fort St. John. I come from a half Filipino, half like Western European background.

Devin: My name is Devin -----. I am – was born in Fort St. John. I've been living in the same house for 14 years and I am currently attending my Grade 11 year at North Peace Secondary School.

Earl: How do you feel about Fort St. John?

Devin: I feel like it's a pretty small town and although I often criticize it on certain things, I do enjoy parts of it. Like the overall flat ground everywhere. I like being able to see the sun and the sky just wherever I look. And I think that that is something that people take for granted a lot of the time.

Earl: I have a question for you. This is Earl, by the way. If you had the chance to move somewhere else, where would it be?

Devin: I would definitely move to a place that has less snow and a shorter winter. Just because I think it gets tiring after a while and you stop feeling the magic of winter. And I'd be somewhere probably in Canada still because I like how things go down here and just the people. But I don't see myself staying in Fort St. John forever, that's what I have to say.

Earl: One more question about your personal life. What do you change about yourself when you're trying to blend in?

Devin: There's definitely a lot of things that I don't show people just because I haven't really grown to accept that – like those things in myself yet, so for example, something that I change about myself is how I talk. I really try and show a lot of respect to people that I'm talking to. And just try and make them feel as comfortable as they can be to talk to me. Like that's something that I have to try really hard to do. And it's not something that I was always doing before.

Jacob: So, I got a question for Earl who just so happens to not be from Fort St. John. Are there major differences between your home city and Fort St. John?

Earl: I would say so. Originally, I did live in Edmonton and also in St. Albert. Those, like, basically, those are bigger cities, big cities. They have a big population, right? So there's definitely adjustment heading into Fort St. John. You gotta get used to the people but the people here are actually much nicer than the people over there. I would say, you get to know more people that way because you would run into more people just because overpopulation here compared to Edmonton. But I still do miss Edmonton. I still consider it one of my homes.

Jacob: Looking back, would you rather stay in Edmonton or keep things the way they are and still move to Fort St. John anyway?

Earl: I think – hmm – I think the move was actually a good thing for me. At the moment like at the time, I was kind of hesitant but looking back and how I changed as a person from then and now, is a big change. Yeah, I used to be a very quiet, very, very quiet person and thanks to the people I meet, people I associate with now and the things I do, activities and around the community, it's helped me become a better person.

Jacob: How did your family feel about moving to Fort St. John?

Earl: My two older brothers actually, they had a harder time trying to adjust because they're – when my older brother was coming from one high school to another and he had to adjust to get to know people that already knew other people. It was different for my middle brother because he kind of went into middle school so he kind of got to know the people in middle school before he headed into high school.

My parents, though, I don't think they had much of a hard time. It's kind of like they kind of just changed their job, in a way. Because they switched from job to job back in Edmonton and then it's basically the same thing. And I think they adjusted that easily.

Jacob: How well do you think your family was accepted in Fort St. John?

Earl: I think my family are some nice people. They like to give respect to anybody around us, really. So I don't think – I think they're accepted pretty well around the community and yeah. I have nothing much to say about that.

Jacob: Do you have family in other parts of the world?

Earl: I do. I do have family, a lot of family in Canada but I also have family in the United States, the Philippines, of course, and the UK.

Jacob: What would you say your parents were like? Were they strict or did they have a different kind of ideology about raising you?

Earl: I guess you could say they're kind of strict. But I think they're more protective than strict. I mean, it kind of brought us here to Canada just to open up our opportunities, right? So, I think the only thing they really did was try and protect us from any dangerous thing that could pull us off our tracks. And to kind of just lead us in the right direction. They didn't do anything else other than that, really.

Jacob: Do you know any stories that your family has from the Philippines?

Earl: I mean, there's a bunch of stories about having like waking up next to a giant insect or I don't know, a snake. There's a snake crawling over my baby – older brother, when he was a baby or something like that. That's like the usual story sometimes in the Philippines. Other than that, there wasn't too many things they told me, actually.

I know that we did have a decently sized family and they would help us out taking care of my older brothers back then. All that stuff.

Rose-Eva (hosting): You just heard from Devin, Jacob, and Earl. For the last conversation on this episode, you'll hear from Somin, Alexis, and Lilian. All three of them talk about the forces that shaped their identity.

Somin: Good morning. My name is Somin Park and I'm a Grade 11 student attending North Peace Secondary. I was born in South Korea from a fully South Korean family. However, I can't

really identify myself as Korean because my family and I immigrated to Australia four years ago. We emigrated back to Canada eight years ago and this is where we live now. I am now a Canadian permanent resident.

Lilian: Hi. My name is Lilian and I am African-Canadian. I am 15 years old and I'm a student at NPSS school. After high school, I have decided to become an actor.

Alexis: Hello. My name is Alexis ---- and I'm in Grade 11 at North Peace Secondary School. I was born in Fort St. John and I've been here all my life.

Somin: So, what makes you who you are?

Alexis: I would say something that makes me who I am is basketball. My family is very involved. So, we're always all like out in the public talking to people and like learning about different people and who they are. So, I think definitely basketball has had a huge influence on who I am.

Somin: For me, education has a lot of influence on who I am. I love to learn and everything is really driven by my passion to learn.

Lilian: All I can say is my attitude towards other people.

Somin: Very interesting. So, Alexis, can you tell me more about your family?

Alexis: Yeah, so my dad's dad came from Germany and his mom is Métis so she came in around the 1600s and on my mom's side, her mom came from Switzerland and her dad came from England over to Oklahoma as well. And they both came up – their families came up from the United States at different times.

So, something interesting about my family is my cousins are both Filipino. They have a Filipino mother and their father is Canadian. So, their different way of life is really interesting and how it meshes with ours. So, I think that's something interesting about my family.

Somin: Okay. Very interesting. How about you, Lilian?

Lilian: For me, I can say is that all my life I've lived in Africa and I recently moved to Canada in 2016 and I have a family in Edmonton. And we just moved to Fort St. John for my dad's job.

Somin: For me, everyone in my family is South Korean. My mom, my dad, and my brother and I. We immigrated to Canada, so we are the only ones living abroad for now. Everyone else is back in Korea.

Lilian: Has there ever been a time when you haven't felt like you have belonged?

Alexis: Not personally, but I definitely feel like there's a time when my family didn't like feel belonged. I remember being around like 10 and my little cousin was eight. So, my little cousin's

Filipino and there's a very distinct – like you can tell we don't look related, right? So we go to a – went to a nail salon to get our nails done for my auntie's wedding and we were sitting there getting our toes done and the lady asked, "Oh, are you guys friends?" And I said, "No, we're cousins." And then she's like, "But she's brown and you're white." And that like moment I was 10 years old and I realized like people don't see us as family, and that kind of messed with me ever since. Even though we have a super close bond, I still remember that.

And we joke about it and stuff but you just kind of realize how close-minded some people are. And I think that for me was a time when I didn't feel like our family belonged in the community, I guess.

Lilian: How about you?

Somin: So, like I said before, I first started studying abroad when I was five years old. So, I can't really say I feel part of the Korean culture because I'm not very – I'm not exactly familiar with the Korean culture anymore. But I also cannot say that I am Canadian because I am not Canadian. So, sometimes I question, "What am I?"

Lilian: For me, when my parents told me that we were moving to Canada, I was like, "Why?" Because there so many white people and I've – all my life I've lived in where black people are surrounding me. So, I was like so terrified people will bully me, people will start teasing me and it kind of felt sad. Yeah.

Somin: So did you find that there was peer pressure to adopt a new culture?

Alexis: Not so much for me because my cousins who are Filipino, they – it was more difficult for them. But I remember showing up to something like family dinners and stuff, and it was just like there's a new food and there's like new ways. And you're like wow, this is like crazy. And they give you some things you don't want to try, right, because you're like a little six-year-old but I definitely – I'm happy I tried those because now I'm like obsessed with spring rolls, so...

Somin: Interesting. How about you, Lilian?

Lilian: For me, it's how I kind of started speaking English. Back home, we never used to speak English a lot but here, it's all the time.

Somin: For me, I never really felt any peer pressure. I just adapted to a new culture and I was willing to. Just because I thought it was necessary. And it was something I was interested in trying.

Lilian: What do you change about yourself when you try to blend in?

Alexis: So personally, for me, like I'm a super outgoing person. I'm loud and like, you can tell when I enter a room. So, I don't really change anything about myself. Obviously, there's these comments, like "You're too loud" or whatever, but I just kind of roll with it. That's who I am and I've accepted that. So, I don't really blend in that well.

Lilian: How about you?

Somin: I first try to change my perspective on how I view things and just try to understand how people from a different country and culture would view something.

Lilian: For me, it's like when you see a white person with nice hair, I try sometimes to make my hair look that nice, but doesn't work.

Somin: Have you felt any pressure to change your background story?

Alexis: Yeah, so my grandma is Métis and I remember growing up, started elementary school like if you're aboriginal you mark that on the papers or whatever and you get put into an aboriginal program just so you can kind of like learn more about that culture. But like I remember there was a time when I hit Grade 7. I was in the aboriginal room and everybody is visibly native or Indigenous and I'm the little white girl, right? So I was kind of – I felt awkward and I felt like – and there was obviously little jokes like, “You can't be Métis. You're white.”

But so ever since then I told my mom, “Mom, don't mark me down as native. I don't want to like – I don't look native so I'm not.” But my grandma's Métis and she's of status so I'm obviously native. But definitely like I tried to lie about not being native because I felt since I was – I didn't look the way I wasn't that. And I think that was my biggest kind of problem.

Somin: Oh. Very interesting. For me, I was always very proud of my heritage. So, sometimes there would be like people might ask, “Do you get bullied?” or “Do you get discriminated just because you're from a different culture?” But for me, I was always very proud, so even if I got discriminated and bullied, I would just not really care.

Lilian: I'm a very proud person. I'm proud of myself, my heritage and I don't think I've ever felt any pressure to change my background.

Somin: If you had a chance to move somewhere else, would you? Where and why?

Alexis: I think growing up in a small – like a small town and a small community, everybody's connected and we all know things about each other. So, I don't think I could ever live in a big city or I could ever be somewhere else. So, I'm really happy where I am right now and I'm learning new things. And I like traveling but I always like to come back to my small community.

Somin: I would want to go to somewhere hot, like Australia.

Lilian: I would like to go to Los Angeles because of the job opportunity. It's a beautiful city.
Yeah.

Somin: Okay. So that brings us to the end of our interview. Thank you. My name is Somin ---.

Lilian: And my name is Lilian.

Alexis: And my name is Alexis ----.

Rose-Eva (hosting): You've reached the end of this episode of the Unheard Youth Podcast entitled, "What Am I?" Exploring identity at North Peace Secondary School.

Figuring out who and what we are is a question that we should never stop asking ourselves. Because identity is always fluid and changing.

Thank you very much to the youth at NPSS for allowing us to understand a bit more about what shapes their identify.

We would also like to thank our friends and partners at CJSR 88.5 FM and the Edmonton Community Foundation. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada. Ce Projet a été rendue possible en partie grâce au gouvernement du Canada.

Thank you to Chivengi for providing the music featured in the podcast. And don't forget to check us out on social media. Let us know your thoughts by commenting on our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Our user name is unheard youth podcast.

We wanted to acknowledge the land where these recordings took place. Fort St. John is located in Treaty 8 territory, home to Beaver First Nations, Dene, Nêhiyaw, and Métis. Treaty 8 was signed on June 21, 1899. Treaty 8 is home to 39 First Nations communities including 23 Alberta First Nations, three Saskatchewan First Nations, six Northwestern Territories First Nations, and eight British Columbia First Nations.

This episode was produced by me, Rose-Eva Forgues-Jenkins. We produced this show at the Centre for Race and Culture at Edmonton, Alberta, Amiskwaskihikan. The Centre for Race and Culture acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, traditional homelands for many Indigenous peoples including the Nêhiyaw, Sauteaux, Niitsitapi, Métis, Dene, and Nakota.

We pay our respects to the ancestors past and present who call this land home.