

Rhetorical Situation Worksheet

Your name:

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Completing this worksheet may take more time than you think. It's worth the time. The information you gather will help you later when writing up assignments. But more importantly, the process of addressing each of the questions below will slowly work to change *how* you read texts. Keep in mind that some answers will not be obvious or even observable in the text, and so you may have to do some critical thinking and, at times, even some online research. Use full sentences. Take as much space as you need.

Context & Exigence: What topic/conversation is this text responding to? What year is the text published? What is the exigence--that is, what motivating occasion/issue/concern prompted the writing? The motivating occasion could be a current or historical event, a crisis, pending legislation, a recently published alternative view, or another ongoing problem.

The topic this text is responding to is the topic of Black English, and more specifically its use as a written language in an academic setting. I would say one of the motivating issues which prompted the writing of this text was the murder of Reggie Jordan, who was an unarmed black man who was killed by the police. The text was initially published in 1988.

Author: Who is the author of this text? What are the author's credentials and what is their investment in the issue?

The author of this text was June Jordan, who was a Jamaican American poet, playwright and essayist. Her investment in the issue is that she was a black woman, and as such, has an innate investment in the topic of racism and the legitimacy of Black English or AAVE by nature of her identity. Furthermore, she speaks of her experiences in her undergrad courses at Stony Brook University, and her interactions with her students, one of whom was the brother of Reggie Jordan. As such, her connection to the topic is uniquely personal.

Text: What can you find out about the publication? What is the genre of the text (e.g., poem, personal essay, essay, news/academic article, blog, textbook chapter, etc.)? How do the conventions of that genre help determine the depth, complexity, and even appearance of the argument? What information about the publication or source (magazine, newspaper, advocacy Web site) helps explain the writer's perspective or the structure and style of the argument?

The text seems to be a personal essay where Jordan discusses her experiences as a prof/teacher, and she also includes the experiences of a student of hers (Willie Jordan). The personal nature of the text gives more credence to its validity, and because it is personal in nature, the audience is allowed to feel the content on a more human level.

Audience: Who is the author's intended audience? What can you infer about the audience (think about beliefs and political association but also age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, profession, education, geographic location, religion, etc.)? Look for clues from the text (especially the original publication) to support your inference.

The intended audience was likely other African Americans who felt as though their language and experiences have been invalidated by white America, and people who fail to recognize the significance of varied dialects. One can thus infer that the audience has probably been indoctrinated or made to feel as though AAVE is "improper" or "wrong," and we see this is the case because in her writings, June

mentions how many of her students had a hard time accepting the fact that many AAVE conventions were in direct conflict with what they had been taught. Furthermore, the audience could have also been readers of the Harvard Educational Review, since that's where this was published. Therefore, it seems as though Jordan intended to educate a broad audience in academia, or people who were already considered powerful and influential.

Purpose: What is the author trying to accomplish? To persuade, entertain, inform, educate, call to action, shock? How do you know?

The author is definitely trying to inform, educate and call to action with this text. When she discusses the experiences of Black Americans, who have been marginalized and told that their way of speaking was improper or incorrect, she makes a point to argue for the legitimacy of AAVE. More specifically, she highlights how other countries have multiple recognized languages and dialects, and how different countries or geographical locations have different ways of speaking, and as such, there can be no one "standard" English. This is done with the intent to inform people of the consequences of white supremacy and racism, and the ways in which they invalidate people's linguistic heritage and culture. When she speaks of the murder of Reggie Jordan, as well, she highlights how black Americans continue to be disenfranchised and treated as lesser, which can be seen as a call to action to combat racism while remaining true to one's identity.

Argument: What do you believe is the main claim/idea/argument that the author is trying to communicate? What stance does s/he take?

The main argument the author is trying to communicate is that AAVE or Black English is just as valid a dialect as any other. Her stance is that being that English is spoken by so many groups of people across the world, each with their own way of speaking it, it is impossible to say there is a singular standard version of English. As such, she conveys her position that AAVE is a valid dialect and one which has been widely suppressed in the US especially in academia.

Evidence: How is the argument supported? Types of support include reasons and logical explanations as well as evidence. Types of evidence include anecdotes, examples, hypothetical situations, (expert) testimony, quotes, citing sources, statistics, charts/graphs, research the author or another source conducts, scientific or other facts, general knowledge, historical references, metaphors/analogies, etc.

Jordan supports her argument by drawing comparisons between the US and other countries. For instance, she says India has at least 14 official languages, and Nicaragua entitles its citizens to formal education in their regional or tribal languages. By using relevant evidence and comparing and contrasting the US to other countries, she highlights the ways in which the educational system in the US has failed to live up to some of its contemporaries, and how it fails to even consider the dialects and cultures of those it is intended to elevate. She also mentions how 10% of native English speakers are African Americans, which further gives legitimacy to the fact that AAVE is a valid dialect and one which demands respect.

Rhetorical Strategies: What aspects of this text stand out for you as a *rhetorical* reader? In other words, what do you observe about what the author strategically *does* (consciously or not) in hopes of appealing to their audience? List here as many observations as you can make about what the text *does*.

One of the strategies that Jordan employs includes giving detailed breakdowns on the conventions of AAVE, and more specifically how they differ from standard academic English, or the English we are all taught. This stood out to me because it highlights how different the two can be, and I feel like it serves to appeal to the reader by bringing to their attention how AAVE has its own set of rules and conventions which make it distinct and unique from other dialects. This furthers the fact that it is a valid dialect, and helps the reader to familiarize themselves with Black English.

Citation: Add the correct MLA or APA bibliographic entry for this text. Use easybib.com if you prefer.

Jordan, June. "Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1988, pp. 363–375., doi:10.17763/haer.58.3.d171833kp7v732j1.

Notes: What do you want to remember about this text?

One of the things I want to remember is the line which reads "We begin to grow up in a house where ever true mirror shows us the face of somebody who does not belong there, whose walk and whose talk will never look or sound 'right,' because that house was meant to shelter a family that is alien and hostile to us." I feel as though this perfectly encapsulates the experience of marginalized peoples in the United States.