

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.

In *Nobody Mean More To Me You Than You and the Life of Willie Jordan*, June Jordan constructs a commentary on Black English and its perception. The text is published in 1985, which is a far less progressive time than we are in now and an era in which Black English and culture were being brought to the forefront. June Jordan recognizes that Black English being perceived as an imperfect form of "Standard English", which is prejudiced within itself because the only form of "Standard English" that is acceptable is white English. She zeroes in on a student named Willie Jordan who is a black man with a hardened exterior but a heart of gold. Willie spoke Standard English which was peculiar to the author, so much so that she chose to name part of the essay after Jordan. Willie's brother is killed in an incident related to police brutality, and as a result, June Jordan made the decision to tell his story.

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

June Jordan was an African-American poet, essayist, teacher and activist. All of these things influence her writing and especially her writing of some of the themes in this essay. She has received multiple awards for her writing including the National Association of Black Journalists Award, Rockefeller Foundation Grant and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She has published numerous poem books, and novels with most of them tackling social issues such as gender, race, immigration and representation of marginalized communities. As an African-American and a writer, language pertaining to Black people is something that Jordan is very familiar with, and she uses her experiences to educate some of the opinions and nuances she layers in her essay.

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 essay was originally published in Jordan's book of essays called *On Call: Political Essays* in 1985. Because of the essay format, Jordan is very argumentative and combative of the stereotypes associated with Black English and she provides personal stories and the lives of some of her students to craft an overall message. Since this was originally published in Jordan's own book, she makes points that are especially personal and unique to an African-American teacher in 1985 amongst other things.

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.

Jordan's intended audience are those who believe that Black English compared to White English is distasteful, and White English is the standard variation of English. This belief is seen in her students after they read *The Color Purple*, which is written in Black English. She feels a need to educate them to think critically about language and how it relates to Black culture, this same feeling is shared in how she speaks to the reader.

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

June Jordan is trying (and does so very effectively) to establish the intersection between racism and the English language in America. With her anecdotes and descriptions of her teaching methods, she is trying to prove that there is no "Standard English", and a person can perfectly articulate themselves in a derivative of the English language. Black English may be an oral language but it still has the same power as any other form of English because all forms of English are equal. There is no "standard", because standard implies the "right way". She points out that her students have been taught to keep that sort of language outside of the classroom because it's not academic enough. Yet Jordan sees this from a different perspective, she sees it as the squandering of an entire language. An entire culture. If Black people speak in Black English, then it's a perfectly normal thing and they should not be reprimanded for speaking in their native tongue. Because if they are, Black English will become a "linguistic buffalo", in the sense that it will be hunted down and poached by white oppressors.

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

Jordan's argument is against the idea that white English is "Standard English" furthermore, there is no form of standard English, and English is more of a tool of transnational communication than a language that had its own culture tied to it. That's where the idea of Black English comes from. Jordan compare Black English to a buffalo, although there were many Black English speakers in 1985 and the way it is spoken has evolved in 2022, White English being pushed as the superior form of English squanders and undermines all other forms of English as just improper spin-offs of some pretentious and sacred language. Black

English is to be taken seriously, and studied in an intellectual manner just as White English is, and Jones enforces that through her teachings in the classroom and the opinions she provides in *Nobody Mean More To Me You Than You and the Life of Willie Jordan*.

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.

In contrast to India, where at least fourteen languages co-exist as legitimate Indian languages, in contrast to Nicaragua, where all citizens are legally entitled to formal school instruction in their regional or tribal languages, compulsory education in America compels accommodation to exclusively White forms of "English." White English, in America, is "Standard English."

The argument is supported to analyzing the etymology and use of certain phrases, revealing a deeper meaning behind how we refer to certain status quos in the English language. For example, Jordan establishes here that what we all know as "Standard English" is actually "White English" and has been spread to country after country causing different derivatives and dialects of English. Meaning that no form of English is superior to the other.

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*.

Jordan noticeably splits the essay into two sections: one where she discusses the power and the danger of squandering a language, using Black English as the canvas to paint a picture of white oppression and alienation from what *English* really is and the second part—a narrative detailing her experiences with her Black English class and Willie Jordan. These two sides inform each other and provide very necessary context for one another, Willie Jordan goes to South Africa to see oppression firsthand and as a result starts to think critically about race through his own lens, not just the lens of Standard 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*.
<http://www2.csudh.edu/ccauthen/575S12/june-jordan-nobody-mean-more-to-me.pdf>.

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

Her students speaking in the same Black English *The Color Purple* was written in.

