

Rhetorical Situation Worksheet

Your name:

Samiha Hussien

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.

Jordan is responding to what it means to be an English speaker and what dictates the rules for "proper" "Standard English" vs. Black English which is deemed as incorrect by white standards.

This text was published in 1985.

The exigence for this is the ongoing oppression of language her black students experience. Black English is not regarded in the same way as "Standard English". It is constantly being threatened to be eliminated due to the notion that one must succumb to the societal evaluation of intelligence and propriety.

Jordan may have also been prompted to write this piece due to the continuous issue of police brutality against black people especially how unfortunately frequent it is and how one of her students in particular was affected by the death of his brother at the hands of the police.

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

"June Jordan (1936-2002) was a poet, playwright, essayist, and professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley." She is very experienced in English studies and has also taught in NYC as referenced throughout the text.

She taught a course in Black English and can understand it and also was doing an independent study with Willie Jordan who is also a subject of this piece. Her investment in the issue is witnessing the rejection of Black English from her black students themselves due to societal standards for the language.

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?

June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan" is an essay.

This genre allows her to explore the statistical elements of the worldwide use of English and how in America, the diverse ways of speaking English are blatantly looked upon with disdain while also weaving in her stories of teaching Black English as well as her student's experiences and their work in a collective piece. It allows her reader's to see the very use of Black English on paper which emulates the experience of her students when reading a text with Black English for the first time.

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.

I believe that Jordan intended to target multiple audiences in this essay one of which being black students leaning in the American education system. From the start of our education, America perpetuates the idea that there is a correct standard for English and suppresses Black English. Accustomed to the use of "Standard English" in the classroom, even her black students were disconcerted with and mocked the use of Black English in literature. Her purpose in teaching the course was to normalize the acceptance of Black English and defy societies rejection of anything that does not meet white standards.

Another intended audience is the media because Jordan specifically comments on and exposes the media's rejection of anything other than "conventional" language. The media has an ulterior agenda and if a story does not align with it, media outlets do not see it fit to release stories no matter how important or pressing the issues may be. The students knew once they decided to write their introduction paragraph on Reggie Jordan's murder in Black English, it would cost them the media's ear because they would not release something that is deemed "imperfect" and would be disliked by major audience groups such as those who push "Standard English" as a singular and "correct" English.

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

Jordan's purpose, as a professor who teaches Black English, is to enlighten and educate readers of the validity of Black English despite the common establishment of "Standard English" in American educational and professional systems. She also hopes to expose the injustice if not being heard due to the use of Black English regarding issues as serious as police brutality.

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

Black English must be seen with the same level of validity and acceptance as the white approved "Standard English". It is far from uncommon but for some reason regarded as a lesser version of English.

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 uses statistics to support her argument. Although 10 percent—a very large portion—of native speakers of English are Afro-American citizens and the majority of English speakers do not speak White English, it is ridiculous that White English is considered the standard. The English language is extremely ephemeral, but merely due to the acceptance of a version of English by white society, White English has become the “standard”—the reference to which all other Englishes supposedly derive from.

"At this, several students dumped on the book. Just about unanimously, their criticisms targeted the language. I listened to what they wanted to say and silently marveled at the similarities between their casual speech patterns and Alice Walker's written version of Black English. But I decided against pointing to these identical traits of syntax, I wanted not to make them self-conscious about their own spoken language—not while they clearly felt it was ‘wrong.’"

Jordan provides this anecdote of her students reacting to the use of Black English in literature because it serves to prove how drastic white-idealistic suppression has adversely affected the mindset of black students and their language. They mock and criticize it because it seems odd when written on paper even though it is the way they speak because of the fact that Black English is not the language asserted in the classroom setting. Their reaction was to ridicule the language because their education taught them that there is a right way to speak English catering to the language of white America.

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*.

ethos: Jordan establishes her ability and authority to speak on the subject of English is that she is a professor of Black English.

‘It was heartbreaking to proceed, from that point. Everyone in the room realized that our decision in favor of Black English had doomed our writings, even as the distinctive reality of our Black lives always has doomed our efforts to "be who we been" in this country.’

Jordan employs the use of pathos specifically at the moment when her students realize the reality of how they will be received when using Black English. The sinking feeling knowing they will not be heard even regarding such a serious and heartbreaking issue because their language is not satisfactory to the media.

‘In addition to that staggering congeries of non-native users of English, there are five countries, or 333,746,000 people, for whom this thing called "English" serves as a native tongue. 2 Approximately 10 percent of these native speakers of "English" are Afro-American citizens of the U.S.A. I cite these numbers and varieties of human beings dependent on "English" in order, quickly, to suggest how strange and how tenuous is any concept of "Standard English.”’

Jordan’s use of statistics here employs logos which serves to expose the true native usage of English and how so many different people of different ethnicities use it but somehow White English is supposed to represent the standard.

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

Jordan, June Harvard Educational Review; Aug 1988; 58, 3; ProQuest Psychology Journals pg. 363

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

I want to remember how limiting education systems can be. Without even realizing it sometimes, we can be subjected to the restrictions of a country or system's educational agenda just like Jordan's students were before they read the text with Black English. Because we grow up with an education that pushes certain ideals that fit society, we can be trained to view anything outside of that structure as abnormal and less intelligent.