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Uncovering Your Students' Authentic Voice

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Introduction/Rationale

As the lead teacher for Creative Writing at the Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School (Co-op) in New Haven, CT., one of my primary objectives is to prove to my students that to be a good writer you have to do at least two things well and consistently: read and write. No one can consider him/herself a writer if s/he doesn't write. On this they usually agree with me. But the idea of reading to be a writer is something of an anathema. Introducing Walt Whitman might get groaning responses in the way of, "Why do I gotta' read this dead-old-white-guy to be a writer?" "This junk is corny!" "Did he really write all this?" What they are saying is: what could this possibly have to do with me?

Remarkably, once my students actually begin to read, analyze, and synthesize (Bloom) a writer like Whitman, they are often quite taken with him. When they read, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, and what I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you," (Whitman lines 1-3) they can hear Whitman's voice and they recognize that it is different from any voice they are used to hearing or producing. The problem is that they cannot say why. They can tell me it is good, they can tell me the lines and words they like, they can ably discuss and argue meaning and their connection to it, but they don't have the experience and/or vocabulary to tell me why and how Whitman does what he does. And they certainly don't have any idea how to use Whitman as a role model to help them create their own authentic voices.

In his book "Classroom Instruction That Works," Robert Marzano postulates that for a student to learn something new, the student must link the new information to his/her prior knowledge. It is only by forming those links that a student can acquire and retain new knowledge. The majority of Co-op students are low and middle-income urban youth who have been in the public school system their entire academic careers. Few of them have ever left the City of New Haven, and like most teenagers they are aggressively homogeneous and highly provincial. They believe that their neighborhood and city are the world. They often generalize about the larger world based on what they see around them. The problem is that they stop there. They simply do not even know what they do not know. The magnitude of their inexperience of the broader world is one of the major impediments to their growth as learners and people. In most cases their prior knowledge base is very limited.

One of the essential questions I ask myself as a teacher is, what can I teach my students now that will stay

with them and help them even five years from now? I can teach them that there is a world beyond their current imagining and that they have a place in it. That there is a past, present, and future available to them through reading and writing that connects to who they are now, what they currently know, who they will be, and what they will know in the future. That it is absolutely possible, and perhaps even easier than they imagine, to learn how to learn and how to communicate. And that it is a worthwhile endeavor to do so.

This unit proposes to show students how reading helps you become a better writer and vice versa, especially as each relate to the idea of authentic voice. The underlying idea is to give students a broader base of prior knowledge by exposing them to some great American writers they most certainly would not read on their own and by giving them the vocabulary they need to understand, analyze, and synthesize the voices of those writers. I want them to begin to ask and answer what is arguably one of the primary essential questions of literature: What is this writer doing and what effect is it having on me? The students will also begin to learn how to use literary vocabulary to discuss and revise their own creative writing. By using a master text as a map, they will begin to learn how someone else's writing can help them reach their own authentic voice. I will be calling this the Master/Apprentice method and I will describe, more fully, how it works later in the unit. Suffice it to say at this point that by working with some of the great American writers, I hope that students will begin to see what T.S. Eliot knew when he wrote in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "Some one said: the dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did. 'Precisely, and they are that which we know.'" (2)

Authentic Voice

The term "authentic voice" is bandied about quite freely in any number of places but is rarely defined in a way that a student can understand. To make matters worse, students are routinely exhorted to write in their authentic voices without any explanation of how such a miracle could be visited upon them. In addition students are rarely given a guided-opportunity to use the well-developed voices of famous writers, speakers, and singers as an actively working model for finding their own authentic voice.

Each of the literary elements described below contribute to the creation of an authentic voice, whether that voice belongs to an established, revered writer or to a student whose voice is just emerging. These are the elements that this unit will be working with as we try to identify what makes a voice authentic.

Personalized Content

As a creative writing teacher I tell my students that something is written in his/her authentic voice when it contains ideas and details that could only be written by him/or her. But young writers tend to write in broad sweeping generalizations and they do so for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is because they think that generalizing makes their writing more meaningful to their readers. It is our job to show them that in fact the exact opposite is true. It is important to let students know that generalized writing is first draft writing-- which can be a good thing-- as long as they understand that part of the writer's craft is to replace the generalized with the specific in future drafts. Students need to be able to see and hear the difference between "anyone could have written this" and "only *you* could have written this in this way."

Sound and Voice

The idea of the sound of someone's voice being recognizable and connected specifically to that person is a concept that requires higher-order thinking to parse. It is difficult to write about sound. It is far easier to hear it and try to figure out what makes it specific to a person. In lesson plan one we will listen to some voices and try to discern what elements make them specific, authentic, and recognizable.

Rhythm and Voice

Truth be told, students "borrow" the rhythms, rhyme schemes, and subject matter of their favorite singers, songwriters, rappers, spoken word artists, and comedians all the time. Sometimes they simply memorize the artist's work and repeat it verbatim. But sometimes consciously or unconsciously they use it as an inspiration or jumping off point for something of their own--something that will be in their own voice. In "A Poetry Handbook" Mary Oliver talks about the value of "imitation" as a means of learning how to write well: "You would learn very little in this world if you were not allowed to imitate. And to repeat your imitations until some solid grounding in the skill was achieved and the slight but wonderful difference--that made you *you* and no one else--could assert itself. Every child is encouraged to imitate. But in the world of writing it is originality that is sought out, while imitation is the sin of sins" (13). This unit is about consciously committing the sin of imitation repeatedly until originality begins to emerge. (See the section Master/Apprentice method for more information.)

Speaker and Listener--Writer and Reader

It has been my experience that emerging writers are primarily concerned with getting something down on paper. And because most student writers write in classrooms their initial concerns deal with formulaic academic, rather than creative, questions: "How long does it have to be?" "When do you want it?" "Can I use slang and/or curse words?" "Can it, or does it have to, rhyme?" I have never, ever, had a student ask me who the intended audience for this poem should be. A student rarely writes to a specific audience unless the student is: in love with, in crush with, heartbroken by, or angry at someone.

The idea that a writer writes to a specific person or group of people is very empowering to a student writer once they know it and once they decide to whom they are writing. "Voice is always created in a relationship between a speaker and an audience. How a word sounds in someone's mouth depends on whose mouth and whose ears. Voice doesn't exist in a void. Voice in a classroom doesn't exist in a void. If our voices are perspectival then they are always changing-- [In the same way that] teaching is not a single thing to think--it is a way of thinking, or several ways of thinking" (Hammer 6/19/07). A solid example of speaker and listener is readily available in the classroom. The conversation that teachers and students engage in while trying to figure out how the idea of voice works is an active example of how people use the elements of voice to communicate.

Syntax and Voice

To understand the idea of syntax requires a person to understand and acknowledge that there is a standard, accepted way in which sentences and lines work. This is, perhaps, the single most difficult concept for my students to understand. That the way a person has grown up speaking is not standard, proper, accepted, or acceptable can be considered a threat to the very identity of that person. The majority of my students are urban African Americans and Hispanics. Most of my students do not speak standard English as a first language and are enormously protective of the syntax they grew up using. June Jordan, in her essay "Nobody Mean More To Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan" is helpful in getting inside the student's resistance to changing his/her syntax. "[. . .]syntax, the structure of an idea, leads you to the world view of the speaker

and reveals her values. The syntax of a sentence equals the structure of your consciousness. If we [insist] that the language of Black English adheres to a distinctive Black syntax, then we [are] postulating a profound difference between white and Black people, *per se*. [Is] it a difference to prize or obliterate? (63)" If you are the repository of your culture (Black, White, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, etc.) and your syntax is a manifestation of your culture, is it surprising that you would be very protective of it?

As a teacher I try to balance my awareness and respect for language of origin and its authentic syntax against my perceived academic duty to language education that produces young American citizens prepared for success. One cannot teach authentic voice without having given this topic some thought, and it is naïve to think that your students won't challenge you on it. There are many articles and books that discuss this issue in depth both objectively and subjectively. I have included a few that have been illuminating to me in the bibliography.

Target Class

The target class for this unit is the tenth grade English Language Arts (ELA) class at Co-op. The tenth grade ELA is likely to be a class of approximately 25 students who are considered average learners. Some will be at the high end of average, some will be at the low end of average, some will have special needs, and the rest will be the average of all of that. The unit is suited to all learners because its focus is on developing the individual's authentic voice. The unit can easily be modified so that students who work at a slower pace or at a lower skill level can work with shorter (more accessible) pieces of writing, as well as with fewer literary elements at a time.

Students come to Co-op, a small urban magnet high school, without deep literary experience. In the lower grades and sadly, even in high school there only seems to be enough time for students to learn to read and write for information. Even where High School ELA teachers are hustling to teach students how to read literature for depth and beauty, the writing assignments are most often analytical. Certainly these are necessary skills, but in this unit and in the Creative Writing classes we try to take students in a somewhat different direction. We try to help each student use their analysis to write a creative response in line with what they think and feel in a way that only that particular student could. We want to help them write creatively in his/her authentic voice.

Projected Timeline for Lessons/Unit

11 to 12 class periods

Additional Target Class

An expanded version of this unit, with additional, longer, and more complex readings, will be part of the senior level Creative Writing class curriculum at Co-op. Because the Creative Writing classes have experience in using a master text as, at least, the starting point for a piece of creative writing, they will work through the lessons in this unit quickly. They will then apply their new vocabulary, knowledge, and skills to [Leaves of Grass] by Walt Whitman. Although the students in the Creative Writing class are self-identified writers, there is usually a wide range of skill levels and abilities from students with IEP's (Individual Education Plans) to Honors

level students and every kind of student in-between. Modification of the unit, even with the more experienced writing students, will still be required and is easily accomplished as described above.

The Master/Apprentice Method

Reading the work of the writers who came before us, listening to the unique voice each brings us, attempting to walk in the footprints left to us, is as good a way as any of learning how to find the unique, authentic voice within each of us. In this way writers are no different from any other artists. We must practice scales like musicians, we have to stand at the barre like dancers, and we have to break great paintings down into the major lines and shapes we see so that others can see them too.

In order to begin to master the elements of reading and writing in our own authentic voices, we must apprentice ourselves to the "master writers" who have done this work so successfully before us. We must choose some literary elements to focus on, read for those elements, discuss them with each other, and then write using those elements, initially imitating what the master writer has done. We must question the writers by questioning what we see them doing in their texts. Of course they cannot answer us verbally, but their work answers our questions. Over time we make those elements our own and their use becomes as fluid and natural to us as our own ability to walk down stairs. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" T.S. Eliot also writes about the impact of what I am calling the master-apprentice method:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. [. . .] The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so [. . .] the values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is the conformity between the old and the new. [Hence no one should] find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (2)

In our disposable society it is certainly no surprise that students who have been on the planet for 15 to 19 years do not have a clear sense of the way in which what is past is prologue. Nor is it a shocker that they believe that what they are doing is new, improved, cutting edge, and was never done before. And yet I have never had a student who did not react with pride at finding out that the writing they were doing was part of, or fit well in, a larger movement or ideal that preceded them. How much better, easier, and more comforting to have them start out knowing that one of their goals is to add their voice to the existing canon and that by doing so they may change perception of the past and redirect the future.

Student Centered Objectives

There are two things I have discovered about students: they cannot resist a direct question and they are absolutely aware of what they don't do well. In years of exceedingly unscientific polling I have asked my students what they wish they understood better, and without fail the majority of them wish they had a better vocabulary and a better sense of grammar and sentence structure. This unit will help students improve in both areas and that should not be kept a secret from the students. I believe in advertising the benefits and objectives, of the students' work to them throughout the unit.

The purpose of this unit is to give ELA and Creative Writing students a working understanding of some of the literary elements that contribute to recognizing and writing with a unique voice.

- 1 Students will use reading to become better writers and writing to become better readers.
- 2 Students will use a common vocabulary of literary elements to read, analyze, and synthesize the voices of a variety of great writers.
- 3 Students will learn how to use the same common vocabulary of literary elements to analyze, discuss, and guide the writing and revision in their own and the writing of their peers.
- 4 Students will begin to understand how master writers create voice and make meaning.
- 5 Students will begin to learn how to use a master text as a map that can help lead them to their own authentic voice.
- 6 Students will begin to connect the elements, skills, and strategies they are learning across the curriculum including as a means of organizing thoughts and words into essays that meet the CAPT and SAT standards.
- 7 Students will be expected to listen with a pen (take notes) during readings and discussions of the master-works studied.
- 8 Students will share their prior knowledge with each other and use that knowledge to connect to the new knowledge we hope they'll gain.

A Few Pedagogical Notes

Teaching by Making Your Own Process Visible

How will students begin to distinguish the general from the specific? This question is deceptively simple to us (adults and teachers) because we can see the difference so clearly, quickly, and seemingly without much effort. That is because we have practiced the skill of noticing this difference for years. It is not that we skip any of the steps we want our students to master; it is that we have come to do so many of those early steps, let us call them processes, so quickly that we are unaware we are doing them.

I believe that the best teachers are the ones that strive to make their own thinking process visible to their students. I do not mean that these teachers require their students to think the same way as they do. Rather I mean that teachers share what they see, think, and do: they model thinking.

A Word About Reading Student Work and Coaching Student Thinking

At Co-op all teachers, across the curriculum, assess students progress using the following three questions. What do our students do well? What don't they do well? What can we do to move each of them to his/her next level of skill and knowledge? Looking at student work in this way illuminates individual and group patterns that can be used to positively influence classroom instruction.

Assessing student knowledge and coaching student thinking are by no means the same as grading student work. Grading student work is a necessary last step in the process of assessing and coaching student thinking. But if we begin by grading we will likely shut down thinking and the creative writing we want students to share. In order for us to get our students thinking and keep them thinking (reading, writing, and speaking), we have to become diagnostic readers and listeners. We have to become teacher-translators who can understand the language of students, teachers, experts, and great writers. We have to understand what each of our students is getting right even when they are (initially) saying it wrong. We have to learn how to listen to them.

All of this is just to say (with acknowledgement to William Carlos Williams) that engaging students in Creative Writing is a delicate piece of business. We cannot on the one hand encourage students to write, and on the other hand read their writing as "correctors." That is not the way to encourage a unique voice. The beauty of limiting ourselves (and our students) to the discussion of objective literary elements frees us as teachers to gently help our students compare and contrast their ability to use those elements well with masters who unquestionably do use them well. This unit discourages the use of the red pen. It encourages the idea that each student is an emerging writer with an emerging voice.

Essential Questions

There are five essential questions I want students to ponder during this unit. Essential questions one relate to the students' prior knowledge of how voice works in the world. Essential questions two help students begin to connect their prior knowledge of voice to the literary elements we will be studying in the work of the master

writers. Essential questions three help the student connect everything they have learned to an in-depth creative writing piece in which they will use the literary elements studied to create their own authentic voices. Essential questions four are a reflection on what we've learned.

Through the students' short writings, the teacher will be able to assess how well each student is, in fact, able to understand and make connections to the variety of elements they are studying. The four essential questions appear in order below. The number of each question is related to the number of each lesson plan:

1. What is the sound of a voice? How or why do people say: "I would know that voice anywhere"?
2. Who is this Master writer speaking to? Who is his/her audience? How do you know? What elements is this Master writer using and how do they affect me? Make me feel? Think?
3. What elements of a Master writer (pick one we've studied) do I want to apprentice myself to? Borrow? Imitate? Make my own?
4. What can we as writers learn about voice by reading a Master writer?

A Proposed Workflow for the Following Lesson Plans

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

The workflow described in this section has been extrapolated from the teachings of Mary Mackley, Carol Jonaitis, and the Connecticut Writing Project. I have studied with them and been coached by them for six years. They have encouraged me to make their methods my own, to use them creatively, and to change them as student response requires. I have done that, and so I can no longer quote them directly. I gratefully acknowledge their work and ideas which I build upon below.

In all cases I suggest that the teacher use the following workflow when introducing students to each of these lessons: teacher demonstrates the work, teacher gives students guided practice of the work, students do the work independently, students share their work with class, class responds back to the student who shared. This workflow is explained in greater detail below.

The benefit of the proposed workflow is that it gives the students a very clear picture of what is expected of them. It also gives the teacher a very clear assessment of what the students are understanding well and not so well so that s/he can adjust classroom instruction accordingly. The best byproduct of this workflow is that it is student--centered and students are motivated by the idea that what they are thinking and writing, is valued and will be listened to at many points during the process.

1. Introduce or review the literary elements that are the focus of the unit. Initially you will have to do this but after a short time you will be able to list the elements and have the students define

them for the class.

2. Introduce students to the overall idea of what they are going to do.

3. Demonstrate what you expect the students to do by actually doing it once in front of them.

a. Make sure that when you demonstrate, you make each process you use to build your conclusions visible to the student by actually telling them exactly what you are thinking as in - I think this because. . . That means you need to take a minute and think about how you think before you demonstrate. (Example: I think that voice is Elvis Presley because I have heard him sing "You Ain't Nothin But a Hounddog" before." I think this is the young Elvis because he sounds very energetic and the tone of his voice is not gravelly the way it got later in his life. Etc.) Emphasize what you think and why you think it.

b. Note: while your students won't necessarily think like you do. . .seeing the way you think can help them understand that there is a process to thinking, that it progressively builds idea on idea, and that they can think and explain their thinking too. It's not a mystery--it just takes practice.

4. Demonstrate again using Guided Practice (Marzano) in which the students are expected to do the work you just demonstrated. This time you will be acting as an encourager helping them to synthesize the process. You will also be taking notes and reflecting back to them what they did--making their process visible to them.

5. Reflecting back to the students comes in two flavors: non-judgmental and judgmental. Each has a place in the learning process and neither should be used punitively.

c. Use the non-judgemental to get student thought and participation flowing--as in we are brainstorming and we will write down whatever comes to mind without placing a value (right or wrong) on it.

d. Use the judgemental to get students to rethink, refine, and revise thoughts and assumptions they are making that are not correct or applicable--as in "Michael Jackson's voice sounds the same in 'ABC, 123' as it does in 'Thriller. It clearly does not. Further explanation of what evidence supports the student assumption is needed. Often a student's incorrect assumption is related to a kernel of something that may be correct. Finding that kernel, which could be a piece of prior knowledge, can help both teacher and student in their efforts to clarify and correct assumptions as needed.

6. Have students begin to work in small groups or individually to do the work independently.

7. Whenever possible have students (or some students-not always the same students) share their work with the class.

8. Whenever possible have the class respond to the student who shared. (Determine in advance if feedback will be asked for so that students are ready.)

9. Refer to the prior work when beginning the new work and whenever prior work is applicable or illuminating to a current point or situation.

Lesson 1: Sound--I Would Know That Voice Anywhere

Essential Question: What is the sound of a voice?

Background Thinking

At the risk of sounding "old school" I must ask the essential question of teachers everywhere: What is it with these kids today? Kids today seem to live in an alternate universe from the rest of us. Their speech patterns, grammar, music, even the way they communicate with each other are foreign to us. They are digital natives and we are digital immigrants (Woodson). It has, however, always been thus in one way or another.

We must recognize that our students' speech patterns, grammar, music, forms of communication, and even (especially) their slang constitute a large part of their prior knowledge base as it relates to sound and voice. We cannot and should not ignore that. We should instead build upon it. I am not suggesting that we all start rapping. I am suggesting that when we want to teach students to listen to the way a writer they have never heard of (Robert Frost) uses sound, asking them to come up with examples from their inner sound library (which we may not be familiar with), is both a worthwhile exercise and fun. When a student quotes the Grammy winning group Outcasts' line from "Hey Ya" "Shake it like a salt shaker" as an example of the use of sound--it is of course funny, but more importantly it's a good example and one they will remember. Hence it is one that the teacher can use more than once to help students connect prior knowledge to new knowledge. Offhand remarks are the meat of the teachable moment, and in a unit that proposes to teach some difficult ideas any help you can get from the students is well worth exploiting.

At the heart of the idea of sound and voice is what inevitably is at the heart of all writer's craft: word choice and the order in which the writer combines and presents them in order to deliver message and meaning. That is as Keats wrote about truth and beauty, "all ye know and all ye need to know." Mary Oliver sums up the process of writer's craft and sound quite neatly: "I mean to suggest that poets select words for their sound as well as their meaning--and that good poets make good initial selections. Of course they also revise[. . .]verbal skills *can* be learned. They can be discussed and practiced. Then, a wonderful thing happens: what is learned consciously settles, somewhere inside the chambers of the mind, where--you can count on it--it will "remember" what it knows and will *float forth to assist in the initial writing*" (27).

Significant Task: Sound Treasure Hunt

Activity 1

Students will listen to selected cuts from a variety of different sources provided by the teacher. They will be asked to try to identify a variety of elements that relate to how they figured out who the speaker is. They will also be asked to identify elements that relate to what they assume about the speaker from sound of his/her voice. This part can be accomplished whether the student knows who the speaker is or not. There are many elements of a voice that a student can hear, without knowing exactly who the speaker is including: sex, age, relative health, mood, purpose of the speaker, potential audience of the speaker, etc.

Students will work with a graphic organizer (Marzano) in order to help them keep track of each voice and the elements identified and connected with it. A description of the basic graphic organizer is provided in the section Handouts below.

I have chosen to begin with voices I believe the students can and will recognize in order for them to become comfortable with the idea of listening in a different way than they are used to. So I plan to use Bart Simpson as my teacher demonstration. (See example in Handout section below.) His character is actually voiced by a woman--a fact I don't think most of the students will know. I like the idea of starting off with something that is so familiar but which is also not exactly as it appears to be. This will signal to the students that there is more to this activity than initially meets the ear. I will expect students to listen to my example with a pen so that they can write the example in their graphic organizer. They can use the examples as guidance later when they are working independently.

I will use The Jackson Five as my guided practice activity because I think "ABC, 123" is a song that is widely heard by young people growing up. I intend to draw a copy of the handout on the board (or on an overhead projection) so that I can listen with a pen while we work on the guided practice.

Next I want to start moving into tougher terrain by having them listen to Martin Luther King, Jr. Most of my students have heard Dr. King's voice and will likely be able to identify him. The purpose of the treasure hunt, however, is not mere identification--it is uncovering the elements that make the identification possible. Students are likely to be able to identify elements including; sound patterns, rhythm, syntax patterns, and audience.

I want to continue with Gil Scott Heron's poem "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" because I am sure they have not heard it so they will be forced to listen to the voice for whatever clues they may be able to pick up. I also want them to have the experience of hearing this poem so that later in the American Voice section of this unit I can refer back to it.

Students will share out from their graphic organizers. Students will hand in their graphic organizers so that teacher can use them for assessment. (See below.)

Handout/Prototype of Graphic Organizer

(table available in print form)

Readings/Hearings

Each of the following needs to be audible.

The Simpsons--any episode--the voice of Bart Simpson, by Nancy Cartwright

ABC, 123, by the Jackson Five. Michael Jackson, lead singer.

Address to the March on Washington, MLK Jr. August 28, 1963

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised, Gil Scott Heron

Assessment

Teacher will have (some or all) students share out what they wrote down (an audible assessment of student work. Teacher will collect student's graphic organizers at end of class. A quick glance at each student's graphic organizer will indicate which elements students have an easy time hearing and which are more difficult. Teacher will use that information to decide what to review and expand upon before beginning Lesson Two.

Projected Length of Lesson

Two class periods

Lesson 2: Audience--Speaker and Listener/Writer and Reader

Background Thinking

When I was growing up I could tell what mood my mother was in and the likely reception she was going to give me using a number of aural clues. I'm guessing that most people can do the same. Specifically I knew I would be facing a different mother depending on what name she called me by: Judi, Ketzeleh (little kitten), Carol-Marsha-I mean Judi, Judith Joyce Katz. Any occasion that required her to use my first, middle, and last name was not going to end well for me.

Certainly word choice, diction, pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, and syntax play an important role in comprehending who a speaker's audience is. In order to make a student's understanding of voice visible to him/her I would start Lesson 2 with a "Quick Write" in which you ask the student's a specific question and give them three to five minutes to write a response. The response will be thinking on paper and not formal writing to be corrected.

Activity I

Ask the students to write down the various ways in which their parent call to them. Ask them to use the literary elements of voice to describe how they (the audience) know what to expect from the parent (speaker). Use your own version of the demonstration above--how you were called by a parent as an example.

Ask a few students to share out their Quick Write encouraging students to use the literary elements of voice to describe how the speaker-listener connection works.

Activity II

Share the following quote with your students. Jordan clarifies the idea of writer/reader and speaker/listener, "[. . .] every sentence assumes the living and active participation of at least two human beings, the speaker and the listener[. . .] If your idea, your sentence, [your line of poetry] assumes the presence of at least two living and active people, you will make it understandable because the motivation behind every sentence is the wish to say something real to somebody real. (64)

Activity I: Teacher demonstration

Give students a clean copy of the graphic organizer used in Significant Task One and a copy of the Adrienne Rich poem (*Dedications*) from *An Atlas of a Difficult World*. Tell students that:

- 1 You (teacher) are going to read the poem to them while they read along.
- 2 You will read the poem two times in a row with a short break between.
- 3 The student's job is to read/listen and to put a mark (underline, star, highlight) at every point in the poem at which they think they know who the poet's audience is.
- 4 Explain that it is almost impossible to hear and mark everything you might want to even in two read-throughs.
- 5 Remind them that, as with most pieces of writing, there can be more than one audience and that there are many possible answers.
- 6 We are not looking/listening for a "correct" answer or a perfectly marked paper--we are trying to hear/feel our immediate responses in a non-judgemental way.
- 7 Give them a "free" answer to start them off: each of us is the audience for this poem, even though Rich doesn't know any of us. At some point in the poem she speaks to each of us. That point will be the same for some of us and different for others. Be on the lookout for the moment when you know she is speaking to you--put your initials next to that part.

Activity II: Guided Practice

After you finish reading ask students to share the line(s) they put their initials next to. A quick way to do this is to have all students who chose the same line put their hands up when they hear "their" line. After all the personal lines have been shared ask students to share the other lines they have marked--telling the class who they think the audience for that line is and/or why they chose it.

Once students have identified audience in the poem have them take out the graphic organizer. Ask the essential question: what literary elements is Rich using to help us identify, ourselves and others as, her audience? The elements we are looking for will most likely be found in personalized content and syntax. Rich uses simple effective details. In a few well-chosen words she establishes where her audience is and that helps us establish who her audience is, and in turn that makes us (her actual audience at the moment) question where we are when we are reading. She makes you ask yourself which one (or more) of the people she is writing to are you?

Finally work with the students to write a new stanza for the poem in which Rich is speaking directly to us, in our classroom, at this very minute. How would she finish the stanza that begins "I know you are reading this poem. . .". Guide students to use words that include time, place, movement, and emotion. This is not an all day event. It is a group quick write (as in--I know you are reading this poem at your kitchen table in the dog days of a too humid summer, under deadline to complete a curriculum you will be teaching in September). It

is not meant to be perfect. It is meant to be the first step in the Master/Apprentice method.

Write the students newly completed Rich-like stanza on a piece of paper that can be posted somewhere in the room. Have the students create a title under which you will write "Inspired by Adrienne Rich". Explain that this is a time honored tradition in writing and that as long as you give Rich the credit she is due you are not plagiarizing her work. . .she is inspiring you and you are gratefully acknowledging her for doing so. Have the students sign the paper and post it.

Activity Three: Student Independent Work

Students will work in small groups. The teacher will prepare a two-page packet for each group that contains a sheet with a short poem printed on it multiple times so that each student in the group can have a copy to work with. Students can rip or cut the paper into individual poems. (Some suggested poems appear below in Readings.) Each student will also receive a blank copy of the Literary Elements of Voice Graphic Organizer used in Lesson One. Each group should receive a different short poem to analyze. Packets can be assigned by the teacher, chosen by lottery, or grouped in any way that the teacher fancies.

The poems recommended for this task were chosen because they clearly seem addressed to one or more people, or kinds of people, that can be identified. In addition each poem is:

- 1 By a great poet.
- 2 Very short (bite size) so that the groups can read the poem (several times) and analyze it in a relatively short period of time (20 minutes tops).
- 3 Famous enough to be found in anthologies and/or online.

The student objectives below should be reviewed with the class before they start. Students may also need a quick review of the Literary Elements and the graphic organizer. Students should be made aware that it is their group's job to make sure the class understands what the group has learned: each group will teach the rest of the class. Students will be graded on their informal presentations by the other groups and teacher. The rubric is below.

Student objectives--the students will:

1. Read the poem, to the class at large, two times at the start of the presentation. They need to read slowly and clearly since everyone will not have a copy in front of them.
2. Identify the person(s) the writer of the poem is trying to reach (the audience).
3. Determine what "something real" the writer is trying to communicate.
4. Choose, and be able to describe how, one or more of the literary elements of voice helped them answer objectives one and two.
5. Share their findings in an orderly and informative manner. The findings are more important that the presentation--the presentation will be informal.

Readings

- 1 "Dedications" from *An Atlas of a Difficult World* by Adrienne Rich (Gioia
- 2 "This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams (Gioia 158)
- 3 "Love That Boy" by Walter Dean Meyers
- 4 "288 (I am nobody)" by Emily Dickinson
- 5 "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks (Gioia 147)
- 6 "Learning English: by Luis Alberto Ambroggio (translated from the Spanish by Lori M. Carlson)

Advanced Reading:

Teaching the Ape to Write Poems, by James Tate (Gioia 839)

Assessment

Students and Teacher will be assessing each group by scoring them 0, 1, 2, or 3 in each of the following categories. Students will come to a consensus within their group of the scores that they are giving the presenting group. Groups may be challenged, on why they gave the score they did, so they should be prepared to explain. Exemplars using Adrienne Rich's (*Dedications*) are given below. The exemplars are in response to objective two: identify the audience. The quoted example is: "I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the/stove/warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in/your hand/because life is short and you too are thirsty."

1 Score 0-- The group did not accomplish the stated goal in this area.

o Exemplar--the students did not identify an audience for the quote

2 Score 1--The group presented an unsupported answer--gave no evidence for why they answered as they did.

o Exemplar--Rich's audience is a new mom

3 Score 2--The group presented a well supported answer--gave text based evidence for why they answered as they did.

o Exemplar--Rich's audience is a new mom with a "crying child". She's trying to get the baby's bottle ready "warming milk". She's busy with the baby.

4 Score 3--the group gave a well-supported answer, with text based evidence, and shared an insight or connection that they had while working.

o Exemplar--gave the evidence in Score 2 and added an insight like--it's cool the way Rich makes it seem like the mom is thirsty and the baby is thirsty--but for different things: A book and a bottle. She tells us the mom is reading the poem and then shows us the mom reading the book.

1. Read the poem to the class at large two times at the start of the presentation.

2. Identify the person(s) the writer of the poem is trying to reach
3. Determine what "something real" the writer is trying to communicate
4. Choose, and be able to describe how, one or more of the literary elements of voice helped them answer objectives one and two
5. Share their findings in an orderly and informative manner. The findings are more important than the presentation--the presentation will be informal.

The teacher should keep track of the student scoring and can use it in any way desired when giving actual grades for participation in the work. The highest score available is 15.

Projected Length of Lesson

Three to four class periods.

Lesson 3: Finding Your Authentic American Voice

Background Thinking

One of the primary goals of this unit is to expose students to a wide variety of authentic American voices in order to increase their prior knowledge. In the first two lessons students have gained familiarity and a certain level of comfort in reading poetry that is written in voices that are quite different from their own. In this lesson students will be reading, discussing, and deciding which voice they want to "imitate" (Oliver) when they begin creatively writing and in order to find their own authentic American voice.

The suggested readings for Lesson 3 range from quite short to quite long. While a short poem is no guarantee of simplicity a long poem, by virtue of its perceived heft, can appear immediately challenging and intimidating to a reluctant or poor reader. The longer pieces can be excerpted, replaced, or removed,

depending on the abilities of your students. The overall purpose and goal of Lesson 3 will remain intact regardless. I recommend that all students are given at least three poems to work with so that they have a variety of voices to choose from when they choose a great poet's voice to imitate.

I will be using Walt Whitman's "*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*" as the basis for Activity I: Teacher Demonstration. I've chosen "*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*" because the way in which Whitman uses syntax to show us who is audience is, as well as to make us his audience, is echoed by Adrienne Rich in her poem (*Dedications*) that we worked with in Lesson 2 . Is Rich imitating Whitman? And if she is what does that give us permission to do when we begin to write? We are certainly as different from the writers we are reading as Rich is from Whitman.

Please note: Once you have worked through Activity I and Activity II of Lesson 3 you may continue and complete each of the remaining activities in this lesson or you may proceed to Lesson 5. The remaining activities are there to help students work independently and with peers to revise and refine the authentic American voice they are developing.

The teacher should prepare a packet for each student that includes:

- 1 The John Hollander quote in Activity I
- 2 Each of the poems s/he will have the students read (I prefer one poem per page)
- 3 A list of the literary elements previously worked with in the unit
- 4 An example of the kind of imitation (Oliver) that leads to a piece of writing that is in the imitators' unique American voice. I have found that students appreciate it when teachers struggle through an assigned activity so I encourage you to do so. But I have also included "*A Pantoum for Walt Whitman Who Never Wrote One and for My Students Who Have*" , a poem I wrote for my students when we were working with the Master/Apprentice method while reading Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. It is a favorite of my students' and a serviceable model.

Activity I: Teacher Demonstration

We are about to read a small collection of poems written by American poets in a variety of American voices. In his introduction to "Poetry for Young People", Poet John Hollander writes about the poems he chose for that anthology and about the American voice. His words apply to the group of poems we are about to read as well:

The old motto of the United States of America, e pluribus unum (out of many, one) referred originally to the federation of different states into one nation. But it has come to mean something very important about our culture, our civilization, which has been celebrated by many of our countries most interesting writers. [These poems] written by men and women with diverse concerns, backgrounds, and attitudes, and these poems, quite different from each other, are all, sometimes in very different ways about the United States of America. (4)

With that in mind we are going to read a variety of poems by a diverse group of American poets. As we read we will be trying to identify what elements of writer's craft they are using to create their unique American voices. We are in the process of figuring out how we can find our own voices by understanding each of theirs. We will identify how they use the literary elements we have been studying and we will also answer some of our essential questions:

1. What literary elements does the writer use to create his/her unique American Voice?
2. Who is the writer's audience?
3. Does this writer speak for you?
4. Is this writer's voice like yours?
5. What does this writer make you think? Feel?

Each poem is a voice map that we can follow. When we follow the map that a poet we like, connect to, and want to imitate has left for us we are on the way to finding our own way of making the trip from writer to reader and from speaker to listener. Our job is to become part of the conversation that the poet we admire began. Our job is to advance the conversation, add a little more detail to the map so that the next writer can continue the journey. Let's go.

Have student's read around (each reads a stanza out loud) Whitman's "*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*". Once the student's have read the teacher will read it once again. As the teacher reads students should highlight any words, phrases, or lines that particularly "pop" for them. The highlighted part can be something they like, don't like, connect to, don't understand, or especially something they wish they had written themselves.

When the second reading is over have students share the parts they highlighted. Encourage open discussion, that is text based, and that centers around the five essential questions above. Make your own thinking process about this poem visible to the students as in: I feel like I am the audience Whitman is writing to. Me. Now. Even though he wrote this a long time ago because I can see the same things he saw, even now. When he says: "These and all else were to me the same as they are to you [. . .] Others the same--others who look back on me because I/look'd forward to them,/ [. . .] What is it then between us?/ What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years/between us?" Well that just gets to me because I think about my place in time and how time works and how maybe he's in the past looking at the water even while I'm here in the present thinking about the water and how did he know I would be hearing his voice. He certainly seems to know someone will be. He's like a time traveler he seems to be able to be where he is and where I am at the same time.

My advice to my students at this point is that we are about to become huge sponges absorbing the great voices and holding onto the lines we like because in a day or so, when you start writing you may want to work with Whitman's idea of the time that has passed "between us." So as we continue reading that's what I want you to do when you are reading, hold onto the ideas, words, phrases, and stanza's that speak to you from all of the poems we read.

Continue to work with "*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*" or choose the next poem that you want your students to consider. Either way we are reading these poems with the understanding that we are one of the poet's intended audiences. We are reading these poems like we are shoppers with enough money to buy, to own, anything we find that fits and that we like.

Work with as many poems as your students can handle. Make sure they are highlighting and keeping all of the poems together.

Read *I Write America* last because it is the most student accessible of all the recommended poems and it is the poem that the Activity II: Guided Practice is based on.

Activity II: Guided Practice

In the same way that it was fairly easy to take Adrienne Rich's refrain "I know you are reading this poem" and have the students write their own versions of it, the poem *I Write America* lends itself naturally to imitation. Imitation, in order to make-the-leap to authentic voice, must have some restrictions, however. The primary restriction I insist upon when students begin their short poem with the words *I Write America* is that whatever they choose to write America about must use the literary element of personal content. We are not interested in broad sweeping generalizations in the nature of: I write America for all the kids who are starving in the ghetto. If you are not personally acquainted with someone who is actually starving in the ghetto. . .don't write about it. There's plenty to write America about in your own personal experience and your own personal experience is more powerful than any generalization you can come up with.

Remind students that they can also write something lovely and grateful to America. . .they don't have to be angry to write to America. But they can be if they want to.

Remarkably, in my experience, students can write one stanza to America in about five to ten minutes. It would seem, in fact, that they have been waiting for someone to invite them to write America. Students want you to write America too--so do.

Have students share out their stanzas and post them in the room or even out in the hall outside your room if your students are amenable to that.

Activity III: Student Independent Work--Writing in your own authentic American voice

Use your own notes to do each of the following steps. Use your work as exemplars to lead your students through the process. Students may use any poem from any of the three lessons in the unit.

1. Reread all of the poem-fragments you have highlighted.
2. Choose the three fragments that you have highlighted that you like the best. Put little sticky notes (or in some way make them easy to find again) on your top three choices.
3. Rank your choices one, two, and three based on which fragments you like the best.
4. Use the fragment that you ranked number one as the first line of the poem you are going to write.
5. Re-read the original poem or at least the stanza that your first line comes from. Choose one to two additional literary elements you might want to imitate from the original poem or writer. For example--you might:

- 1 Write to a similar audience
- 2 Use similar syntax and/or tone
- 3 Use the same word count or syllable count per line
- 4 Use elements of sound that the original used (repetition, rhyme, etc)
- 5 Work with similar subject matter
- 6 Etc.
6. Once you have chosen the first line you must decide who you are writing to--who is your audience? Re-read the quote from June Jordan. The audiences you might write may include the original poet.
7. Your completed poem should have a minimum of fourteen lines.

Please note: I use fourteen lines because it's the length of a sonnet and I think it takes at least that many lines to develop a thought. Most students want a minimum length to get started--their completed poem can be longer.

Also bear in mind that by this time in the unit the student's heads will be swimming with the poetry of great writers. This will help some students and traumatize others. Virtually nothing is more helpful to the writer than writing to a specific person. You may need to remind the students of this many times throughout their writing process. Keeping a specific audience, or person in mind while writing makes the writing far more manageable--it is the difference between trying to talk to get your message across to a whole room full of people and text messaging just one person. Which feels more specific and controlled?

Recommended Readings

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry , by Walt Whitman

The New Colossus , Emma Lazarus (<http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.htm>)

Let America Be America Again , Langston Hughes

next to of course god america i , by e e cummings (Gioia 291)

I Write America , The Cast of Def Poetry Jam on Broadway

A Pantoum for Walt Whitman, by Judith J. Katz (appears at the end of this lesson)

Advanced Readings:

The Warden Said to Me the Other Day, by Etheridge Knight (Gioia 854)

Bilingual/Bilingue, by Rhina Espaillat (Gioia 856)

Assessment

The "To Do" chart below is designed to help students, peer writing counselors, and the teacher assess the student writers' progress as well as to help keep students moving forward through the whole process of writing. As the student completes each section s/he should sign off in the box marked self. The boxes for peer and teacher will be discussed in Lesson Four. Lesson Four is optional.

One of the great beauties of the "To Do" chart is that it serves as a quick assessment tool for the teacher as well as for the student. As the student checks off his or her progress the teacher can, via a quick glance, see exactly where the student thinks s/he is in the writing process. I say "where the student thinks s/he is" because, of course, a student may breeze over a specific step without actually understanding it or working through its intricacies. That can be okay in some steps but in others it can create an impasse that keeps the student from moving forward. The "To Do" chart gives the teacher and student an objective vocabulary for discussion of how to get from here to there as well as how to review and move forward again.

Most classes have a mixture of abilities as well as a variety of speeds at which students work. As students complete the Lesson Three "To Do" you may have them move on to the Lesson Four "To Do". In so doing some of your students will end up with more edited pieces than others, which is fine.

Regarding Steps 12 and 13: It is important that each student share their work with the class. It is equally important that each student knows and is able to tell the class:

- 1 What poem and poet they are imitating or working with.
- 2 What literary elements they have been trying to work with in their poem.
- 3 Who they are writing to. . .who their audience is.

When the student identifies the three elements of writer's craft above they are signaling what they are trying to accomplish to their reader/listener (step 12). When the reader/listener writes a short piece of "fan mail" back to the writer (step 13) after hearing his/her poem, the reader/listener should try to connect his/her positive response to one of the elements the writer said s/he was trying to accomplish. Of course the teacher needs to realize that reading and responding in this way is time consuming. After each reader the class at large needs about five minutes to write and deliver their missives. The teacher should also write a short note during this period. I have often been able to write both a note to the reader and a evaluation grade for the work of the student during that five minute period. Since I have already read the poem and discussed it with

the student I am aware of the work the student has struggled with and has either done or not done. Most students enjoy both writing and receiving the little pieces of fan mail and I enjoy grading the work on the spot rather than later that evening.

(table available in print form)

Projected Length of Lesson

Five to seven class periods.

Sample Poem by Judith J. Katz

For Walt Whitman; Who Never Wrote A Pantoum

And For My Seniors Who Have

Judith J. Katz 11/3/06

"Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord"*

like the dewey manna

in the dessert

filling but not satisfying

Like the dewey manna

comforting and consistent

filling but not satisfying

what we need, not what we really want

Comforting and consistent

meltingly aromatic food for angels

what we need, not what we really want

not being angels

Meltingly aromatic food for angels

revered, respected, and in the end reviled

not being angels

it is all too good for us

Revered, respected, and in the end reviled

forty years is a long walk to hold onto a singular focus

it is all too good for us

but of course, we don't know that, we're just walking

"Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord"

forty years is a long walk to hold onto a singular focus

in the dessert

but of course, we don't know that, we're just walking.

*Song of myself, by Walt Whitman

Lesson Four: Peer Editing, Teacher Editing, Final Draft

Students may read each others'work for the purpose of helping each other revise and edit. To help direct and speed this process students may use the "To Do" worksheet below. The sheet is equally useful as teacher/student worksheet.

(table available in print form)

Lesson Five: Reflection

Background Reasoning

At the end of unit of this intensity I like to have students take 20 minutes and reflect on what they have learned, thought about, done well, not done so well, etc. In order to do that I ask my students to do 20 minutes of sustained silent writing.

Activity I

Please answer the following questions. You may look through your notes, the poems we have read, or any other source material you may think can help you reflect on the experiences you have had and knowledge you have gained during this process.

1. What do you know now that you did not know before we started this unit?
2. What poetry and/or poets did you like, love, connect with, or not connect with in this unit?
3. What do you think you did well?

4. What do you think you could have done better?
5. How did the whole process of this unit affect the way in which you think about (hear) voice in writing?
6. How did the whole process in this unit affect the way you think about your own authentic voice?
7. What might have made this unit better or more powerful for you?

Assessment

This reflection helps the student cement their learning and helps the teacher see what the students think they will take away from this experience. This assessment is priceless in what it can tell the teacher about what his/her students have learned as well as what the teacher has done well, not so well, and could do better in the immediate future with these students and in the far future with the next group of students.

Projected Length of Lesson

One class period.

Annotated Bibliography

Readings and Resources

Bloom, Benjamin. "Bloom's Taxonomy" <http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/bloom.html>

Bloom developed this vocabulary to categorize how learning occurs in an educational setting. His ideas and vocabulary are widely used in developing objectives and assessing student progress.

Gioia, Dana, Editor. Twentieth Century American Poetry. McGraw Hill: Boston. 2004 Brooks, Gwendolyn. *we real cool*

Cummings, e e. next to of course god america i

Espallat, Rhina. Bilingual/Bilingue

Knight, Etheridge. The Warden Said to Me the Other Day

This book is chock full of wonderful poetry. A very useful, easy to find, anthology.

Simmons, Russell. *I Write America*. Def Poetry Jam on Broadway, Original Cast Script. New York: MTV Books. 2005

Some of the poems in this book are a bit risqué and the language can be rough, but overall the work is quite good and the students relate well to the spoken word poets' voices. Definitely worth having because even reluctant readers read this book.

Dickinson, Emily. Poem 288

Eliot, T.S. *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. 1922.
<http://www.bartelby.com/200/sw4.html>

Hammer, Langdon. Professor of English, Yale University. Classroom Lecture. June 19, 2007

He knows what of he speaks.

Hughes, Langston. Let America Be America Again

Jordan, June. *Nobody Mean More to Me Than You And the Future Life of Willie Jordan*. On Call. Political Essays. South End: Boston 1985

King, Martin Luther, Jr.

Liberty State Park Website. Lazarus, Emma. The New Colossus

Page 1. <http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.htm>

The poem on the Statue of Liberty--it has a very clear audience.

Marzano, Robert et al. *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum. 2001

Clear, easy to work with strategies that really do work--even in an urban classroom. A quick and very useful read--a book I turn to for strategies over and over again.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry. New York: Harvest/Harcourt 1994

A straightforward, yet creative and intellectually satisfying book of well laid out working descriptions of poetic elements. After working closely with this book for this paper I ordered a class set for my Creative Writing students.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass* Online text copyright (c) 2003, Ian Lancashire for the Department of English, University of Toronto. Published by the Web Development Group, Information Technology Services, University of Toronto Libraries.

<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/html/1807/4350/poem2288.html>

Excellent online version of the 1855 version of the Whitman poem. Easy to reference.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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