

WHOSE PROTEST IS IT ANYWAY?



AUTHORITY AND VOICE OF PROTEST



WHAT IS 'AUTHORITY'?

Authority refers to the role of the composer and responder and the degree to which these are privileged in making meaning. It is used and implied in the English syllabus in two different senses: authority over a text ('author intent') and the authority of the text.

The first sense, authority over a text, refers to who (including the student author) controls meaning in its composition and responses to it. However, authority is different from traditional notions of authorship or 'the author'. The author of a text is not so much a person as a function that we ascribe to a text, producing one possible context for interpretation.

Authority also needs to take into account that many texts are collaborative efforts with contributions of teams of people who influence the final product – the writers, editors, illustrators, researchers, musicians, producers, curators, technicians and publishers - whose ideas and technical needs shape the work. A further level of authority resides with the institution that commissions and accredits the text, often shaping the message to its institutional requirements. The digital world allows for distributed authority through the joint construction of knowledge and opinion, for example Wikipedia, trending on Twitter, *Likes* in Facebook and the number of views on Youtube.

Authority also needs to acknowledge the role of the responder who brings his or her own ideas and experiences to bear on its meaning and who may accept or reject premises of the text. In this way, authority is always in a state of negotiation between composer(s) and responders.

In its second sense, authority of a text, it refers to how trustworthy the text appears to be, to what extent it can be taken as an authority on its subject matter. The authority of a text is often determined by its appropriate style, its reference to accepted experts and its context of publication.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



Understanding how authority operates leads students to become constructive and critical thinkers in the ways they make meaning in and through texts. Authority begins with the authority of the classroom where texts are explored and negotiated according to a set of expectations, conventions and processes. Accepting that authority does not wholly reside with an author figure invites students to investigate the many personal, cultural, institutional and technical influences that shape meaning, so providing avenues through which meaning may be questioned and made with some accuracy. Knowing how to test the authority of a text and the reliability of its content enables students to make judgements about its validity and truth.

HOW SHOULD I THINK ABOUT AUTHORITY?

STAGE 5

Students understand how authority may be constructed, confirmed or challenged.

They learn that

- a sense of authority may be constructed by language use
- authority is strengthened through citation and references to established sources
- groups of responders may be included or excluded by language use
- texts may contradict or subvert cultural assumptions.



Caged Bird

Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.





Extension Knowledge

THE CAGED BIRD
SINGS WITH A
FEARFUL TRILL OF
THINGS UNKNOWN

STAGE 6

Students understand that authority is negotiated and conferred through various processes of authorisation.

They learn that

- interactive digital texts enable different levels of agency which embody reading processes; agency is not necessarily authority
- the acts of textual re-working, recreation and intervention may transfer authority from the original text, sometimes undermining, while at other times, acknowledging its value
- texts construct subject positions which responders can, within the context of their own experience, willingly or passively accept or intentionally reject
- processes of authorisation vary according to context and medium
- knowledge of the processes of representation, particularly of non-fiction texts, can make us question a text's reliability*
- processes of deconstruction can undermine a text's authority and reveal its cultural assumptions*

*Advanced and Extension courses



WHAT COULD I BE DOING?

- Questioning the authority that the author has to tell the story they are telling.
- Use referencing within your work in order to show that you know what you are talking about. (APA Referencing is one such method).
- Do your research!

