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Duration

4–5 class sessions total. Each lesson is intended to be completed in two or three class sessions of approximately 40 minutes each.

Resources

1. YouTube Video: Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?"



marcoap.co/truth

2. Free-Response Question



3. Teacher's Commentary



4. Student Activities



Objectives of Lesson Plans

- **Lesson Plan One:** To introduce students to the concepts of "context," "audience," and "speaker," using Sojourner Truth's speech, "Ain't I a Woman?"
- **Lesson Plan Two:** To introduce students to the concepts of "message," "purpose," and "exigence," using the same speech

College Board Objectives from the 2019–20 CED

- **RHS-1:** "Individuals write within a particular situation and make strategic writing choices based on that situation."
- **Skill 1.A:** "Identify and describe components of the rhetorical situation: the exigence, audience, writer, purpose, context, and message."

Student Activities

- **Lesson Plan One:** Annotated text, noting the context, audience, and speaker and/or analysis paragraph
- **Lesson Plan Two:** Annotated text, noting message and primary points as well as analysis paragraph and/or student version of "Ain't I a ...?" speech

How to Use These Lessons

These Lesson Plans are designed for the first few weeks of an AP[®] English Language course. Your goal is to help create a common vocabulary of analysis (i.e., purpose, audience, exigence, etc.) for your students to use all year long. You can also use this text to help assess the analytical abilities of your students. While the text is easy enough for many new AP[®] students, it's rich and complex enough for even the most advanced students. Because the Lesson Plans also involve a video performance of the speech, it's a great way to engage students early in the school year and get the conversation going.

If you are used to teaching SOAPStone or some other mnemonic, this speech is an excellent way to introduce the students to that mnemonic. As always, adapt these Lesson Plans to what works for you and your students.

The first "big idea" of the new 2019 *Course and Exam Description (CED)* is Rhetorical Situation. Sojourner Truth is a recommended source (she appears on p. 86 of the *CED*) because her speech is so carefully suited to her audience.

The first RHS skill is 1.A (see p. 91 of the *CED*), which packs a total of six ideas into this one concept. We have provided two parts that focus on the easier concepts in Lesson One and the more challenging concepts in Lesson Two. If your students aren't ready for the harder material of Lesson Two, you can move more slowly through Lesson One and help them develop confidence with those terms first.

Historical Background

Sojourner Truth was an important activist for African-American and Women's Rights in the nineteenth century. She was born around 1797 in Swartekill, New York and was sold off at least four separate times in her childhood and early adulthood. In her early childhood, she was owned by a Dutch family and spoke only Dutch. Her experience as a slave was filled with physical abuse, rape, and violence. Her fourth slavemaster beat her first husband to death. She adopted the name "Sojourner Truth" in 1843, claiming that God had called her to preach in the countryside. She supported the Union Army during the Civil War and challenged existing laws that treated African-Americans as property. Since her death in 1883, Sojourner Truth has been considered one of the most important voices for civil rights in American history.

It's worth noting that there are two versions of the "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. The version analyzed here is the more widely performed and taught version, but it's not the more historically accurate one. A shorter version was published much closer to the date of Truth's actual speech in 1851.

After reading the information above, choose what you wish to share with your students about Truth and her life. A brief discussion about her trials and accomplishments will help students analyze the speech and its effectiveness.



This historical background is for your purposes in preparing for class. Although Sojourner Truth is a fascinating historical figure, she is interesting for this lesson for her work as a rhetorician and speaker, not necessarily as a historical figure.

LESSON PLAN ONE: CONTEXT, AUDIENCE, SPEAKER

Introducing the Context

Also known as the "rhetorical occasion" or "rhetorical situation," the "context" of a text is a significant feature of the analytical vocabulary of the AP® English Language curriculum. The context of "Ain't I a Woman?" is a perfect example of the significance of this concept. Truth is speaking at a Women's Convention, so we can assume her audience is likely to be sympathetic to her message about Women's Rights and interested in her personal story. Crucially, the speech is situated in the North in the years leading up to the Civil War. Because many in the North supported the abolition of slavery, Truth was able to speak candidly about the hardships she encountered and her desire for equal rights for slaves and women.

Introducing the Video

Before showing the video, you could offer a brief context for the video and then allow the students to experience the emotional force of the speech. You could say something like this:

"We are going to watch a performance of one of the most famous speeches in American history. It was delivered by Sojourner Truth in 1851 to the Women's Convention of Akron, Ohio. It's a short, powerful speech. Let's watch it and then discuss together."

The speech lasts only a couple of minutes. Watch it through once without interruption, and then distribute the printed version of the speech to the students to reference as they re-read and discuss.

A word of caution: some teachers make the mistake of overloading their students with historical context before letting them read and analyze a text. Remember that students will receive only scant historical information when they take the real AP® Exam. They are expected to jump into a text and begin reading and analyzing right away. We recommend spending time at the beginning of the year discussing the speaker in depth, but these discussions should dissipate as the school year progresses.

Starting the Discussion

This is such a powerful speech that you can probably begin by taking stock of the students' initial reactions to the video. Here are some different ways to get the discussion going without resorting to a bland "So, what did you think?" kind of question:

- What is Sojourner Truth saying in this speech?
- This is a very emotional speech, but what is it *about*?
- She keeps repeating the rhetorical question, "Ain't I a woman?" Why do you think she's asking it?

Discussing the Audience

As you transition from a general discussion of the speech, focus on the concept of the "audience." An audience includes all the people who will listen to a speech or read a text (i.e., the primary audience) and the wider public who will read a copy of the speech in the future (i.e., the secondary audience). Most free-response questions on the real exam will explicitly identify the primary audience within the prompt. Remind students to read and re-read that information closely to help them get started in the process of thinking critically about the audience.

It can be challenging to find out information about the audience from within a speech or text. You should re-watch the video together and focus only on this aspect of the speech. Ask the students to consider only one question while they watch: "What does this tell me about the audience?" Then, as you watch the video together, stop the video every time she reveals something about the audience (or about every 30 seconds or so). You could build a list on the board so that the students see just how much they can learn about this audience from Truth's words.

Discussing the Speaker

Like the notion of an "audience," the concept of a "speaker" is easy to grasp. Remind the students that *speaker* and *writer* and *author* are kind of interchangeable for the purposes of this discussion. The *speaker* is the person who is producing words for us to hear or read. Acknowledge that "speaker" seems like a very easy topic. A simple question like "Who is speaking?" could be answered in a word or a sentence.

But discussing the concept of a "speaker" could lead you to a much deeper discussion. The question "What does the speaker say about herself?" will require more than a sentence. In this speech, Sojourner Truth reveals an entire autobiography of her life as a slave, laborer, woman, mother, and activist. She also makes clever theological arguments. (Truth was an active preacher, so these kinds of arguments were part of her work.)

If you want to structure this as an introductory lesson that surveys "context," "audience," and "speaker" in a single class period, then it's perfectly fine at this point to leave the discussion at the level of description rather than analysis. If you want to stretch this source over several days, you could begin to discuss how Sojourner Truth uses her autobiography to develop her argument and even discuss *ethos*. We recommend keeping this part of the lesson simple and moving on.

Student Activities

For Lesson One, we have created two student activities: text annotations and an analysis paragraph. We recommend using the analysis paragraph as a homework assignment. As the new 2019 *CED* recommends, your early AP® English Language assignments should focus on paragraph-length exercises rather than full essays. See the activities handout for further direction, including directions for the annotations and a writing prompt.

A tip for new teachers:

Let the students speculate about what they've heard in an open-ended fashion. Don't rush the discussion to get to your teaching points about context, audience, and speaker. Try to get a few different reactions from a few different students and affirm their initial feedback. This helps create a welcoming discussion environment.

One of the "key questions" for RHS, Skill 1.A is "What perspectives on the subject might the audience have due to their shared and/or individual beliefs, values, needs, and backgrounds?" (see p. 91 of the new *CED*). You can use this question to propel the discussion forward.

You could do the same exercise you did before and watch the video, looking only for information about the speaker. Instead of watching the video again, we recommend that you ask for volunteers to read the passage. This could help with engagement.

LESSON PLAN TWO: MESSAGE, PURPOSE, EXIGENCE

Discussing the Message

Before discussing the message, or main idea, students will first need to interact with the passage in a manner that prompts them to consider the primary points that Truth makes in the piece. See the Activities Handout for a detailed explanation of this process.

Once students have completed a second annotation activity for the entire passage, they are ready for a whole group discussion of Truth’s message. You can begin this discussion by asking students to share their findings and ideas with a partner or small group and work together to create a single sentence that encapsulates Truth’s message. Next, ask students to share their ideas with the class and keep a running list in order to highlight how each student or small group not only has their own “voice,” but the gist of the message should also be the same. If not, stop and discuss how you determine the message of a passage.

Early on, students will benefit from this type of metacognition from you. Also, taking the process step-by-step will show them how to describe the message quickly under the time constraints of the real AP® Exam.

Discussing the Purpose

Once students have a firm grasp of context, audience, speaker, and message, they can begin to understand how the speaker’s words accomplish her overall purpose, which is often identified in the free-response prompts of the real exam. It is imperative that students review the prompt specifically searching for the message and/or the purpose. We suggest that students put brackets around this part of the prompt.

As stated in the prompt, Truth’s purpose was to relay a message about women’s rights to her audience. You could discuss this with students by asking them:

- What is Truth saying about women’s rights? Do they need more or less? Who is going to give them these rights?
- When abolitionists spoke about slavery, who did they primarily speak for: slave *men* or slave *women*?
- When women’s rights activists spoke out, who were they advocating for, *white women* or *African-American women*?

In this passage, Truth’s purpose is quite clear: she is advocating for the rights of African-American women, a group that was often overlooked in discussions of civil rights.

Discussing the Exigence

“Exigence” is the motivation behind the speaker’s purpose. It is often unsaid, which makes it challenging for students to discuss, but it is an important differentiator among essay scores because it allows for richer and deeper commentary. In order to analyze the exigence, the students must first understand how the context, audience, and purpose connect to the speaker.

Truth’s motivation or exigence should be easy to identify through her message. Women are strong, capable, and deserving of the same rights as men. To prompt this discussion, ask the students:

- What have you learned about Truth through the lesson that would motivate her to persuade her audience to fight for equality?
- What assumptions do her and the audience have to agree on in order to accomplish her purpose?
- What universal truth is she discussing?

Remember, students may rely heavily on you here. “Exigence” is a new concept for most of them, so be patient and provide ample time for them to speak and understand this concept. We recommend that you give students time to write out their responses to the questions above. This will make them feel more comfortable when they share out and enrich the class discussion.

Student Activities

After the annotation and discussion, students should be ready to start writing. As the new *CED* suggests, this is a good time for students to construct a paragraph that analyzes the connection between the speaker, audience, and purpose. Students should develop a thesis statement that identifies the speaker, situation, and purpose, and then develop commentary about a primary point that Truth makes to her audience to support her overall purpose.

Another possible activity is asking students to create their own “Ain’t I a ...?” speech. This assignment requires students to consider their own rhetorical context, audience, purpose, and exigence. This opportunity to become a speaker should make students more aware of the rhetorical choices that speakers make in order to accomplish their purpose.