

## ENGLISH

**In your study of distinctive voices how do the use of language and the conventions of a text enrich your understanding of people and events?**

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All texts, regardless of form or composer, inherently present different voices in their composition. Created by powerful and apt language forms, techniques and conventions, a distinctive voice is unique to its composer and the context in which it was used. This voice assists the responder in getting insight into the person and the events alluded or referred to in such texts. The texts that will be used to effectively illustrate this concept include Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech delivered in the face of paramount racial injustice throughout America towards Afro-Americans and Jessie Street's 'Is it to be back to the kitchen' in which Street questions what role women will play in society, particularly the workforce, at the end of WWII. Also the short story 'Sky High' by Hannah Roberts will be used to demonstrate how textual conventions and language can familiarize the responder with different voices within a text and how comparison of different voices can enrich understanding of a people and events contained within the text.

The distinct voice within Martin Luther King's speech 'I have a dream' is characterized by figurative language and emotive language, and the analysing of this use of these textual conventions is crucial in understanding the issue King is identifying; the widespread racism and discrimination of Afro-American people within the American society. King's speech had the exceptional ability to expose the injustices and inhumanity of a dominant and oppressive white society without inciting condemnation and hatred. Delivered in a time when the Afro-American peoples were cruelly mistreated and deprived of basic human rights, we are able to understand the severity of such events through King's use of figurative language when he describes how "One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity". The use of metaphorical language to compare segregation to manacles; discrimination to chains, and the economic condition of the Negro in relation to the rest of America is compared to 'a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity' is effective in creating an image of the suffering and downtrodden state of the Afro-Americans. The sentiment of isolation and poverty imparted in the idea of the 'lonely island of poverty' is juxtaposed with the prosperity and joy in the metaphorical image of the 'vast ocean of material prosperity' around, which King associates with the equality and freedom as held by white people. King also makes clever use of figurative language when he states how "America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked insufficient funds. But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity". The imagery created by the use of these figures of language; the 'bank of justice' and 'vaults of opportunity' enables the listener to visualise his ideas and thus be persuaded by his way of thinking and also creates a voice of determination and resolve which is intended to motivate the Negro people. So simultaneously, King is able to make manifest the antagonistic injustices and prejudice against his people while delivering his speech in a comprehensible way at a level which his audience can relate to through figurative language, and so enlightening our understanding of these events.

On a similar note, the textual conventions Jessie Street employs to form her distinctive voice in her speech 'Is it to be back to the kitchen' in presenting an argument for gender equality where women are allowed to remain in the workforce and have more freedom of choice, effectively allow us to get an understanding of the issue that is being addressed and Street's sentiments concerning it. In this speech Street, an Australian woman, questions what role women will play in society, particularly the workforce, at the end of WWII. She voices her disappointment that there is a suggestion that women will be forced to return to their roles as mothers and wives, claiming that this is what the Nazis did in Germany. Street suggests that women have been restricted in their professional roles and unable to take on roles with power and responsibility and concludes that women should have equal pay and opportunity in the workforce. Street uses a combination of colloquial and formal language to create

an appealing and entertaining voice; delivering a well structure argument concealed beneath her conversational and passionate voice. She begins her speech with a colloquial expression, “there is a good deal of talk just now about...” which makes her immediately seem very familiar and in touch with reality. Street also uses a changing register within sentences. This clever device is used to create an articulate yet casual voice. This is evident in the line ‘expecting her to adhere to a lot of worn out conventions’ where the more formal ‘adhere’ is juxtaposed with the colloquial ‘worn-out’ which serves to make such expectations that woman should return home seem out of date, or old fashioned. The use of this technique makes us understand that Street is trying to incite change, she is trying to influence woman to seek greater choice in their lives and men to assent to women gaining more freedom. Street also uses metaphors to create her distinctly female voice in defending the rights of other women. This is evident when she likens life at home to a prison: ‘I think that this life could be made attractive to many more women by developing amenities and customs that render home less of a prison that it is to many women with young families.’ By metaphorically referring to life at home as a prison, she is conveying the sense of confinement and entrapment felt by women stuck at home with young families to her male audience who would probably be ignorant of this, and so making them understand that what she is raising is indeed an issue in society which needs to be addressed.

In Hannah Roberts ‘Sky High’, there are two voices; the voice of the persona as a child and the older reminiscing voice of the persona as an adult. Language techniques are used to create a comparison between these two voices, and it is through this comparison that we can understand how the persona in the text has changed. The persona in ‘Sky High’ is an adult remembering the backyard and the washing line as she saw it as a child. Her memories of the past are set in present tense and conveyed through a childlike voice, the persona’s distinct voice as a child. The voice changes towards the end to the adult persona’s voice as she describes the same scene in the present, how there is an “older, more aged warped washing line she reaches up to now”. The change in the persona’s voice is evident through the use of diction. The child voice describes the “socks and knickers and shirts like coloured flags in a secret code” while the older adult voice in describes the same thing as “writing my own semaphore secrets in colourful t-shirts and mismatched socks”. The use of more complex words such as ‘secret semaphore’ to replace simplistic childlike language such as ‘coloured flags in a secret code in describing the array of clothes on the line enables the responder to distinguish between the two different voices in the text, and in comparing them we can understand how the persona is different; as an adult she is more sophisticated and intelligent as compared to herself as a child. And although though she still appreciates her memories of the simple joys and challenges she knew as a child, with adulthood comes responsibilities, and the responder is given understanding of this through the use of figurative language. The child persona enjoys “basking in the sun from my exalted position, almost sky high and feeling as frilly and nearly as pink as the bathers I am wearing.” but the adult voice knows that now there are “too many things tying me to the ground”. The simile used in comparing the child persona’s feelings as ‘frilly’ and ‘pink’ like her bathers is used to convey to the responder the carefree nature and simplicity of childhood while the ‘too many things tying me to the ground’ is symbolist of how the burden of responsibilities as an adult is preventing her from re-experiencing the carefree immature enjoyments of the child. So we are able to understand how the persona has changed, in comparing the two different voices, the child and the adult, which are both distinguishable through the use of language techniques.

We are also able to learn about the composers of the text themselves through their ability to captivate and motivate the audience through language techniques and textual techniques. The most distinctive feature of the Martin Luther King’s speech is its use of the techniques of Protestant preaching, combining intellectual structure with fervent emotional appeal to the audience. The text is given the force of biblical sanction through direct biblical references and quasi-bible language such as ‘Let us not wallow in the valley of despair’ and reaches its conclusion with a quotation from ‘the old Negro spiritual’. This strong connection with Christian teachings and biblical references is very significant. Since the vast majority of the white people in the American society at this time would have professed Christianity, Kings endorsement of Christianity and his frequent use of biblical references would have deterred opposition to his message, simply because white people, in

professing Christianity, could not denounce elements of Christianity which King incorporates into his speech. King also uses exclamatory statements such as “Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado!” and this shows the passion and energy King feels about his ‘dream’ that one day America will become a nation where his children “will not be judged on the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character”. So from analysing the techniques in his distinct voice we are able to gain insight into King himself. We find that he, like those who would seek to oppose his cause, is of Christian faith, and he identifies this faith with his motivation; his ‘dream’ of freedom for his people. We also understand the reason for his passion and energy to reach this end. It lies in his personal reference to desiring to see his children grow up as free from the discrimination that his people have been subjected to.

In concluding, a distinctive voice is unique to its composer and the context in which it was used, and this is well demonstrated in each of the texts used; in Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’, Jessie Street’s ‘Is it to be back to the Kitchen’ and ‘Sky High’ by Hannah Robert. One is able to enrich their understanding of people and events through analysing language and textual conventions used to create such voices. The distinctive voices of Martin Luther King and Jessie Street in their speeches enlighten ones understanding of the social, cultural and political contexts of people, sentiments and ideologies at the time in which they were created. The voices in ‘Sky High’ help the responder understand how the persona has changed through age and development. In all these texts, the distinctive voices present are witness to the personalities and their experiences from which they have been created, and this enables the responder to have greater understanding of these people.