

Literary Dialect in Southwestern Humor

In this activity, students learn to recognize the use of altered spellings in creating literary dialect. Students discuss the relationship between literary dialect and negative stereotypes and consider ethical issues associated with the use of dialect for humorous rhetorical effect.

A lesson plan for AP English Language and Composition

BY SONYA MASSENGILL

Learning Outcomes

- Students will recognize literary dialect as a feature of Southwestern humor.
- Students will understand that spelling does not represent standard pronunciation and recognize that authors need to alter spellings for all their characters in order to accurately reflect pronunciation.
- Students will evaluate the historical significance of language to mark individuals as unintelligent or socially inferior and understand authentic dialect differences.

Teacher Planning

TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

50 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Video clip: “What Speech Tells Us.” Voices of North Carolina Curriculum. Available at <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/linguistics/Disk1/01-Language-Attitudes/01-What-speech-tells-us-800Kbps.mov>
- “The Boom in the *Calaveras Clarion*” by Bret Harte. Text available through Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2556/2556-h/2556-h.htm>
- Handout – Bret Harte – Literary Dialect in Southwestern Humor
- Handout – Excerpt from Bret Harte’s “The Boom in the *Calaveras Clarion*”

Background Information

Best known for the story, “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” Bret Harte was a New Yorker who moved to California and discovered success as a humorist, combining realism and romanticism to entertain readers with his stories of the charming, but rough-around-the-edges, characters of the American Southwest. Though not particularly deep, Harte’s stories included colorful dialect to create a sense of local color and to charm readers with his characters’ wild escapades. In “The Boom in the *Calaveras Clarion*,” Harte’s alternation between the unmarked Standard American English of the newspaper

editor and the non-standard speech patterns of Mr. and Mrs. Dimmidge illustrates the use of language to create stereotypes. Readers familiar with the use of dialect to create humor in the works of Mark Twain will not be surprised to learn that Harte influenced Twain's development as a writer.

Pre-activities

- Introduce dialect unit with video clip, "What Speech Tells Us" and introduce critical vocabulary.
- Assign "The Boom in the *Calaveras Clarion*" for reading homework.
- Select three students to perform the excerpt from the story in a Reader's Theatre format. Explain the goals of the reading to these students and provide copies of the excerpt for them to practice before class.

Activities

- Discuss students' initial responses to Bret Harte's short story. Discuss Harte's rhetorical purpose in "The Boom in the *Calaveras Clarion*" and discuss students' ideas about the effectiveness of the humor in the story.
- Distribute "Bret Harte – Literary Dialect in Southwestern Humor" handout and have students write descriptions of the narrator's attitude toward the three main characters in the story.
- Distribute copies of the excerpt from the story and have students listen to three of their classmates present two versions of the passage, one with what they consider natural pronunciations and a second version with exaggerated pronunciation. Use discussion questions on the handout to consider social, cultural, and ethical implications of Harte's use of literary dialect.

Assessment

Assess by students' written responses and through group discussion.

Critical Vocabulary

dialect

differences in language based on geographical, cultural, or social background. The spoken version of a language always involves variations from the formal written standard. Although dialect is often associated with a lack of education, everyone speaks a dialect.

literary dialect

the presentation of dialect in literature (Literary dialect may include phonological, grammatical, and lexical features, as well as eye dialect. For this lesson, the focus is on phonological, or pronunciation, differences in language.)

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (2004)

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

- **Goal 4:** *The learner will analyze prose written in a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts.*
 - **Objective 4.01** *Determine the author's intent/argument by explaining the effectiveness of the author's use of language for the intended audience.*
 - **Objective 4.02:** *Analyze the effectiveness of the author's intent/argument by:*
 - *evaluating the author's rhetorical purpose.*
 - *synthesizing connections between text and historical and cultural context.*

Excerpt from Bret Harte's "The Boom in the *Calaveras Clarion*"

Divide the following excerpt from Bret Harte's short story into three parts (narrator, editor, and Mr. Dimmidge). Perform the passage in a Reader's Theatre style, using the natural pronunciation that Harte seems to have intended.

Next, perform the passage again, carefully pronouncing every consonant. Be sure that you don't get sloppy with final consonants. (For example, in the third line, be sure to pronounce the final *t*, *k*, and *d* on "I – don't think I understand.")

"Can I do anything for you?" said the editor blandly.

"Ay! I've coom here to bill ma woife."

"I—don't think I understand," hesitated the editor, with a smile.

"I've coom here to get ye to put into your paaper a warnin', a notiss, that onless she returns to my house in four weeks, I'll have nowt to do wi' her again."

"Oh!" said the editor, now perfectly reassured, "you want an advertisement? That's the business of the foreman; I'll call him." He was rising from his seat when the stranger laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and gently forced him down again.

"Noa, lad! I don't want noa foreman nor understrappers to take this job. I want to talk it over wi' you. Sabe? My woife she bin up and awaa these six months. We had a bit of difference, that ain't here nor there, but she skedaddled outter my house. I want to give her fair warning, and let her know I ain't payin' any debts o' hers arter this notiss, and I ain't takin' her back arter four weeks from date."

"I see," said the editor glibly. "What's your wife's name?"

"Eliza Jane Dimmidge."

"Good," continued the editor, scribbling on the paper before him; "something like this will do: 'Whereas my wife, Eliza Jane Dimmidge, having left my bed and board without just cause or provocation, this is to give notice that I shall not be responsible for any debts of her contracting on or after this date.'"

"Ye must be a lawyer," said Mr. Dimmidge admiringly.

Literary Dialect in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In this activity, students learn about rhetorical features that contributed both to the effectiveness of the most popular novel of the nineteenth century and to the offensiveness of the novel to many modern audiences. Students contrast their personal responses to the rhetorical power of Frederick Douglass's autobiography with their reactions to Harriet Beecher Stowe's use of literary dialect and consider the relationships between speaker, audience, and purpose that contribute to rhetorical choices about language. Students also compare the rhetorical function of pathos in non-print and print texts.

A lesson plan for AP English Language and Composition

BY SONYA MASSENGILL

Learning Outcomes

- Students will distinguish between phonological, grammatical, and lexical dialect features.
- Students will recognize the difference between informal and superstandard speech.
- Students will recognize audience biases that contributed to the popularity of dialect in abolitionist fiction and the rhetorical purposes that led most authors of slave narratives to avoid dialect.
- Students will understand the relationship between pathos, audience, and rhetorical purpose in fiction and in art from the nineteenth century.

Teacher Planning

TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

two 50-minute classes

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Thomas Nast Slavery Pictures. Available at http://www.sonofthesouth.net/Slavery_Pictures_.htm
- Handout – “Historical Background for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*”
- Handout – “Dialect Features in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*”

Background Information

The fact that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the most popular novel of the nineteenth century is undisputed; the reason for its success is more enigmatic. At the time of Harriet Beecher Stowe's death in 1896, an obituary in the *New York Times* reflected American pride in the author who had laid to rest the question, “Who reads an American book?”¹ The novel's success continued to awe scholars in the

¹“Harriet Beecher Stowe: Death of the Authoress of ‘Uncle Tom's Cabin.’” *New York Times* 2 July 1896. 25 Oct. 2007 <<http://query.nytimes.com>>.

early twentieth century. In 1926 biographers revered Stowe as a social reformer whose first novel “. . . was apparently read by almost everyone who could spell out words, and . . . exploded on the world a sensation which has probably never been equaled anywhere in literary annals.”² In the United States, the novel received credit for rendering the Fugitive Slave Law unenforceable; in France, it renewed enthusiasm for Bible study. In England, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* inspired 6,000 women to fill 26 volumes with signatures endorsing an anti-slavery address to the Christian women of America.³ The fact that Harriet Beecher Stowe had almost no first-hand knowledge of slavery – having only been on a slave plantation once briefly in 1833, and showed very little knowledge of or interest in abolition until the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850⁴ made the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* more than sensational.

Oddly, initial response to Stowe’s novel was positive both in the North and the South. The scathing anti-slavery message that is so obvious to modern readers worked more subtly with its nineteenth century audience. In 1905 Seth Curtis Beach noted that Stowe’s Southern readers did not at first perceive the novel’s virulent attack on the system of slavery: “It was not till the sale of the book had run to over 100,000 copies that a reaction set in and then, strange to say, the note of warning was sounded by that infallible authority upon American affairs, the London Times.”⁵ Southern reaction to the novel seemed slow, but once the book’s influence became apparent, it “was effectively banned in the South” and direct attacks on the author, variously described as “a liar” and “a loathesome person,” began.⁶ Nonetheless, by writing a novel that ultimately sold, according to some estimates, over two million copies, Stowe accomplished what no other American novelist had been able to achieve.⁷

Modern readers often find Stowe’s novel to be patronizing and to rely on offensive racial stereotypes. Stowe’s use of dialect is particularly controversial today. Stowe has been credited with establishing a model in nineteenth century literature for associating Standard English with light-skinned slaves and stigmatized dialects with dark-skinned slaves.⁸ The two passages provided represent two extremes of standard and non-standard language in the novel and reflect the rhetorical power of dialect in nineteenth century texts.

Pre-activities

- Students will have read and completed a unit focusing on rhetorical analysis of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
- Have students examine Thomas Nast’s Slavery Pictures and write an informal analysis of rhetorical strategies suggested by his visual rhetoric.

² Adams, Elmer C., and Warren Dunham Foster. *Heroines of Modern Progress*. (New York: Macmillan, 1926) 10.

³ *Ibid.* 112.

⁴ *Ibid.* 99; White, Isabelle. “Sentimentality and the Uses of Death.” *The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Eds. Mason I. Lowance, Jr., Ellen E. Westbrook, and R. C. De Prospro. (Amherst: U of Maryland P, 1994) 57; Foster, Charles H. *Harriet Beecher Stowe and New England Puritanism*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1954) 28.

⁵ Beach, Seth Curtis. *Daughters of the Puritans: A Group of Brief Biographies*. Essay Index Reprint Series. (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries, 1905) 241.

⁶ White 53.

⁷ Ross, Susan Carol. “The Gendered Narrator: The Voice of the God/Mother in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Dred*.” (MA thesis. U of Arlington, 1993) 60. 26 Sept. 2007 <<http://stinet.dtic.mil>>.

⁸ Tricomi, Albert. “Dialect and Identity in Harriet Jacobs’s Autobiography and Other Slave Narratives.” *Callaloo* 29.2 (2006): 619-633.

Activities

Day 1:

- Discuss students' responses to the visual rhetoric in Thomas Nast's Slavery Pictures. Ask students to evaluate the relationship between pathos, audience, and rhetorical purpose.

Day 2:

- Distribute "Historical Background for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* handout and "Dialect Features in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* handout. After introducing critical vocabulary, have students read the two handouts and work in small groups to answer the questions about dialect in the passage from Stowe's novel.
- Have students share their responses in whole-class discussion.

Assessment

Assess by students' written responses and through group discussion.

Critical Vocabulary

dialect

differences in language based on geographical, cultural, or social background. The spoken version of a language always involves variations from the formal written standard. Although dialect is often associated with a lack of education, everyone speaks a dialect.

Standard American English

*a form of English commonly accepted as the norm. Although Standard American English is often associated with formal written English, spoken Standard American English includes some diversity, particularly in pronunciation. Standard American English is generally considered to lack socially stigmatized features associated with geographical or social background. A spoken form that closely mirrors formal written English is sometimes referred to as **Superstandard**.*

phonological features

dialect features related to pronunciation

grammatical features

dialect features related to grammatical deviations from Standard American English

lexical features

*dialect features related to vocabulary (Common lexical features include regional differences in content words such as variations for soft drinks (soda, coke, pop) or variations in function words (quarter **to** three, quarter **of** three, quarter **till** three). Lexical differences may also label individuals as old-fashioned.*

socially stigmatized dialect features

language features disdained by speakers of socially prestigious dialects

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (2004)

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

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 - **Objective 4.01** *Determine the author's intent/argument by:*
 - *identifying an author's use of rhetorical strategies and devices and the extent to which they impact the development of the theme.*
 - *explaining the effectiveness of the author's use of language for the intended audience.*
- **Goal 5:** *The learner will develop a deep understanding of representative literature with a specific emphasis on non-fiction.*
 - **Objective 5.01:** *Explore texts by making connections and extending comparisons between features of different pieces of print and non-print text.*

Historical Background for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

That *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the most popular novel of the nineteenth century is clear; the reason for its success is more enigmatic. At the time of Harriet Beecher Stowe's death in 1896, an obituary in the *New York Times* reflected American pride in the author who had laid to rest the question, "Who reads an American book?"⁹ The novel's success continued to awe scholars in the early twentieth century. In 1926 biographers revered Stowe as a social reformer whose first novel ". . . was apparently read by almost everyone who could spell out words, and . . . exploded on the world a sensation which has probably never been equaled anywhere in literary annals."¹⁰ In the United States, the novel received credit for rendering the Fugitive Slave Law unenforceable; in France, it renewed enthusiasm for Bible study. In England, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* inspired 6,000 women to fill 26 volumes with signatures endorsing an anti-slavery address to the Christian women of America.¹¹ The fact that Harriet Beecher Stowe had almost no first-hand knowledge of slavery – having only been on a slave plantation once briefly in 1833, and showed very little knowledge of or interest in abolition until the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850¹² made the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* more than sensational.

Oddly, initial response to Stowe's novel was positive both in the North and the South. The scathing anti-slavery message that is so obvious to modern readers worked more subtly with its nineteenth century audience. In 1905 Seth Curtis Beach noted that Stowe's Southern readers did not at first perceive the novel's virulent attack on the system of slavery: "It was not till the sale of the book had run to over 100,000 copies that a reaction set in and then, strange to say, the note of warning was sounded by that infallible authority upon American affairs, the London Times."¹³ Southern reaction to the novel seemed slow, but once the book's influence became apparent, it "was effectively banned in the South" and direct attacks on the author, variously described as "a liar" and "a loathesome person," began.¹⁴ Nonetheless, by writing a novel that ultimately sold, according to some estimates, over two million copies, Stowe accomplished what no other American novelist had been able to achieve.¹⁵

Modern readers often find Stowe's novel to be patronizing and to rely on offensive racial stereotypes. Stowe's use of dialect is particularly controversial today. Stowe has been credited with establishing a model in nineteenth century literature for associating Standard English with light-skinned slaves and stigmatized dialects with dark-skinned slaves.¹⁶ The two passages provided represent two extremes of standard and non-standard language in the novel and reflect the rhetorical power of dialect in nineteenth century texts.

⁹"Harriet Beecher Stowe: Death of the Authoress of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" *New York Times* 2 July 1896. 25 Oct. 2007 <<http://query.nytimes.com>>.

¹⁰ Adams, Elmer C., and Warren Dunham Foster. *Heroines of Modern Progress*. (New York: Macmillan, 1926) 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 112.

¹² *Ibid.* 99; White, Isabelle. "Sentimentality and the Uses of Death." *The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Eds. Mason I. Lowance, Jr., Ellen E. Westbrook, and R. C. De Prosopo. (Amherst: U of Maryland P, 1994) 57; Foster, Charles H. *Harriet Beecher Stowe and New England Puritanism*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1954) 28.

¹³ Beach, Seth Curtis. *Daughters of the Puritans: A Group of Brief Biographies*. Essay Index Reprint Series. (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries, 1905) 241.

¹⁴ White 53.

¹⁵ Ross, Susan Carol. "The Gendered Narrator: The Voice of the God/Mother in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*." (MA thesis. U of Arlington, 1993) 60. 26 Sept. 2007 <<http://stinet.dtic.mil>>.

¹⁶ Tricomi, Albert. "Dialect and Identity in Harriet Jacobs's Autobiography and Other Slave Narratives." *Callaloo* 29.2 (2006): 619-633.

Dialect Features in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe describes Aunt Chloe as a dark-skinned slave: "A round, black, shining face is hers, so glossy as to suggest the idea that she might have been washed over with white of eggs, like one of her own tea rusks." In contrast, Eliza is a light-skinned slave whom Stowe presents as a refined and virtuous young heroine of the novel: "The traveller in the south must often have remarked that peculiar air of refinement, that softness of voice and manner, which seems in many cases to be a particular gift to the quadroon and mulatto women." In the excerpts below, contrast Aunt Chloe's speech with Eliza's.

"Yes, yes—sartin," said Aunt Chloe, delighted "you'll see. Lor! to think of some of our dinners! Yer mind dat ar great chicken pie I made when we guv de dinner to General Knox? I and Missis, we come pretty near quarrelling about dat ar crust. What does get into ladies sometimes, I don't know; but, sometimes, when a body has de heaviest kind o' 'sponsibility on 'em, as ye may say, and is all kinder 'seris' and taken up, dey takes dat ar time to be hangin' round and kinder interferin'! Now, Missis, she wanted me to do dis way, and she wanted me to do dat way; and, finally, I got kinder sarcy, and, says I, 'Now, Missis, do jist look at dem beautiful white hands o' yourn with long fingers, and all a sparkling with rings, like my white lilies when de dew 's on 'em; and look at my great black stumpin hands. Now, don't ye think dat de Lord must have meant *me* to make de pie-crust, and you to stay in de parlor? Dar! I was jist so sarcy, Mas'r George."

"And now," said Eliza, as she stood in the door, "I saw my husband only this afternoon, and I little knew then what was to come. They have pushed him to the very last standing place, and he told me, today, that he was going to run away. Do try, if you can, to get word to him. Tell him how I went, and why I went; and tell him I'm going to try and find Canada. You must give my love to him, and tell him, if I never see him again," she turned away, and stood with her back to them for a moment, and then added, in a husky voice, "tell him to be as good as he can, and try and meet me in the kingdom of heaven."

- **How would you describe Aunt Chloe's language? Does Stowe emphasize phonological, grammatical, or lexical dialect features? Which dialect features in Aunt Chloe's speech do you think are the most socially stigmatized?**
- **Does Eliza's language sound like conversational speech? Is she speaking Standard English or a Superstandard English? Provide examples to support your answer.**
- **What rhetorical purposes might have influenced Harriet Beecher Stowe's choices about dialect for her characters? Why might a sentimental novel with a plot that most modern readers find unrealistic have been more popular than Frederick Douglass's autobiography? Why do you think Douglass avoided dialect in his autobiography?**

Dialect Choices in African American Speeches: Sojourner Truth and Maria W. Stewart

In this activity, students are introduced to the systematicity of dialect and learn about rhetorical decisions that complicate the transcription of nineteenth century non-fiction texts by African Americans. Students will listen to Library of Congress audio recordings of former slaves and consider questions transcribers must answer in making decisions about accurately recording voices that reflect language diversity. Students then will compare and contrast a speech by Maria W. Stewart with two transcriptions of Sojourner Truth's more famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech and discuss the ways in which language diversity complicates the traditional rhetorical relationships between speaker, audience, and purpose.

A lesson plan for AP English Language and Composition

BY SONYA MASSENGILL

Learning Outcomes

- Students will recognize that nineteenth century speakers of Standard American English and African American Vernacular English used rhetorical strategies such as logos, pathos, and ethos, as well as stylistic elements such as anaphora, biblical allusions, and rhetorical questions to develop effective arguments.
- Students will recognize that phonological features of dialect are systematic and rule-governed.
- Students will learn to identify and evaluate the rhetorical significance of dialect features of African American Vernacular English in nineteenth century American non-fiction texts.

Teacher Planning

TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

Three 50-minute classes

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Video clip of Alice Walker reading Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsjdLL3MrKk>
- Handout – Sojourner Truth – "Ain't I a Woman?"
- Handout – Sojourner Truth – "A'nt I a Woman?" – Frances Gage's version
- Handout – Maria W. Miller Stewart, "Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall." AP Exam Free Response Question 1, 2005 Exam. Available at http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/ap/students/english/ap05_frq_english_lang_b.pdf.

- Library of Congress Audio Recordings and Transcripts of Interviews with Former Slaves. Available at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/>.
- Photographs from University of Virginia website illustrating the importance of literacy among African Americans following Emancipation. Available at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma02/amacker/photo/education.html>.

Background Information

A significant problem for evaluating non-fiction texts related to nineteenth African American authors involves the question of the role of dialect in accurately recording the voices of illiterate speakers. Although many African Americans acquired literacy and became powerful writers in spite of laws against teaching slaves to read, some eloquent speakers relied on white allies to record their words. An educated speaker like Maria W. Stewart had no need to rely on others to record her ideas. Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, on the other hand, both depended on others to get their words into print.

Questions about the reliability of these non-fiction texts arise as a result of inevitable inequities in power distribution between the African American speaker and the white writer who controlled content and style in these non-fiction texts. White abolitionist writers had their own agendas in agreeing to record the words of former slaves, as well as their own biases about what content would be effective in swaying a white audience to join the fight against slavery. As the success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental appeal to a largely female audience in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suggests, white Christian readers might be persuaded to fight an institution that destroyed families and threatened the sacred trust of motherhood when they would not oppose enforced servitude and physical violence against another human being. The resulting tension often led to complicated negotiation between speaker and writer. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, was willing to record Harriet Jacobs's story, but she wanted to include it in her own book. Jacobs, who was literate, decided to write her story herself. Although her editor, Lydia Maria Childs, was responsible for some changes in her narrative, Jacobs's text is considered to be primarily in her own words. Sojourner Truth chose Olive Gilbert to record her autobiographical account, but Gilbert's editorial commentary reveals her own authority in constructing the narrative of Truth's life and her frustration when Truth refused to express opinions or reveal sensational stories that she thought would have appealed more to the audience Gilbert was attempting to persuade.

The problem of accuracy in recording a narrative text is complicated by questions about authenticity in recording the speaker's narrative voice. In an 1863 article in *Atlantic Monthly*, Harriet Beecher Stowe used heavy dialect to record words she attributed to Sojourner Truth. Her association of dialect with dark-skinned African Americans is reflected in her description of Truth: "When I went into the room, a tall spare form arose to meet me. She was evidently a full-blooded African, and though now aged and worn with many hardships, still gave the impression of a physical development which in early youth must have been as fine a specimen of the torrid zone as Cumberworth's celebrated statuette of the Negro Woman at the Fountain." Her record of her first meeting with Truth presents her own language as unmarked (even superstandard in her spoken speech – Would Stowe really have said, "do you not?" instead of "don't you?") but uses dialect to represent Truth's non-standard language:

"So, this is *you*" she said.

"Yes," I answered.

“Well, honey, de Lord bless ye! I jes’ thought I’d like to come an’ have a look at ye. You’s heerd o’ me, I reckon?” she asked.

“Yes, I think I have. You go about lecturing, do you not?”

“Yes, honey, that’s what I do. The Lord has made me a sign unto this nation an’ I go round-a-testifying’, and showin’ on ‘em their sins agin my people.”

. . . . Her great gloomy eyes and her dark face seemed to work with some undercurrent of feeling; she sighed deeply, and occasionally broke out,

“O Lord! O Lord! Oh, the tears, an’ the groans, an’ the moans! O Lord!”

Olive Gilbert, on the other hand decided to avoid dialect in recording Truth’s voice in “The Narrative of Sojourner Truth.” Her record of Truth’s narrative voice is quite a bit different from the one Stowe provides:

“Ah! She says, with emphasis that cannot be written, ‘the slaveholders are TERRIBLE for promising to give you this or that, or such and such a privilege, if you will do thus and so; and when the time of fulfillment comes, and one claims the promise, they, forsooth, recollect nothing of the kind; and you are, like as not, taunted with being a LIAR.’”

Sojourner Truth’s famous “Ain’t I a Woman” speech, delivered May 28, 1851, at a women’s convention in Akron, Ohio, highlights the relationship between dialect transcription, authorial integrity, and the rhetorical significance of language. Transcriptions of the text have varied from versions recorded in Standard English to others in heavy dialect. In the absence of technology for audio-recording, the actual substance of the speech cannot be known. Although a transcriber may be able to capture grammatical and lexical dialect features with some degree of accuracy, no transcriber accurately records every feature of pronunciation in a speech, so selections about dialect features to include are selective by nature. Ultimately, the decision to include or omit dialect features of spoken speech involves important beliefs about the power of language to construct identity and to influence an audience.

For more information, see:

Humez, Jean. “Reading ‘The Narrative of Sojourner Truth’ as a Collaborative Text.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 16.1 (1996): 29-52.

Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. “Ain’t I a Symbol?” *American Quarterly* 50.1 (1998): 149-57.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. “Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl.” *Atlantic Monthly* 11 (1863). *Sojourner Truth Institute*. 5 Dec. 2009

<<http://www.sojournertruth.org/Library/Archive/LibyanSibyl.htm>>.

Tricomi, Albert. “Dialect and Identity in Harriet Jacobs’s Autobiography and Other Slave Narratives.” *Callaloo* 29.2 (2006): 619-33.

Pre-activities

- Before Day 1, assign the excerpt from Maria W. Stewart’s 1832 lecture as homework. Students will use close reading strategies to mark the text and draft an essay evaluating rhetorical strategies in the passage. Students should treat the assignment as a timed drill, spending about 40 minutes on the task.
- Before Day 2, have students view photographs from the University of Virginia website illustrating the importance of literacy among African Americans following Emancipation and

listen to samples of interviews with former slaves from the Library of Congress collection. Have students record their impressions of the speech of former slaves and of their interviewers. Students should circle words that could have been transcribed to suggest features of dialect more clearly and record notes about the difference a transcription using dialect would make in the presentation of the voices of former slaves.

- Share background information with the students.

Activities

Day 1:

- Have students peer edit their essays on the Maria W. Stewart speech, focusing on clear claims and specific textual evidence to support their ideas about the effectiveness of Stewart's rhetorical strategies.
- Discuss students' ideas about Stewart's rhetorical strategies. Evaluate the importance of formal Standard American English and stylistic features in contributing to the author's credibility with her audience.

Day 2:

- Discuss students' impressions of the University of Virginia photographs and the Library of Congress audio recordings of interviews with former slaves. What practical and ethical decisions might have influenced the decision to avoid dialect spellings in the transcripts? Compare dialect features used in the spoken language of the slaves interviewed with the written transcripts.
- Have students read Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech and underline non-standard features. Discuss whether these features represent deviations from Standard American English in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. Identify rhetorical features that demonstrate Truth's understanding of argumentation. Have students consider reasons why Sojourner Truth's speech is more famous today than Stewart's.
- View the video clip of Alice Walker reading Sojourner Truth's speech. Then have students listen to the clip a second time and circle phonological features that differ from the written text. Discuss the effect of these pronunciation features on the effectiveness of the speech.

Day 3:

- Introduce common phonological features of African American Vernacular English.
- Have student use the handout on features of AAVE to evaluate Frances Gage's transcription of Sojourner Truth's "An't I a Woman?" speech. Contrast both the types of features and the numbers of features of AAVE included in the two versions of the speech, as well as the features Alice Walker used in her reading of the speech.
- Have students discuss the difference between the rhetorical effects of dialect in spoken speech and in a written transcription of a speech. How would considerations of audience influence decisions about including or omitting spellings that indicate phonological features of dialect?

Assessment

Assess through a rhetorical analysis essay and group discussion.

Critical Vocabulary

dialect

differences in language based on geographical, cultural, or social background. The spoken version of a language always involves variations from the formal written standard. Although dialect is often associated with a lack of education, everyone speaks a dialect.

eye dialect

*the use of spelling to indicate dialect differences. Eye dialect reflects difference in social class rather than real language diversity (**wuz** vs. **was**).*

vernacular

the natural language of a speech community. The term vernacular can be used to refer to informal speech or to a specific dialect. It is often associated with non-standard forms of a language.

African American Vernacular English

AAVE is a dialect common throughout the United States in many African American communities. It tends to be associated with lower middle class and working class speakers, but it also is associated with cool identity and hip-hop culture. Not all African Americans speak AAVE, but many use code-switching to shift between the dialect and Standard American English. Many features of AAVE seem to be recent developments in African American communities, but some of the dialect features are also found in some historical documents such as slave narratives – though questions about authorship sometimes complicate the use of these documents as records of dialect features from earlier periods of African American history.

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (2004)

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

- **Goal 3:** *The learner will create and sustain arguments based on readings, research, observations, and personal experiences.*
 - **Objective 3.01** *Understand argumentative structure by identifying the strengths of argumentative strategies and techniques.*
- **Goal 5:** *The learner will develop a deeper understanding of representative literature with a specific emphasis on non-fiction.*
 - **Objective 5.02** *Analyze the author's rhetorical strategies and linguistic choices by:*
 - *understanding the author's intent.*
 - *recognizing the author's rhetorical style.*
 - *identifying the author's audience.*
 - *evaluating the effectiveness of such choices.*

Common Phonological Features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Many people are surprised to learn that dialects are as systematic and rule governed as any standard form of language. All speakers of a language vary pronunciation of individual features. In fact, an individual will vary pronunciation depending on setting (formal or informal), listener, and even factors such as how tired the speaker is.

Features of dialect, which include phonological (or pronunciation) differences, are not random. Sociolinguists study the rules that govern dialect variations among different speech communities. Some features are shared by more than one speech community. For instance, speakers of African American Vernacular English and Northeasterners from Boston both use a feature that sociolinguists call *r*-lessness. African American Vernacular English and rural Southern vernacular dialects often omit the *r* after vowels (Didn't yo' daddy teach you right?) Speakers from Boston omit the *r* in *car* (cah), but add an *r* in the word *wash* (warsh). In fact, *r*-less speech used to be the prestigious form among elite New Yorkers, such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt omitted *r*'s after vowels, imitating the British Received Pronunciation form popularized in England in the nineteenth century.

Below is a brief list of common phonological dialect features in AAVE.

- **r-lessness:** Vernacular dialects, including AAVE, often reduce or delete *r* following a vowel (sister - siste'). *R-loss* also occurs after a consonant when the *r* precedes a rounded vowel (*oo* or *oh* sound). Vernacular speakers might say, "Thow [throw] that ball *thu* [through] the hoop," but they wouldn't say "I have *thee* [three] sisters" or "Quit your *thashing* [thrashing]." Occasionally, *r-loss* makes it sound like a speaker is saying a completely different word. A speaker who deletes the *r* on the word *their* may sound like she's saying *they* (*They* books are on the shelf in the back.).
- **-th stopping:** At the beginning of a word, *th* often changes to *d* in AAVE. Compare this shift to European American vernacular varieties that often change initial *th* to *t* (thing – ting). Sociolinguists call this change **-th stopping**. The rules governing AAVE and EAE stopping involve two different sounds of *th* in English.

Place your fingers over your Adam's apple and pronounce "this" and "thistle." You should feel a vibration when you pronounce the first word; you are using a voiced *th*. Voiceless *th* is the sound in *thistle*; it sounds more breathy and does not cause your vocal cords to vibrate. AAVE often replaces voiced *th* with *d*. (this – dis). EAE tends to replace voiceless *th* with *t*. (think – tink).

- **initial syllable deletion:** Omitting an unstressed syllable at the beginning of a word is common in informal English (I finished early 'cause the homework was easy.) In AAVE, a larger range of words lose the initial syllable (I 'spect you'd better go on into the house.).

- **Final consonant cluster reduction (CCR):** In informal speech, most people delete final consonants occasionally. Rules govern these deletions in dialect too. When a word ends in a consonant cluster (two or more consonants) ending with a sound that linguists call **stopped** (b, p, d, t, k, g), many speakers delete the last consonant sound. The rules for CCR are very systematic. Remember the distinction between voiced and unvoiced consonants? If both consonants in the final consonant cluster are voiced OR if both the consonants in the final consonant cluster are unvoiced, speakers will frequently delete the last consonant in informal speech (cold – col'; best – bes'). Wait --- they don't just do it arbitrarily. They delete the consonant IF the next word begins with a consonant. (*Did you fin' Kevin?* If someone pronounced the *d* on *find* in informal speech, they would probably sound a bit stuffy or strange. *Don't ac' so superior.* Most speakers would not really pronounce the *t* in *act* in informal speech. If the word *act* were followed by a word beginning with a vowel, most speakers would pronounce the *t*. *Don't act all uppity.*) In AAVE, final consonant cluster reduction can also take place when the next word begins with a vowel. (*That's the bes' apple I've ever tasted.*)
- **“g-dropping”:** This feature is in quotation marks because linguists tend to cringe at the popular name. It's not really g-dropping, but it is related to a *g* on the end of a word. When a word ends in *-ing* (cooking, cleaning, running, swimming), the sound at the end of the word is not really a *g* sound. The “ng” sound is pronounced as a single sound that linguists call an “engma” or a “nasal velar.” You can just call it the “ng” sound. Anyway, when the “ng” sound occurs in an unstressed syllable, vernacular dialects substitute “n” for “ng” (swimming – swimmin'). You can be sophisticated and call it *velar fronting* or you can call it “*g-dropping*” -- but please use quotation marks to show that you know it's not the real term and to avoid causing a linguist's blood pressure to rise!
- **/v/ to /b/:** Some features of African American Vernacular English are less common today but often appear in **literary** texts and historical documents. In the nineteenth century –*v* between vowels and at the end of a word often shifted to a **b** sound.

Eye dialect: When analyzing literature and historical documents, it is important to distinguish between spellings that represent true dialect features and spellings that convey the author's attitude toward the speaker but fail to reflect any phonological distinctions. Authors who use eye dialect often use spellings like *wuz* for *was* or *womin* for *women*. Sometimes the line between eye dialect and real dialect is a fine one. For instance, since consonant cluster reduction and “g-dropping” are common in informal speech, does an author really need to provide alternative spellings to represent pronunciation that many or most speakers use without special spelling (*ol'* or *ole* for *old*)? Eye dialect usually suggests that the speaker is from a low social class or has little education – or sometimes even the idea that the speaker has low moral standards. Distinguishing between eye dialect and real dialect features can reveal important information about power relations and social class, as well as about an author's beliefs about the rhetorical function of dialect.

For more information about dialects see:

Wolfram, Walt, and Ben Ward, eds. *American Voices: How Dialects Differ from Coast to Coast*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Modern History Sourcebook:
Sojourner Truth:
"Ain't I a Woman?", December 1851 --- Version 1

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883): *Ain't I A Woman?*

Delivered 1851

Women's Convention, Akron, Ohio

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

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Sojourner Truth (c.1792-1883) - was the adopted name of a woman born in New York who escaped from slavery shortly before mandatory emancipation became law in the state in 1828. Truth was nearly six feet tall and physically powerful from her years of hard labor. She gave this speech - which made her famous at the time it in Akron, Ohio, at a women 's rights meeting in May, 1851. This version includes an introduction a setting of the scene.

Sojourner Truth, Mrs. Stowe's "Lybian Sibyl," was present at this Convention. Some of our younger readers may not know that Sojourner Truth was once a slave in the State of New York, and carries to-day as many marks of the diabolism of slavery, as ever scarred the back of a victim in Mississippi. Though she can neither read nor write, she is a woman of rare intelligence and commonsense on all subjects. She is still living, at Battle Creek, Michigan, though now 110 years old. [*note: In fact at time of publication she was c. 84 years old*] Although the exalted character and personal appearance of this noble woman have been often portrayed, and her brave deeds and words many times rehearsed, yet we give the following graphic picture of Sojourner's appearance in one of the most stormy sessions of the Convention, from:

Reminiscences by Frances D. Gage: Sojourner Truth.

The leaders of the movement trembled on seeing a tall, gaunt black woman in a gray dress and white turban, surmounted with an uncouth sunbonnet, march deliberately into the church, walk with the air of a queen up the aisle, and take her seat upon the pulpit steps. A buzz of disapprobation was heard all over the house, and there fell on the listening ear, "An abolition affair!" "Woman's rights and niggers!" "I told you so!" "Go it, darkey!"

I chanced on that occasion to wear my first laurels in public life as president of the meeting. At my request order was restored, and the business of the Convention went on. Morning, afternoon, and evening exercises came and

went. Through all these sessions old Sojourner, quiet and reticent as the "Lybian Statue," sat crouched against the wall on the corner of the pulpit stairs, her sunbonnet shading her eyes, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting upon her broad, hard palms. At intermission she was busy selling the "Life of Sojourner Truth," a narrative of her own strange and adventurous life. Again and again, timorous and trembling ones came to me and said, with earnestness, "Don't let her speak, Mrs. Gage, it will ruin us. Every newspaper in the land will have our cause mixed up with abolition and niggers, and we shall be utterly denounced." My only answer was, "We shall see when the time comes."

The second day the work waxed warm. Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Universalist ministers came in to hear and discuss the resolutions presented. One claimed superior rights and privileges for man, on the ground of "superior intellect"; another, because of the "manhood of Christ; if God had desired the equality of woman, He would have given some token of His will through the birth, life, and death of the Saviour." Another gave us a theological view of the "sin of our first mother."

There were very few women in those days who dared to "speak in meeting"; and the august teachers of the people were seemingly getting the better of us, while the boys in the galleries, and the sneerers among the pews, were hugely enjoying the discomfiture, as they supposed, of the "strongminded."

Some of the tenderskinned friends were on the point of losing dignity, and the atmosphere betokened a storm. When, slowly from her seat in the corner rose Sojourner Truth, who, till now, had scarcely lifted her head. "Don't let her speak!" gasped half a dozen in my ear. She moved slowly and solemnly to the front, laid her old bonnet at her feet, and turned her great speaking eyes to me. There was a hissing sound of disapprobation above and below. I rose and announced "Sojourner Truth," and begged the audience to keep silence for a few moments.

The tumult subsided at once, and every eye was fixed on this almost Amazon form, which stood nearly six feet high, head erect, and eyes piercing the upper air like one in a dream. At her first word there was a profound hush. She spoke in deep tones, which, though not loud, reached every ear in the house, and away through the throng at the doors and windows.

"Wall, chilern, whar dar is so much racket dar must be somethin' out o' kilter. I tink dat 'twixt de niggers of de Souf and de womin at de Norf, all talkin' 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout?"

"Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mudpuddles, or gibs me any best place!" And raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And a'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! (and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power). I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man-when I could get it-and bear de lash as well! And a'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'n't I a woman?"

"Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head; what dis dey call it?" ("Intellect," whispered some one near.)

"Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do wid womin's rights or nigger's rights. If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little halfmeasure full?"

And she pointed her significant finger, and sent a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud.

"Den dat little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wan't a woman! Whar did your Christ come from?"

Rolling thunder couldn't have stilled that crowd, as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eyes of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated,

"Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do wid Him." Oh, what a rebuke that was to that little man.

Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve. I can not follow her through it all. It was pointed, and witty, and solemn; eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause; and she ended by asserting:

"If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all alone, dese women togedder (and she glanced her eye over the platform) ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now dey is asking to do it, de men better let 'em."

Long continued cheering greeted this.

" Blegged to ye for hearin' on me, and now ole Sojourner han't got nothin' more to say."

Amid roars of applause, she returned to her corner, leaving more than one of us with streaming eyes, and hearts beating with gratitude. She had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty turning the whole tide in our favor. I have never in my life seen anything like the magical influence that subdued the mobbish spirit of the day, and turned the sneers and jeers of an excited crowd into notes of respect and admiration. Hundreds rushed up to shake hands with her, and congratulate the glorious old mother, and bid her Godspeed on her mission of "testifyin' agin concerning the wickedness of this 'ere people."

From Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda J. Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. I (1881; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 114-17.

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Literary Dialect and Language Variation in Works by Harriet Jacobs, Mark Twain, Countee Cullen, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Langston Hughes

In this activity, students learn about language variation in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction texts. They learn about the systematicity of grammatical features of dialect and evaluate the rhetorical effects of alternating between dialect and standard language forms in print texts.

A lesson plan for AP English Language and Composition

BY SONYA MASSENGILL

Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to analyze the rhetorical significance of language variation in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction texts.
- Students will understand that grammatical features of dialect are systematic and rule-governed.
- Students will be able to use informal responses and formal argumentation to develop their own positions about the significance of language variation in communicating attitudes and creating meaning.

Teacher Planning

TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

Four fifty-minute classes

MATERIALS NEEDED

- “Incident” by Countee Cullen. Available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=171327>.
- “Signs of the Times” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=173465>.
- “Frederick Douglass” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Available at <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/frederick-douglass-2/>.
- “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes. Available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=177021>.
- “Harlem” by Langston Hughes. Available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=175884>.
- Chapter 4 from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Available through Dover Thrift editions or online at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/76/76-h/76-h.htm>.

- Chapter 13 from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*. Available through Dover Thrift editions or online at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11030/11030.txt>.
- Handout – Grammatical Features of African American English
- “A-Prefixing” and “Invariant Be” Worksheets Available in *Voices of North Carolina Student Workbook* at <http://ncsu.edu/linguistics/download.php>.
- African American English video. Available from *Voices of North Carolina Curriculum Downloads* at <http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/download.php>.
- Handout – Phonological Features of African American English (included with lesson on Sojourner Truth and Maria W. Stewart)
- Worksheet – Dialect Features in Jim's Speech
- Worksheet – Dialect Features in Luke's Speech

Background Information

Phonological and grammatical dialect features were often used in nineteenth century literature to indicate socially stigmatized language patterns that suggested low social class and a lack of education, if not plain ignorance and moral weakness. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Huck, Jim, Tom, Pap, Mrs. Hotchkiss, and Buck all use a-prefixing. Judge Thatcher, on the other hand, speaks in Standard American English. Slaves narratives of the period typically used Standard American English, and the subtitle “Written by Himself” reflected the rhetorical significance of standard language forms in narratives written without a white collaborator. In her autobiography, Harriet Jacobs deviated from the slave narrative convention and used a complex alternation between Standard American English and a wide range of stigmatized dialect forms to convey attitudes about morality, education, and social class. Unlike the popular nineteenth century novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, who associated heavy dialect features with dark skin color, Jacobs used heavy dialect in much more subtle ways that merit close examination.

Ironically, socially-stigmatized dialect features are as systematic and rule-governed as features of standard language forms. Dialect features often derive from earlier forms that were considered standard in a language; in other words, dialects often include relics of past standard usage. One linguist has suggested that a-prefixing, for instance, may have originated from a shift in phrases like *on board* and *on foot* to the vocabulary forms *aboard* and *afoot*. Since a-prefixing refers today to vernacular verb forms, this theory may or may not be valid. Nonetheless, a-prefixing and other grammatical features of dialect follow predictable rules that students can easily learn to recognize.

For more information about dialect in *Huck Finn* and in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, see:

Antieu, Lamont. “I’m a-going to see what’s going on here’: A-prefixing in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.” *Language and Literature* 10 (2001): 145-57.

Carkeet, David. “The Dialects in *Huckleberry Finn*.” *American Literature* 51.3 (1979): 315-32.

Tricomi, Albert. “Dialect and Identity in Harriet Jacobs’s Autobiography and Other Slave Narratives.” *Callaloo* 29.2 (2006): 619-633.

Pre-activities

- Prior to this lesson, students will have read either Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* or Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
- Prior to this lesson, students will have participated in discussions of controversial elements of Twain's novel, including initial critical responses to the novel (Available at <http://etext.virginia.edu/twain/twapubint.html>) and more recent arguments about whether or not the book is racist. Students will have examined E.W. Kemble's illustrations for the novel (Available at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/huckpix/huckpix.html>) and have evaluated the relationship between visual rhetoric and accusations that the novel is racist.
- Prior to Day 1 of this lesson, students will have read selected poems by Countee Cullen, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Langston Hughes and completed a Reader Response entry on their responses to features of dialect and Standard American English in the poems.
- Prior to Day 3 of this lesson, students will read or review Chapter 13 from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Chapter 4 from *Huck Finn*. Both texts are available online through Project Gutenberg. Students will complete a Reader Response entry about their reactions to dialect in each text.

Activities

Day 1:

- Discuss Countee Cullen's presentation in "Incident" of the rhetorical power of a single word to inflict pain. Contrast his message with Langston Hughes's message in "Harlem."
- Contrast the use of Standard American English and dialect in poems by Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Discuss whether or not there are distinctions between acceptability in insider and outsider use of dialect features to identify a speech community. Discuss the role of speaker, audience, and rhetorical purpose in decisions to use dialect or Standard English in the poetry of Hughes and Dunbar. Hypothesize why contemporary African American authors like Toni Morrison avoid phonological features of dialect in fiction.
- View African American English video. Discuss ideas about language variation expressed in the video in light of the choices Dunbar and Hughes have made in their poems.

Day 2:

- Review phonological features of African American Vernacular English (from lesson on Maria W. Stewart and Sojourner Truth) and introduce the fact that grammatical features of AAVE are also rule-governed.
- Use A-Prefixing Worksheets to help students discover inductively the systematicity of grammatical features of dialect. Discuss the association of a-prefixing with characters of low social class in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
- Use Invariant Be Worksheets to introduce AAVE grammatical features. Distribute and discuss handout on grammatical features of AAVE. As time permits, begin looking for grammatical dialect features in Harriet Jacobs's autobiography or Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*.

Days 3-4:

- Discuss Jacobs's break from slave narrative to include dialect in her autobiography. Contrast the Standard English of the narrator in her non-fiction account with the dialect features in the speech of Huck in Twain's fictional narrative.
- Discuss the significance of frequent stigmatized dialect features in providing social commentary. What is the rhetorical significance of unmarked speech by Judge Thatcher and by Jacobs's narrator and speech marked by dialect features for other individuals in each work?
- Divide students into small groups and assign half the members of each group a passage from *Huck Finn* and the other half of each group a passage from *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*. Have students complete a worksheet to identify phonological and grammatical dialect features in each passage and then compare results. Discuss differences that might be attributable to insider/outsider status in relation to a speech community.
- As a class, contrast rhetorical decisions about dialect in the works of Cullen, Dunbar, Hughes, Twain, and Jacobs. Have students begin to generate ideas for an argumentative essay about the rhetorical significance of language variation in nineteenth century texts about slavery.

Assessment

Assess by students' written responses on worksheets, informal reader response entries, group discussion, and a final argumentative essay.

Critical Vocabulary

dialect

differences in language based on geographical, cultural, or social background. The spoken version of a language always involves variations from the formal written standard. Although dialect is often associated with a lack of education, everyone speaks a dialect.

grammaticality

language forms that conform to systematic rules. In popular usage, grammatical constructions are often associated with forms that conform to socially accepted standards. Linguists, on the other hand, consider language to be grammatical when it follows a predictable set of rules. Although linguists stress the importance of learning Standard American English, they distinguish between dialects, which are rule-governed (and thus grammatical) and random usage errors. The distinction between referring to a language system as illogical or unintelligent and simply following its own set of grammatical rules is important when evaluating literary dialect and when teaching Standard American English to members of speech communities that use a non-standard dialect. Differences in grammatical features of dialect, like phonological features, often contribute to an attitude of condescension in literature, despite the fact that dialect features are as systematic (sometimes even more so) than the patterns in Standard American English.

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (2004)

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

- ***Goal 3:*** *The learner will create and sustain arguments based on readings, research, observations, and personal experiences.*
 - ***Objective 3.02*** *Create and sustain a response by:*
 - *Producing expository and argumentative compositions that introduce, defend, qualify, or refute a complex central idea.*
 - *Developing compositions with appropriate, specific evidence and cogent explanations.*

- ***Goal 5:*** *The learner will develop a deeper understanding of representative literature with a specific emphasis on non-fiction.*
 - ***Objective 5.01*** *Explore texts by making connections and extending comparisons between features of different pieces of print and non-print text (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, film).*

Grammatical Features of African American English (AAVE)

In addition to the phonological features of African American English considered in the last lesson, dialects also include systematic and rule-governed variations in grammar patterns. Some non-standard grammatical features of dialect are considered standard in other languages or in earlier forms of English. In fact, linguists use the term “grammatical” a bit differently than most people do. To linguists, *grammaticality* refers to the systematicity of a language form – not to whether or not it is the socially accepted form. As we saw in the exercises with a-prefixing and Invariant *be*, dialects do not randomly break the rules of Standard American English. Patterns in dialect follow rules related to parts of speech. (*Challenge for the grammar whizzes -- Which verb forms in Standard American English is most like Invariant Be in AAVE: perfect tenses or progressive tenses?*)

a-prefixing: This dialect feature is common today in Appalachian speech and other Southern rural dialects. Huck frequently uses this form in Mark Twain’s novel, but speakers of African American Vernacular English use the form too (though less frequently). In *Huck Finn* the rules governing when this form is used get complicated, but three rules generally determine when it is possible to use the form. (Like other dialect features, speakers don’t always use a dialect form just because they can.)

- A-prefixing can occur before verbs but not before nouns or adjectives. (“He was a-laughing so hard, he cried” is acceptable, but “A-shopping makes me tired” is not.)
- A-prefixing can occur before a verb with a stressed initial syllable. (You might go *a-fishing*, but you won’t talk about *a-remembering* a great story.)
- A-prefixing does not occur after a preposition. (You won’t succeed by *a-breaking* the rules.)

Note: Sometimes in *Huck Finn*, a-prefixing seems to appear after a preposition, but on closer examination it is following a particle. (“And so he went on *a-mumbling* up stairs, and then we left.”) Notice that *on* is part of the verb phrase. It is not introducing a prepositional phrase; if it were, it would need to be followed by a noun functioning as the object of the preposition. To tell the difference, stop reading after the word that is either a preposition or a particle. If it still makes sense, you’ve probably got a particle. (*He carried the trash out [particle] last night vs. He threw the trash into [preposition] the dumpster.*)

multiple negation: We frequently refer to this dialect feature as double negatives. When a speaker says, “I ain’t got no time for that,” we label the two negative forms, as well as the non-standard “ain’t,” as sure signs of a lack of sophistication and education. In previous generations, these forms were not socially stigmatized. Thus, Chaucer praised the friar in his *Canterbury Tales* by saying, “Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous,” and Shakespeare created a character (not an ignorant one If a character speaks in iambic pentameter instead of prose in a Shakespeare play, the playwright is not suggesting a lack of education.) who claimed, “No never none / Shall mistress of it be, save I above.” In French, double negatives are considered standard. In the phrase, “Je ne sais pas” (*I don’t know*), the words *ne* and *pas* are both markers of negation. Similarly, the Spanish phrase “No hace nada” (*He doesn’t do anything*) uses a double negative. –So, there is nothing inherently ignorant about using more than one negative in a sentence. Common usage, rather than principles of logic, governs the Standard English form. Many dialects use two or more negatives for emphasis. “They wouldn’t do nothing for nobody” may be non-standard, but it expresses the idea more forcefully than the grammatically-accepted “They would do nothing for anyone.”

auxiliary and copula deletion: These dialect features refer to the omission of forms of the verb *be*, whether the form is used as an auxiliary verb, often also called a helping verb (*She's reading the newspaper* vs. *She reading the newspaper*), or as an intransitive verb (*You're out of your mind* vs. *You out of your mind*). Dialects follow rules for this feature too. The deletion only occurs with contractible forms of *be*, so it won't be found in a sentence like "Snobby people can be really annoying, and you know who you are." This feature also is unlikely to occur with the first person pronoun *I*, so you probably won't ever hear anyone say, "I tired of all your nonsense." Both Southern European American and African American dialects use this form.

regularization: A common feature of language is the movement toward regular forms. Many irregular forms tend to die out in a language. Plurals used to be marked in English by endings other than *-s* or *-es*. Only a few words in English still retain the older plural forms. You might enjoy teaching school if you like children; you might like farming if you enjoy working with oxen, and you might go into the ministry if you prefer helping the brethren. You are not, however, going to cover your eyen or earen with your handen anymore.

Verbs are a particularly sensitive to a tendency toward regularization in dialect forms. Think about the difficulty of learning irregular verb forms in a foreign language. Second language learners find English equally frustrating.

I go	we go
You go	you go
He, she, or it <u>goes</u>	they go

In African American Vernacular English (AAVE), speakers often regularize the third person singular verb form so that it is consistent with the rest of the verb forms. In terms of logic and systematicity, the dialect version (*He, she or it go*) wins out. A similar pattern occurs with past tense verbs.

Today I talk.	Yesterday, I talked.
Today I walk.	Yesterday, I walked.
Today I smile.	Yesterday, I smiled.
Today I row.	Yesterday, I rowed.
Today, I mow.	Yesterday, I mowed.
Today, I know.	Yesterday, I knowed ----WAIT! – Grammar Alert!

IGNORANT GRAMMATICAL USAGE!!
OR IS IT?

You might be unwise to use the dialect form in a college admissions interview, but there is a major difference between knowing how to use Standard English forms and assuming that other forms are random and non-rule governed. It may not be "proper English," but the non-standard form is completely systematic.

For more information about dialects see:

Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling-Estes. *American English: Dialects and Variation*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Dialect Features in Jim's Speech

Directions:

1. In the passage provided from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, underline all the features that are not socially acceptable in Standard American English. Many characters in the novel use dialect, but can you find a passage in the novel in which another character speaks uses non-standard features with similar frequency? Which characters seem to come the closest?
2. Complete the worksheet to distinguish between types of non-standard forms in Jim's speech.

“Yo’ ole father doan’ know, yit, what he’s a-gwyne to do. Sometimes he spec he’ll go ‘way, en den agin he spec he’ll stay. De bes’ way is to res’ easy en let de ole man take his own way. Dey’s two angels hoverin’ roun’ ‘bout him. One uv ‘em is white en shiny, en ‘tother one is black. De white one gits him to go right, a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up. A body can’t tell, yit, which one gwyne to fetch him at de las’ But you is all right. You gwyne to have considable trouble in yo’ life, en considable joy. Sometimes you gwyne to git hurt, en sometimes you gwyne to git sick; but every time you’s gwyne to git well agin. Dey’s two gals flyin’ ‘bout you in yo’ life. One uv ’em’s light en ‘tother one is dark. One is rich en ‘tother is po’. You’s gwyne to marry de’ po’ one fust en de rich one by-en-by. You wants to keep ‘way fum de water as much as you kin, en don’t run no resk, ‘kase it’s down in de bills dat you’s gwyne to git hung.” (202 words)

Analysis of Grammatical Features of Dialect and Informal American English in Jim's Speech

Non-standard Form	Number of Times Feature is Used	Phonological Features of Dialect	Grammatical Features of Dialect	Features of Informal American English
yo'		r-lessness		
ole				final consonant cluster reduction; colloquial eye dialect
doan'				colloquial eye dialect
Yit				colloquial eye dialect
a-gwyne			a-prefixing	colloquial eye dialect

Dialect Features in Luke's Speech

Directions:

1. In the passage provided from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, underline all the features that are not socially acceptable in Standard American English. Many characters in the novel use dialect, but Luke is the character who uses the heaviest dialect form. Contrast Luke's speech with the narrator's voice in the passage. Which characters in Jacobs's autobiography seem to come the closest to Luke's frequency of dialect use?
2. Complete the worksheet to distinguish between types of non-standard forms in Luke's speech.

He then told me of the advice he had received, and the plans he had laid. I asked if he had money enough to take him to Canada. "'Pend upon it, I hab," he replied. "I tuk car fur dat. I'd bin workin all my days fur dem cussed whites, an got no pay but kicks and cuffs. So I tought dis nigger had a right to money nuff to bring him to de Free States. Massa Henry he lib till ebery body vish him dead; an ven he did die, I knowed de debbil would hab him, an wouldn't vant him to bring his money 'long too. So I tuk some of his bills, and put 'em in de pocket of his ole trousers. An ven he was buried, dis nigger ask fur dem ole trousers, an dey gub 'em to me." With a low, chuckling laugh, he added, "You see I didn't steal it; dey gub it to me. I tell you, I had mighty hard time to keep de speculator from findin it; but he didn't git it."

This is a fair specimen of how the moral sense is educated by slavery. When a man has his wages stolen from him, year after year, and the laws sanction and enforce the theft, how can he be expected to have more regard to honesty than has the man who robs him? I have become somewhat enlightened, but I confess that I agree with poor, ignorant, much-abused Luke, in thinking he had a right to that money, as a portion of his unpaid wages. He went to Canada forthwith, and I have not since heard from him.

(Narrator: 132 words; Luke: 146 words)

Analysis of Grammatical Features of Dialect and Informal American English in Luke's Speech

Non-standard Form	Number of Times Feature is Used	Phonological Features of Dialect	Grammatical Features of Dialect	Features of Informal American English
'pend		Initial unstressed syllable deletion		
hab		/b/ for /v/		
tuk				Colloquial eye dialect
car				Colloquial eye dialect
fur				Colloquial eye dialect
dat		Initial –th stopping		
bin				Colloquial eye dialect
workin				"g-dropping"

Jacobs/Twain Essay Prompts

Select one of the prompts below. Responses should be 1000-1200 words in length.

1. Nineteenth-century slave narratives traditionally followed the form found in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Former slaves who had been able to acquire literacy, despite laws against teaching them to read and write, tended to use formal, academic English in their autobiographical accounts of their experiences in slavery. Those who collaborated with white abolitionists to record their personal narratives, like Sojourner Truth, often preferred that their stories be transcribed in the same style. In fiction and non-fiction representations of African Americans, some white abolitionists, like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frances Gage, recorded former slaves' speech in heavy dialect (including eye dialect). Such transcriptions are controversial with modern readers, but they reflect complicated personal views about race and deliberate rhetorical strategies intended to persuade more individuals to support human rights for African Americans. In this setting, Harriet Jacobs's decision to alternate between Standard American English and dialect in her autobiographical *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* raises interesting questions about the relationship between insider/outsider status and dialect, as well as about the rhetorical significance of language variation. **In a well-developed essay, present an argument explaining whether or not Harriet Jacobs's narrative strategy was effective for convincing white Americans of the equality of African Americans. Include discussion of the rhetorical significance of standard and non-standard language features, and support your argument with specific, apt, references to the text.**
2. In the nineteenth century, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was often criticized for its use of common (ungrammatical!) language and coarse content. Critics worried that such a novel might corrupt the youth of America. In more recent years, controversy has centered on whether or not the book is racist and should be banned. Certainly, Mark Twain's ideas about race were complex. Those who love the novel often point to the warm portrayal of Jim as a wise father-figure for Huck and to Huck's decision to throw away his soul rather than return Jim to slavery. Others express outrage at Tom's charades at the Phelps farm when Jim's life and freedom were at stake, at caricatures of Jim that reflect the patronizing conventions of minstrelsy (a form of entertainment Mark Twain delighted in), at over 200 uses of a racially charged epithet, and at dialect features that reinforce negative stereotypes of African Americans. **In a well-developed essay, present an argument explaining whether or not Twain's novel is racist. Include discussion of the rhetorical significance of standard and non-standard language features, and support your argument with specific, apt references to the text.**

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