

and shape. Are the colors vibrant and alive or muted and monochromatic? Are the shapes sharp and jagged or rounded and smooth? When you have identified the individual elements of the painting, you might ask yourself what significance each has.

To unveil this significance, ask how the portrait identifies the figure as part of a subculture and, alternately, whether the painting suggests the larger American culture. Analyze each figure's face, dress, posture, and gaze; or look at the objects and background in the picture. What do such elements suggest about the culture? Furthermore, ask yourself, What are the people doing and what do such actions imply about their culture? In addition, ask how color evokes a particular heritage. Do the colors have symbolic meaning? Overall, what cultural elements does the artist seem to celebrate? What elements are critiqued?

When analyzing a painting, the first step is to identify particular visual elements that have cultural meaning:

- figure(s) (dress, posture, face, expression, hair, placement) How are the people positioned? What do they look like? How are they interacting?
- background (location, detail, relation to figure) What does the background look like? Is the figure comfortable against this background? Is there a conflict?
- objects (what they are; why they are there; what they look like or are made of) How do the objects reflect on the values of the figure? How does the figure use them?
- color (bright, contrasting, monochromatic; associated with certain objects and not others) Do the colors suggest a culture? Are they symbolic? Do they reflect a mood?
- shape (sharp, smooth, large, small, rounded, jagged, symmetrical, or asymmetrical) How do the shapes suggest elements of a specific culture? Are certain shapes related to the figure?

After identifying and characterizing these elements, consider what the elements suggest about the relationship between the people depicted and their cultures:

- What elements are identified with the subculture? In what way?
- What elements are identified with the larger American culture? In what way?
- What is the relationship between those elements and the heritages they represent? (a blending? a tension? a source of inspiration? a conflict?)
- What common ground does the painting suggest? What elements suggest it?

The analysis that follows draws on these questions and is meant to serve as a model for your own analyses of works of art.

Analysis of a Painting

Look at *Flip Flops and Lace* (insert 2-1). Even in the title, you can sense dissonance—the poverty suggested by the flip-flops and the prosperity suggested by the lace. Stephen Scott Young's painting of a young African American girl in a chair offers numerous elements—especially figure (the girl), background (old house), and objects (chair)—that suggest a tension between the girl's poverty and the economic promise of the American dream. The little girl sits demurely in the demeanor of children schooled for proper behavior in an upwardly mobile society: her ankles are crossed neatly, her hands are

clasped obediently on her knee, and her head is turned shyly away and down from the viewer, as if she were at a dance. Furthermore, she wears a spotless white dress, with lace trim, and someone has neatly arranged her hair. In contrast, you might notice that her empty kitchen chair made of rough metal and cheap plastic, is incongruously placed on concrete slabs. The girl's youth, tidiness, and innocence are contrasted with the aging, worn-out, hopeless surroundings.

The painting can also be viewed symbolically as if the contrast between the decaying surroundings and the young child reflects the girl's personal situation. One interpretation might be that the painting symbolically depicts a conflict between the limited opportunities available to the girl—because of her poverty and the country's racism—and the American ideal of limitless opportunity. The heritage of deprivation is everywhere in the painting—in the nondescript wall, in the barren ground, even in the faded flip-flops, which the girl holds uncomfortably crossed in order to maintain her demure pose.

In addition to figure, background, and objects, you might note how color and shape emphasize difference. The painting seems composed of sharp white and black contrasts. The white dress, white wall, and white foreground all appear stark against the young girl's dark skin and the dark shadows on the ground. Further, the whiter white of the harsh sunlight on her dress and forehead appear almost glaring—too bright for the girl to look at—heightening the tension. Like color, shape also increases the tension. The girl is depicted in soft curves and gentle shapes; her arms, head, and legs are bent, while her dress curves over her knee. The background, however, is painted in sharp, rough lines. The lines in the broken wall and crumbling concrete are jagged and asymmetrical.

Given such stark contrasts, you might ask where in the painting lies common ground for African Americans and white society in the face of racial and economic tensions? Perhaps the girl's eyes, a focus point, might offer a clue. These eyes gaze past the viewer to someone or something outside of our immediate vision. However, they are neither hopeful nor resistant, but quizzical and sad. Indeed, while the neat appearance of the girl's hair and dress, and the tidy way she sits, might suggest that she can transcend her impoverished background, her posture and expression might suggest the opposite: that the closest she can get to escaping poverty is wearing a clean dress. If this is true, then the common ground may lie only in the viewer's empathy for an innocent girl, well behaved, with little hope of overcoming her circumstances.

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN ESSAYS

The essays in this chapter address the experience of simultaneously living in two cultures, particularly while speaking two languages. Amy Tan, Richard Rodriguez, and Barbara Melix struggle to establish an identity that either reconciles two heritages or resists the claims of one of them. In each case, the writer experiences the tension between the cultures as a tension between languages or dialects. Tan writes about the indirectness of the Chinese language—which some interpret as discretion—and argues that the subtlety of her family language suggests more than this stereotype would indicate. Rodriguez identifies his Spanish language and Mexican ancestry as belonging to a private culture that conflicts with the “public” culture represented by American English. In a similar way, Barbara Melix shifts between Standard English and Black English, though she does not favor one over the other; each suits a different context.

Caffilene Allen, Itabari Njeri, Louise Erdrich, and Lydia Minatoya also write about language as a reflection of culture: each shows how personal names reflect cultural identity. Erdrich laments her loss of identity as a Chippewa Native American; much of her culture is lost—what is left are the expressive names, such as Standing Strong or Sky Coming Down. Njeri rejects her American birth name, Jill Lord, and adopts an African name—an action that affirms her African heritage. Lydia Minatoya recounts how her name reflects her Japanese parents' desire for her to fit into American culture and thrive here. Caffilene Allen describes how her teachers changed her East Tennessee "Caffilene" to "Kathleen," disrupting her identity and creating shame in her family. At the same time, leaving behind her Appalachian dialect created opportunities for Allen outside the family, just as learning English did for Rodriguez.

As background for such language tensions, Barbara Wallraff and Haunani-Kay Task write about the close bond between a language and its culture. Wallraff explores the myth of the world dominance of English. Although she recognizes that English is the principal language of scientific and economic discourse in countries throughout the world, she argues that English has in no way supplanted these countries' native languages. Task describes how English-speaking historians have devalued Hawaiian culture, an attitude she blames at least partly on their ignorance of the Hawaiian language. Both readings offer an important backdrop to discussions about the significance of specific family languages and heritages within the wider U.S. culture.

Analyzing the Essays

Like the paintings, these readings offer a range of responses to the tension between a private and public culture, from resistance to celebration. When analyzing the essays in this chapter, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What attitudes, values, and concerns does the writer identify as "American"?
2. What are the values, attitudes, and concerns associated with the family heritage or subculture?
3. What are the values, attitudes, and concerns associated with the larger American culture?
4. Does the writer state or imply a common ground? If not, can you posit one?

Analysis of an Essay

Read Itabari Njeri's "What's in a Name?" (p. 71). Then read this example of how you might analyze the essay.

Njeri tries to define the subculture of African Americans and its relation to U.S. culture as a whole through her reflections on her name change. She makes us aware of the ambiguity she feels in identifying her "original name." Although whites and many African Americans consider the "original name" to be Njeri's birth name, Jill Lord, Njeri defines her "original name" as her African ancestral name—unknownable because slavery disrupted family ties. For Njeri, "Jill Lord" is her "slave name," and so she adopts the African name "Itabari Njeri," even against her mother's wishes. While she recognizes that for others, her birth name represents her American rights—for instance, her freedom of speech and right to vote—still she resists being cut off from her African roots. Although she can never know who her specific African ancestors were, she seeks a con-

nection with them through her African name. In so doing, she depicts what may seem an irreconcilable conflict and paradox: she can never know the culture her family lost through slavery, but she wants recognition that it existed.

Taking a step back from this conflict, you might ask yourself, Does Njeri suggest a common ground between her ancestral and American identities? If not, can you posit one? Here are some possibilities: Njeri holds many typically American values, such as material and professional success; she is a well-educated and successful journalist. She also identifies with the American ideal of opportunity and self-transformation. In particular, she sees herself as part of a group of writers and artists who are forging out of cultural conflicts a new African American aesthetic. But while she is thoroughly American in these attitudes, she also takes pride in the connections she makes with some of the Africans she meets, even though these individuals seem also to have been influenced by American culture. Two incidents of personal recognition illustrate this bond. In Tanzania, the hotel operator calls Njeri "sister" and asks her to "Please tell everyone in Harlem hello for us." Later, on the border of Tanzania and Kenya, a woman smiles at her and says, in broken English, "I know you" and "You are from the lost tribe." These two experiences help create the connection to Africa that Njeri seeks.

READING

AMY TAN Tan, who was born in Oakland, California, confronts a controversial linguistic issue: to what extent does a people's language determine what they can perceive? Comparing her family's native Chinese with her own native English, she speculates that although cultures use language in different ways (e.g., Chinese speakers tend to be less blunt than American English speakers), the languages themselves do not cause them to perceive the world differently. Different language behavior, however, does lead to misunderstandings, as Tan amply illustrates. If you speak more than one language, do you notice that they give rise to different kinds of social behavior? Do you know of language practices that are acceptable, even expected, in one culture, yet considered rude or unusual in another?

TAN is the author of *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and other novels, memoirs, and essays.

The Language of Discretion (1990)

BY AMY TAN

At a recent family dinner in San Francisco, my mother whispered to me: "Sau-sau [Brother's Wife] pretends too hard to be polite! Why bother? In the end, she always takes everything."

My mother thinks like a *waixiao*, an expatriate, temporarily away from China since 1949, no longer patient with ritual courtesies. As if to prove her point, she reached across the table to offer my elderly aunt from Beijing the last scallop from the Happy Family seafood dish.

Sau-sau scowled. "*B'yo, zhen b'yo!*" (I don't want it, really I don't!) she cried, patting her plump stomach.

"Take it! Take it!" scolded my mother in Chinese.
 "Full, I'm already full," Sau-sau protested weakly, eyeing the beloved scallop.
 "Ah!" exclaimed my mother, completely exasperated. "Nobody else wants it. If you don't take it, it will only rot!"

At this point, Sau-sau sighed, acting as if she were doing my mother a big favor by taking the wretched scrap off her hands.

My mother turned to her brother, a high-ranking communist official who was visiting her in California for the first time: "In America a Chinese person could starve to death. If you say you don't want it, they won't ask you again forever."

My uncle nodded and said he understood fully: Americans take things quickly because they have no time to be polite. I thought about this misunderstanding again—of social contexts failing in translation—when a friend sent me an article from the *New York Times Magazine* (24 April 1988). The article, on changes in New York's Chinatown, made passing reference to the inherent ambivalence of the Chinese language.

Chinese people are so "discreet and modest," the article stated, there aren't even words for "yes" and "no."

That's not true, I thought, although I can see why an outsider might think that. I continued reading.

If one is Chinese, the article went on to say, "One compromises, one doesn't hazard a loss of face by an overemphatic response."

My throat seized. Why do people keep saying these things? As if we truly were those little dolls sold in Chinatown tourist shops, heads bobbing up and down in complacent agreement to anything said!

I worry about the effect of one-dimensional statements on the unwary and guileless. When they read about this so-called vocabulary deficit, do they also conclude that Chinese people evolved into a mild-mannered lot because the language only allowed them to hobble forth with minced words?

Something enormous is always lost in translation. Something insidious seeps into the gaps, especially when amateur linguists continue to compare, one-for-one, language differences and then put forth notions wide open to misinterpretation: that Chinese people have no direct linguistic means to make decisions, assert or deny, affirm or negate, just say no to drug dealers, or behave properly on the witness stand when told, "Please answer yes or no."

Yet one can argue, with the help of renowned linguists, that the Chinese are indeed up a creek without "yes" and "no." Take any number of variations on the old language-and-reality theory stated years ago by Edward Sapir: "Human beings . . . are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium for their society. . . . The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent built up on the language habits of the group."

This notion was further bolstered by the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which roughly states that one's perception of the world and how one functions in it depends a great deal on the language used. As Sapir, Whorf, and new carriers of the banner would have us believe, language shapes our thinking, channels us along certain patterns embedded in words, syntactic structures, and intonation patterns. Language has become the peg and the shelf that enables us to sort out and categorize the world. In English, we see "cats" and "dogs"; what if the language had also specified *glutz*, mean-

ing "animals that leave fur on the sofa," and *glortz*, meaning "animals that leave fur and drool on the sofa"? How would language, the enabler, have changed our perceptions with slight vocabulary variations?

And if this were the case—of language being the master of destined thought—think of the opportunities lost from failure to evolve two little words, *yes* and *no*, the simplest of opposites! Ghenghis Khan could have been sent back to Mongolia. Opium wars might have been averted. The Cultural Revolution could have been sidestepped.

There are still many, from serious linguists to pop psychology cultists, who view language and reality as inextricably tied, one being the consequence of the other. We have traversed the range from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to est and neurolinguistic programming, which tell us "you are what you say."

I too have been intrigued by the theories. I can summarize, albeit badly, ages-old empirical evidence: of Eskimos and their infinite ways to say "snow," their ability to see the differences in snowflake configurations, thanks to the richness of their vocabulary, while non-Eskimo speakers like myself founder in "snow," "more snow," and "lots more where that came from."

I too have experienced dramatic cognitive awakenings via the word. Once I added "mao" to my vocabulary I began to see it everywhere. When I learned how to pronounce *prix fixe*, I ate French food at prices better than the easier-to-say *à la carte* choices.

But just how seriously are we supposed to take this?

Sapir said something else about language and reality. It is the part that often gets left behind in the dot-dot-dots of quotes: ". . . No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached."

When I first read this, I thought, Here at last is validity for the dilemmas I felt growing up in a bicultural, bilingual family! As any child of immigrant parents knows, there's a special kind of double bind attached to knowing two languages. My parents, for example, spoke to me in both Chinese and English; I spoke back to them in English.

"Amy-ah!" they'd call to me.
 "What?" I'd mumble back.

"Do not question us when we call," they scolded me in Chinese. "It is not respectful."
 "What do you mean?"

"Ah! Didn't we just tell you not to question?"

To this day, I wonder which parts of my behavior were shaped by Chinese, which by English. I am tempted to think, for example, that if I am of two minds on some matter it is due to the richness of my linguistic experiences, not to any personal tendencies toward wishy-washiness. But which mind says what?

Was it perhaps patience—developed through years of deciphering my mother's fractured English—that had me listening politely while a woman announced over the phone that I had won one of five valuable prizes? Was it respect—pounded in by the Chinese imperative to accept convoluted explanations—that had me agreeing that I might find it worthwhile to drive seventy-five miles to view a time-share resort? Could I have heeded at a loss for words when asked, "Wouldn't you like to win a Hawaiian cruise or perhaps a fabulous Star of India designed exclusively by Carter and Van Arpels?"

And when this same woman called back a week later, this time complaining that I had missed my appointment, obviously it was my type A language that kicked into gear and interrupted her. Certainly, my blunt denial—"Frankly I'm not interested"—was as American as apple pie. And when she said, "But it's in Morgan Hill," and I shouted, "Read my lips, I don't care if it's Timbuktu," you can be sure I said it with the precise intonation expressing both cynicism and disgust.

It's dangerous business, this sorting out of language and behavior. Which one is English? Which is Chinese? The categories manifest themselves: passive and aggressive, tentative and assertive, indirect and direct. And I realize they are just variations of the same theme: that Chinese people are discreet and modest.

Reject them all!

If my reaction is overly strident, it is because I cannot come across as too emphatic. I grew up listening to the same lines over and over again, like so many rote expressions repeated in an English phrasebook. And I too almost came to believe them.

Yet if I consider my upbringing more carefully, I find there was nothing discreet about the Chinese language I grew up with. My parents made everything abundantly clear. Nothing wishy-washy in their demands, no compromises accepted. "Of course you will become a famous neurosurgeon," they told me. "And yes, a concert pianist on the side."

In fact, now that I remember, it seems that the more emphatic outbursts always spilled over into Chinese: "Not that way! You must wash rice so not a single grain spills out."

I do not believe that my parents—both immigrants from mainland China—are an exception to the modest-and-discreet rule. I have only to look at the number of Chinese engineering students skewing minority ratios at Berkeley, MIT, and Yale. Certainly they were not raised by passive mothers and fathers who said, "It is up to you, my daughter. Writer, welfare recipient, masseuse, or molecular engineer—you decide."

And my American mind says, See, those engineering students weren't able to say no to their parents' demands. But then my Chinese mind remembers: Ah, but those parents all wanted their sons and daughters to be *pre-med*.

Having listened to both Chinese and English, I also tend to be suspicious of any comparisons between the two languages. Typically, one language—that of the person doing the comparing—is often used as the standard, the benchmark for a logical form of expression. And so the language being compared is always in danger of being judged deficient or superfluous, simplistic or unnecessarily complex, melodious or cacophonous. English speakers point out that Chinese is extremely difficult because it relies on variations in tone barely discernible to the human ear. By the same token, Chinese speakers tell me English is extremely difficult because it is inconsistent, a language of too many broken rules, of Mickey Mice and Donald Ducks.

Even more dangerous to my mind is the temptation to compare both language and behavior *in translation*. To listen to my mother speak English, one might think she has no concept of past or future tense, that she doesn't see the difference between singular and plural, that she is gender blind because she calls my husband "she." If one were not careful, one might also generalize that, based on the way my mother talks, all Chinese people take a circumlocutory route to get to the point. It is, in fact, my mother's idiosyncratic behavior to ramble a bit.

Sapir was right about differences between two languages and their realities. I can illustrate why word-for-word translation is not enough to translate meaning and intent. I once received a letter from China which I read to non-Chinese speaking friends. The letter, originally written in Chinese, had been translated by my brother-in-law in Beijing. One portion described the time when my uncle at age ten discovered his widowed mother (my grandmother) had remarried—as a number three concubine, the ultimate disgrace for an honorable family. The translated version of my uncle's letter read in part:

In 1925, I met my mother in Shanghai. When she came to me, I didn't have greeting to her as if seeing nothing. She pulled me to a corner secretly and asked me why I didn't have greeting to her. I couldn't control myself and cried, "Ma! Why did you leave us? People told me: one day you are a beancake yourself."

Your sister-in-law found it and swore at you, called you names. So . . . is it true?" She clasped my hand and answered immediately. "It's not true, don't say what like this." After this time, there was a few chance to meet her.

"What!" cried my friends. "Was eating a beancake so terrible?"

Of course not. The beancake was simply a euphemism; a ten-year-old boy did not dare question his mother on something as shocking as concubinage. Eating a beancake was his equivalent for committing this selfish act, something inconsiderate of all family members, hence, my grandmother's despairing response to what seemed like a ludicrous charge of gluttony. And sure enough, she was banished from the family, and my uncle saw her only a few times before her death.

While the above may fuel people's argument that Chinese is indeed a language of extreme discretion, it does not mean that Chinese people speak in secrets and riddles. The contexts are fully understood. It is only to those on the *outside* that the language seems cryptic, the behavior inscrutable.

I am, evidently, one of the outsiders. My nephew in Shanghai, who recently started taking English lessons, has been writing me letters in English. I had told him I was a fiction writer, and so in one letter he wrote, "Congratulate to you on your writing. Perhaps one day I should like to read it." I took it in the same vein as "Perhaps one day we can get together for lunch." I sent back a cheery note. A month went by and another letter arrived from Shanghai: "Last one perhaps I hadn't writing distinctly," he said. "In the future, you'll send a copy of your works for me."

I try to explain to my English-speaking friends that Chinese language is more *strategic* in manner, whereas English tends to be more direct; an American business executive may say, "Let's make a deal," and the Chinese manager may reply, "Is your person interested in learning about your widget business?" Each to his or her own purpose, each with his or her own linguistic path. But I hesitate to add more to the pile of generalizations, because no matter how many examples I provide and explain, I fear that it appears defensive and only reinforces the image: that Chinese people are "discreet and modest"—and it takes an American to explain what they really mean.

Why am I complaining? The description seems harmless enough (after all, the *New York Times Magazine* writer did not say "slippery and evasive"). It is precisely the bland, easy acceptability of the phrase that worries me.

I worry that the dominant society may see Chinese people from a limited—and limiting—perspective. I worry that seemingly benign stereotypes may be part of the reason there are few Chinese in top management positions, in mainstream political roles. I worry about the power of language: that if one says anything enough times—in any language—it might become true.

Could this be why Chinese friends of my parents' generation are willing to accept the generalization?

"Why are you complaining?" one of them said to me. "If people think we are modest and polite, let them think that. Wouldn't Americans be pleased to admit they are thought of as polite?"

And I do believe anyone would take the description as a compliment—at first. But after a while, it annoys, as if the only things that people heard one say were phatic remarks: "I'm so pleased to meet you. I've heard many wonderful things about you. For me? You shouldn't have!"

These remarks are not representative of new ideas, honest emotions, or considered thought. They are what is said from the polite distance of social contexts: of greetings, farewells, wedding thank-you notes, convenient excuses, and the like.

It makes me wonder though. How many anthropologists, how many sociologists, how many travel journalists have documented so-called "natural interactions" in foreign lands, all observed with spiral notebook in hand? How many other cases are there of the long-lost primitive tribe, people who turned out to be sophisticated enough to put on the stone-age show that ethnologists had come to see?

And how many tourists fresh off the bus have wandered into Chinatown expecting the self-effacing shopkeeper to admit under duress that the goods are not worth the price asked? I have witnessed it.

"I don't know," the tourist said to the shopkeeper, a Cantonese woman in her fifties. "It doesn't look genuine to me. I'll give you three dollars."

"You don't like my price, go somewhere else," said the shopkeeper.

"You are not a nice person," cried the shocked tourist, "not a nice person at all!"

"Who say I have to be nice," snapped the shopkeeper.

"So how does one say 'yes' and 'no' in Chinese?" ask my friends a bit warily.

And here I do agree in part with the *New York Times Magazine* article. There is no one word for "yes" or "no"—but not out of necessity to be discreet. If anything, I would say the Chinese equivalent of answering "yes" or "no" is *discrete*, that is, specific to what is asked.

Ask a Chinese person if he or she has eaten, and he or she might say *chirle* (eaten already) or perhaps *meiyou* (have not).

Ask, "So you had insurance at the time of the accident?" and the response would be *dwa* (correct) or *meiyou* (did not have).

Ask, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" and the answer refers directly to the proposition being asserted or denied: stopped already, still have not, never beat, have no wife.

What could be clearer?

As for those who are still wondering how to translate the language of discretion, I offer this personal example.

My aunt and uncle were about to return to Beijing after a three-month visit to the United States. On their last night I announced I wanted to take them out to dinner. "Are you hungry?" I asked in Chinese.

"Not hungry," said my uncle promptly, the same response he once gave me ten minutes before he suffered a low-blood-sugar attack.

"Not too hungry," said my aunt. "Perhaps you're hungry?"

"A little," I admitted.

"We can eat, we can eat," they both consented.

"What kind of food?" I asked.

"Oh, doesn't matter. Anything will do. Nothing fancy, just some simple food is fine."

"Do you like Japanese food? We haven't had that yet," I suggested.

They looked at each other.

"We can eat it," said my uncle bravely, this survivor of the Long March.

"We have eaten it before," added my aunt. "Raw fish."

"Oh, you don't like it?" I said. "Don't be polite. We can go somewhere else."

"We are not being polite. We can eat it," my aunt insisted.

So I drove them to Japantown and we walked past several restaurants featuring colorful plastic displays of sushi.

"Not this one, not this either," I continued to say, as if searching for a Japanese restaurant similar to the last. "Here it is," I finally said, turning into a restaurant famous for its Chinese fish dishes from Shandong.

"Oh, Chinese food!" cried my aunt, obviously relieved.

My uncle patted my arm. "You think Chinese."

"It's your last night here in America," I said. "So don't be polite. Act like an American."

And that night we ate a banquet.

Notes

1. Edward Sapir, *Selected Writings*, ed. D. G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949).

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. Tan is quick to dismiss stereotypes—that Americans have no time to be polite and that the Chinese are "discreet and modest." Think of a stereotype that you used to believe, but no longer do. What changed your mind?
2. If you have visited an area where the culture was different from your own but the language was not, did you ever find it difficult to communicate? Explain your answer.

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Tan's principal rhetorical device is to move back and forth between a language theory and a first-person experience with language. For example, in her opening paragraph, she narrates a family story and immediately follows that story with a theory, by a writer at the *New York Times*, about the Chinese language and culture. Choose one of the theories Tan discusses

and show how one of the personal experiences reinforces, discredits, or provides a new perspective on this theory.

2. Tan often asks questions that she does not answer or whose answers are implicit in her argument—that is, she answers them indirectly. Choose two of Tan's questions and consider how Tan might answer them directly.

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Richard Rodriguez ("Public and Private Language," p. 51) and Amy Tan both write about their experiences growing up bilingual and bicultural, yet the tone of each article is quite different: Tan is at times humorous, at times outraged, whereas Rodriguez's tone is largely sad, wistful. What accounts for this difference in tone?
2. In "What Global Language?" (p. 93), Barbara Wallraff questions the status of English as a global language. Given Tan's belief that different speakers of different languages have different styles of interacting, do you think any language can truly be global?

WRITING TO ACT

1. According to Tan, "something enormous is always lost in translation." Interview someone you know from another culture, asking them about the behavioral differences they noticed in communicating in their new culture. Pay particularly close attention to a possible "social context" that failed in translation. Based on your findings, write a guide for a newcomer to your culture.
2. Survey some of the slang students use on your campus. After you've collected at least ten words, analyze what these terms reveal about your campus's culture. Discuss your analysis and conclusions in an article for your school paper.

READING

RICHARD RODRIGUEZ The son of Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans, Rodriguez experiences English as a public language that gives him power and confidence to speak in public—and Spanish as a private language that binds his family together. Though he values the public identity English offers him, he regrets the feeling of closeness his family loses as the children, speaking English and Americanized, grow away from their parents, who are tied, in language and custom, to their native country. Do you agree with Rodriguez's assessment of himself as having two distinct identities? What do immigrants lose when they assimilate into U.S. culture?

RODRIGUEZ is the author of numerous essays, and his books include the autobiography *Hunger for Memory* (from which this reading is excerpted), *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*, and *King's Highway*.

Public and Private Language (1982)

BY RICHARD RODRIGUEZ

Supporters of bilingual education today imply that students like me miss a great deal by not being taught in their family's language. What they seem not to recognize is that, as a socially disadvantaged child, I considered Spanish to be a private language. What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right—and the obligation—to speak the public language of *los gringos*. The odd truth is that my first-grade classmates could have become bilingual, in the conventional sense of that word, more easily than I. Had they been taught (as upper-middle-class children are often taught early) a second language like Spanish or French, they could have regarded it simply as that: another public language. In my case such bilingualism could not have been so quickly achieved. What I did not believe was that I could speak a single public language.

Without question, it would have pleased me to hear my teachers address me in Spanish when I entered the classroom. I would have felt much less afraid. I would have trusted them and responded with ease. But I would have delayed—for how long postponed?—having to learn the language of public society. I would have evaded—and for how long could I have afforded to delay?—learning the great lesson of school, that I had a public identity.

Fortunately, my teachers were unsentimental about their responsibility. What they understood was that I needed to speak a public language. So their voices would search me out, asking me questions. Each time I'd hear them, I'd hook up in surprise to see a nun's face frowning at me. I'd mumble, not really meaning to answer. The nun would persist, "Richard, stand up. Don't look at the floor. Speak up. Speak to the entire class, not just to me!" But I couldn't believe that the English language was mine to use. (In part, I did not want to believe it.) I continued to mumble. I resisted the teacher's demands. (Did I somehow suspect that once I learned public language my pleasing family life would be changed?) Silent, waiting for the bell to sound, I remained dazed, diffident, afraid.

Because I wrongly imagined that English was intrinsically a public language and Spanish an intrinsically private one, I easily noted the difference between classroom language and the language of home. At school, words were directed to a general audience of listeners. ("Boys and girls.") Words were meaningfully ordered. And the point was not self-expression alone but to make oneself understood by many others. The teacher quizzed: "Boys and girls, why do we use that word in this sentence? Could we think of a better word to use there? Would the sentence change its meaning if the words were differently arranged? And wasn't there a better way of saying much the same thing?" (I couldn't say. I wouldn't try to say.)

Three months. Five. Half a year passed. Unsmiling, ever watchful, my teachers noted my silence. They began to connect my behavior with the difficult progress my older sister and brother were making. Until one Saturday morning three nuns arrived at the house to talk to our parents. Stiffly, they sat on the blue living room sofa. From the doorway of another room, spying the visitors, I noted the incongruity—the clash of two worlds, the faces and voices of school intruding upon the familiar setting of home. I overheard one voice gently wondering, "Do your children speak only Spanish at home, Mrs. Rodriguez?" While another voice added, "That Richard especially seems so timid and shy."

That Rich-heard!

With great tact the visitors continued, "Is it possible for you and your husband to encourage your children to practice their English when they are home?" Of course, my parents complied. What would they not do for their children's well-being? And how could they have questioned the Church's authority which those women represented? In an instant, they agreed to give up the language (the sounds) that had revealed and accentuated our family's closeness. The moment after the visitors left, the change was observed. "Alma, speak to us *en inglés*," my father and mother united to tell us.

At first, it seemed a kind of game. After dinner each night, the family gathered to practice "our" English. (It was still then *inglés*, a language foreign to us, so we felt drawn as strangers to it.) Laughter, we would try to define words we could not pronounce. We played with strange English sounds, often over-anglicizing our pronunciations. And we filled the smiling gaps of our sentences with familiar Spanish sounds. But that was cheating, somebody shouted. Everyone laughed. In school, meanwhile, like my brother and sister, I was required to attend a daily tutoring session. I needed a full year of special attention. I also needed my teachers to keep my attention from straying in class by calling out, *Rich-heard*—their English voices slowly prying loose my ties to my other name, its three notes, *Ri-car-da*. Most of all I needed to hear my mother and father speak to me in a moment of seriousness in broken—suddenly heartbreaking—English. The scene was inevitable: One Saturday morning I entered the kitchen where my parents were talking in Spanish. I did not realize that they were talking in Spanish however until, at the moment they saw me, I heard their voices change to speak English. Those *gringo* sounds they uttered startled me. Pushed me away. In that moment of trivial misunderstanding and profound insight, I felt my throat twisted by unsounded grief. I turned quickly and left the room. But I had no place to escape to with Spanish. (The spell was broken.) My brother and sisters were speaking English in another part of the house.

Again and again in the days following, increasingly angry, I was obliged to hear my mother and father: "Speak to us *en inglés*." (*Speak*.) Only then did I determine to learn classroom English. Weeks after, it happened: One day in school I raised my hand to volunteer an answer. I spoke out in a loud voice. And I did not think it remarkable when the entire class understood. That day, I moved very far from the disadvantaged child I had been only days earlier. The belief, the calming assurance that I belonged in public, had at last taken hold.

Shortly after, I stopped hearing the high and loud sounds of *los gringos*. A more and more confident speaker of English, I didn't trouble to listen to how strangers sounded, speaking to me. And there simply were too many English-speaking people in my day for me to hear American accents anymore. Conversations quickened. Listening to persons who sounded eccentrically pitched voices, I usually noted their sounds for an initial few seconds before I concentrated on *what* they were saying. Conversations became content-full. Transparent. I hearing someone's *tone* of voice—angry or questioning or sarcastic or happy or sad—I didn't distinguish it from the words it expressed. Sound and word were thus tightly wedded. At the end of a day, I was often bemused, always relieved, to realize how "silent," though crowded with words, my day in public had been. (This public silence measured and quickened the change in my life.)

At last, seven years old, I came to believe what had been technically true since my birth: I was an American citizen.

But the special feeling of closeness at home was diminished by then. Gone was the desperate, urgent, intense feeling of being at home; rare was the experience of feeling myself individualized by family intimates. We remained a loving family, but one greatly changed. No longer so close; no longer bound tight by the pleasing and troubling knowledge of our public separateness. Neither my older brother nor sister rushed home after school anymore. Nor did I. When I arrived home there would often be neighborhood kids in the house. Or the house would be empty of sounds.

Following the dramatic Americanization of their children, even my parents grew more publicly confident. Especially my mother. She learned the names of all the people on our block. And she decided we needed to have a telephone installed in the house. My father continued to use the word *gringo*. But it was no longer charged with the old bitterness or distrust. (Stripped of any emotional content, the word simply became a name for those Americans not of Hispanic descent.) Hearing him, sometimes, I wasn't sure if he was pronouncing the Spanish word *gringo* or saying *gringo* in English.

Matching the silence I started hearing in public was a new quiet at home. The family's quiet was partly due to the fact that, as we children learned more and more English, we shared fewer and fewer words with our parents. Sentences needed to be spoken slowly when a child addressed his mother or father. (Often the parent wouldn't understand.) The child would need to repeat himself. (Still the parent misunderstood.) The young voice, frustrated, would end up saying, "Never mind"—the subject was closed. Dinners would be noisy with the clinking of knives and forks against dishes. My mother would smile softly between her remarks; my father at the other end of the table would chew and chew at his food, while he stared over the heads of his children.

My mother? My father? After English became my primary language, I no longer knew what words to use in addressing my parents. The old Spanish words (those tender accents of sound) I had used earlier—*maná* and *papá*—I couldn't use anymore. They would have been too painful reminders of how much had changed in my life. On the other hand, the words I heard neighborhood kids call their parents seemed equally unsatisfactory. *Mother* and *father*; *Ma*, *Papa*, *Pu*, *Dad*, *Pop* (how I hated the all-American sound of that last word especially)—all these terms I felt were unsuitable, not really terms of address for my parents. As a result, I never used them at home. Whenever I'd speak to my parents, I would try to get their attention with eye contact alone. In public conversations, I'd refer to "my parents" or "my mother and father."

My mother and father, for their part, responded differently, as their children spoke to them less. She grew restless, seemed troubled and anxious at the scarcity of words exchanged in the house. It was she who would question me about my day when I came home from school. She smiled at small talk. She pried at the edges of my sentences to get me to say something more. (What?) She'd join conversations she overheard, but her intrusions often stopped her children's talking. By contrast, my father seemed reconciled to the new quiet. Though his English improved somewhat, he retired into silence. At dinner he spoke very little. One night his children and even his wife helplessly giggled at his garbled English pronunciation of "the Catholic Grace before Meals." Thereafter he made his wife recite the prayer at the start of each meal, even on formal occasions, when

there were guests in the house. Hers became the public voice of the family. On official business, it was she, not my father, one would usually hear on the phone or in stores, talking to strangers. His children grew so accustomed to his silence that, years later, they would speak routinely of his shyness. (My mother would often try to explain: Both his parents died when he was eight. He was raised by an uncle who treated him like little more than a menial servant. He was never encouraged to speak. He grew up alone. A man of few words.) But my father was not shy, I realized, when I'd watch him speaking Spanish with relatives. Using Spanish, he was quickly effusive. Especially when talking with other men, his voice would spark, flicker, flare alive with sounds. In Spanish, he expressed ideas and feelings he rarely revealed in English. With firm Spanish sounds, he conveyed confidence and authority English would never allow him.

The silence at home, however, was finally more than a literal silence. Fewer words passed between parent and child, but more profound was the silence that resulted from my inattention to sounds. At about the time I no longer bothered to listen with care to the sounds of English in public, I grew careless about listening to the sounds family members made when they spoke. Most of the time I heard someone speaking at home and didn't distinguish his sounds from the words people uttered in public. I didn't even pay much attention to my parents' accented and ungrammatical speech. At least not at home. Only when I was with them in public would I grow alert to their accents. Though, even then, their sounds caused me less and less concern. For I was increasingly confident of my own public identity.

I would have been happier about my public success had I not sometimes recalled what it had been like earlier, when my family had conveyed its intimacy through a set of conveniently private sounds. Sometimes in public, hearing a stranger, I'd hark back to my past. A Mexican farmworker approached me downtown to ask directions to somewhere. "Hijito . . ." he said. And his voice summoned deep longing. Another time, standing beside my mother in the visiting room of a Carmelite convent, before the dense screen which rendered the nuns shadowy figures, I heard several Spanish-speaking nuns—their busy, singsong overlapping voices—assure us that yes, yes, we were remembered, all our family was remembered in their prayers. (Their voices echoed faraway family sounds.) Another day, a dark-faced old woman—her hand light on my shoulder—steadied herself against me as she boarded a bus. She murmured something I couldn't quite comprehend. Her Spanish voice came near, like the face of a never-before-seen relative in the instant before I was kissed. Her voice, like so many of the Spanish voices I'd hear in public, recalled the golden age of my youth. Hearing Spanish then, I continued to be a careful, if sad, listener to sounds. Hearing a Spanish-speaking family walking behind me, I turned to look. I smiled for an instant, before my glance found the Hispanic-looking faces of strangers in the crowd going by.

Today I hear bilingual educators say that children lose a degree of "individuality" by becoming assimilated into public society. (Bilingual schooling was popularized in the seventies, that decade when middle-class ethnics began to resist the process of assimilation—the American melting pot.) But the bilingualists simplistically scorn the value and necessity of assimilation. They do not seem to realize that there are two ways a person is individualized. So they do not realize that while one suffers a diminished

sense of private individuality by becoming assimilated into public society, such assimilation makes possible the achievement of public individuality.

The bilingualists insist that a student should be reminded of his difference from others in mass society, his heritage. But they equate more separateness with individuality. The fact is that only in private—with intimates—is separateness from the crowd a prerequisite for individuality. (An intimate draws me apart, tells me that I am unique, unlike all others.) In public, by contrast, full individuality is achieved, paradoxically, by those who are able to consider themselves members of the crowd. Thus it happened for me: Only when I was able to think of myself as an American, no longer an alien in *gringo* society, could I seek the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality. The social and political advantages I enjoy as a man result from the day that I came to believe that my name, indeed, is *Rich-heard Roud-ree-guess*. It is true that my public society today is often impersonal. (My public society is usually mass society.) Yet despite the anonymity of the crowd and despite the fact that the individuality I achieve in public is often tenuous—because it depends on my being one in a crowd—I celebrate the day I acquired my new name. Those middle-class ethnics who scorn assimilation seem to me filled with decadent self-pity, obsessed by the burden of public life. Dangerously, they romanticize public separateness and they trivialize the dilemma of the socially disadvantaged.

My awkward childhood does not prove the necessity of bilingual education. My story discloses instead an essential myth of childhood—inevitable pain. If I rehearse here the changes in my private life after my Americanization, it is finally to emphasize the public gain. The loss implies the gain: The house I returned to each afternoon was quiet. Intimate sounds no longer rushed to the door to greet me. There were other noises inside. The telephone rang. Neighborhood kids ran past the door of the bedroom where I was reading my schoolbooks—covered with shipping-bag paper. Once I learned public language, it would never again be easy for me to hear intimate family voices. More and more of my day was spent hearing words. But that may only be a way of saying that the day I raised my hand in class and spoke loudly to an entire roomful of faces, my childhood started to end.

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READINGS

1. If you have spoken a language other than your native one, did you experience a change of identity in the process? If English is the only language you use, how is the way you speak at home different from the way you speak at school or in another public situation?
2. Think of an occasion where you tried hard to fit in—at school, at a social event, at work, or somewhere else. How was your use of language part of this effort?
3. Rodriguez refers often to the power and meaningfulness of silence. Describe a situation in which you experienced silence (your own or that of others) as a form of communication. What was communicated by the silence?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. The tone of this reading is often nostalgic, suggesting sadness and loss. Where do you feel this tone most strongly, and what individual words contribute to this feeling? How does the tone reinforce Rodriguez's ideas?
2. Rodriguez moves back and forth between narrating his family's story and reflecting on the national controversy over bilingual education. What is his stance on bilingual teaching? Do his personal experiences make his opinions on bilingual teaching more believable? Why or why not?

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Compare Rodriguez's behavior with that of Lydia Minatoya ("Transformation," p. 81) as outsiders at school. How does each child cope with this outsider status?
2. In "The Language of Discretion" (p. 43), Amy Tan objects to an article in the *New York Times Magazine* that polarizes Chinese and U.S. language and behavior. Explain her reasons for questioning this attitude. Then consider the way Rodriguez characterizes English as a public and Spanish as a private language. Do you think Amy Tan would disagree with the way he polarizes English and Spanish? Why or why not?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Research the issue of bilingual education in your state or in a state such as California or Texas. Many of the current programs are controversial. Based upon your findings, write a letter to the state's legislature with recommendations for improvement.
2. Write a glossary in which you define terms that are special to a group you belong to—e.g., the slang that students on your campus use. Be sure to include adequate explanations, assuming that your intended audience does not belong to the group and is not familiar with the slang.

BARBARA MELLIX Growing up bilingual in Black English and Standard English, Mellix learns how language use is identified with social class and how it can confer insider or outsider status. Mellix's facility with both languages gives her power in several worlds: she can talk comfortably with her family, prove that she is respectable to a white policeman, and share her ideas as a professional writer. What, then, does Mellix mean by this statement: "...when we spoke standard English, we acknowledged [to ourselves and to others—but primarily to ourselves] that our customary way of speaking was inferior"? What makes one way of speaking "superior" to another?

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From *Outside, In* (1987) BY BARBARA MELLIX

Two years ago, when I started writing this paper, trying to bring order out of chaos, my ten-year-old daughter was suffering from an acute attack of boredom. She drifted in and out of the room complaining that she had nothing to do, no one to "be with" because none of her friends were at home. Patiently I explained that I was working on something special and needed peace and quiet, and I suggested that she paint, read, or work with her computer. None of these interested her. Finally, she pulled up a chair to my desk and watched me, now and then heaving long, loud sighs. After two or three minutes (nine or ten sighs), I lost my patience. "Looka here, Allie," I said, "you too old for this kinda carryin' on. I done told you this is important. You wronger than dirt to be in here huggin' me like this and you know it. Now git on outta here and leave me off before I put my foot all the way down."

I was at home, alone with my family, and my daughter understood that this way of speaking was appropriate in that context. She knew, as a matter of fact, that it was almost inevitable; when I get angry at home, I speak some of my finest, most cherished black English. Had I been speaking to my daughter in this manner in certain other environments, she would have been shocked and probably worried that I had taken leave of my sense of propriety.

Like my children, I grew up speaking what I considered two distinctly different languages—black English and standard English (or as I thought of them then, the ordinary everyday speech of "country" coloreds and "proper" English)—and in the process of acquiring these languages, I developed an understanding of when, where, and how to use them. But unlike my children, I grew up in a world that was primarily black. My friends, neighbors, ministers, teachers—almost everybody I associated with every day—were black. And we spoke to one another in our own special language: *That sho is a pretty dress you got on. If she don't soon leave me off I'm gon' tell her head a mess. I was so mad I could'a pissed a blue nail. He all the time trying to low-rate somebody. Ain't that just about nastiest thing you ever set ears on?*

Then there were the "others," the "proper" blacks, transplanted relatives and one-time friends who came home from the city for weddings, funerals, and vacations. And the whites. To these we spoke standard English. "Ain't?" my mother would yell at me when I used the term in the presence of "others." "You know better than that." And I would hang my head in shame and say the "proper" word.

I remember one summer sitting in my grandmother's house in Greeleyville, South Carolina, when it was full of the chatter of city relatives who were home on vacation. My parents sat quietly, only now and then volunteering a comment or answering a question. My mother's face took on a strained expression when she spoke. I could see that she was being careful to say just the right words in just the right way. Her voice sounded thick, muffled. And when she finished speaking, she would lapse into silence, her proper smile on her face. My father was more articulate, more aggressive. He spoke quickly, his words sharp and clear. But he held his proud head higher, a signal that he, too, was uncomfortable. My sisters and brothers and I stared at our aunts, uncles, and cousins, speaking only when prompted. Even then, we hesitated, formed our sentences in our minds, then spoke softly, shyly.

My parents looked small and anxious during those occasions, and I waited impatiently for our leave-taking when we would mock our relatives the moment we were out of their hearing. "Reeely," we would say to one another, flexing our wrists and rolling our eyes, "how doo you stan' this heat? Chile, it just too hyooo-mid for words." Our relatives had made us feel "country," and this was our way of regaining pride in ourselves while getting a little revenge in the bargain. The words bubbled in our throats and rolled across our tongues, a balm.

As a child I felt this same doubleness in uptown Greeleyville where the whites lived. "Ain't that a pretty dress you're wearing!" Toby, the town policeman, said to me one day when I was fifteen. "Thank you very much," I replied, my voice barely audible in my own ears. The words felt wrong in my mouth, rigid, foreign. It was not that I had never spoken that phrase before—it was common in black English, too—but I was extremely conscious that this was an occasion for proper English. I had taken out my English and put it on as I did my church clothes, and I felt as if I were wearing my Sunday best in the middle of the week. It did not matter that Toby had not spoken grammatically correct English. He was white and could speak as he wished. I had something to prove. Toby did not.

Speaking standard English to whites was our way of demonstrating that we knew their language and could use it. Speaking it to standard-English-speaking blacks was our way of showing them that we, as well as they, could "put on airs." But when we spoke standard English, we acknowledged (to ourselves and to others—but primarily to ourselves) that our customary way of speaking was inferior. We felt foolish, embarrassed, somehow diminished because we were ashamed to be our real selves. We were reserved, shy in the presence of those who owned and/or spoke the language.

My parents never set aside time to drill us in standard English. Their forms of instruction were less formal. When my father was feeling particularly expansive, he would regale us with tales of his exploits in the outside world. In almost flawless English, complete with dialogue and flavored with gestures and embellishment, he told us about his attempt to get a haircut at a white barbershop; his refusal to acknowledge one of the town merchants until the man addressed him as "Mister"; the time he refused to step off the sidewalk uptown to let some whites pass; his airplane trip to New York City (to visit a sick relative) during which the stewardesses and porters—recognizing that he was a "gentleman"—addressed him as "Sir." I did not realize then—not, I think, did my father—that he was teaching us, among other things, standard English and the relationship between language and power.

My mother's approach was different. Often, when one of us said "I'm gon wash off my feet," she would say, "And what will you walk on if you wash them off?" Everyone would laugh at the victim of my mother's "proper" mood. But it was different when one of us children was in a proper mood. "You think you are so superior," I said to my oldest sister one day when we were arguing and she was winning. "Superior!" my sister mocked. "You mean I'm acting 'biggid'?" My sisters and brothers sniggered, then joined in teasing me. Finally, my mother said, "Leave your sister alone. There's nothing wrong with using proper English." There was a half-smile on her face. I had gotten "uppity," had "put on airs" for no good reason. I was at home, alone with the family, and I hadn't been prompted by one of my mother's proper moods. But there was also a proud light in my mother's eyes; her children were learning English very well.

Not until years later, as a college student, did I begin to understand our ambivalence toward English, our scorn of it, our need to master it, to own and be owned by it—an ambivalence that extended to the public-school classroom. In our school, where there were no whites, my teachers taught standard English but used black English to do it. When my grammar-school teachers wanted us to write, for example, they usually said something like, "I want y'all to write five sentences that make a statement. Anybody git done before the rest can color." It was probably almost those exact words that led me to write these sentences in 1953 when I was in the second grade:

The white clouds are pretty.

There are only 15 people in our room.

We will go to gym.

We have a new poster.

We may go out doors.

Second grade came after "Little First" and "Big First," so by then I knew the implied rules that accompanied all writing assignments. Writing was an occasion for proper English. I was not to write in the way we spoke to one another: The white clouds pretty; There ain't but 15 people in our room; We going to gym; We got a new poster; We can go out in the yard. Rather I was to use the language of "other"; clouds *are*, there *are*, we *will*, we *have*, we *may*.

My sentences were short, rigid, perfunctory, like the letters my mother wrote to relatives:

Dear Papa,

How are you? How is Mattie? Fine I hope. We are fine. We will come to see you

Sunday. Cousin Ned will give us a ride.

Love,

Daughter

The language was not ours. It was something from outside us, something we used for special occasions.

But my coloring on the other side of that second-grade paper is different. I drew three hearts and a sun. The sun has a smiling face that radiates and envelops everything it touches. And although the sun and its world are enclosed in a circle, the colors I used—red, blue, green, purple, orange, yellow, black—indicate that I was less restricted with drawing and coloring than I was with writing standard English. My valentines were not just red. My sun was not just a yellow ball in the sky.

By the time I reached the twelfth grade, speaking and writing standard English had taken on new importance. Each year, about half of the newly graduated seniors of our school moved to large cities—particularly in the North—to live with relatives and find work. Our English teacher constantly corrected our grammar: "Not 'ain't,' but 'isn't.'" We seldom wrote papers, and even those few were usually plot summaries of short stories. When our teacher returned the papers, she usually lectured on the importance of using standard English: "I *am*; you *are*; he, she, or it *is*," she would say, writing on the chalkboard as she spoke. "How you gon git a job talking about 'I is,' or 'I isn't' or 'I ain't'?"

In Pittsburgh, where I moved after graduation, I watched my aunt and uncle—who had always spoken standard English when in Greeleyville—switch from black

English to standard English to a mixture of the two, according to where they were or who they were with. At home and with certain close relatives, friends, and neighbors, they spoke black English. With those less close, they spoke a mixture. In public and with strangers, they generally spoke standard English.

In time, I learned to speak standard English with ease and to switch smoothly from black to standard or a mixture, and back again. But no matter where I was, no matter what the situation or occasion, I continued to write as I had in school:

Dear Mommie,

How are you? How is everybody else? Fine I hope. I am fine. So are Aunt and Uncle. Tell everyone I said hello. I will write again soon.

Love,

Barbara

At work, at a health insurance company, I learned to write letters to customers. I studied form letters and letters written by co-workers, memorizing the phrases and the ways in which they were used. I dictated:

Thank you for your letter of January 5. We have made the changes in your coverage you requested. Your new premium will be \$150 every three months.

We are pleased to have been of service to you.

In a sense, I was proud of the letters I wrote for the company: they were proof of my ability to survive in the city, the outside world—an indication of my growing mastery of English. But they also indicate that writing was still mechanical for me, something that didn't require much thought.

Reading also became a more significant part of my life during those early years in Pittsburgh. I had always liked reading, but now I devoted more and more of my spare time to it. I read romances, mysteries, popular novels. Looking back, I realize that the books I liked best were simple, unambiguous: good versus bad and right versus wrong with right rewarded and wrong punished, mysteries unraveled and all set right in the end. It was how I remembered life in Greeleyville.

Of course I was romanticizing life in Greeleyville had not been so very complicated. Back there I had been—first as a child, then as a young woman with limited experience in the outside world—living in a relatively closed-in society. But there were implicit and explicit principles that guided our way of life and shaped our relationships with one another and the people outside—principles that a newcomer would find elusive and baffling. In Pittsburgh, I had matured, become more experienced: I had worked at three different jobs, associated with a wider range of people, married, had children. This new environment with different prescriptions for living required that I speak standard English much of the time, and slowly, imperceptibly, I had ceased seeing a sharp distinction between myself and “others.” Reading romances and mysteries, characterized by dichotomy, was a way of shying away from change, from the person I was becoming.

But that other part of me—that part which took great pride in my ability to hold a job writing business letters—was increasingly drawn to the new developments in my life and the attending possibilities, opportunities for even greater change. If I could write letters for a nationally known business, could I not also do something better, more challenging, more important? Could I not, perhaps, go to college and become a

school teacher? For years, afraid and a little embarrassed, I did no more than imagine this different me, this possible me. But sixteen years after coming north, when my youngest daughter entered kindergarten, I found myself unable—or unwilling—to resist the lure of possibility. I enrolled in my first college course: Basic Writing, at the University of Pittsburgh.

For the first time in my life, I was required to write extensively about myself. Using the most formal English at my command, I wrote these sentences near the beginning of the term:

One of my duties as a homemaker is simply picking up after others. A day seldom passes that I don't search for a mislaid toy, book, or gym shoe, etc. I change the “ly-D-ho,” fight “ring around the collar,” and keep our laundry smelling “April fresh.” Occasionally, I settle arguments between my children and suggest things to do when they're bored. Taking telephone messages for my oldest daughter is my newest (and sometimes most aggravating) chore. Hanging the toilet paper roll is my most insignificant.

My concern was to use “appropriate” language, to sound as if I belonged in a college classroom. But I felt separate from the language—as if it did not and could not belong to me. I couldn't think and feel genuinely in that language, couldn't make it express what I thought and felt about being a housewife. A part of me resented, among other things, being judged by such things as the appearance of my family's laundry and toilet bowl, but in that language I could only imagine and write about a conventional housewife.

For the most part, the remainder of the term was a period of adjustment, a time of trying to find my bearings as a student in a college composition class, to learn to shut out my black English whenever I composed, and to prevent it from creeping into my formulations; a time for trying to grasp the language of the classroom and reproduce it in my prose; for trying to talk about myself in that language, reach others through it. Each experience of writing was like standing naked and revealing my imperfection, my “otherness.” And each new assignment was another chance to make myself over in language, reshape myself, make myself “better” in my rapidly changing image of a student in a college composition class.

But writing became increasingly unmanageable as the term progressed, and by the end of the semester, my sentences sounded like this:

My excitement was soon dampened, however, by what seemed like a small voice in the back of my head saying that I should be careful with my long awaited opportunity. I felt frustrated and this seemed to make it difficult to concentrate.

There is a poverty of language in these sentences. By this point, I knew that the clichéd language of my Housewife essay was unacceptable, and I generally recognized trite expressions. At the same time, I hadn't yet mastered the language of the classroom, hadn't yet come to see it as belonging to me. Most notable is the lifelessness of the prose, the apparent absence of a person behind the words. I wanted those sentences—and the rest of the essay—to convey the anguish of yearning to, at once, become something more and yet remain the same. I had the sensation of being split in two, part of me going into a future the other part didn't believe possible. As that person, the student writer at that moment, I was essentially mute. I could not—in the process of composing—use the language of the old me, yet I couldn't imagine myself in the language of “others.”

I found this particularly discouraging because at midsemester I had been writing in a much different way. Note the language of this introduction to an essay I had written then, near the middle of the term:

Pain is a constant companion to the people in "Footwork." Their jobs are physically damaging. Employers are insensitive to their feelings and in many cases add to their problems. The general public wounds them further by treating them with disgrace because of what they do for a living. Although the workers are as diverse as they are similar, there is a definite link between them. They suffer a great deal of abuse.

The voice here is stronger, more confident, appropriating terms like "physically damaging," "wounds them further," "insensitive," "diverse"—terms I couldn't have imagined using when writing about my own experience—and shaping them into sentences like, "Although the workers are as diverse as they are similar, there is a definite link between them." And there is the sense of a personality behind the prose, someone who sympathizes with the workers: "The general public wounds them further by treating them with disgrace because of what they do for a living."

What caused these differences? I was, I believed, explaining other people's thoughts and feelings, and I was free to move about in the language of "others" so long as I was speaking of others. I was unaware that I was transforming into my best classroom language my own thoughts and feelings about people whose experiences and ways of speaking were in many ways similar to mine.

The following year, unable to turn back or to let go of what had become something of an obsession with language (and hoping to catch and hold the sense of control that had eluded me in Basic Writing), I enrolled in a research writing course. I spent most of the term learning how to prepare for and write a research paper. I chose sex education as my subject and spent hours in libraries, searching for information, reading, taking notes. Then (not without messiness and often-demoralizing frustration) I organized my information into categories, wrote a thesis statement, and composed my paper—a series of paraphrases and quotations spaced between carefully constructed transitions. The process and results felt artificial, but as I would later come to realize I was passing through a necessary stage. My sentences sounded like this:

This reserve becomes understandable with examination of who the abusers are. In an overwhelming number of cases, they are people the victims know and trust. Family members, relatives, neighbors and close family friends commit seventy-five percent of all reported sex crimes against children, and parents, parent substitutes and relatives are the offenders in thirty to eighty percent of all reported cases. While assault by strangers does occur, it is less common, and is usually a single episode. But abuse by family members, relatives and acquaintances may continue for an extended period of time. In cases of incest, for example, children are abused repeatedly for an average of eight years. In such cases, "the use of physical force is rarely necessary because of the child's trusting, dependent relationship with the offender. The child's cooperation is often facilitated by the adult's position of dominance, an offer of material goods, a threat of physical violence, or a misrepresentation of moral standards."

The completed paper gave me a sense of profound satisfaction, and I read it often after my professor returned it. I know now that what I was pleased with was the language I used and the professional voice it helped me maintain. "Use better words," my teacher had snapped at me one day after reading the notes I'd begun accumulating from my research, and slowly I began taking on the language of my sources. In the next set of notes, I used the word "vacillating"; my professor applauded. And by the time I composed the final draft, I felt at ease with terms like "overwhelming number of cases," "single episode," and "reserve," and I shaped them into sentences similar to those of my "expert" sources.

If I were writing the paper today, I would of course do some things differently. Rather than open with an anecdote—as my teacher suggested—I would begin simply with a quotation that caught my interest as I was researching my paper (and which I scribbled, without its source, in the margin of my notebook): "Truth does not do so much good in the world as the semblance of truth does evil." The quotation felt right because it captured what was for me the central idea of my essay—an idea that emerged gradually during the making of my paper—and expressed it in a way I would like to have said it. The anecdote, a hypothetical situation I invented to conform to the information in the paper, felt forced and insincere because it represented—to a great degree—my teacher's understanding of the essay, her idea of what in it was most significant. Improving upon my previous experiences with writing, I was beginning to think and feel in the language I used, to find my own voices in it, to sense that how one speaks influences how one means. But I was not yet secure enough, comfortable enough with the language to trust my intuition.

Now that I know that to seek knowledge, freedom, and autonomy means always to be in the concentrated process of becoming—always to be venturing into new territory, feeling one's way at first; then getting one's balance, negotiating, accommodating, discovering one's self in ways that previously defined "others"—I sometimes get tired. And I ask myself why I keep on participating in this highbrow form of violence, this slumming against perplexity. But there is no real futility in the question, no hint of that part of the old me who stood outside standard English, hugging to herself a disabling mistrust of a language she thought could not represent a person with her history and experience. Rather, the question represents a person who feels the consequence of her education, the weight of her possibilities as a teacher and writer and human being, a voice in society. And I would not change that person, would not give back the good burden that accompanies my growing expertise, my increasing power to shape myself in language and share that self with "others."

"To speak," says Frantz Fanon, "means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization."¹ To write means to do the same, but in a more profound sense. However, Fanon also says that to achieve mastery means to "get" in a position of power, to "grasp," to "assume." This, I have learned—both as a student and subsequently as a teacher—can involve tremendous emotional and psychological conflict for those attempting to master academic discourse. Although as a proficient student writer I had a fairly good grasp of ordinary spoken English and was proficient at what Labov calls "code-switching" (and what John Baugh in *Black Street Speech* terms "style shifting"), when I came face to face with the demands of academic

writing, I grew increasingly self-conscious, constantly aware of my status as a black and a speaker of one of the many black English vernaculars—a traditional outsider. For the first time, I experienced my sense of doubleness as something menacing, a built-in enemy. Whenever I turned inward for salvation, the balm so available during my childhood, I found instead this new fragmentation which spoke to me in many voices. It was the voice of my desire to prosper, but at the same time it spoke of what I had relinquished and could not regain: a safe way of being, a state of powerlessness which exempted me from responsibility for who I was and might be. And it accused me of betrayal, of turning away from blackness. To recover balance, I had to take on the language of the academy, the language of "others." And to do that, I had to learn to imagine myself a part of the culture of that language, and therefore someone free to manage that language, to take liberties with it. Writing and rewriting, practicing, experimenting, I came to comprehend more fully the generative power of language. I discovered—with the help of some especially sensitive teachers—that through writing one can continually bring new selves into being, each with new responsibilities and difficulties, but also with new possibilities. Remarkable power, indeed. I write and continually give birth to myself.

Notes

1. *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; rpt., New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 17, 18.

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. Think about times when you found it a strain to speak or write. What caused this difficulty? When do you feel most comfortable speaking or writing, and why?
2. What does it mean to "own" a language? What form of English or another language—a form of slang, for example—do you feel you own?
3. Think of prose you have read that you would call "lifeless." What made this writing lifeless?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Much of Melix's argument depends on definition: as the essay unfolds, she defines the differences between Black English and Standard English, indicating not only how their vocabulary and sentence structure differ, but also how the speakers and the occasions for each language differ. Given what Melix tells us, how would you define these two languages?
2. Melix uses direct quotation to illustrate the different uses of language she describes. Select three quotations and explain how each one illustrates the point Melix is making. Pay attention to specific word choices. What adjectives would you use to describe these words?
3. The account of Melix's growth as a writer, from her basic composition course to her discovery that she had the "power to shape [herself] in language and share that self with 'others,'" is a rhetorical technique called personal testimony. Trace the development of Melix's ability to write well. Does the personal testimony give her essay credibility? Why or why not?

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Caffeine Allen ("First They Changed My Name . . .," below), Richard Rodriguez ("Public and Private Language," p. 51), and Melix all find that leaving their childhood language is an essential step to gaining personal power and developing a public self. What kind of self does each writer develop, and what role does language play in this development?
2. Barbara Wallraff ("What Global Language?" p. 93) and Melix both indicate that bilingualism requires more than "a very basic ability to communicate" (Wallraff). How is Melix bilingual; that is, how does her use of two languages go beyond this basic ability? Why does Wallraff consider such an ability important to a global exchange of ideas?
3. Caffeine Allen ("First They Changed My Name . . .," p. 65), Amy Tan ("The Language of Discretion," p. 43), and Melix are all concerned with how the use of language characterizes people from their communities. Compare the reasons for and the nature of this concern. Why does it matter what others think of their communities?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Research the controversy over Ebonics; then consider how Melix might respond to this issue. Write a report, analyzing the different positions on this issue.
2. Write a brief autobiography of your development as a writer, focusing on two or three significant events in your growth. What obstacles did you encounter? What, if anything, helped you through them? When did you most like your writing, and when did you like it the least?

READING

CAFFIENE ALLEN For Caffiene Allen, the change, first of her name, later of her speech, marked her entrance into a world outside the Appalachia where she grew up. What is lost when a person leaves her familiar world and enters another culture? What is gained? How does Allen's attitude toward her mother change as the narration progresses?

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First They Changed My Name . . . (1994)

BY CAFFIENE ALLEN

Although I was born in 1951, I grew up speaking the English of an earlier century—a fact I was reminded of one Sunday afternoon at my mother's rest home. A nurse drew me aside and, blushing a little, said uncertainly, "Your mother says father has been 'prugging' again." Quickly, I put her mind at ease. How well I knew what prugging meant. It had

been the cause of all my spankings as a young child. Progging was the act of going through belongings that were not yours, digging into clothes drawers, purses, anything that contained intriguing items in its mysterious depths.

Though words like "progging" seemed strange to the nurse, the rest home was not more than 12 miles from Tumbling Creek, Tennessee, the town where I grew up. What we called "old" English was the only language that I knew until I was six years old, when I was dragged, wailing and sobbing, onto the school bus. In school, I soon discovered that the lack of communication links from Tumbling Creek to the outside world, as well as the clannish nature of the people who lived there, had allowed two separate cultures, divided by centuries, to exist within miles of each other. At the school, I heard such unfamiliar words as "church," "couch," "living room," "Christ," and "isn't." At home, we used "meetinghouse," "divanetic," "front room," "the Good Man," and "ain't." I had vague memories of some of those strange words being spoken occasionally, but whoever had used them had been immediately accused of trying to be like the "town-doggers" (town dwellers). That those were the terms my teachers wanted me to use was incomprehensible.

Perhaps my confusion helps to explain why I was surprisingly meek when my teachers took it upon themselves to change my name, thinking that I had misspelled it. They were probably not too far from the truth. Coming from English, Scottish, Irish, and German stock that never left the Tennessee hill area, I inherited a linguistic pattern that was mostly oral and did not include the "th" sound. My mother was most likely trying to give me the good Irish name of Kathleen, but pronounced the "th" with an "f" sound

and then spelled it phonetically for the nurse. All went well until I got to the first grade, where my teacher first decided that my name must be Caffie Lene but then settled on Kathleen. She told me I had to start writing it that way. My mother had no objection; whatever the God-Teacher said must be done—even if it meant changing my name.

In the second grade, my teacher told me that it was a law that everyone had to have a middle name, and that I should choose one for myself, so she could put it on my permanent record. I was delighted. Here was my chance to be Barbara Allen, the focus of an English ballad in which the heroine rejects "sweet William," supposedly causing his death. When they both eventually die of broken hearts, a rose grows from William's grave and a briar from Barbara Allen's. Why I wished to become the namesake of such a person is something that I have never wanted to examine too closely, but I was absolutely thrilled when my teacher wrote Kathleen Barbara Allen on my permanent record.

If I had known how much frustration would result from these changes, I would have been less thrilled. I soon discovered that Kathleen was one of the most common names in school, and that I was doomed to almost always have a number added after my name to distinguish me from the others with the same name. By the sixth grade I had developed a somewhat oversensitive approach to life, and began to notice that I was never Kathy #1 but always Kathy #2 or #3. I still had enough of my mother's awe for teachers that I was never able to express my displeasure to them.

I was given the chance to reclaim my name when, as a senior in high school, I was required to produce a birth certificate in order to graduate. By that time,

I had almost forgotten about Caffilene, so I was very surprised to see the name on my birth certificate. My teachers were even more surprised, since the ones who had changed my name were long gone. A new problem loomed: I was one name on the school records and another on my birth certificate—therefore, I couldn't graduate. It took several teachers and a great deal of trouble to convince the bureaucracy I should be allowed to graduate.

Changing my name had a profound effect on my sense of identity, but my teachers had an equally long-lasting impact on my relationship with my mother, who believed that if the teacher said it was right, it was so. Having only a third-grade education obtained in a one-room country schoolhouse, she had the same reverence for schoolteachers as she had for the mysterious government, which kept her and her five children alive by sending a monthly Social Security check after my father was killed in the copper mines when I was 16 months old. To her, the government and the teachers were the keepers of some noble and powerful system upon which our survival and well-being depended, and we would be nothing less than ungrateful fools if we questioned their sterling wisdom. My four older brothers and sisters seemed to catch on sooner than I did: if my mother ever found out that the teachers she revered had a low opinion of her way of speech and life, she would be deeply hurt. For her peace of mind, my siblings learned to behave and speak one way at school and another way at home, whereas I would bound home, armed with linguistic rules that created a lifelong conflict between my mother and me. My first demand was that she allow me to call her Mommy rather than Minny (actually, her name

was de Sara de Mina de Magdalene Pless Allen, but we couldn't get all of that out). "What for?" was her reply. None of her ancestors had ever done such a thing. "Because the teacher said I wasn't showing proper respect."

She became even more puzzled. "What does that mean?"

I had to admit that I didn't know. "But she said I was supposed to call you Mommy, and so I'm going to."

Well, the God-Teacher had said it, so it had to be.

She had an easier time with my second question. After I learned to read about Dick and Jane, I soon realized that everyone—even Jane—was sometimes referred to as "he." Having a strictly literal approach to life, I couldn't understand. When I asked my teachers why only the male pronoun was used, they laughed at me, so I took my question home to my mother. Readily, she replied with the only answer that a good Baptist could give, and one which she sincerely believed: "Because men are better than women." I soon learned to stop asking my mother questions.

By the fourth grade I had become increasingly ashamed of my mother and almost came to despise her for her manner and speech. One evening at the supper table when she was speaking improper English, chewing with her mouth open, and propping her elbows on the table, I found myself staring in open disgust. Suddenly, she stopped speaking in mid-sentence and glared at me, her face turning purple. By now, I was familiar enough with this scene to know what was going to happen next. Sure enough, I escaped from my seat just in time to miss being hit by the fork that she threw at my eyes. "Stop looking at me like I was a freak!" she screamed. Later, after the dishes were washed and

put away, I went into the kitchen to get a glass of water. Through the screen door, I saw my mother sitting on the back steps, watching the sun go down behind the Blue Ridge Mountains. Her shoulders were shaking with silent sobs. For the first time, I sensed the depth of her isolation and despair; I also got my first inkling that she was not the one who was in the wrong. An intelligent, beautiful woman raised in a fundamentalist culture that assured her that she was nothing simply because she was a woman, she now was confronted with the scorn, brought home to her by her daughter, of those whom she had once revered as her benevolent protectors. Now she was sure that she was truly worthless.

Even though that moment gave me some understanding of my mother, it did not give me enough to change my ways totally. I continued to try to convince her that she needed to speak and act more like the people in town. I didn't have much success by myself, but I eventually got help from a rather surprising source. My mother had adamantly refused to get a telephone or a car, which were becoming more and more common in Tumbling Creek by the mid-1960s, so it was an incredible surprise to me when, one day when I was in the seventh grade, she brought home a television. Never in my life, not before or since, have I felt such a sense of wonder as when the television was first turned on in our house and people showed up on the screen in my living room who were fun to watch and listen to. Suddenly, the mountains seemed a little less lonely and my mother a little less mean. By this time, I was pretty much considered an oddity by everyone who knew me. Since I always ate first, with the men rather than with the women, who had to wait until the men were fin-

ished before they could even sit down at the table, I became a third sex; people would say, "the men, the women, and Kathy." My love for books and writing seemed especially odd and somewhat slothlike to those working in the fields and the house morning, noon, and night in order to survive (which seemed to include everyone except me). And more than once, students in my class had been sent to the principal's office for calling me a nigger-lover. (No one in Tumbling Creek or Copperhill had ever met a person of color, but racism existed there, and my support of the civil rights movement increased my isolation.) But there, on the television, were people who gave me some inkling of another world out there where I might find others with ideas like mine. Peter, Paul, and Mary showed up singing "Blowing in the Wind" at a civil rights march. One afternoon, while my mother and I were watching *Who Do You Trust?*, newscasters interrupted to report a confrontation between Governor George Wallace and a black student trying to enter the University of Alabama. My spirits rose. Although at first they all seemed to be losing, at least there were people out there fighting for the same things that I thought were right.

I picked up "correct" pronunciation and grammar from TV, as well as an accent that gradually replaced my east Tennessee twang. My mother, on the other hand, changed the words to suit her own style of speech. Once, she told me that her favorite TV show was "Feenanzie." When I told her there was no such show, she retorted that there certainly was: "It's the one that has Hoss Cartwright and Little Joe and advertises Chevrolets."

Nevertheless, my mother did let television temper her cultural approach to

life. She stopped trying to compliment my friends by telling them they were "just as fat as a little pig." She learned to stop asking the kids I brought home if they wanted a "dope," which meant a soft drink in Tumbling Creek. Most important, through TV, she learned to understand me and the ways that I had already adopted, and so television made life a little easier for both of us.

Many years have gone by. I grew up and left Tumbling Creek, as my teachers and my mother always knew I would. But even now, thinking back on those times and conflicts, I find my emotions toward my mother and my teachers still bound up in the same love-hate web most of us reserve for our families only. In a way, my teachers were my family.

"They were the first to encourage my love for learning, to find scholarships for me, to bring me books to read during the long, lonely summer months, to encourage my writing, to express their belief that I could even make a living as a writer. But at the same time, they taught me to hate my culture, to despise people who had a different linguistic approach to life, even if one of those people was my mother. After many long years, I have managed finally to reconcile to some extent my world with my mother's. Regaining a sense of pride in my Appalachian heritage and an appreciation for who my mother was as a person was one of the hardest and most valuable tasks of my adult life.

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. If you have a nickname or have experienced a name or nickname change in your life, what parts of your life do the different names/nicknames represent? Do they reflect different aspects of your personality or of your culture?
2. Think of someone whom you regard or once regarded as a powerful, even intimidating, force in your life, as Allen's teachers are to her and to her mother. How do these people affect your behavior and ideas? What was it about this person that made you trust his/her authority?
3. Allen finds herself "an oddity" both at home and at school. Think of a time when you felt like an oddity. What caused this feeling, and how did you deal with it?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Allen's article is built on contrasts—e.g., between the languages she spoke at home and at school and between her behavior at home and that of her brothers and sisters. What other contrasts do you see? How do they help clarify the point of the article?
2. The article is full of telling details, bits of information that Allen doesn't comment on, but that reveal a great deal about the lives and attitudes of the people in her narration. Why, for example, does she tell us that her mother's nurse blushed when reporting her mother's comment about "propping"? How does the fact that Allen's father died when she was

sixteen months old affect your understanding of her mother? What does her sympathy with the civil rights movement tell us about how she has changed? Find three other details and explain what they add to your understanding of the people in this reading.

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Itabari Njeri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71), Richard Rodriguez ("Public and Private Language," p. 51), and Allen each experience name changes. What is the reason for the change of name in each case, and what is its significance for each writer?
2. Teachers are powerful people in Richard Rodriguez's ("Public and Private Language," p. 51), Lydia Minatoya's ("Transformation," p. 81), and Allen's worlds. Compare the way teachers influence each of these three writers as children.
3. Compare Louise Erdrich's ("The Names of Women," p. 76) attitude toward the women in her culture to Allen's attitude toward her mother. What do the women's lives have in common? What do Erdrich and Allen most respect about these women?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Technologies such as television, movies, and computers are sometimes praised and sometimes reviled for homogenizing cultures. Television brought the outside world into Allen's mother's life and made it easier for her to understand her daughter's thinking. Think of a technology that has the potential to allow people from different cultures to understand one another better. Then write an editorial for your campus newspaper in which you explain how this understanding might come about.
2. Itabari Njeri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71), Amy Tan ("The Language of Discretion," p. 43), and Allen imply that it is important for people to try to understand and sympathize with others rather than judge them prematurely. Consider a person or a group of people in your community whom you think are judged unfairly. Write a letter to this group and explain how others can better understand their differences.

READING

ITABARI NJERI When she changed her name from Jill Lord to Itabari Njeri, the writer of this article sought to "reclaim [her African] culture and synthesize it with [her] present reality." This act is both personal—an effort to clarify her identity as both African and American—and political—a desire to reconnect with the African culture her ancestors lost in slavery. "When I changed my name," she says, "I changed my life." Think about how closely your name is tied to your identity, both as an individual and as a member of an ethnic group. See if you can imagine a name change for yourself that would change your identity. As you read, also consider what objections people make to Njeri's African name and how she counters this criticism.

NJERI is a journalist, critic, and essayist; she is the author of *The Last Plantation* and *Every Goodbye Ain't Gone*, which won the American Book Award in 1990. This essay first appeared in the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, where Njeri worked as a staff writer.

What's in a Name? (1989) BY ITABARI NJERI

The decade was about to end when I started my first newspaper job. The seventies might have been the disco generation for some, but it was a continuation of the Black Power, post-civil rights era for me. Of course in some parts of America it was still the pre-civil rights era. And that was the part of America I wanted to explore. As a good reporter I needed a sense of the whole country, not just the provincial Northeast Corridor in which I was raised.

I head for Greenville ("Pearl of the Piedmont"), South Carolina.

"Where're," some people snarled, their nostrils twitching, their mouths twisted so their top lips went slightly to the right, the bottom ones way down and to the left, "did you get *that* name from?"

Itabidly, Itabeedly. Etabeere. Eat a berry. Mata Hari. Theda Bara. And one secretary in the office of the Greenville Urban League told her employer: "It's Ms. Idi Amin."

Then, and now, there are a whole bunch of people who greet me with: "Hi, Ita." They think "Ita" is my last name. Even when they don't, they still want to call me "Ita." When I tell them my first name is Itabari, they say, "Well, what do people call you for short?" "They don't call me anything for short," I say. "The name is Itabari."

Sophisticated white people, upon hearing my name, approach me as would a cultural anthropologist finding a piece of exotic right in his own living room. This happens a lot, still, at cocktail parties.

"Oh, what an unusual and beautiful name. Where are you from?"

"Brooklyn," I say. I can see the disappointment in their eyes. Just another home-grown Negro.

Then there are other white people who, having heard my decidedly northeastern accent, will simply say, "What a lovely name," and smile knowingly, indicating that they saw *Roots* and understand.

Then there are others, black and white, who for different reasons take me through this number:

"What's your *real* name?"

"Itabari Njeri is my real, legal name," I explain.

"Okay, what's your original name?" they ask, often with eyes rolling, exasperation in their voices.

After Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Ntozake Shange, and Kunta Kinte, who, I ask, should be exasperated by this question-and-answer game? Nevertheless, I explain, "Because of slavery, black people in the Western world don't usually know their original names. What you really want to know is what my slave name was."

Now this is where things get tense. Four hundred years of bitter history, culture, and politics between blacks and whites in America is evoked by this one term, "slave name." Some white people wince when they hear the phrase, pained and embarrassed by this reminder of their ancestors' inhumanity. Further, they quickly scrutinize me and conclude that mine was a post-Emancipation Proclamation birth. "You were never a slave."

I used to be reluctant to tell people my slave name unless I surmised that they wouldn't impose their cultural values on me and refuse to use my African name. I

don't care anymore. When I changed my name, I changed my life, and I've been Italian for more years now than I was ill. Nonetheless, people will say: "Well, that's your *real* name, you were born in America and that's what I am going to call you." My mother tried a variation of this on me when I legalized my traditional African name. I respectfully made it clear to her that I would not tolerate it. Her behavior, and subsequently her attitude, changed.

But many black folks remain just as skeptical of my name as my mother was.

"You're one of those black people who changed their name, huh," they are likely to begin. "Well, I still got the old slave master's Irish name," said one man named O'Hare at a party. This man's defensive tone was a reaction to what I call the "blacker than thou" syndrome perpetrated by many black nationalists in the sixties and seventies. Those who reclaimed their African names made blacks who didn't do the same thing feel like Uncle Toms.

These so-called Uncle Toms couldn't figure out why they should use an African name when they didn't know a thing about Africa. Besides, many of them were proud of their names, no matter how they had come by them. And it should be noted that after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, four million black people changed their names, adopting surnames such as Freeman, Freedman, and Liberty. They eagerly gave up names that slave masters had imposed upon them as a way of identifying their human chattel.

Besides names that indicated their newly won freedom, blacks chose common English names such as Jones, Scott, and Johnson. English was their language. America was their home, and they wanted names that would allow them to assimilate as easily as possible.

Of course, many of our European surnames belong to us by birthright. We are the legal as well as "illegitimate" heirs to the names Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, et al., and in my own family, Lord.

Still, I consider most of these names to be by-products of slavery, if not actual slave names. Had we not been enslaved, we would not have been cut off from our culture, lost our indigenous languages, and been compelled to use European names.

The loss of our African culture is a tragic fact of history, and the conflict it poses is a profound one that has divided blacks many times since Emancipation: do we accept the loss and assimilate totally or do we try to reclaim our culture and synthesize it with our present reality?

A new generation of black people in America is reexamining the issues raised by the cultural nationalists and Pan-Africanists of the sixties and seventies: what are the cultural images that appropriately convey the "new" black aesthetic in literature and art?

The young Afro-American novelist Trey Ellis has asserted that the "New Black Aesthetic shamelessly borrows and reassembles across both race and class lines." It is not afraid to embrace the full implications of our hundreds of years in the New World. We are a new people who need not be tied to externally imposed or self-indicted cultural parochialism. Had I understood that as a teenager, I might still be singing today.

Even the fundamental issue of identity and nomenclature, raised by Baraka and others twenty years ago, is back on the agenda: are we to call ourselves blacks or African-Americans?

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In reality, it's an old debate. "Only with the founding of the American Colonization Society in 1816 did blacks recoil from using the term African in referring to themselves and their institutions," the noted historian and author Sterling Stuckey pointed out in an interview with me. They feared that using the term "African" would fuel white efforts to send them back to Africa. But they felt no white person had the right to send them back when they had slaved to build America.

Many black institutions retained their African identification, most notably the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Changes in black self-identification in America have come in cycles, usually reflecting the larger dynamics of domestic and international politics.

The period after World War II, said Stuckey, "culminating in the Cold War years of Roy Wilkins's leadership of the NAACP," was a time of "frenzied integrationism." And there was "no respectable black leader on the scene evincing any sort of interest in Africa—neither the NAACP or the Urban League."

This, he said, "was an example of historical discontinuity, the likes of which we, as a people, had not seen before." Prior to that, for more than a century and a half, black leaders were Pan-Africanists, including Frederick Douglass. "He recognized," said Stuckey, "that Africa was important and that somehow one had to redeem the motherland in order to be genuinely respected in the New World."

The Reverend Jesse Jackson has, of course, placed on the national agenda the importance of blacks in America restoring their cultural, historical, and political links with Africa.

But what does it really mean to be called an African-American?

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"Black" can be viewed as a more encompassing term, referring to all people of African descent. "Afro-American" and "African-American" refer to a specific ethnic group. I use the terms interchangeably, depending on the context and the point I want to emphasize.

But I wonder: as the twenty-first century breathes down our necks—prodding us to wake up to the expanding mélange of ethnic groups immigrating in record numbers to the United States, inevitably intermarrying, and to realize the eventual reshaping of the nation's political imperatives in a newly multicultural society—will the term "African-American" be as much of a racial and cultural obfuscation as the term "black"? In other words, will we be the only people, in a society moving toward cultural pluralism, viewed to have no history and no culture? Will we just be a color with a new name: African-American?

Or will the term be—as I think it should—an ethnic label describing people with a shared culture who descended from Africans, were transformed in (as well as transformed) America, and are genetically intertwined with myriad other groups in the United States?

Such a definition reflects the historical reality and distances us from the fallacious, unscientific concept of separate races when there is only one: *Homo sapiens*.

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But to comprehend what should be an obvious definition requires knowledge and a willingness to accept history.

When James Baldwin wrote *Nobody Knows My Name*, the title was a metaphor—at the deepest level of the collective African-American psyche—for the blighting of black history and culture before the nadir of slavery and since.

The eradication or distortion of our place in world history and culture is most obvious in the popular media. Liz Taylor—and, for an earlier generation, Claudette Colbert—still represent what Cleopatra—a woman of color in a multiethnic society, dominated at various times by blacks—looks like.

And in American homes, thanks to reruns and cable, a new generation of black kids grow up believing that a simpleton shouting “Dy-no-mite!” is a genuine reflection of Afro-American culture, rather than a white Hollywood writer’s stereotype.

More recently, *Coming to America*, starring Eddie Murphy as an African prince seeking a bride in the United States, depicted traditional African dancers in what amounted to a Las Vegas stage show, totally distorting the nature and beauty of real African dance. But with every burlesque-style pelvic thrust on the screen, I saw blacks in the audience burst into applause. They think that’s African culture, too.

And what do Africans know of us, since blacks don’t control the organs of communication that disseminate information about us?

“No!” screamed the mother of a Kenyan man when he announced his engagement to an African-American woman who was a friend of mine. The mother said marry a European, marry a white American. But please, not one of those low-down, ignorant, drug-dealing, murderous black people she had seen in American movies. Ultimately, the mother prevailed.

In Tanzania, the travel agent looked at me indignantly. “Njeri, that’s Kikuyu. What are you doing with an African name?” he demanded.

I’d been in Dar es Salaam about a month and had learned that Africans assess in a glance the ethnic origins of the people they meet.

Without a greeting, strangers on the street in Tanzania’s capital would comment, “Oh, you’re an Afro-American or West Indian.”

“Both.”

“I knew it,” they’d respond, sometimes politely, sometimes not.

Or, people I got to know while in Africa would mention, “I know another half-caste like you.” Then they would call in the “mixed-race” person and say, “Please meet Itabari Njeri.” The darker-complexioned African, presumably of unmixed ancestry, would then smile and stare at us like we were animals in the zoo.

Of course, this “half-caste” (which I suppose is a term preferable to “mulatto,” which I hate, and which every person who understands its derogatory meaning—“mule”—should never use) was usually the product of a mixed marriage, not generations of ethnic intermingling. And it was clear from most “half-castes” I met that they did not like being compared to so mongrelized and stigmatized a group as Afro-Americans.

I had minored in African studies in college, worked for years with Africans in the United States, and had no romantic illusions as to how I would be received in the motherland. I wasn’t going back to find my roots. The only thing that shocked me in Tanzania was being called, with great disdain, a “white woman” by an African waiter. Even if the rest of the world didn’t follow the practice, I then assumed everyone understood that any known or perceptible degree of African ancestry made one “black” in America by law and social custom.

But I was pleasantly surprised by the telephone call I received two minutes after I walked into my Dar es Salaam hotel room. It was the hotel operator. “Sister, welcome to Tanzania. . . . Please tell everyone in Harlem hello for us.” The year was 1978, and

people in Tanzania were wearing half-foot-high platform shoes and dancing to James Brown wherever I went.

Shortly before I left, I stood on a hill surrounded by a field of endless flowers in Arusha, near the border of Tanzania and Kenya. A toothless woman with a wide smile, a staff in her hand, and two young girls at her side, came toward me on a winding path. I spoke to her in fractured Swahili and she to me in broken English.

“I know you,” she said smiling. “Wa-Negro.” “Wa” is a prefix in Bantu languages meaning people. “You are from the lost tribe,” she told me. “Welcome,” she said, touching me, then walked down a hill that lay in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro.

I never told her my name, but when I told other Africans, they’d say: “Eminni, Italiari. Too long. How about I just call you Ita.”

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. To what extent do you see your name as connected to your ancestry? What assumptions do you think people make about you when they first hear your name? Think about the first time you heard a name that was unusual—what impression of the person did that name give you?
2. Why is Njeri pleased when the hotel operator in Dar es Salaam says, “Sister, welcome to Tanzania. . . . Please tell everyone in Harlem hello for us”?
3. What do Africans perceive Njeri’s cultural identity to be? What do Americans consider it to be? How does Njeri define her cultural identity?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. One of Njeri’s rhetorical strategies is to quote or paraphrase respected authorities on African American culture: Trey Ellis, Sterling Stuckey, and James Baldwin. What do these sections of her article contribute to her argument? Do you find that they make her writing more convincing?
2. Much of Njeri’s writing depends on the reader’s recognition of allusions to a wide range of figures from popular culture, literature, and politics: Mata Hari, Theda Bara, Idi Amin, Uncle Tom, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Ntozake Shange, Kunta Kinte, Eddie Murphy, and James Brown, among others. How does recognizing the allusion enrich your understanding of Njeri’s argument? What is the effect of mentioning these figures, as Njeri does, without providing a lot of information about them?
3. Before telling us why she changed her name, Njeri gives multiple illustrations of people reacting unsympathetically to her new name. What is the effect of her beginning the essay with several opposing viewpoints?

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Lydia Minatoya’s (“Transformation,” p. 81) parents are as concerned with choosing the right name for their children as Njeri is in choosing one for herself. In what ways are their motivations alike or different? How do their different historical circumstances explain the similarities or differences you see?

2. Both Louise Erdrich ("The Names of Women," p. 76) and Njeri believe that a person's name and identity are the same thing. Do you agree? What was lost when Njeri's slave ancestors were stripped of their African names? What was lost when Erdrich's ancestors were renamed after Catholic saints?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Njeri argues that the term "African-American" more accurately describes people of African descent who share a common culture than does the word "black." Consider a racial, ethnic, cultural, or other label for a group you belong to. Write a letter to others in the group, and explain why the label does or does not accurately describe the group and, if not, include suggestions for a better label.
2. Njeri believes that popular media such as movies offer distorted images of African Americans. View a movie or TV show or listen to music that presents an image of a group you know well. Then write a review, assessing the accuracy of this portrayal.

READING

LOUISE ERDRICH Louise Erdrich argues that the names of the Anishinabe, a Native American culture that is largely gone today, "tell stories" about the people whose names these were. What are some of these stories, and what do they tell us about the Anishinabe women? How do these stories represent the Anishinabe people as a whole? Why is it important for Erdrich to tell us these stories?

ERDRICH belongs to the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Native Americans. A poet, a short story writer, and a novelist, she is best known for her novel *Love Medicine*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1984.

The Names of Women (1995) BY LOUISE ERDRICH

I *kwe* is the word for woman in the language of the Anishinabe, my mother's people, whose descendants, mixed with and married to French trappers and farmers, are the Michifis of the Turtle Mountain reservation in North Dakota. Every Anishinabe *kwe*, every mixed-blood descendant like me, who can trace her way back a generation or two, is the daughter of a mystery. The history of the woodland Anishinabe—decimated by disease, fighting Plains Indian tribes to the west and squeezed by European settlers to the east—is much like most other Native American stories, a confusion of losses, a tale of absences, of a culture that was blown apart and changed so radically in such a short time that only the names survive.

And yet, those names.

The names of the first women whose existence is recorded on the rolls of the Turtle Mountain Reservation, in 1892, reveal as much as we can ever recapture of their personalities, complex natures, and relationships. These names tell stories, or half stories, if only we listen closely.

There once were women named *Standing Strong*, *Fish Bones*, *Different Thunder*. There once was a girl called *Yellow Straps*. Imagine what it was like to pick berries with *Sky Coming Down*, to walk through a storm with *Lightning Proof*. Surely, she was struck and lived, but what about the person next to her? People always avoided *Steps Over Truth*, when they wanted a straight answer, and *I Hour*, when they wanted to keep a secret. *Glittering* put coal on her face and watched for enemies at night. The woman named *Standing Across* could see things moving far across the lake. The old ladies gossiped about *Playing Around*, but no one dared say anything to her face. *Ice* was good at gambling. *Shining One Side* loved to sit and talk to *Opposite the Sky*. They both knew *Sounding Feather*, *Exhausted Wind*, and *Green Cloud*, daughter of *Seeing Iron*. *Center of the Sky* was a widow. *Rabbit*, *Prairie Chicken*, and *Daylight* were all little girls. *She Tramp* could make great distance in a day of walking. *Cross Lightning* had a powerful smile. When *Setting Wind* and *Gentle Woman* *Standing* sang together the whole tribe listened. *Stop the Day* got her name when at her about the afternoon went still. *Log* was strong. *Cloud Touching Bottom* weak and consumptive. *Mirage married Wind*. Everyone loved *Musical Cloud*, but children hid from *Dressed in Stone*. *Lying Down Grass* had such a gentle voice and touch, but no one dared to cross *She Black of Heart*.

We can imagine something of these women from their names. Anishinabe historian Basil Johnston notes that "such was the mystique and force of a name that it was considered presumptuous and unbecoming, even vain, for a person to utter his own name. It was the custom for a third person, if present, to utter the name of the person to be identified. Seldom, if ever, did either husband or wife speak the name of the other in public."

Shortly after the first tribal roll, the practice of renaming became an ecclesiastical exercise, and, as a result, most women in the next two generations bear the names of saints particularly beloved by the French. *She Knows the Bear* became Marie. *Sloping Cloud* was christened Jeanne. *Taking Care of the Day* and *Yellow Day Woman* turned into Catherine. Identities are altogether lost. The daughters of my own ancestors, *Kwayzancheewin—Acts Like a Boy* and *Striped Earth Woman*—go unrecorded, and no hint or reflection of their individual natures comes to light through the scattered records of those times, although they must have been genetically tough in order to survive: there were epidemics of typhoid, flu, measles, and other diseases that winnowed the tribe each winter. They had to have grown up sensible, hard-working, undeviating in their attention to their tasks. They had to have been lucky. And if very lucky, they acquired carts.

It is no small thing that both of my great-grandmothers were known as women with carts.

The first was Elise Eliza McCloud, the great-granddaughter of *Striped Earth Woman*. The buggy she owned was somewhat grander than a cart. In her photograph, Elise Eliza gazes straight ahead, intent, elevated in her pride. Perhaps she and her daughter Justine, both wearing reshaped felt fedoras, were on their way to the train that would take them from Rugby, North Dakota, to Grand Forks, and back again. Back and forth across the upper tier of the plains, they peddled their hand-worked tourist items—dangling moccasin brooches and little beaded hats, or, in the summer, the wild berries, plums, and nuts that they had gathered from the wooded hills. Of Elise Eliza's

industry there remains in the family only an intricately beaded pair of buffalo horns and a piece of real furniture, a "highboy," an object once regarded with some awe, a prize she won for selling the most merchandise from a manufacturer's catalogue.

The owner of the other cart, Virginia Grandbois, died when I was nine years old: she was a fearsome and fascinating presence, an old woman seated like an icon behind the door of my grandparents' house. Forty years before I was born, she was photographed on her way to fetch drinking water at the reservation well. In the picture she is seated high, the reins in her fingers connected to a couple of shaggy fetlock-draft ponies. The barrel she will fill stands behind her. She wears a man's sweater and an expression of vast self-pleasure. She might have been saying *Kaygoh*, a warning, to calm the horses. She might have been speaking to whomever it was who held the camera, still a novel luxury.

Virginia Grandbois was known to smell of flowers. In spite of the potato picking, water hauling, field and housework, she found the time and will to dust her face with pale powder, in order to look more French. She was the great-great-granddaughter of the daughter of the principal leader of the *A-wan-s-e*, the Bullhead clan, a woman whose real name was never recorded but who, on marrying a Frenchman, was "recreated" as Madame Cadotte. It was Madame Cadotte who acted as a liaison between her Ojibway relatives and her husband so that, even when French influence waned in the region, Jean-Baptiste Cadotte stayed on as the only trader of importance, the last governor of the fort at Sault St. Marie.

By the time I knew Virginia Grandbois, however, her mind had darkened, and her body deepened, shrunk to bones and leather. She did not live in the present or in any known time at all. Periodically, she would awaken from dim and unknown dreams to find herself seated behind the door in her daughter's house. She then cried out for her cart and her horses. When they did not materialize, Virginia Grandbois rose with great energy and purpose. Then she walked towards her house, taking the straightest line.

That house, long sold and gone, lay over one hundred miles due east and still Virginia Grandbois charged ahead, no matter what lay in her path—fences, sloughs, woods, the yards of other families. She wanted home, to get home, to be home. She wanted her own place back, the place she had made, not her daughter's, not anyone else's. Hers. There was no substitute, no kindness, no reality that would change her mind. She had to be tied to the chair, and the chair to the wall, and still there was no reasoning with Virginia Grandbois. Her entire life, her hard-won personality, boiled down in the end to one stubborn, fixed, desperate idea.

I started with the same idea—this urge to get home, even if I must walk straight across the world. Only, for me, the urge to walk is the urge to write. Like my great-grandmother's house, there is no home for me to get to. A mixed-blood, raised in the Sugarbeet Capital, educated on the Eastern seaboard, married in a tiny New England village, living now on a ridge directly across from the Swan Range in the Rocky Mountains, my home is a collection of homes, of wells in which the quiet of experience shales away into sweet bedrock.

Elise Eliza pieced the quilt my mother slept under, a patchwork of shirts, pants, other worn-out scraps, bordered with small rinsed and pressed Bull Durham sacks. As

if in another time and place, although it is only the dim barrel of a four-year-old's memory, I see myself lying wrapped under smoky quilts and dank green army blankets in the house in which my mother was born. In the fragrance of tobacco, some smoked in home-rolled cigarettes, some offered to the Manitous whose presence still was honored, I dream myself home. Beneath the rafters, shadowed with bunches of plants and torn calendars, in the nest of a sagging bed, I listen to mice rustle and the scratch of an owl's claws as it paces the shingles.

Elise Eliza's daughter-in-law, my grandmother Mary Lefavor, kept that house of hand-bewed and stacked beams, muddled between. She managed to shore it up and keep it standing by stuffing every new crack with disposable diapers. Having used and reused cloth to diaper her own children, my grandmother washed and hung to dry the paper and plastic diapers that her granddaughters bought for her great-grandchildren. When their plastic-paper shredded, she gathered them carefully together and one day, on a summer visit, I woke early to find her tamping the rolled stuff carefully into the cracked walls of that old house.

It is autumn in the Plains, and in the little sloughs ducks land, and mudhens, whose flesh always tastes greasy and charred. Snow is coming soon, and after its first fall there will be a short, false warmth that brings out the sweet-sour odor of highbush cranberries. As a descendant of the women who skinned buffalo and tanned and smoked the hides, of women who pounded berries with the dried meat to make winter food, who made tea from willow bark and rosehips, who gathered snakeroot, I am affected by the change of seasons. Here is a time when plants consolidate their tonic and drop seed, when animals store energy and grow thick fur. As for me, I start keeping longer hours, writing more, working harder, though I am obviously not a creature of a traditional Anishinabe culture. I was not raised speaking the old language, or adhering to the cycle of religious ceremonies that govern the Anishinabe spiritual relationship to the land and the moral order within human configurations. As the wedding of many backgrounds I am free to do what simply feels right.

My mother knits, sews, cans, dries food and preserves it. She knows how to gather tea, berries, snare rabbits, milk cows, and churn butter. She can grow squash and melons from seeds she gathered the fall before. She is, as were the women who came before me, a repository of all of the homey virtues, and I am the first in a long line who has not saved the autumn's harvest in birch bark *mukuks* and skin bags and in a cellar dry and cold with dust. I am the first who scratches the ground for pleasure, not survival, and grows flowers instead of potatoes. I record rather than practice the arts that filled the hands and days of my mother and her mother, and all the mothers going back into the shadows, when women wore names that told us who they were.

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. What does Erdich mean when she states that every descendant of an Anishinabe is "the daughter of a mystery"? Do you have ancestors whom you regard as a "mystery"?
2. What is the significance of being a woman with a cart? What possession or attribute has similar significance for you?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Erdrich's article is full of descriptions of women: her great-grandmothers Elise Eliza McCloud and Virginia Grandbois, and—more briefly—the women named in the fourth paragraph. What personality characteristics do these descriptions reveal? How does Erdrich's characterization of these women support her contention that the Anishinabe had a rich, powerful culture?
2. Although Erdrich quotes an Anishinabe historian, most of her article gives the impression of recollection, as if she were repeating stories handed down through the memories of generations of family members. Explain why you do or do not find this strategy convincing.

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Like Itabari Njeri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71), Erdrich has "an urge to get home," to learn about her ancestral culture. How does Njeri satisfy this need? How does Erdrich? How do words and writing figure into this quest?
2. Both Haunani-Kay Trask ("From a Native Daughter," p. 85) and Erdrich view themselves as native daughters in a land colonized by Europeans. What does each writer see as the consequence for her people of this colonization? In what ways does each writer assert the value of her native culture?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Erdrich describes how she differs from her ancestors:
I am the first in a long line who has not saved the autumn's harvest in birch bark *makuks*.
I am the first who scratches the ground for pleasure, not survival, and grows flowers instead of potatoes. I record rather than practice the arts that filled the hands and days of my mother . . . and all the mothers going back into the shadows.
Research a specific element of the lives of your ancestors and their contemporaries, such as how they prepared food, their means of transportation, or how they communicated with others. Your research could draw on history books, the Internet, and conversations with family members. Write a magazine article defining how this element of your life and identity differ from those of your grandparents or earlier generations of your family.
2. Research the names of a member of a Native American culture, possibly one that lived or lives in your area. How do the names characterize the people who hold (or held) them? Write a news article reporting on your findings.

READING

LYDIA MINATOYA In narrating events from her childhood and family history, Japanese American Lydia Minatoya shows the struggle and the price of trying to assimilate into a white, race-conscious culture. Infusing this experience is a historical event: the forced relocation of 120,000 Japanese Americans, including Minatoya's parents, into internment camps during World War II. Responding to racial panic after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government required Japanese Americans to move to detention centers, where they lived in barracks behind barbed wire, guarded by armed troops. Most of those interned lost their homes, farms, businesses, and

jobs. As you read, think about how this event, which occurred before Lydia's birth in 1950 in Albany, New York, influences her behavior and that of her family and teachers. Why is it important for the Minatoyas to fit in? What is the American Dream, and what lessons does Lydia draw from her efforts to fulfill it?

MINATOYA's essay first appeared in *Talking to High Monks in the Snow*, a memoir. She is also the author of the novel *The Strangeness of Beauty*.

Transformation (1992) BY LYDIA MINATOYA

Perhaps it begins with my naming. During her pregnancy, my mother was reading Dr. Spock. "Children need to belong," he cautioned. "An unusual name can make them the subject of ridicule." My father frowned when he heard this. He stole a worried glance at my sister. Burdened by her Japanese name, Misa played unsuspiciously on the kitchen floor.

The Japanese know full well the dangers of conspicuousness. "The nail that sticks out gets pounded down," cautions an old maxim. In America, Relocation was all the proof they needed.

And so it was, with great earnestness, my parents searched for a conventional name. They wanted me to have the full true promise of America.

"I will ask my colleague Froilan," said my father. "He is the smartest man I know." "And he has poetic soul," said my mother, who cared about such things.

In due course, Father consulted Froilan. He gave Froilan his conditions for suitability. "First, if possible, the full name should be alliterative," said my father. "Like Misa Minatoya." He closed his eyes and sang my sister's name. "Second, if not an alliteration, at least the name should have assonantal rhyme."

"Like Misa Minatoya?" said Froilan with a teasing grin.

"Exactly," my father intoned. He gave an emphatic nod. "Finally, most importantly, the name must be readily recognizable as conventional." He peered at Froilan with hope. "Do you have any suggestions or ideas?"

Froilan, whose own American child was named Ricardito, thought a while.

"We already have selected the name for a boy," offered my father. "Eugene."

"Eugene?" wondered Froilan. "But it meets none of your conditions!"

"Eugene is a special case," said my father, "after Eugene, Oregon, and Eugene O'Neill. The beauty of the Pacific Northwest, the power of a great writer."

"I see," said Froilan, who did not but who realized that this naming business would be more complex than he had anticipated. "How about Maria?"

"Too common," said my father. "We want a *conventional* name, not a common one."

"Hmmm," said Froilan, wondering what the distinction was. He thought some more and then brightened. "Lydia!" he declared. He rhymed the name with media. "Lydia for *la bonita infantil*!"

And so I received my uncommon conventional name. It really did not provide the camouflage my parents had anticipated. I remained unalterably alien. For Dr. Spock

had been addressing *American* families, and in those days, everyone knew all real American families were white.

Call it denial, but many Japanese Americans never quite understood that the promise of America was not truly meant for them. They lived in horse stalls at the Santa Anita racetrack and said the Pledge of Allegiance daily. They rode to Relocation Camps under armed guard, labeled with numbered tags, and sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." They lived in deserts or swamps, ludicrously imprisoned—where would they run if they ever escaped—and formed garden clubs, and yearbook staffs, and citizen town meetings. They even elected beauty queens.

My mother practiced her *okoto* and was featured in a recital. She taught classes in fashion design and her students mounted a show. Into exile she had carried an *okoto* and a sewing machine. They were her past and her future. She believed in Art and Technology.

My mother's camp was the third most populous city in the entire state of Wyoming. Across the barren lands, behind barbed wire, bloomed these little oases of democracy. The older generation bore the humiliation with pride. "*Kodomo no tame ni*," they said. For the sake of the children. They thought that if their dignity was great, then their children would be spared. Call it valor. Call it bathos. Perhaps it was closer to slapstick: a sweet and bitter lunacy.

Call it adaptive behavior. Coming from a land swept by savage typhoons, ravaged by earthquakes and volcanoes, the Japanese have evolved a view of the world: a cooperative, stoic, almost magical way of thinking. Get along, work hard, and never quite see the things that can bring you pain. Against the tyranny of nature, of feudal lords, of wartime hysteria, the charm works equally well.

And so my parents gave me an American name and hoped that I could pass. They nourished me with the American dream: Opportunity, Will, Transformation.

When I was four and my sister was eight, Misa regularly used me as a comic foil. She would bring her playmates home from school and query me as I sat amidst the milk bottles on the front steps.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" she would say. She would nudge her audience into attentiveness.

"A mother kitty cat?" I would enthuse. Our cat had just delivered her first litter of kittens and I was enchanted by the rasping tongue and soft mewings of motherhood.

"And what makes you think you can become a cat?" Misa would prompt, gesturing to her howling friends—wait for this; it gets better yet.

"This is America," I stoutly would declare. "I can grow up to be anything I want!" My faith was unshakable. I believed. Opportunity. Will. Transformation.

When we lived in Albany, I always was the teachers' pet. "So tiny, so precocious, so prettily dressed!" They thought I was a living doll and this was fine with me.

My father knew that the effusive praise would die. He had been through this with my sister. After five years of being a perfect darling, Misa had reached the age where students were tracked by ability. Then, the anger started. Misa had tested into the advanced track. It was impossible, the community declared. Misa was forbidden entry into advanced classes as long as there were white children being placed below her. In her defense, before an angry rabble, my father made a presentation to the Board of Education.

But I was too young to know of this. I knew only that my teachers praised and petted me. They took me to other classes as an example. "Watch now, as Lydia demonstrates attentive behavior," they would croon as I was led to an empty desk at the head of the class. I had a routine. I would sit carefully, spreading my petticoated skirt neatly beneath me. I would pull my chair close to the desk, crossing my swinging legs at my snowy white ankles. I would fold my hands carefully on the desk before me and stare pensively at the blackboard.

This routine won me few friends. The sixth-grade boys threw rocks at me. They danced around me in a tight circle, palling at the corners of their eyes. "Ching Chong Chinaman," they chanted. But teachers loved me. When I was in first grade, a third-grade teacher went weeping to the principal. She begged to have me skipped. She was leaving to get married and wanted her turn with the dolly.

When we moved, the greatest shock was the knowledge that I had lost my charm. From the first, my teacher failed to notice me. But to me, it did not matter. I was in love. I watched her moods, her needs, her small vanities. I was determined to ingratiate.

Miss Hempstead was a shimmering vision with a small upturned nose and eyes that were kewpie doll blue. Slender as a sylph, she tripped around the classroom, all saucy in her high-heeled shoes. Whenever I looked at Miss Hempstead, I pitied the Albany teachers whom, formerly, I had adored. Poor old Miss Rosenberg. With a shiver of distaste, I recalled her loose fleshy arms, her mottled hands, the scent of lavender as she crushed me to her heavy breasts.

Miss Hempstead had a pet of her own. Her name was Linda Sherlock. I watched Linda closely and plotted Miss Hempstead's courtship. The key was the piano. Miss Hempstead played the piano. She fancied herself a musical star. She sang songs from Broadway revues and shaped her students' reactions. "Getting to know you," she would sing. We would smile at her in a staged manner and position ourselves obediently at her feet.

Miss Hempstead was famous for her ability to soothe. Each day at rest time, she played the piano and sang soporific songs. Linda Sherlock was the only child who succumbed. Routinely, Linda's head would bend and nod until she crumpled gracefully into her folded arms. A tousled strand of blond hair would fall across her forehead. Miss Hempstead would end her song, would gently lower the keyboard cover. She would turn toward the restive eyes of the class. "Isn't she sweetness itself?" Miss Hempstead would declare. It made me want to vomit.

I was growing weary. My studiousness, my attentiveness, my fastidious grooming and pert poise: all were failing me. I changed my tactics. I became a problem. Miss Hempstead sent me home with nasty notes in sealed envelopes: Lydia is a slow child, a noisy child, her presence is disruptive. My mother looked at me with surprise. "*Nani desu ka?* Are you having problems with your teacher?" But I was tenacious. I pushed harder and harder, firmly caught in the obsessive need of the scorned.

One day I snapped. As Miss Hempstead began to sing her wretched lullabies, my head dropped to the desk with a powerful CRACK! It lolled there, briefly, then rolled toward the edge with a momentum that sent my entire body catapulting to the floor. Miss Hempstead's spine stretched slightly, like a cat that senses danger. Otherwise, she paid no heed. The linoleum floor was smooth and cool. It emitted a faint pleasant odor: a mixture of chalk dust and wax.

I began to snore heavily. The class sat electrified. There would be no drowsing today. The music went on and on. Finally, one boy could not stand it. "Miss Hempstead," he probed plaintively, "Lydia has fallen asleep on the floor!" Miss Hempstead did not turn. Her playing grew slightly strident but she did not falter.

I lay on the floor through rest time. I lay on the floor through math drill. I lay on the floor while my classmates scraped around me, pushing their sturdy little wooden desks into the configuration for reading circle. It was not until penmanship practice that I finally stretched and stirred. I rose like Sleeping Beauty and slipped back to my seat. I smiled enigmatically. A spell had been broken. I never again had a crush on a teacher.

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. Think about a situation in which you worried about not fitting in. What were the consequences of being an outsider? What, if anything, did you do to feel part of the group?
2. Naming is an important part of identity. Consider the implications of your name—why your parents chose it and what it implies about you.
3. In what ways are your values and attitudes like or different from your parents'? If you have undergone a transformation like Lydia's, what caused it, and how did it change your thinking?
4. What is the "Japanese way of thinking" that Minatoya refers to? Identify a way of thinking that is common to people of your family's ancestry, and explain, if you can, how it came about. How does this way of thinking affect you?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Minatoya's argument relies heavily on situational irony. That is, it reports on actions that the reader and writer know will not work out as the person performing them intends. For example, Minatoya describes her father's hope that his daughter's English first name will ensure that she fit in—while at the same time making clear (in her references to Japanese internment camps) that a change of name will neither disguise Lydia's Japanese heritage nor protect her from racism. What other instances of irony do you see in this reading? How, for example, might Minatoya's description of the Japanese response to internment, her father's reliance on Froilan, her mother's faith in "Art and Technology," and her own eagerness to be a teacher's "dolly" be considered ironic?
2. The reading works by recounting several brief stories—among them, how Lydia got her name, how Japanese Americans adapted to internment, and how four-year-old Lydia entertained her sister's friends. What other stories does the reading tell, what ideas tie them together, and what is the effect of the accumulation of these independent tales?
3. Much of the power of this story comes from the author's use of telling detail—the "snowy white anklets" that seem to encapsulate Lydia as a goody-goody; Lydia's father's presentation "before an angry rabble," a courageous act that defines his own transformation. Find a passage that is especially concrete, and explain how the individual details enhance the point of that passage.

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Lydia's parents had culturally based ideas about naming children. How would Amy Tan ("The Language of Discretion," p. 43) explain their criteria for choosing the perfect name?
2. Compare Lydia's father's reasons for choosing his daughter's name with the reasons Tabari Nieri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71) gives for changing her name, and the reasons Caffiene Allen's ("First They Changed My Name . . ." p. 65) teacher gives for changing Allen's name. What values motivate each of these decisions?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Find a news article about someone who has suffered from "the dangers of conspicuousness"—someone who was victimized because, for whatever reason, he or she stuck out as an outsider. Write an editorial in response to this story.
2. Research the history of the Japanese American internment. Then create a poster or Web page that uses both language and graphics to describe a part of this experience.

READING

HAUNANI-KAY TRASK Trask argues that European and American historians have failed to understand Hawaiian culture because they did not know the Hawaiian language. She particularly critiques their misrepresentation of ancient Hawai'i as a feudal system. A feudal system, a hierarchical social structure in which a king owned the land and his serfs worked it for him, was not possible in Hawai'i, which had a tradition of shared land use. Had the historians understood how the Hawaiian language denotes possession, and paid attention to the stories native Hawaiians told about the land, they would have understood that the land did not belong to one person, but to everyone. Why do you think Trask considers the historians' misrepresentation of the Hawaiians' relationship to the land to be deliberate?

TRASK, a Professor of Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawaii, is also a poet and political activist. She is the author of *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, which includes the essay printed below, and *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*; she coproduced the documentary film *Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation*.

From a Native Daughter (1987) BY HAUNANI-KAY TRASK

*E noi'i wale mai no ka haole, o,
'a'ole e pau no huna a Hawai'i 'imi loa
Let the haole freely research us in detail
But the doings of deep delving Hawai'i
will not be exhausted.*

KUPUNO
19th-century Hawaiian historian

Aloha kākou. Let us greet each other in friendship and love. My given name is Hauaniokawēkū o Halekalā, native of *Hawai'i Nui*. My father's family is from the *ānuu* (land) of Kaua'i, my mother's family from the *ānuu* of Maui. I reside today among my native people in the community of *Waimānalo*.

I have lived all my life under the power of America. My native country, *Hawai'i*, is owned by the United States. I attended missionary schools, both Catholic and Protestant, in my youth, and I was sent away to the American mainland to receive a "higher" education at the University of Wisconsin. Now I teach the history and culture of my people at the University of *Hawai'i*.

When I was young the story of my people was told twice: once by my parents, then again by my school teachers. From my *ʻohana* (family), I learned about the life of the old ones: how they fished and planted by the moon; shared all the fruits of their labors, especially their children; danced in great numbers for long hours; and honored the unity of their world in intricate genealogical chants. My mother said *Hawaiians* had sailed over thousands of miles to make their home in these sacred islands. And they had flourished, until the coming of the *huale* (whites).

At school, I learned that the "pagan *Hawaiians*" did not read or write, were lustful cannibals, traded in slaves, and could not sing. Captain Cook had "discovered" *Hawai'i* and the ungrateful *Hawaiians* had killed him. In revenge, the Christian god had cursed the *Hawaiians* with disease and death.

I learned the first of these stories from speaking with my mother and father. I learned the second from books. By the time I left for college, the books had won out over my parents, especially since I spent four long years in a missionary boarding school for *Hawaiian* children.

When I went away I understood the world as a place and a feeling divided in two: one *huale* (white), and the other *kinaka* (native). When I returned ten years later with a Ph.D., the division was sharper, the lack of connection more painful. There was the world that we lived in—my ancestors, my family, and my people—and then there was the world historians described. This world, they had written, was the truth. A primitive group, *Hawaiians* had been ruled by bloodthirsty priests and despotic kings who owned all the land and kept our people in feudal subjugation. The chiefs were cruel, the people poor.

But this was not the story my mother told me. No one had owned the land before the *huale* came; everyone could fish and plant, except during sacred periods. And the chiefs were good and loved their people.

Was my mother confused? What did our *kūpuna* (elders) say? They replied: Did these historians (all *huale*) know the language? Did they understand the chants? How long had they lived among our people? Whose stories had they heard?

None of the historians had ever learned our mother tongue. They had all been content to read what Europeans and Americans had written. But why did scholars, presumably well-trained and thoughtful, neglect our language? Not merely a passage-way to knowledge, language is a form of knowing by itself; a people's way of thinking and feeling is revealed through its music.

I sensed the answer without needing to answer. From years of living in a divided world, I knew the historian's judgment: *There is no value in things Hawaiian; all value comes from things huale.*

Historians, I realized, were very like missionaries. They were a part of the colonizing horde. One group colonized the spirit; the other, the mind. Frantz Fanon had been right, but not just about Africans. He had been right about the bondage of my own people: "By a kind of perverted logic, [colonialism] turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (1968:210). The first step in the colonizing process, Fanon had written, was the deculturation of a people. What better way to take our culture than to remake our image? A rich historical past became small and ignorant in the hands of Westerners. And we suffered a damaged sense of people and culture because of this distortion.

Burdened by a linear, progressive conception of history and by an assumption that Euro-American culture flourishes at the upper end of that progression, Westerners have told the history of *Hawai'i* as an inevitable if occasionally bitter-sweet triumph of Western ways over "primitive" *Hawaiian* ways. A few authors—the most sympathetic—have recorded with deep-felt sorrow the passing of our people. But in the end, we are repeatedly told, such an eclipse was for the best.

Obviously it was best for Westerners, not for our dying multitudes. This is why the historian's mission has been to justify our passing by celebrating Western dominance. Fanon would have called this missionizing, intellectual colonization. And it is clearest in the historian's insistence that pre-*huale* *Hawaiian* land tenure was "feudal"—a term that is now applied, without question, in every monograph, in every schoolbook, and in every tour guide description of my people's history.

From the earliest days of Western contact my people told their guests that *no one* owned the land. The land—like the air and the sea—was for all to use and share as their hirtight. Our chiefs were *stewards* of the land; they could not own or privately possess the land any more than they could sell it.

But the *huale* insisted on characterizing our chiefs as feudal landlords and our people as serfs. Thus, a European term which described a European practice founded on the European concept of private property—feudalism—was imposed upon a people halfway around the world from Europe and vastly different from her in every conceivable way. More than betraying an ignorance of *Hawaiian* culture and history, however, this misrepresentation was malevolent in design.

By inventing feudalism in ancient *Hawai'i*, Western scholars quickly transformed a spiritually-based, self-sufficient economic system of land use and occupancy into an oppressive, medieval European practice of divine right ownership, with the common people tied like serfs to the land. By claiming that a Pacific people lived under a European system—that the *Hawaiians* lived under feudalism—Westerners could then designate a successful system of shared land use with a pejorative and inaccurate Western term. Land tenure changes instituted by Americans and in line with current Western notions of private property were then made to appear hencial to the *Hawaiians*. But in practice, such changes benefited the *huale*, who alienated the people from the land, taking it for themselves.

The prelude to this land alienation was the great dying of the people. Barely half a century after contact with the West our people had declined in number by eighty percent. Disease and death were rampant. The sandalwood forests had been stripped bare for international commerce between England and China. The missionaries had insatuated themselves everywhere. And a debt-ridden *Hawaiian* king (there had been

no king before Western contact) succumbed to enormous pressure from the Americans and followed their schemes for dividing up the land.

This is how private property land tenure entered Hawai'i. The common people, driven from their birthright, received less than one percent of the land. They starved while huge *hale*-owned sugar plantations thrived.

And what had the historians said? They had said that the Americans "liberated" the Hawaiians from an oppressive "feudal" system. By inventing a false feudal past, the historians justify—and become complicitous in—massive American theft.

Is there "evidence"—as historians call it—for traditional Hawaiian concepts of land use? The evidence is in the sayings of my people and in the words they wrote more than a century ago, much of which has been translated. However, historians have chosen to ignore any references here to shared land use. But there is incontrovertible evidence in the very structure of the Hawaiian language. If the historians had bothered to learn our language (as any American historian of France would learn French) they would have discovered that we show possession in two ways: through the use of an "a" possessive, which reveals acquired status, and through the use of an "o" possessive, which denotes inherent status. My body (*ko 'u kino*) and my parents (*ko 'u maua*) take the "a" form. But land, like one's body and one's parents, takes the "o" possessive (*ko 'u 'āina*). Thus, in our way of speaking, land is inherent to the people; it is like our bodies and our parents. The people cannot exist without the land, and the land cannot exist without the people.

Every major historian of Hawai'i has been mistaken about Hawaiian land tenure. The chiefs did not own the land; they *could not* own the land. My mother was right and the *hale* historians were wrong. If they had studied our language they would have known that no one owned the land. But was their failing merely ignorance, or simple ethnocentric bias?

No, I did not believe them to be so benign. As I read on, a pattern emerged in their writing. Our ways were inferior to those of the West, to those of the historians' own culture. We were "less developed," or "immature," or "authoritarian." In some tellings we were much worse. Thus, Gavan Daws (1968), the most famed modern historian of Hawai'i, had continued a tradition established earlier by missionaries Hiram Bingham (1848) and Sheldon Dibble (1909), by referring to the old ones as "thieves" and "savages" who regularly practiced infanticide and who, in contrast to "civilized" whites, preferred "lewd dancing" to work. Ralph Kuykendall (1938), long considered the most thorough if also the most boring of historians of Hawai'i, sustained another fiction—that my ancestors owned slaves, the outcast *Kauwā*. This opinion, as well as the description of Hawaiian land tenure as feudal, had been supported by respected sociologist Andrew Lind (1938).¹ Finally, nearly all historians had refused to accept our genealogical dating of A.D. 400 or earlier for our arrival from the South Pacific. They had, instead, claimed that our earliest appearance in Hawai'i could only be traced to A.D. 1100. Thus at least seven hundred years of our history were repudiated by "superior" Western scholarship. Only recently have archeological data confirmed what Hawaiians had said these many centuries (Tuggle 1979).

Suddenly the entire sweep of our written history was clear to me. I was reading the West's view of itself through the degradation of my own past. When historians

wrote that the king owned the land and the common people were bound to it, they were saying that ownership was the only way human beings in their world could relate to the land, and in that relationship, some one person had to control both the land and the interaction between humans.

And when they said that our chiefs were despotic, they were telling of their own society, where hierarchy always results in domination. Thus any authority or elder is automatically suspected of tyranny.

And when they wrote that Hawaiians were lazy, they meant that work must be continuous and ever a burden.

And when they wrote that we were promiscuous, they meant that love-making in the Christian West is a sin.

And when they wrote that we were racist because we preferred our own ways to theirs, they meant that their culture needed to dominate other cultures.

And when they wrote that we were superstitious, believing in the *mana* of nature and people, they meant that the West has long since lost a deep spiritual and cultural relationship to the earth.

And when they wrote that Hawaiians were "primitive" in their grief over the passing of loved ones, they meant that the West grieves for the living who do not walk among their ancestors.

For so long, more than half my life, I had misunderstood this written record, thinking it described my own people. But my history was nowhere present. For we had not written. We had chanted and sailed and fished and built and prayed. And we had told stories through the great blood lines of memory; genealogy.

To know my history, I had to put away my books and return to the land. I had to plant taro in the earth before I could understand the inseparable bond between people and *'āina*. I had to feel again the spirits of nature and take gifts of plants and fish to the ancient altars. I had to begin to speak my language with our elders and leave long silences for wisdom to grow. But before anything else, I had to learn the language like a lover so that I could rock within her and lay at night in her dreaming arms.

There was nothing in my schooling that had told me of this, or hinted that somewhere there was a longer, older story of origins, of the flowing of songs out to a great but distant sea. Only my parents' voices, over and over, spoke to me of a Hawaiian world. While the books spoke from a different world, a Western world.

And yet, Hawaiians are not of the West. We are of *Hawai'i Nei*, this world where I live, this place, this culture, this *'āina*.

What can I say, then, to Western historians of my place and people? Let me answer with a story.

A while ago I was asked to share a panel on the American overthrow of our government in 1893. The other panelists were all *hale*. But one was a *hale* historian from the mainland who had just published a book on what he called the American anti-imperialists. He and I met briefly in preparation for the panel. I asked him if he knew the language. He said no. I asked him if he knew the record of opposition to our annexation to America. He said there was no real evidence for it, just comments here and there. I told him that he didn't understand and that at the panel I would share the evidence. When we met in public and spoke, I said this:

There is a song much loved by our people. It was sung when Hawaiians were forbidden from congregating in groups of more than three. Addressed to our imprisoned Queen, it was written in 1893, and tells of Hawaiian feelings for our land and against annexation. Listen to our lament:

Kaulana na pua a'o Hawai'i
Kupa'a maliope o ka 'āina
Hiki mai ka 'elele o ka loko 'āno
Palapala 'ānuhi me ka pākaha

Famous are the children of Hawai'i
Who cling steadfastly to the land
Comes the evil-hearted with
A document greedy for plunder

Pāne mai Hawai'i moku o Keawe
Kokū na hōmo a'o Pīlani
Moloka'i, and Lana'i help
Kāoa'i of Mano assists
Firmly together with the sands of
Kakuhikewa

Do not put the signature
On the paper of the enemy
Annexation is wicked sale
Of the civil rights of the Hawaiian
people

Mahepe mākou o Lili'ulani
A loa'a 'e ka poma o ka 'āina
The story is told
Of the people who love the land

Mahepe mākou o Lili'ulani
A loa'a 'e ka poma o ka 'āina
The story is told
Of the people who love the land

This song, I said, continues to be sung with great dignity at Hawaiian political gatherings. For our people still share the feelings of anger and protest that it conveys.

But our guest, the *hale* historian, answered that this song, although beautiful, was not evidence of either opposition or of imperialism from the Hawaiian perspective.

Many Hawaiians in the audience were shocked at his remarks, but in hindsight, I think they were predictable. They are the standard response of the historian who does not know the language and has no respect for its memory.

Finally, I proceeded to relate a personal story, thinking that surely such a tale could not want for authenticity since I myself was relating it. My *tūtū* (grandmother) had told my mother who had told me that at the time of the overthrow a great wailing went up throughout the islands, a wailing of weeks, a wailing of impenetrable grief, a wailing of death. But he remarked again, this too is not evidence.

And so, history goes on, written in long volumes by foreign people. Whole libraries begin to form, book upon book, shelf upon shelf.

At the same time, the stories go on, generation to generation, family to family. Which history do Western historians desire to know? Is it to be a tale of writings by their own countrymen, individuals convinced of their "unique" capacity for analysis, looking at us with Western eyes, thinking about us within Western philosophical contexts, categorizing us by Western indices, judging us by Judeo-Christian morals, exhorting us to capitalist achievements, and finally, leaving us an authoritative-because-Western record of their complete misunderstanding?

All this has been done already. Not merely a few times, but many times. And still, every year, there appear new and eager faces to take up the same telling, as if the West must continue, implacably, with the din of its own disbelief.

But there is, as there has been always, another possibility. If it is truly our history Western historians desire to know, they must put down their books, and take up our practices. First, of course, the language. But later, the people, the *'āina*, the stories. Above all, in the end, the stories. Historians must listen, they must hear the generational connections, the reservoir of sounds and meanings.

They must come, as American Indians suggested long ago, to understand the land. Not in the Western way, but in the indigenous way, the way of living within and protecting the bond between people and *'āina*.

This bond is cultural, and it can be understood only culturally. But because the West has lost any cultural understanding of the bond between people and land, it is not possible to know this connection through Western culture. This means that the history of indigenous people cannot be written from within Western culture. Such a story is merely the West's story of itself.

Our story remains unwritten. It rests within the culture, which is inseparable from the land. To know this is to know our history. To write this is to write of the land and the people who are born from her.

Notes

1. See also Fornander (1878-85). Lest one think these sources antiquated, it should be noted that there exist only a handful of modern scholarly works on the history of Hawai'i. The most respected are those by Kirk Endall (1938) and Daws (1968), and a social history of the twentieth century by Lawrence Fuchs (1961). Of these, only Kirkendall and Daws claim any knowledge of pre-*hale* history, while concentrating on the twentieth century. However, countless popular works have relied on these two studies which, in turn, are themselves based on primary sources written in English by extremely biased, anti-Hawaiian Westerners such as explorers, traders, missionaries (e.g., Brigham [1848] and Dibble [1909]), and sugar planters. Indeed, a favorite technique of Daws—whose *Shoal of Time* is the most acclaimed and recent general history—is the lengthy quotation without comment of the most racist remarks by missionaries and planters. Thus, at one point, half a page is consumed with a "white man's burden" quotation from an 1886 *Planter's Monthly* article ("It is better for the colored man of India and Australia that the white man rules, and it is better here that the white man should rule. . .," etc., p. 213). Daws's only comment is, "The conclusion was inescapable" to get a sense of such characteristics, contempt for Hawaiians, one has but to read the first few pages, where Daws refers several times to the Hawaiians as "savages" and "thieves," and where he approvingly has Captain Cook thinking, "It was a sensible primitive who bowed before a superior civilization" (p. 2). See also—among examples too numerous to cite—his glib description of sacred *hale* as a "trivial diversion," which, instead of work, the Hawaiians "would practice energetically in the hut and for days on end. . . their bare brown flesh glistening with sweat" (pp. 65-66). Daws, who repeatedly displays an affection for descriptions of Hawaiian skin color, taught Hawaiian history for some years at the University of Hawai'i; he now holds the Chair of Pacific History at the Australian National University's Institute of Advanced Studies.

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. Think of how people from your own ethnic heritage have been characterized in historical accounts. Which elements of this characterization do you consider accurate and which not?
2. Trask points out that for more than half her life, she believed the account of her people as described by Western historians. Think of a time when you learned something new about

your family or your ethnic group. Did it change your understanding of your heritage? Why or why not?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Much of Trask's article is infused with a fervent, angry tone, using language that condemns the Western historians: they are guilty of "colonization," they "insisted on" characterizing Hawai'i as a feudal system, they "imposed" their views on her people, they were "complicitous" in stealing Hawai'i from its people. What other language can you find that conveys Trask's anger? How does the tone of the article affect your reaction to her ideas?
2. Trask contrasts the linear argument typical of Western academic writing, in which the writer advances a thesis and provides facts to illustrate it, with the rhetorical method of her native people, who convey ideas through storytelling. Her own essay combines these two strategies. Where in her essay does she use one strategy, and where does she use the other? What is the effect of juxtaposing the two?
3. What is the effect of the use of the Hawaiian language throughout this article? How does it enhance Trask's argument, even though most of her readers are unlikely to know Hawaiian?

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. Like Louise Erdrich ("The Names of Women," p. 76) Trask argues that language and culture are inextricable. How does the language tie people to the culture in each case—or how does it help define the culture?
2. Like Caffeine Allen in "First They Changed My Name . . ." (p. 65), Trask comes to see her culture differently as an adult than she did as a child. What is it about each culture that these writers see in a new way?
3. Both Barbara Wallraff ("What Global Language?" p. 93) and Trask believe that it is important for people to learn other languages. What advantages do they believe multilingualism offers for communication?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Think of a group that you believe is misunderstood, whether it is an entire national culture or a local group, perhaps one on campus. Write an editorial in which you explain why you think popular conceptions of this group are inaccurate.
2. Tell a story that illustrates a value or belief held by your family. Collect your story with those of other students in your class, and produce a Web page or portfolio of your combined work.

READING

BARBARA WALLRAFF Wallraff argues that though English is spoken throughout the world, it is less pervasive globally than it may seem, and she marshals considerable evidence to support her view: for example, in the United States, a great many people speak a language other than English at home; in a few years, English will no longer be the principal language of the Internet; science and technology courses outside English-speaking countries are taught in the native language; worldwide, far more people speak Chinese than English. Do you agree with Wallraff's conclusion that "we may be well advised to do as people elsewhere are doing: become bilingual"?

WALLRAFF is a senior editor and a columnist at the *Atlantic Monthly* and the author of *Word Court* and *Your Own Words*, books that explore what it means to use language correctly.

What Global Language? (2000)

BY BARBARA WALLRAFF

Because I am interested in what happens to the English language over the past year or so I've been asking people, at dinner parties and professional gatherings and so on, whether they think that English is well on its way to being the global language. Typically, they look puzzled about why I would even bother to ask such an obvious question. They say firmly, Of course. Then they start talking about the Internet. We're just having a conversation, so I refrain from launching into everything I'm about to tell you. It's not that I believe they're actually wrong. But the idea of English as a global language doesn't mean what they think it does—at least, not according to people I've interviewed whose professions are bound up especially closely in what happens to the English language.

English has inarguably achieved some sort of global status. Whenever we turn on the news to find out what's happening in East Asia, or the Balkans, or Africa, or South America, or practically anywhere, local people are being interviewed and telling us about it in English. This past April [2000] the journalist I'd Anthony, in one of two articles about global English that he wrote for the Associated Press, observed, "When Pope John Paul II arrived in the Middle East last month to retrace Christ's footsteps and address Christians, Muslims and Jews, the pontiff spoke not Latin, not Arabic, not Hebrew, not his native Polish. He spoke in English."

Indeed, by now lists of facts about the amazing reach of our language may have begun to sound awfully familiar.

Have we heard these particular facts before, or only others like them? English is the working language of the Asian trade group ASEAN. It is the de facto working language of 98 percent of German research physicists and 83 percent of German research chemists. It is the official language of the European Central Bank, even though the bank is in Frankfurt and neither Britain nor any other predominantly English-speaking country is a member of the European Monetary Union. It is the language in which black parents in South Africa overwhelmingly wish their children to be educated. This little list of facts comes from British sources: a report, *The Future of English?*, and a follow-up newsletter that David Graddol, a language researcher at The Open University, and his consulting firm, The English Company U.K., wrote in 1997 and 1998 for the British Council, whose mission is to promote British culture worldwide; and a book by David Crystal, who is a professor at the University of Wales.

And yet, of course, English is not sweeping all before it, not even in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, ten years ago about one in seven people in this country spoke a language other than English at home—and since then the proportion of immigrants in the population has grown and grown. Ever-wider swaths of Florida, California, and the Southwest are heavily Spanish-speaking. Hispanic people make up 30 percent of the population of New York City, and a television station there that is affiliated with

a Spanish-language network has been known to draw a larger daily audience than at least one of the city's English-language network affiliates. Even Sioux City, Iowa, now has a Spanish-language newspaper. According to the census, from 1980 to 1990 the number of Spanish-speakers in the United States grew by 50 percent.

Over the same decade the number of speakers of Chinese in the United States grew by 98 percent. Today approximately 2.4 million Chinese-speakers live in America, and more than four out of five of them prefer to speak Chinese at home. The rate of growth of certain other languages in the United States has been higher still. From 1980 to 1990 the number of speakers of Korean increased by 127 percent and of speakers of Vietnamese by 150 percent. Small American towns from Huntsville, Alabama, to Meriden, Connecticut, to Wausau, Wisconsin, to El Centro, Texas—all sites of linguistic controversy in recent years—have been alarmed to find that many new arrivals do not speak English well and some may not even see the point of going to the trouble of learning it.

How can all of this, simultaneously, be true? How can it be that English is conquering the globe if it can't even hold its own in parts of our traditionally English-speaking country? ...

A few more definitions will be helpful here. "Second-language" speakers live in places where English has some sort of official or special status. In India, for instance, the national government sanctions the use of English for its business, along with fifteen indigenous languages. ...

"Foreign-language" speakers of English live in places where English is not singled out in any formal way, and tend to learn it to communicate with people from

elsewhere. Examples might be Japanese who travel abroad on business and Italians who work in tourism in their own country. ...

David Crystal, in his *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995), observed that only 98 million second-language speakers of English in the world could be totted up with certainty. In *English as a Global Language*, though, he argued that the true number was more nearly 350 million. ...

Estimates of the number of foreign-language speakers of English range more widely still. Crystal reports that these "have been as low as 100 million and as high as 1,000 million." The estimates would vary, because by definition foreign-language speakers live in places where English has no official or special status. They may or may not have been asked in a national census or other poll about their competence in English or other languages; they may or may not have had any formal schooling in English; their assessment of their ability to speak English may or may not be accurate.

This last point is particularly worth bearing in mind. According to recent "Eurobarometer" surveys described by Graddol, "77% of Danish adults and 75% of Swedish adults for example, say they can take part in a conversation in English." And "nearly one third of the citizens of the 13 'non-English-speaking' countries in the EU 'can speak English well enough to take part in a conversation.'" However, Richard Parker, in his book *Mixed Signals: The Prospects for Global Television News* (1995), reported this about a study commissioned by Lintas, a major media buyer, in the early 1990s:

When ad researchers recently tested 4,500 Europeans for "perceived" versus "actual"

English-language skills, the results were discouraging. First, the interviewees were asked to evaluate their English-language abilities, and then to translate a series of sample English phrases or sentences. The study produced, in its own words, "sobering" results: "the number of people really fit for English-language television turned out to be less than half the expected audience."

In countries such as France, Spain, and Italy, the study found, fewer than 3 percent had excellent command of English; only in small markets, such as Scandinavia and the Low Countries did the numbers even exceed 10 percent.

So the number of people in the world who speak English is unknown, and how well many of them speak and understand it is questionable. No one is arguing that English is not widely spoken and taught. But the vast numbers that are often repeated—a billion English-speakers, a billion and a half—have only tenuous grounding in reality. ...

FIRST, SECOND, OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

People who expect English to triumph over all the other languages are sometimes surprised to learn that the world today holds three times as many native speakers of Chinese as native speakers of English. "Chinese," as language scholars use the word, refers to a family of languages and dialects the most widely spoken of which is Mandarin, and which share a written language although they are not all mutually intelligible when spoken. "English" refers to a family of languages and dialects the most widely spoken of which is standard American English, and which have a common

origin in England—though not all varieties of English, either, are mutually intelligible. The versions of English used by educated speakers practically anywhere can be understood by most Americans, but pidgins, creoles, and diverse dialects belong to the same family, and these are not always so generally intelligible. To hear for yourself how far English now ranges from what we Americans are used to, you need only rent a video of the 1998 Scottish film *My Name Is Joe*, which, though in English, comes fully subtitled. ...

In any case, the numerical gap is impressive: about 1,113 million people speak Chinese as their mother tongue, whereas about 372 million people speak English. And yet English is still the world's second most common native language, though it is likely to cede second place within fifty years to the South Asian linguistic group whose leading members are Hindi and Urdu. In 2050, according to a model of language use that The English Company developed and named "engco" after itself, the world will hold 1,384 million native speakers of Chinese, 556 million of Hindi and Urdu, and 508 million of English. As native languages, Spanish and Arabic will be almost as common as English, with 486 million and 482 million speakers respectively. And among young people aged fifteen to twenty-four English is expected to be in fourth place, behind not only Chinese and the Hindi-Urdu languages but also Arabic, and just ahead of Spanish. ...

Nonetheless, the gains that everyone expects English to make must come because it is adopted as a second language or a foreign language by most of the people who speak it. ...

Something else obviously implied by the ascendancy of English as a second and a foreign language is that more and

more people who speak English speak another language at least as well, and probably better. India may have the third or fourth largest number of English-speakers in the world, but English is thought to be the mother tongue of much less than one percent of the population. This is bound to affect the way the language is used locally. Browsing some English-language Web sites from India recently, I seldom had trouble understanding what was meant. I did, however, time and again come across unfamiliar words borrowed from Hindi or another indigenous Indian language. On the site called India World the buttons that a user could click on to call up various types of information were labeled "satnachar: Personalised News," "dhan: Investing in India," "khai: Search India," "khai: Indian Cricket," and so forth. . . .

... Much has been made of the Internet as an instrument for circulating English around the globe. According to one estimate that has been widely repeated over the past few years, 80 percent of what's available on the Internet is in English. Some observers, however, have recently been warning that this may have been the high-water mark. It's not that English-speakers are logging off—*an contraire*—but that other people are increasingly logging on, to search out or create content in their own languages. As the newsletter that The English Company prepared for the British Council asserted in September of 1998, "Non-English speakers are the fastest growing group of new Internet users." The consensus among those who study these things is that Internet traffic in languages other than English will outstrip English-language traffic within the next few years. There's no reason this should surprise us—particularly if we recall that there are about 372 million people in the world

whose native language is English and about 5,700 million people whose native language is something else. According to the same newsletter, a recent study by Euro Marketing Associates estimated that

nearly 44% of the world's online population now speak a language other than English at home.

Although many of these Internet users are bilingual and speak English in the workplace, Euro Marketing suggest that advertisers of nonbusiness products will more easily reach this group by using their home language. Of the 56 million people who speak languages on the Internet other than English, Spanish speakers represent nearly a quarter.

The study also estimated that 13.1 percent of all Internet users speak an Asian language at home—Japanese, for the most part. A surge in Internet use like the one that began in the United States half a dozen or so years ago is now under way in a number of other populous and relatively well-off places. . . .

No matter how much English-language material there is on the Web, then, or even how much more English material there is than material in other languages, it is naive to assume that home computers around the world will, in effect, become the work stations of a vast English language lab. People *could* use their computers that way—just as we English-speaking Americans could enlist our computers to help us learn Italian, Korean, or Yoruba. But, the glories of learning for its own sake aside, why would we want to do that? Aren't we delighted to be able to gather information, shop, do business, and be entertained in our own language? Why wouldn't others feel the same way? Consider, too, that

many people regard high technology as something very much like a new language. Surely it's enough for a person to try to keep his or her hardware and software more or less up-to-date and running smoothly without simultaneously having to grapple with instructions or content in an actual foreign language. . . .

One more fact worth keeping in mind is that the relationship between science or technology and English is, essentially, accidental. It is chiefly because the United States has long been in the vanguard of much scientific and technological research, of course, that English is so widely used in these fields. If the United States were for the most part French-speaking, surely French would be the language of science and technology; there is nothing inherent in English to tie it to these fields. . . .

Here an argument is sometimes advanced that American culture furthers innovation, openness to new ideas, and so forth, and that our culture, whether by accident or not, is inseparable from the English language. But this takes us only so far. Even if the vanguards in all scientific and technological fields, everywhere in the world, used English in their work, once the fruits of their labor

became known to ordinary people and began to matter to them, people would coin words in their local languages to describe these things. Theoretical physicists at international conferences may speak English among themselves, but most high school and college physics teachers use their native languages in class with their students. The Microsoft engineers who designed the Windows computer-operating system spoke English, and used English in what they created, but in the latest version, Windows Millennium, the words that users see on the screen are available in twenty-eight languages—and the spell-checker offers a choice of four varieties of English.

In sum, the globalization of English does not mean that if we who speak only English just sit back and wait, we'll soon be able to exchange ideas with anyone who has anything to say. We can't count on having much more around the world than a very basic ability to communicate. Outside certain professional fields, if English-speaking Americans hope to exchange ideas with people in a nuanced way, we may be well advised to do as people elsewhere are doing: become bilingual. . . .

CONNECTING PERSONALLY TO THE READING

1. If you have studied a foreign language, do the conclusions of the Lintas study seem credible to you: is there likely to be a gap between a person's perception of ability to speak a foreign language and the actual ability to converse? If you are comfortable conversing in a foreign language, how long did it take you to develop this proficiency? If not, why not?
2. Visit a Web site written in a language you are studying. How much of the site do you understand?
3. Do you think it is important for people around the world to speak a common language? Why or why not?

FOCUSING ON THE ARGUMENT

1. Wallraff's argument relies heavily on statistics. How persuasive would her argument be without these numbers? Which statistics made you most inclined to accept her argument, and why?
2. In paragraphs 2 and 3, Wallraff presents evidence that might seem to undermine her view that English is not a global language. What is the effect of this evidence on her argument?
3. This reading often works through contrasts—e.g., between what people commonly think the expression “global language” means and what Wallraff means by it. For example, Wallraff compares percentages of native Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese speakers in the United States; contrasts how well nonnative English speakers think they know English with their actual proficiency; and distinguishes between “second language” and “foreign language” English speakers. Find one contrast in this article, and show how it illuminates Wallraff's argument. What would be lost if only one of the items being compared were described?

SYNTHESIZING IDEAS FROM MULTIPLE READINGS

1. In “Public and Private Language” (p. 51), Richard Rodriguez distinguishes between a public and private language. What is his definition of a public language, and how might the use of English outside English-speaking countries be described as a public act?
2. Richard Rodriguez (“Public and Private Language”), Itabari Njeri (“What's in a Name?” p. 71), Caffeine Allen (“First They Changed My Name . . .,” p. 65), and Louise Erdrich (“The Names of Women,” p. 76) all suggest that there is a close relationship between one's native language and one's identification with the larger culture. Where do you see evidence of this idea in the Wallraff article?

WRITING TO ACT

1. Find a Web site written in a language you have studied, but in which you are not entirely fluent. Write an article on the experience of navigating and retrieving information from this Web site.
2. Do a survey in which you ask students on your campus how well they read, write, and speak in another language and how often, outside of a foreign language class, they are called upon to use this language. Then write an article for your campus newspaper, reporting on your results.

Connecting the Readings with the Artworks

Stephen Scott Young, *Flip Flops and Lace*

1. In what ways are Richard Rodriguez in “Public and Private Language” (p. 51) and Lydia Minatoya in “Transformation” (p. 81) at odds with the culture they find themselves in as children? Do you think the girl in *Flip Flops and Lace* (insert 2-1) is at odds with her culture? Why or why not? In what ways can all three children be said to be isolated?
2. How does the painting reflect the cultural division Barbara Mellix describes in “From Outside, In” (p. 57)? What resolution does Mellix find for this problem? What resolution, if any, do you suppose is possible for the girl in the painting?

3. Haunani-Kay Trask's article, “From a Native Daughter” (p. 85), is a protest against white cultural dominance of her people. In what ways does she present this protest, and how might Young's painting be seen as a similar kind of protest?

Jacob Lawrence, *The Library*

1. None of the library patrons are paying attention to each other. Would Lawrence agree with Barbara Mellix (“From Outside, In,” p. 57) and Richard Rodriguez (“Public and Private Language,” p. 51) that a shared language helps create community? Why or why not?
2. When Caffeine Allen tells us, in “First They Changed My Name . . .” (p. 65), that her teachers have a “low opinion of [her mother's] way of speech,” she suggests that they regard her mother as illiterate. How is literacy defined in Allen's essay? How is it defined in Lawrence's painting? What is the value of literacy in each world?

Carmen Lomas Garza, *Cámas para Sueños*

1. Caffeine Allen (“First They Changed My Name . . .,” p. 65) and Louise Erdrich (“The Names of Women,” p. 76) write about their relationships with their mothers. Compare those mother-child relationships with that between the mother and children in Garza's painting.
2. What was Richard Rodriguez's (“Public and Private Language,” p. 51) childhood like? How does it compare with the childhood depicted here?

Henry Sugimoto, *Nisei Babies in Concentration Camp*

1. In arguing that Western historians have deliberately misrepresented Hawaiian history, depicting it in ways that would justify the U.S. takeover of Hawai'i, Haunani-Kay Trask's essay, “From a Native Daughter” (p. 85), advances a political thesis. How does Sugimoto's painting also advance a political viewpoint?
2. Many of the readings, including those by Caffeine Allen (“First They Changed My Name . . .,” p. 65), Richard Rodriguez (“Public and Private Language,” p. 51), Lydia Minatoya (“Transformation,” p. 81), and Amy Tan (“The Language of Discretion,” p. 43), recount what it is like to be treated as an outsider, a common experience for immigrants and their children. In what ways does Sugimoto's painting depict this experience? How does the composition of the painting reinforce this idea?
3. How does the experience represented in the painting parallel or contrast with the experiences Lydia Minatoya's family (“From a Native Daughter,” p. 85) had in a Japanese relocation camp? As a child, Minatoya tries hard to fit in, as does her father. Do you think the babies in the painting reflect this same impulse? Why or why not?

Tomie Arai, *The Laundryman's Daughter*

1. In “The Language of Discretion” (p. 43), Amy Tan worries that stereotypes of Chinese Americans limit the ways others perceive them. How would you describe the Chinese Americans in Arai's artwork? How are they like or unlike the people Tan describes? In what ways do they represent or depart from the stereotypes Tan mentions?

2. Both Itabari Njeri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71) and Louise Erdrich ("The Names of Women," p. 76) write about the importance of a name in establishing personal identity, yet Arai does not tell us the names of the people she depicts. What is the effect of this choice?

Patricia Rodriguez, Irene Perez, Graciela Carillo, *Fantasy World for Children*

1. Like Frida Kahlo (*Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*), the Mujeres Muralistas celebrate Latino/a cultural values using ancient and modern Mexican images. In what ways are the works of art alike and different in how they depict the differences between two cultures? Does either suggest a possible integration such as Itabari Njeri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71) hopes to achieve? Explain.
2. In "Public and Private Language" (p. 51), Richard Rodriguez sees the division between two cultures as the division between two languages: English is the "public" language of education and work, and Spanish is the "private" language of the family. Do you think that the Mujeres Muralistas would see this division as accurate? Explain, using details from their mural.
3. In "The Names of Women" (p. 76), Louise Erdrich sees herself as the "first in a long line" of Anishinabe women, who "scratches . . . the ground for pleasure, not survival, and grows . . . flowers instead of potatoes." She writes about rather than practices the knitting, sewing, and canning of her forebears. How is Erdrich's integration of two cultures like that of the Mujeres Muralistas? Explain.

Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*

1. In "From a Native Daughter" (p. 85), Haunani-Kay Trask recounts that as a child and later as a new Ph.D., she saw the world divided into two: *haole* (white) and *kānaka* (native). She learned that European and American historians misinterpreted Hawaiian stories about "possession," which was communal, and labeled Hawai'i "feudalistic" and "despotic." How are Trask and Kahlo alike in how they depict American values and culture?
2. In "What Global Language?" (p. 93), Barbara Wallraff argues that English only appears to be a global language—that other languages continually see their numbers rise, even in the United States. Why, according to Wallraff and Kahlo, might language, as well as other cultural values (e.g., religion, work, dress), be particularly valued at the intersection of two cultures?
3. When Itabari Njeri ("What's in a Name?" p. 71) changes her name from Jill Lord, she seeks to "reclaim [her African] culture and synthesize it with [her] present reality." In the face of the loss of African culture—but as part of a new generation of black people—she tries to create a new identity borrowing from both cultures. Do you think that Kahlo's painting also forges a new identity, one that synthesizes two cultures? Explain.

Judy Chicago, *Rainbow Shabbat*

1. Underlying Judy Chicago's stained glass window and Lydia Minatoya's essay "Transformation" (p. 81) are experiences of oppression that took place during World War II: for Chicago, the annihilation of Jews, gypsies, and other groups in the Nazi Holocaust; and, for Minatoya, the forced relocation and internment of Japanese Americans. Using background information you have (or can research) on these two events, what values is Chicago portraying in her artwork, and why?
2. In discussing the use of the English language throughout the world, Barbara Wallraff suggests in "What Global Language?" (p. 93) that the reputed "globalization" of English—and with it, U.S. culture—is not complete. What does Wallraff mean by "globalization"? According to this definition, is Chicago's work of art an image of "globalization"? Why or why not?
3. Chicago's stained glass window offers an image of cross-cultural harmony. How might Haunani-Kay Trask ("From a Native Daughter," p. 85) respond to this image?

FINDING COMMON CAUSE IN CONTROVERSY

When African Americans attempt to eradicate elements of Black English vernacular from their speech, are they "practicing a form of self-hatred"? Or are they exercising their right to "social mobility"?

We typically think of debates as either/or, right/wrong thinking. However, this need not be the case. We view debate as critical thinking about a question of some import. Debate underlies all decision making. In the debate that follows, the decision seems a trivial one—whether or not Earvin "Magic" Johnson should take elocution lessons to eradicate features of his dialect. Underneath the decision, however, lie values and beliefs that are very important to different groups of people. One way to find common ground between the opposing viewpoints is by understanding the values and beliefs behind them.

One's mother tongue—one's language or dialect—is closely tied to one's culture and upbringing. It cannot easily be abandoned for a more prestigious dialect or language at whim. Nor should one's dialect be abandoned, according to many, for it reflects one's heritage. Yet some African Americans, who have learned the prestige dialect, see mastering Standard English as the route to success and respect. Are these blacks "sellouts"? Are they embracing a "slave mentality"? Are they laughable when they make this effort?

READING

KEN PARISH PERKINS Ken Parish Perkins writes about Black English and the question of assimilation versus cultural identity. His tone is at times amused and at times wistful, even sorrowful—suggesting that he feels empathy for both positions. He writes about dialect differences that split not only blacks and whites, but also blacks and other blacks. In particular, he describes varying reactions among African Americans to Earvin "Magic" Johnson's lessons in Standard English

pronunciation. He thinks that holding on to "broken English" for the sake of one's culture is "complete nonsense." Yet he takes great pleasure in the dialect he speaks and the sense of exclusivity and empowerment it gives him, and he speaks of its constructions and rhythm with great pride.

PERKINS is a television critic and columnist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*; he is the recipient of two Griot Awards for his news coverage of African Americans.

The Dilemma of Black English (1998) | BY KEN PARISH PERKINS

A lifelong friend of mine called the other day to shoot the breeze and we began, as we often do, to delve into, dissect, and dispose of subjects large and small with speedy efficiency.

Before long we'd been transported back to our Chicago enclave, and it wasn't until my live-in looked on in perplexed horror that I was aware of our slippage into the netherworld of diction and cultural expression.

He: "What it be like, brah?"

Me: "Just kickin', ma man. Wassup in A-Town?"

He: "Same-o sam-o, knowwhat'msayin'? I gotta wait for some mo' months before they come through on that promotion."

Me: "So, wassup wit that? Thought dat was promised."

He: "Just another means in keepin' a brother down, youknowwhat'msayin'?"

My friend Daryl is college-educated with a weighty resume of fine work in banking, and, sure, I know exactly what he's saying. Many may not, my loved one included. She often uses my bilingual services as interpreter when Daryl and I are on one of our verbal rolls, which is almost any time we're within each other's space.

Ours is, to be precise, a black vernacular from the urban section of the Midwest region, a kind of picing of melodic rhythms weaving speech and expression, where metaphors, similes, and nouns are literally turned into verbs, and the rest is merely tossed in for primitive simplicity.

I explain this in part to be serious and amusing because the whole issue of "Ethnics" or "black English," took center stage a couple of years back when an Oakland, Calif. school board pushed for permission to teach black English not as a cultural dialect but as a genetically based second language equal in stature to ordinary English. The board figured it was the only way students could academically progress.

But many African-Americans were insulted. Criticism mounted, and the resolution crashed and burned.

Buried under the rubble was a muffled debate about whether critics of "black English" are merely wannabe-white black folk seeking assimilation into the dominant culture. Well, such a debate has resurfaced, albeit in the underground railroad of black thought (Internet, radio, black barbershops), conjured by a former basketball player who never would have thought he'd be part of a philosophical discussion on cultural linguistics.

Surely you know the dude. Earvin "Magic" Johnson. A former college b-ball player who bolted out of Michigan State University early for NBA riches.

A businessman and millionaire many times over, Johnson is also a brother from around the way and speaks that language accordingly. After harsh, though relatively

quiet, criticism of his language skills during a brief stint as a sports commentator, Johnson knew he had to be better prepared for his latest battle.

He has been dutifully taking speech and diction lessons to better communicate with his interviewees, his live audience, and the viewers his show desperately needs to survive in the competitive late-night arena.

Of course, he slips. Johnson's way of saying "dis" for the word "this," "dat" for "that," "I shoulda," and "all's I want to do" has a good number of African-Americans rolling on the floor while others cringe in the embarrassment of a black man butchering the English language.

And that's where the debate begins. Some believe that black critics of black dialect are practicing a form of self-hatred, choosing a white culture over their own, and embracing what they call a slave mentality. Johnson is perfectly fine, since he's just talkin' like a brotha, ya know?

Besides, there's a reason for this. Johnson's dialect, as is mine, is a mixture of accent and sentence construction handed down from enslaved Africans who didn't speak English and weren't taught it. Before you dismiss this as nonsense, consider that slaves picked up words from masters intent on condemning them to a devastating cycle among the lower rungs of society. Some have made it out over the years, while many have not.

Daryl and I grew up in a poor, all-black neighborhood and were educated in cash-strapped all-black schools—my first "educated" peer was a white college roommate from a wealthy suburb whose word usage was jarring to me but considered standard English by my professors. He could barely understand a word I said, and I had to adjust if my plans were to make it through journalism school.

For phone conversations with Daryl, black English is our adopted mode of speech, a vernacular chosen with the knowledge that we're both able to employ a more standardized language at will. Call us sellouts if you so please, but our social mobility and respect (from blacks as well as others) hinges on it, even though I have yet to master "ask" without saying "ax," and my editor often appears confused when I'm excited and speaking quickly.

In some ways it's like we're doomed. Past experience keeps black Americans gravely suspicious of anyone wanting to change anything about a way of life that's exclusive and therefore empowering. Our radars will remain keen as long as we witness, for instance, the dilution of the Spanish language in California (bilingual classes will be no more) and other ills.

Still, to adhere to such broken English for the sake of holding on to cultural heritage is false hope and complete nonsense. It's unfortunate that we continue to engage in "who's blacker than whom" contests, attaching the preservation of one's cultural history and identity to, of all things, poor grammar.

Johnson's talk show will go down in flames not because of dis and dat but because he is charming but not entertaining, and late-night television simply isn't his thing. While I've never talked with Johnson, I could see our private conversations dipping into the black vernacular, both of us feeling quite comfortable with the proceedings.

There is, in some ways, a sadness to this truth. But I'll settle for the beauty of this exclusivity when it comes, particularly from strangers. Like the other day. Upon leaving the office, a black male city worker emptying the meters noticed me and said quickly, "Wassup, brah?"

"Nothin' much, ma man," I told him. "Nothin' much."

EMPATHIZING WITH DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

To take a position on this debate, first identify the point of view of African Americans who might resent the idea that their dialect is not good enough. These individuals might feel that replacing features of dialect with Standard English in order to become a host on late-night television was practicing a form of self-hatred.

- Put yourself in the place of Earvin "Magic" Johnson. You are a role model and hero to millions. What do you think it was like to have to worry about saying "dis" instead of "this" and "dat" instead of "that"? Is Johnson really "butchering" English when he says "I shoulda"? Perkins offers telling examples of how much his urban Midwest dialect means to him. What do you take from these examples? How would it make you feel to be asked to give up that common dialect?
- Why is there good cause for African Americans to be suspicious of "anyone wanting to change anything about a way of life that's exclusive and therefore empowering"?
- What part of your cultural identity is tied up with the way that you speak? How easy would it be to give up the way you speak and adopt a different way? What would you lose?
- Do you think that Perkins's argument for social mobility and respect is really a justification for his "selling out"? He does seem to disdain Black English by saying that it is "broken," "ungrammatical," and "primitive." Do you think he looks down on the millions of African Americans who haven't been able to learn Standard English?
- What do you think is wrong with asking millions of African Americans to change their speech in order to have higher-paying jobs? Does he mean that many will be condemned to low-paying jobs because they can only speak "broken English"?

Next, put yourself in the place of African Americans who want increased social mobility and respect and don't see themselves as selling out because they learn Standard English.

- If you did not know how to speak Standard English, what kinds of jobs do you think you would have difficulty obtaining? This job stratification may be wrong, but is it a social reality?
- Why might contests of "who's blacker than whom" be pointless? What harmful consequences might they have?
- Perkins and his friend Daryl both speak Standard English as well as their urban Midwest variety of Black English. Do you think that the solution to this debate is to encourage African Americans to speak both? Is this a viable solution?
- Would it be naive or foolish to assume that African Americans should continue fighting for the prestige of Black English? In what ways does the fight over Ebonics in Oakland suggest that a language's prestige has very little to do with the linguistic stature of the language itself and more to do with social values?
- Perkins's experience learning Standard English suggests that he adapted when he had to. There does not seem to be much self-hatred in his description. Do you agree that success and respect need to be the prime motivations for change?

ADDING MORE INFORMATION

Once you have thought about these two positions, and decided which side you think is stronger, seek out additional information and arguments that would strengthen or weaken your position.

- We often look to the schools to address questions of language. Investigate the Oakland, California, school board's decision to teach Ebonics. What were the arguments for and against? See these Web sites:
www.americanstudies.wayne.edu/xchange/3.1/gupta.html

www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/12_01/ebsecret.shtml
www.aawe.com/ebonicsarticle.html

- Investigate what linguists say about Black English vernacular. Is it really "broken" English? Does it reflect "poor grammar"? What is the history of Black English?
- Many of those African Americans who do not speak Black English are unsympathetic to the argument that Black English needs respect. Many would like to move on to larger issues affecting blacks such as jobs and education. Why is it not so easy to dismiss language when one addresses issues of jobs and education?

SEEKING COMMON CAUSE

Before you take a side, identify the points on which the two sides agree so that you can narrow the focus of the debate.

1. Most people agree that Standard English offers greater opportunities for upward mobility and respect on the job.
2. Linguists confirm that Black English offers unique constructions, rhythms, and pronunciation that distinguish it from Standard English, but make it a viable dialect.
3. Speaking one's dialect provides one with a sense of special identity.
4. Language is not the only way by which we establish and maintain our identities.
5. Language can be particularly divisive, perhaps unnecessarily so. We all have personal and public identities that may be in conflict.
6. Speakers of Standard English and of Black English deserve the same access to jobs and education.

DEBATE ESSAY

When an African American like Earvin "Magic" Johnson tries to change the way he speaks to obtain increased "social mobility," is he exercising a form of self-hatred?

In your essay, use ideas from both sides of this issue. Reveal what values both sides share, show why one side offers a stronger argument, and describe the opposing side accurately. You might also draw on your own experience learning a foreign language or different dialect to show how it might feel to be asked to change the way you speak.

WRITING PROJECTS

Writing a Short Essay

1. Write a literacy autobiography in which you trace your efforts to become proficient in a language. You might write about your acquisition of a foreign language or of the kind of academic language you are expected to use in school or of a language special to a group you have joined, possibly a social group on campus. What incentive did you have to learn this language? What was difficult in this effort? What came easily to you? What rewards were there, if any?
2. Write a short essay in which you consider how you switch between languages. These could be two distinct languages, like Spanish and English, or two dialects or language styles that you use with different people—for instance, you may use different syntax and vocabulary

when talking to a professor than when talking to your roommate. Or you might write in a different style when you send e-mail to friends than when you compose a research paper for your history class.

Here are some questions you might address: Do you feel that different aspects of your personality emerge as you write or speak in the two languages or language styles? What is required of you in each situation? Which language or language style is more comfortable for you, and why? How would you define the differences or similarities in these languages? When you switch from one language to the other, what is lost?

3. Meet in groups of three students and take turns interviewing one another about two different language communities that each of you belongs to. Ask such questions as who is part of the language community, what distinguishes the group as such a community, and what is the nature of the language and conversation/writing produced in this language? Each member of the group will take a turn as the person interviewed, the interviewer, and the person who takes notes on what is being said. Then write a report, as a group, on your collective findings.
4. Interview someone you know who speaks more than one language. These could be two different dialects, professional (e.g., legal, finance, computer) languages, or national languages (e.g., Korean, French). Ask whether they ever experience a conflict between the two or whether they move easily from one to the other. Do they find it easy to say what they mean in both languages? Do they favor one over the other? Write an essay based on this interview.
5. Interview someone you know whose native language is not English or who speaks a dialect of English. Ask this person to describe his/her earliest experiences learning English (or Standard American English). Did learning to function in a new language change this person's identity? Were stereotypes attached to the native or new language? You might ask your subject to give you examples of expressions or ways of speaking that don't translate easily into English and to explain them to you. Write up your findings.
6. If you have traveled abroad, consider how much your cultural identity is tied to your native language. What tensions did you feel between your familiar way of behaving and what you felt was expected of you in the foreign country? How did language enter into this experience?

Writing an Extended Argument

Choose two of the paintings for this chapter and consider whether the person or people depicted seem to be in harmony with their culture or in conflict with it. How do the elements of the painting (color, line, composition, etc.) create this impression of harmony or conflict?

Then choose two of the readings, and analyze how the people discussed there fit in or conflict with their ancestral or the larger American culture. Using both the paintings and readings you just analyzed—and drawing upon additional paintings and readings for further evidence—answer *one* of these questions:

1. What is necessary for someone to feel at home in a culture?
Or
2. What experiences or conditions make a person feel conflicted—caught between two incompatible cultures?

As you think about how the readings and paintings suggest answers to these questions, you might consider these related issues: Where do you see common ground between conflicting experiences? Where do you see tension, and what resolution, if any, do the paintings and readings offer?

Be sure to use ample concrete detail from the readings and paintings to illustrate your essay.

Designing the Extended Writing Project

The following suggestions for constructing a thesis, organizing, adding details, and integrating the thesis and the readings can be generalized to any other writing project you do.

To make your points clearly, we recommend that you include these elements.

A Thesis

The essay prompt under "Writing an Extended Argument" includes several subquestions, which are designed to help you think of ideas for the essay. When you write the essay, you do not necessarily have to answer every one of these questions. In fact, be sure that you have a single thesis that you elaborate on; avoid simply answering each question in turn as if you were writing an exam. The thesis is the point of your essay; it is a complete sentence (sometimes two sentences) that makes a statement about what it takes to feel at home—or not at home—in a culture.

EXAMPLES Richard Rodriguez and Caffeine Allen show that not knowing the language of a culture makes them outsiders, whereas in the paintings by Stephen Scott Young (*Flip-Flops and Lace*) and Henry Sugimoto (*Nisei Babies*) the divisive force is racism.

Louise Erdrich and Haunani-Kay Trask suggest that knowing and appreciating one's ancestral history connects them to their culture; this idea is reflected in Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States* and Tomie Arai's *The Laundryman's Daughter*.

A Structure Based on the Thesis

One of the most effective ways to organize an essay is to follow the order of ideas set forth in your thesis. There is almost always more than one way to do this. The sample below shows one possibility; the paper based on this outline will have several paragraphs for each section:

Thesis: Richard Rodriguez and Caffeine Allen show that not knowing the language of a culture makes them outsiders, whereas in the paintings by Stephen Scott Young (*Flip-Flops and Lace*) and Henry Sugimoto (*Nisei Babies*) the divisive force is racism.

Section one: Describe Rodriguez's and Allen's experiences as children who could not speak the language used at school. Show how this language problem made them feel like outsiders.

Section two: Describe how Rodriguez's and Allen's lives changed—how they began to fit in—once they became fluent in English (Rodriguez) or in the form of English used in school and the workplace (Allen).

Section three: Show how the paintings by Young and Sugimoto illustrate racism.

Section four: Show how the paintings by Young and Sugimoto illustrate one consequence of racism, treating African Americans and Japanese Americans as outsiders.

Detailed Descriptions of the Readings and Visuals

Your description of the *relevant* portions of the readings and visuals is your evidence and will make up the bulk of the essay. Details draw the readers into your writing and persuade them of your interpretation. Be sure to describe the readings and works of art so specifically that a reader who is not familiar with them can picture the visuals and understand your assertions about the readings. In other words, don't stop with a generalization; add concrete information to illustrate it.

Not

The girl in *Flip-Flops and Lace* looks sad.

But

The girl in *Flip Flaps and Lace* looks sad. Her shoulders sink forward; her lips are pursed and unsmiling, and she stares into space, looking at nothing in particular.

Not

Barbara Wallraff argues that non-English-speakers routinely integrate words from their native languages into English.

But

Barbara Wallraff argues that people using English in a non-English-speaking country routinely integrate words from their native languages into English. The India World Web site, for example, is mostly in English, but has buttons labeled "'samachar: Personalised News,' 'dhan: Investing in India,' [and] 'khai: Search India.'"

Using WEB Resources

Extend the Scope of Your Essay

The Web sites listed below offer information about, and additional works of art by, some of the artists represented in this chapter:

Carmen Lomas Garza

<http://www.carmenlomasgarza.com/>

The Jacob Lawrence Virtual Archive and Information Center

<http://www.jacoblawrence.org/art00.html>

Japanese-American National Museum, Henry Sugimoto exhibit

japanese-american-national-museum.visit-los-angeles.com/

Analyze a painting that you find on one of these Web sites and incorporate the analysis into your essay.

Study the Debate over Bilingual Education

Explore some of the Web sites listed below, and familiarize yourself with the arguments for and against bilingual education. Then expand your debate essay by including more information on the benefits and drawbacks of bilingual education. How does the information you find here complicate your understanding of the issues?

Key Legal Cases in Bilingual Education

www.teachilearn.com/uh/guadarrama/sociopsych/legal.htm

The Bilingual Families Web Page

<http://www.nethelp.no/cindy/biling-fam.html>

ACLU Briefing Paper: English Only

<http://archive.aclu.org/library/pbp06.html>

Comparison of Philosophical Assumptions of English-only L2 Instruction versus Bilingual Education

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmorra/Prop227/AssumptionsEOvBE.htm>

English First—Bilingual Education Resources

<http://www.englishfirst.org/be/begeneral.htm>

America's Dairy Farmers and Milk Processors. "Want strong bones? . . . " [2004]

By featuring martial artist, action hero, and stuntman Jackie Chan, this ad draws on stereotypes about professional athletes. Why is the ad using an athlete to sell milk? What associations do people usually have with this product? What type of reader is this ad trying to reach?



Jackie Chan is a martial artist, action hero, and stuntman. He is shown in a dynamic, acrobatic pose, holding a large milk can. The can has the words "MILK" and "2%" visible. The background is dark and textured, suggesting an urban or industrial setting.