Language, Identity, and Culture: Exploring, Employing, Embracing

2



FIGURE 2.1 In a 19th-century lithograph, Cherokee leader Sequoyah, unable to read or write, is shown with a table depicting the writing system he created for his native Cherokee language. His invention of the Cherokee syllabary, a collection of symbols representing the syllables of the spoken language, would provide a divided Cherokee nation with a way to communicate and thus create a sense of identity and unity. (credit: "Sequoyah" by Lehman and Duval/ Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

2.1 Seeds of Self
2.2 Identity Trailblazer: Cathy Park Hong
2.3 Glance at the Issues: Oppression and Reclamation
2.4 Annotated Sample Reading from The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois
2.5 Writing Process: Thinking Critically about How Identity Is Constructed Through Writing
2.6 Evaluation: Antiracism and Inclusivity
2.7 Spotlight on ... Variations of English
2.8 Portfolio: Decolonizing Self

INTRODUCTION Based on his dealings with white people who could read and write, Sequoyah (c. 1775–1843), a Cherokee leader, believed that power resulted from the ability to share knowledge. A written language comprehensible and accessible to the Cherokee people could be far more effective in preserving their culture than relying on memory or oral tradition. Hoping to unite and strengthen the Cherokee politically after they were forced from their lands by the U.S. government, Sequoyah spent 10 years developing a method for his people to communicate in writing. His language system, based on written symbols representing syllables spoken in the Cherokee language, was treated skeptically at first but was later adopted and used in Cherokee newspapers, official documents, and descriptions of rituals and medicines.

Although the use of the Cherokee language eventually gave way to English, Sequoyah remained true to all aspects of Cherokee culture. He spoke only Cherokee, wore the clothing of his people, and followed Cherokee religious customs, refusing to assimilate in any way. As evidenced by Sequoyah's ideas about communication, language, writing, and culture are clearly linked. Although Sequoyah had political purposes in mind, a common language is an important element of shared culture and goes further in developing a sense of cultural identity than what Sequoyah may have envisioned at the time.

While all humans have the same basic needs—food, water, shelter, affection, and a sense of belonging—cultural identity is shaped by family, upbringing, language, and geographical location. You may have grown up in a small town, in a large city, or in the suburbs; you may have been raised with siblings and may have attended church; you may speak more than one language. You may be single, married, or dating; you may drive a car, SUV, or truck. All your lived experiences have shaped who you are today. **Identity** is the word that encompasses all the parts of yourself that make you who you are. For example, if you were to respond to all of the scenarios presented in the sentences above, your answers would collectively make up at least some of your identity.

Having a variety of identities might result in both advantages and disadvantages associated with your lived experiences. Those advantages are called privileges, and the disadvantages **discrimination**. When you consider that people have multiple identities, also consider that these multiple identities lead to various points of **intersection** among lived experiences. The idea of **intersectionality**, then, helps you consider systems of privilege or discrimination projected onto people as a consequence of their identities.

Considering your own identity and position in the world, as well as the identities and positions of others, gives critical meaning to your personal and academic writing. Experiences make people who they are, teaching them how to move through the world and consider the effects their actions and words have on others.

In this chapter, you will explore the concept of cultural identity. *What kind of lived experiences have you had?* How have those experiences shaped and molded you? What experiences have others had, and how have those experiences shaped them?

Whenever you consider lived experiences, think about the contexts in which they occur, and the systems of communication used in those contexts. The word **culture** includes the expressions, customs, practices, and experiences that connect a person to other people in their present, past, and future. Who you are is closely connected to the cultures you inhabit and the ways in which you communicate. Among the more noticeable markers of your identities are the languages you speak. In this chapter, **language** is defined as a system of words used to communicate. Just as you likely have multiple identities, you likely speak varieties of languages as part of each of those identities.

The goal of this chapter in particular, and this text in general, is to help you think critically about language, culture, and identity in ways that make room for everyone's lived experiences. In this chapter, you will learn how authors use language to communicate their sense of cultural identity. You will read about Cathy Park Hong and W. E. B. Du Bois, activists who have used writing to explore identity and culture. You will examine your own culture as well as your personal, unconscious bias, reflecting on both of these aspects of identity to increase your understanding of the world.

2.1 Seeds of Self

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the importance of communication in various cultural, language-related, and rhetorical situations.
- Articulate how language use can promote social justice and equality.



Between 1870 and 1900, nearly 12 million immigrants arrived in the United States, many through Ellis Island. Many sought relief from religious and political persecution; others were skilled workers in search of jobs. Once

in the United States, many immigrants faced difficulties adjusting to the demands of life in a new country, including the challenges of learning a new language and new customs. They moved into neighborhoods where others from the same country already resided. There, they lived among those who knew their language and customs, ate familiar food, and participated in cultural practices handed down by their ancestors. Living in immigrant communities reminded people of their home countries and kept their cultures alive.

Understanding Culture

Culture includes observable aspects, such as the religion and language of a group of people, as well as intangible aspects, such as shared preferences, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, in Black women's natural hair culture, wash day practices might be prescribed and may involve assistance from other members of the group, whether family or friends. This community has a shared vocabulary of hair types labeled from 1 to 4 for curl type and A to C for curl diameter, as well as steps such as *detangle* and *lift* and styling techniques such as *twist out*, *braid out*, *wash and go*, and *updo*. These terms evolved from Black women's shared experiences. Likewise, in Hispanic culture, the *quinceañera* is a custom and rite of passage for 15-year-old girls. The elaborate celebration is attended by the girl's extended family and recognized by the cultural community at large. Participation in regular daily practices, such as Black women's natural hair culture, and once-in-a-lifetime celebrations, such as the *quinceañera*, can contribute to a person's culture and sense of identity.

The iceberg is often used as a metaphor for culture. The top of the iceberg, visible to all, is much smaller than the part hidden below the water. So it is with culture. The less obvious parts of culture can sometimes be "hidden" from observers. This lack of knowledge can make understanding cultures other than your own more difficult because these hidden parts are more challenging to recognize or understand.

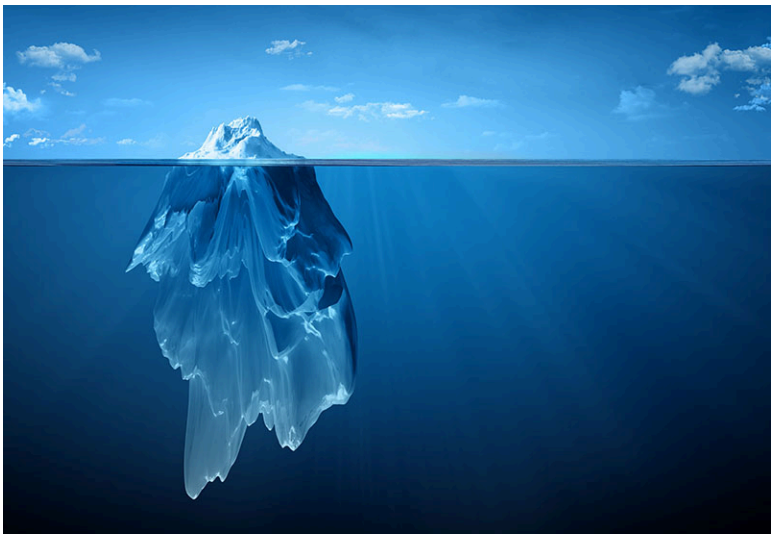


FIGURE 2.2 Icebergs often serve as a metaphor for the aspects of culture that seem "hidden" or invisible. Notice how only part of the iceberg is visible above the water. (credit: "iceberg" by Ce?sar Henrique de Santis Nascimento/ flickr, Public Domain)

Within a culture, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are both taught explicitly and learned implicitly. Think back for a moment to your high school days. You may have attended a freshman orientation that included a tour of the building, a summary of school rules, and an overview of the school schedule. This orientation was the beginning of your cultural understanding of the school and your role in it. But as you began attending regularly, you probably learned other, often unspoken cultural traditions and norms—perhaps ninth graders were expected to sit in a certain part of the cafeteria, for example. All cultures teach in similar ways. This conscious and unconscious learning process develops beliefs and attitudes that you come to view as valid. You then express these beliefs through your actions and teach them to other members.

Culture is not static; it changes and grows dynamically in response to any number of variables. Some aspects are difficult to interpret, particularly language. In fact, culture plays a significant role in the use of language. Not only does it affect *what* is said, but culture also affects *how* it is said (including tone). Different aspects of culture can be interpreted differently by various groups, making language among the most challenging aspects of culture.

Situating Self

Attending college and participating in academic traditions are now a part of your identity. This new environment not only welcomes the traditions you bring with you but also will teach you new ones, thereby broadening your view of culture and the world. In this new cultural environment, you may struggle to find your place. Embrace this struggle because it is a sign of personal growth and development. What is important to note is that even though you may struggle to situate yourself in this new environment, nothing should prevent the self you bring with you to college from finding its proper place. In other words, you do not need to lose who you are to become who you will be. Former First Lady Michelle Obama (b. 1964) writes in her book *Becoming* (2018) that your personal story "is what you have, what you will always have. It is something to own." So make space in your understanding of yourself for the value that your cultural experiences provide to others in this new environment. By sharing yourself—your culture and identity—with peers and professors, you give them an opportunity to develop and grow. College or university is a place for you to have experiences that help you first figure out who you already are and then explore who you want to be. Allow these experiences to provide that opportunity.

A **cultural system** includes all parts of a culture that shape its members: its beliefs, traditions, and rituals. Self-awareness about your own culture includes an examination of who and what have influenced your perception of the world and how you experience it. This perception, often called a **cultural lens**, affects how you understand the world and will change as you form new experiences. For example, your religious culture may influence your beliefs. However, if challenged by a new cultural experience, those beliefs may be reinforced, shift, or change completely.

Exploring Voice

One discovery that often comes out of a first-year college writing experience is finding your writing voice. When instructors talk about **voice** in writing, they are imagining a rhetorical mixture of these elements:

- **Vocabulary:** the words used to express your thoughts
- **Tone:** the attitude conveyed through your words
- **Viewpoint:** the position or perspective that comes through your writing
- **Syntax:** the order or arrangement of words

Because they provide innumerable possibilities, combinations of words, attitude, perspective, and word order will create a unique signature for your writing—one that expresses your identity as a writer.

Communication is a cornerstone of culture. It is the way people share experiences, build relationships, and develop community. Similarly, expressing communication through writing is a powerful way to share culture. Just as a person's body language reveals a deeper meaning behind their spoken language, so does a writer's voice provide deeper insight into their culture and identity.

2.2 Trailblazer

Identity Trailblazer: Cathy Park Hong

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how authors weave identity into their compositions.
- Articulate how genre conventions are shaped by purpose, culture, and expectation.

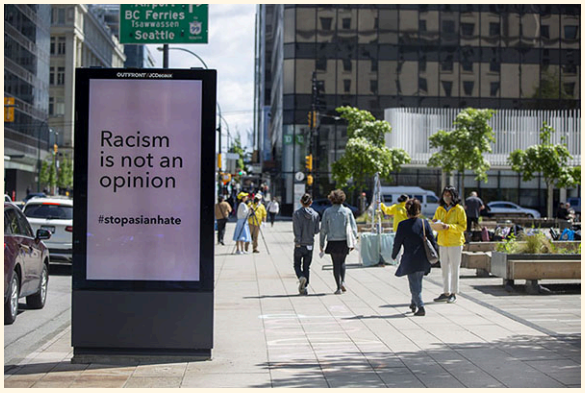


FIGURE 2.3 Cathy Park Hong (https://openstax.org/r/cathyparkhong) writes about racism from the perspective of Asians and Asian Americans. (credit: "Racism is not an option" by GoToVan/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

"Sometimes you need to explain your experiences in order to understand them yourself."

Fear: The Enemy Within

Cathy Park Hong (b. 1976) is an Asian American poet, writer, and educator committed to exploring living art. Born to Korean parents in Los Angeles, California, Hong studied at Oberlin College and at the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, where she earned a master of fine arts degree. She has received numerous fellowships, including a Fulbright scholarship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship. Hong has taught at Sarah Lawrence College and Rutgers University and served as poetry editor for the *New Republic.*

In her work, Hong explores her search for identity as a first-generation Asian American, specifically her struggles with feeling alienated from Anglo-American culture. Hong's first publication, the book of poems *Translating Mo'um* (2002), examines the often tenuous challenges experienced by first-generation Americans, specifically regarding language. Her second book of poems, *Dance Dance Revolution: Poems* (2007), won the Barnard Women Poets Prize. The work incorporates the idea of "code switching," a technique in which people switch between languages or language forms, such as formal and colloquial.

Hong most recently published a collection of essays titled *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020), a memoir that takes on the lens of cultural criticism. Writing from her personal experiences as an Asian American woman growing up and living in America, Hong delves into deeply painful and often unseen racial trauma experienced by Asians and Asian Americans. Published as anti-Asian hate crimes gained increasing national attention, Hong's essays help readers understand the curious place that Asian Americans inhabit in American race relations, where they are viewed as caricatures of the "model minority" and face

invisible racism.

The title of *Minor Feelings* comes from the word *han*, which Koreans use to describe emotions that include anger, melancholy, envy, and shame. Hong believes these same emotions are shared by minorities in America today. She expresses difficulty in using the pronoun *we* in her writing because of the diversity of Asian Americans. Yet she notes that what this diverse population has in common is that even as second- and third-generation Americans, Asian Americans find they still don't enjoy first-class status in American life in the same way that White Americans do. She proposes thinking of the label *Asian Americans* as "less of an identity, and more as a coalition" (Hong, "Why") in order to seek common ground with others who share similar experiences. Hong believes that one key is cross-cultural community building among Asian communities and between Asian, Black, Latina/Latino, and Indigenous communities.

Hong's poetry and essays also explore the racism she has experienced in the literary world, from graduate school to literary circles. Perhaps the most maddening part of those experiences, she notes, is that her perception of racism is constantly "questioned or dismissed" (Hong, *Minor* 55). Although writing about racial experiences was discouraged as "anti-academic" when she was a student, Hong has made a career of sharing these experiences through poetry and prose. She hopes that her work not only helps Asian Americans feel recognized and acknowledged but also encourages readers of all ethnicities to practice self-interrogation.

Discussion Questions

1. Cathy Park Hong recalls not having an outlet to express the racism she experienced growing up. How has writing provided that outlet for her as an adult?
2. Race informs Hong's writing, though the academic circles she was a part of discouraged this. How can art and language be influenced by identity?
3. How has Hong's work helped her explore her own culture and provided a window for others to understand it?
4. The myth of the model minority isolates Asian Americans from other people of color. How does Hong's writing work to overcome this isolation?

2.3 Glance at the Issues: Oppression and Reclamation

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Articulate how language conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes.
- Define *oppression* and explain its effects.
- Define *inclusion* and summarize ways to write inclusively.

Writing about identity and culture gives authors the opportunity to share personal experiences and provides a vehicle for storytelling. This storytelling can turn into a purposeful message with meaningful rhetorical impact.

What Is Oppression?

Some languages, cultures, and identities face discrimination. People often believe that for one group to advance, another must be held back. This suppression of growth, advancement, economic development, and educational opportunity has led to systems of **oppression**—prolonged and sustained unjust treatment—for some groups. For example, Black people from various parts of Africa endured centuries of oppression because of the transatlantic slave trade. Between the mid-16th and mid-19th centuries, European, Spanish, and American groups captured an estimated 10–12 million African men, women, and children from their homelands, boarded them on ships, and transported them to Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas to be

sold into enslavement. After 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States, Black people continued to be denied basic human rights, such as the opportunity to work at certain jobs, despite their educational achievement; to be served a meal in a restaurant; to use a public restroom or water fountain; to shop for necessities in a grocery or department store; or to live peacefully in their own communities. Black Americans have continued to be subjected to social inequities. As a community, they suffer from higher rates of incarceration, lower pay rates, fewer educational opportunities, and higher mortality at the hands of law enforcement—injustices that stem from racist policies of centuries past. Similarly, Indigenous people have been subjected to hundreds of years of oppression and silencing, often the result of colonialization, which included stripping them of their customs, land, language, and lives.

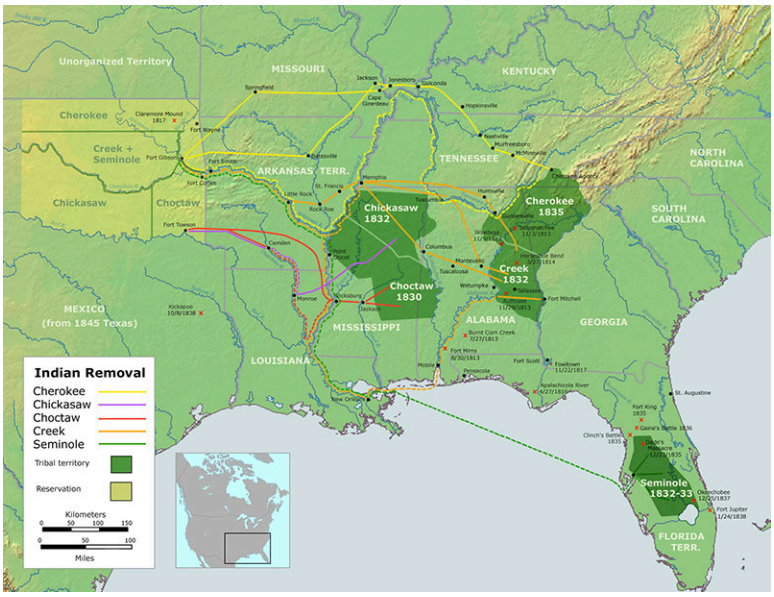


FIGURE 2.4 This map shows the routes of the Trail of Tears (https://openstax.org/r/trailoftears) (1836–1839), the U.S. government's forced relocation of tens of thousands of Native Americans from their lands in the southeastern United States to "Indian Territory" in what is now Oklahoma. Thousands died of starvation, exposure, or disease during the long and brutal 1,200-mile journey, much of it on foot. (credit: "Trails of Tears" by Nikator and www.demis.nl/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Oppression isn't just a historical problem—it extends to society today. In the two decades since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States and the subsequent War on Terror, Muslims and Sikhs have experienced hate crimes and oppression. People who identify as LGBTQ have been shunned or persecuted, subjected to hate crimes, and banned from serving in the military and have struggled to gain the right to marry. This TED Talk (https://openstax.org/r/thistedtalk) highlights the struggle for transgender rights.

In addition, migrant and refugee families, largely from countries in Central and South America, have been separated and jailed in recent efforts to curtail immigration along the southern U.S. border. Asian Americans have been subjected to racially motivated harassment and attacks, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the violent March 2021 mass shooting at an Asian American massage parlor. This TED Talk (https://openstax.org/r/talksstereotype) discusses the harm of Asian stereotypes. Discrimination has persisted for generations and continues to make it difficult for those who oppress to view the oppressed as their equals.

Reclaiming Humanity

One way to help restructure the world to reduce or even eliminate oppression is to explore your own biases. A **bias** occurs when you prejudicially favor one person, place, thing, or idea over another. People are naturally conditioned to favor the familiar over the unfamiliar. If you begin to question why you think as you do or make the decisions you make, you may begin to view others as equal, even though they may look different, live differently, and experience the world differently.

Two of the most frequent ways people isolate others are through markers of identity, especially race and gender, and through language varieties, such as standard and nonstandard English. If your view of people is primarily influenced by their physical features and the words they speak, you do not allow yourself to engage fully with them in their humanity.

Viewing others as people first and understanding the importance of questioning the lens through which you view them is the beginning. However, you also have to think critically about language bias. When you hear people of African descent speak in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or speak English with Caribbean or African accents, you may make assumptions about who they are and what they know. When you encounter people who speak English with Spanish accents, you also may make assumptions about who they are and their place in the world. However, when you hear British English or English spoken with a French, German, or Slavic accent, you may notice the difference, but you also may make a different set of assumptions about those people.

Anti-racism as Inclusion

One way to be inclusive is to write in specifically anti-racist ways. Inclusive writing begins with identifying ways in which language can be and has been used to exclude cultures, social groups, or races. Exclusive language is, unfortunately, ingrained in much of academia. It is a product of habit and the assumption that all readers are alike, with similar experiences, values, and beliefs. To write inclusively, think beyond yourself by considering other perspectives, groups, and races that may be harmed by thoughtless word choices.

Here are several principles to help you develop inclusive and anti-racist writing:

- Consider the assumptions you make about readers, and then work to address those assumptions.
- Choose language carefully.
- Revise with a critical eye. Look for racist phrases and words that label cultures negatively.
- Seek feedback and receive it with an open mind primed for learning. Because writing is personal, you may easily feel offended or dismissive. However, feedback, especially from people whose perspective differs from yours, can help you grow in anti-racist knowledge.
- Consider rhetoric and presentation. Aim to make your writing understandable, straightforward, and accessible. Use a glossary or footnotes to explain complex terms or ideas.
- Avoid casual phrases that suggest people with disabilities or from other cultures are victims and avoid euphemisms that refer to cultures to which you do not belong. Similarly, avoid using mental health issues in metaphors.
- Think about your adjectives. Some groups or people prefer not to be described by an adjective. It is important to follow individual groups' preferences for being referred to in either person-first or identity-first language.
- Avoid stereotyping; write about an individual as an individual, not as if they represent an entire group or culture. You may also choose to use gender-neutral pronouns.
- Be precise with meaning. Rather than describing something as "crazy," try a more precise term such as *intense*, *uncontrolled*, or *foolish* to give a more accurate description.
- Impact overrules intent. The impact of your language on your reader is more important than your good intentions. When you learn better, do better.

Exploring the Issues

The following key terms and characteristics provide a better understand of anti-racist and inclusive writing:

- **Ally:** a person who identifies as a supporter of marginalized groups and who advocates for them
- **Anti-racist:** adhering to a set of beliefs and actions that oppose racism and promote inclusion and equality of marginalized groups
- **Critical race theory:** the idea that racism is ingrained in the institutions and systems of American society

- **Cultural appropriation:** taking the creative or artistic forms of a different culture and using them as one's own, particularly in a way that is disrespectful of the original context
- **Culture:** the shared beliefs, values, and assumptions of a group of people
- **Emotional tax:** the invisible mental stress taken on by people of marginalized backgrounds in an attempt to feel included, respected, and safe
- **Ethnocentrism:** the idea that one's own culture is inherently better than other cultures
- **Intersectionality:** the intertwining of different aspects of social identities, including gender, race, culture, ethnicity, social class, religion, and sexual orientation, that results in unique experiences and opportunities
- **Microaggression:** behavior or speech that subtly or indirectly expresses prejudice based on race, gender, ability, age, or other aspects of identity, often but not always without an individual's conscious intention (For example, the drill team director instructs all members to wear their hair straight for competition.)
- **Neurodiversity:** the idea that humans have a range of differences in neurological functioning that should be respected
- **Unconscious bias:** any implicit, unfair preferences that people hold without being aware of them

2.4 Annotated Sample Reading from The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Articulate how conventions are shaped by purpose, language, culture, and expectation.
- Analyze relationships between ideas and patterns of organization.
- Analyze how W. E. B. Du Bois uses language, identity, and culture to shape his writing.

Introduction



FIGURE 2.5 W. E. B. Du Bois (credit: "Du Bois, W. E. B.." Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) was an American historian and sociologist who graduated from Fisk University in

1888 and Harvard University in 1895. Du Bois deeply influenced the civil rights movement in the United States and is widely regarded as among the most important Black protest leaders and activists of the first half of the 20th century. He helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and his essay collection *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) is considered seminal American literature.

Du Bois conducted sociological investigations of Black life in America, specifically the disenfranchisement of Black Americans and the pervasive nature of racism, including how it can influence how people of color see themselves. Du Bois dedicated years of his life to sociological studies of Black people in America, at first applying social science in his quest for racial and social justice. However, he eventually came to believe that the only path to progress was through protest. In his written works, particularly *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois discusses the dual nature of living as a Black person in America and feeling unable to be both a "Negro" and an American at once. In the excerpt below, Du Bois explains his famed theories of the color line, the veil, and double consciousness.

Du Bois's work was a direct result of the world in which he lived and the one from which previous generations came—one that highlighted the complex issues of race and conflict in America. He wrote both for Black and White audiences, professing that his message was for all and affected the very heart of American democracy. Learning about the struggles of Black people in 19th- and early 20th-century America is still important today, and even a century later, Du Bois's words can help all people understand the complex contextual issues that affect race relations. Understanding these challenges encourages tolerance, acceptance, and connections between cultures.

LIVING BY THEIR OWN WORDS

Between Me and the World

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

The Color Line. *Du Bois previously introduced the "color line," the divide between races, in his "Forethought." This line is sometimes invisible, but at other times, it is a physical line. The example of White people wondering what it feels like to be "a problem" demonstrates the invisible color line separating Black and White citizens into two separate communities.*

Audience. *Du Bois probably is writing with a White audience in mind, as Black readers likely understand the ideas he proposes. He uses academic language, which may be his authentic voice as an academic and a writer, but he also seeks to reach his intended audience.*

> And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.

The Veil. *Du Bois's anecdote about the girl refusing his card introduces his idea of the "veil," a symbol he uses throughout the text to demonstrate the color line. The veil represents the different worlds that Black and White people must inhabit. Though invisible, the veil shuts Du Bois out of this girl's world.*

> I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head,—some way. With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above.

Point of View and Voice. *Du Bois uses the first-person point of view to relate his lived experiences. He writes in a voice that invites readers to picture him speaking, asking rhetorical questions.*

Vivid Language. *Du Bois uses vivid language to emphasize the bitterness created by the treatment of Black children. The image of the "prison-house" walls closing in shows the inability to escape the veil that society placed between White and Black children. Du Bois emphasizes the impact of this separation in the choice that Black children must make: accept that they will never have the opportunities enjoyed by White children or hopelessly try to achieve them.*

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

Double Consciousness. *Du Bois expands the image of the veil separating the worlds of Black and White people to include the idea of "double-consciousness": that Black people see themselves through the eyes of White people. Racist ideation is inescapable, and Black people end up viewing their own culture negatively.*

Conflict. *These ideas of double consciousness and the veil leave Black Americans at war with themselves. Du Bois uses the metaphor of a measuring tape meant for one world but used to measure another and the warring idea of "twoness."*

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

Culture and Self. *Du Bois explores the concept of self through the lens of Africanism and Americanism. He recognizes that the "Negro soul" has an important place in the world. Yet he feels that holding on to his Black roots means that the world sees him as un-American and leaves him without opportunity.*

> This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten. The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Through history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness. Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness,—it is the contradiction of double aims.

Simile. *The comparison of Black men to falling stars, never allowed to reveal the possibilities of their success, demonstrates the difficulties they face.*

Discussion Questions

1. What might have been the impact of Du Bois's use of academic language on his audience?
2. How does Du Bois use his personal experience to relate the experiences of a broader culture?
3. What impact do the images of shadows and darkness have on Du Bois's message?
4. In this section of the text, Du Bois focuses on internalization of race. How does this concept illustrate the impact of racism on society?

Assumptions and Stereotypes

Du Bois experiences the veil between worlds as a Black American because of assumptions and stereotypes. Unfortunately, such assumptions and stereotypes still exist in America today. In Chapter 2, you have begun to learn about the impact of language on culture and about how developing anti-racist and inclusive ideas is an important part of the composition process.

Read the following scenario.

Mark is an assistant manager at a neighborhood convenience store. At the end of the evening, his inventory count is short. After an examination of the store, Mark notices that a large display of novelty items is nearly empty. Knowing his store sells only a few of those items each day, Mark identifies theft of the items as the likely source of the discrepancy. He thinks back through the customers he served that day.

2.5 Writing Process: Thinking Critically about How Identity Is Constructed Through Writing

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the importance of communication in various cultural, language, and rhetorical situations.
- Implement a variety of drafting strategies to demonstrate the connection between language and social justice.
- Apply the composition processes and tools as a means to discover and reconsider ideas.
- Participate in the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes.
- Give and act on productive feedback to works in progress.

Now it's your turn to join this cultural conversation. As you write, keep your audience in mind as well as the principles of inclusivity and anti-racism that you have learned about. Consider how you can share your personal experiences, ideas, and beliefs in a way that is inclusive of all and shows sensitivity to the culture of your readers.

Summary of Assignment: Cultural Artifact

Choose an artifact that symbolizes something about a culture to which you belong. This might be a physical object that you have, or it may be a metaphorical object, such as Du Bois's color line or veil, that represents something larger about your culture. Write approximately 350–700 words describing it, using sensory detail and explaining its meaning both to you personally and within your culture. To begin your thinking, view this TEDx Talk (https://openstax.org/r/thistedxtalk) for a discussion of cultural artifacts and narrative led by artist David Bailey.

Another Lens 1. Choose a space that is important to a cultural community to which you belong. While visiting this space, conduct an hour-long observation. Respond in writing to these items: *Describe the space in detail. What do you see permanently affixed in the space? What activity is going on? How is the space currently used? What is the atmosphere? How are you feeling while conducting your observation?* Then, do some brief research on the space (using the Internet, the library, or campus archives), and answer these questions: *What is the history of the space? When was it established, and under what circumstances? How has this space been used in the past? What is your response or reaction to this history?* Then write a passage in which you highlight a unique feature of the space and your cultural relationship to it.

Another Lens 2. Considering Du Bois's theory of double consciousness, explore the ways in which you may experience competing identities or competing cultures in your own life. *What experiences have you had or witnessed where language clashed with or supported your identity or culture? What happened? How did others react? How did you react? What insight does your experience offer on this discussion of rhetoric and the power of language to define, shape, and change or give birth to identity or culture?*

Quick Launch: Joining the Dialogue

You may choose to use journaling to develop your language use and voice. Journaling, or keeping a written record of your thoughts and ideas, can clarify your thoughts and emotions, help you better understand your values, and increase your creativity. The following two journaling techniques should help you get started.

Character Sketch and Captured Moment

Because your cultural artifact may be tied to a person, a character sketch might help you think about its significance. A character sketch is a brief description of a real or fictional person—in this case, likely someone you know or even yourself. In it, you describe the character's personality, physical traits, habits, history, relationships, and ties to the cultural artifact. You may include research about the character to introduce readers to them. Use the following format if you need more guidance:

Character Sketch

- Introduction
  - Quotation
  - Anecdote about the character
  - Most important traits
- Supporting Details
  - Physical appearance
  - Actions
  - Thoughts
  - Language
  - Ties to cultural artifact

A character sketch of your grandmother might read as follows.

> My first memory of Nonna materializes in the kitchen, where we are baking Swedish cookies together. She carefully shows me how to measure ingredients, stirring with her hand over mine in her deep "cookie-making" bowl. Nonna is a slight woman with a big heart full of kindness. She teaches me many skills, both in and out of the kitchen, that I still use today. Some have proven to be life lessons. She never met a stranger she didn't like and often said it takes more effort to be unkind than kind. Because of Nonna, the Swedish cookie has become a metaphor for my life. The ingredients of one's life make up an identity, and the combination is always delicious.

Another journaling technique is to record a captured moment through the examination of a cultural artifact. This exercise lets you use an artifact as a means to look at an event in your life and create a written piece that captures its importance, emotion, or meaning. Select an artifact and an experience. Think about what they mean to you. *What do you remember, and why?* Then go deeper. Analyze the long-term meaning of it in your life. Try to recreate the artifact and then the experience in your mind, and relive the sensations you experienced in the moment.

Choose the Artifact



Begin your assignment by choosing your artifact. You may take inspiration from W. E. B. Du Bois's image of the veil in the annotated sample in the previous section. Or, going back to the beginning of this chapter and Sequoyah's syllabary, you may choose to take inspiration from something linguistic, an expression or a way of talking that is associated with your culture. You may choose an artifact that, like the veil, has metaphorical significance. Or you may choose a more tangible artifact, such as a religious symbol, a traditional clothing item, or any number of objects related to your chosen culture.

Once you have chosen your artifact, do a prewriting exercise called a **freewrite**. In this activity, set a time limit (say, 10 minutes), and write whatever comes to mind about your object within that time. Don't worry about organization, flow, grammar, punctuation, or whether your writing is "good"; just write. This exercise not only gets your creative juices flowing but also allows you to put pen to paper and opens your mind to what may be subconscious thoughts about the object as it relates to culture.

Next, it is time to take a more refined approach to planning your writing. Think back to The Digital World: Building on What You Already Know to Respond Critically, which addresses the different purposes for writing. To help shape your writing use a separate sheet of paper to answer the questions in Table 2.1.

Who is my audience?
What is my purpose for writing?
What organizational strategies will I use?
How will I introduce my artifact?
How will I describe my artifact using sensory language?
Will I share personal anecdotes, examples, or ideas?
How will I add cultural context to my writing to help my audience understand my culture?
What transitions will I use?
How will I end my writing?

TABLE 2.1 Planning questions

Drafting: Critical Context

In your writing, try to incorporate and respond to the current cultural climate. **Context** is information that helps readers understand the cultural factors that affect your ideas, actions, and thoughts. Context helps build the relationship between you as a writer and your audience, providing clarity and meaning. For example, Du Bois's veil means very little until readers understand the deep racial divide that existed during his lifetime, including Jim Crow laws, segregation, and violent crimes committed against his fellow Black Americans.

Cultural Context

Sharing cultural context helps your readers understand elements of culture they may be unfamiliar with. Consider what background information you need to provide, especially information that is integral to readers' understanding of the traditions, beliefs, and actions that relate to your artifact. Essentially, you will need to close the gap between your own culture and that of your readers.

Armed with your freewrite and your answers to the questions as a starting place, create your first draft. As you write, embed cultural context and explain the significance of your artifact in a way that is relatable and meaningful to your audience. Like Du Bois, try to use figurative language, such as similes or personification, in your description, and include the relevant sensory elements of the artifact: its appearance, taste, smell, sound, and feel. See Print or Textual Analysis: What You Read for definitions and examples of some figurative language, or consult this site (https://openstax.org/r/figurativelanguage). Consider using a graphic organizer like Figure 2.6 as a guide. Add more outer circles if needed, and be mindful of writing in a way that it is accessible and inclusive.

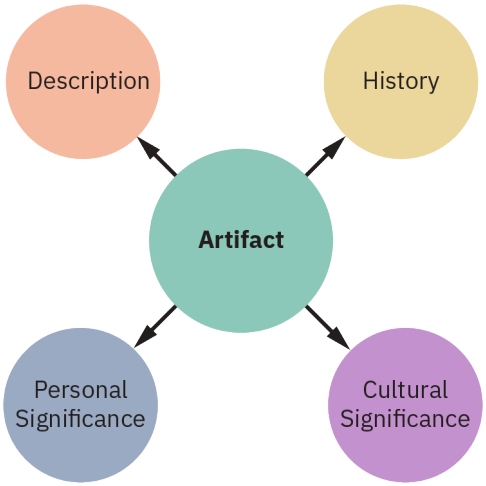


FIGURE 2.6 Idea web (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)

Remember that your first draft is just a starting point. The most important thing is to get your ideas on paper. This draft can be considered a test of sorts—one that determines what should and should not appear in the final paper.

Consider the following sensory description of Broadway in New York, written by British novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870) in his book *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842). *What does Dickens, as a British observer, note about this street in America? How does he use language to convey what he sees, hears, and smells? In what ways does he use language to convey a British viewpoint?*

> Warm weather! The sun strikes upon our heads at this open window, as though its rays were concentrated through a burning-glass; but the day is in its zenith, and the season an unusual one. Was there ever such a sunny street as this Broadway! The pavement stones are polished with the tread of feet until they shine again; the red bricks of the houses might be yet in the dry, hot kilns; and the roofs of those omnibuses look as though, if water were poured on them, they would hiss and smoke, and smell like half-quenched fires. No stint of omnibuses here! Half-a-dozen have gone by within as many minutes. Plenty of hackney cabs and coaches too; gigs, phaetons, large-wheeled tilburies, and private carriages—rather of a clumsy make, and not very different from the public vehicles, but built for the heavy roads beyond the city pavement. . . . [C]oachmen . . . in straw hats, black hats, white hats, glazed caps, fur caps; in coats of drab, black, brown, green, blue, nankeen, striped jean and linen; and there, in that one instance (look while it passes, or it will be too late), in suits of livery. Some southern republican that, who puts his blacks in uniform, and swells with Sultan pomp and power. Yonder, where that phaeton with the well-clipped pair of grays has stopped—standing at their heads now—is a Yorkshire groom, who has not been very long in these parts, and looks sorrowfully round for a companion pair of top-boots, which he may traverse the city half a year without meeting. Heaven save the ladies, how they dress! We have seen more colours in these ten minutes, than we should have seen elsewhere, in as many days. What various parasols! what rainbow silks and satins! what pinking of thin stockings, and pinching of thin shoes, and fluttering of ribbons and silk tassels, and display of rich cloaks with gaudy hoods and linings! The young gentlemen are fond, you see, of turning down their shirt-collars and cultivating their whiskers, especially under the chin; but they cannot approach the ladies in their dress or bearing, being, to say the truth, humanity of quite another sort. Byrons of the desk and counter, pass on, and let us see what kind of men those are behind ye: those two labourers in holiday clothes, of whom one carries in his hand a crumpled scrap of paper from which he tries to spell out a hard name, while the other looks about for it on all the doors and windows.

Now, how might Dickens go on to provide context and make connections between British and American cultures so that readers understand both more keenly? Although *American Notes* is generally critical of the United States, this description creates a positive mood, as if Dickens recognizes something of home during his visit to Broadway—a cultural artifact. This recognition suggests that moments of unexpected joy can create connections between cultures.

Peer Review:

One of the most helpful parts of the writing process can be soliciting input from a peer reviewer. This input will be particularly helpful for this assignment if the peer reviewer is not a member of the culture you are writing about. An outsider's view will help you determine whether you have included appropriate cultural context. Peer reviewers can use the following sentence starters to provide feedback.

- One piece of your writing I found meaningful was _____.
- Something new I learned about your culture is _____; you explained this well by _____.
- Something I was confused by was _____; I don't understand this because _____.
- A major point that I think needs more detail or explanation is _____.
- In my opinion, the purpose of your paper is _____.
- To me, it seems that your audience is _____.
- I would describe the voice of your piece as _____.
- I think you could better build cultural context by _____.

Revising:

Writing is a **recursive** process; you will push forward, step back, and repeat steps multiple times as your ideas develop and change. As you reread, you may want to add, delete, reorder, or otherwise change your draft. This response is natural. You may need to return to the brainstorming process to mine for new ideas or organizational principles.

As you reread and prepare for revisions, focus on the voice you have used. *If a friend were to read your draft,*

could they "hear" you in it? If not, work on revising to create a more natural cadence and tone. Another area of focus should be to explain cultural context and build cultural bridges. Use your peer reviewer's feedback to develop a piece that will be meaningful to your audience.

While describing your artifact is likely a deeply personal endeavor, an important part of writing is to consider your audience. Composition offers a unique opportunity to build and share cultural understanding. One way to achieve this goal is by using anti-racist and inclusive language. Try to view your composition from outside of your own experience.

- Is any language or are any ideas harmful or offensive to other cultures?
- Are you using the language of preference for a specified group?
- Can people of various abilities read and understand your writing?

One overarching strategy you can use for anti-racist revision is to constantly question commonly used words and phrases. For example, the word *Eskimo* is a European term used to describe people living in the Arctic without regard for differentiation. The term was later used to describe a popular frozen treat known as an *Eskimo pie*. Today, the term is considered offensive to Inuit communities—Indigenous people living in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. You can also make yourself aware of the evolving preferences for language use. For example, the term *Negro* gave way to *African American*, which is now giving way to the term *Black*. Finally, consider the use of the word *see*, for example, to mean "to understand": *Do you see what I mean?* Is the use of *see* in this way inclusive of a visually impaired person who may be reading your text? To start, determine one or two places to include anti-racist or inclusive language or ideas in your writing, and build those into your piece.

2.6 Evaluation: Antiracism and Inclusivity

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Apply or challenge measurement outcomes for anti-racist and inclusive language.
- Compare your written work with evaluation criteria.





Learning to be both anti-racist and inclusive in your writing will help you share your culture with others and build bridges with cultures that differ from yours. As a writer, you have a unique opportunity to share your understandings, beliefs, and ideas, but if you do so in a way that limits understanding, you will reach only those who already agree with you or have similar experiences.

Anti-racist writing actively identifies and opposes racism. Its goal is to directly challenge racist ideas, methods, and behaviors and to replace them with anti-racist ones. Unfortunately, the history of academic writing often has been entrenched in racism at institutional and structural levels. Like Du Bois's "double-consciousness," students from other cultures have been penalized unfairly for their adherence to cultural traditions. American culture has made some strides, yet it isn't enough to be "not racist"—it must do better by being actively anti-racist. One way to do this is to work to understand, use, and appreciate cultural forms, voices, and attitudes and to share beliefs that communicate identity and issues within cultures.

Inclusive writing encourages writers to think about what readers need and how they interact with the content. Inclusive writing represents culture authentically, helping readers find common threads in the writer's words, though they may not share a particular culture.

Ask a peer to use the following rubric to evaluate your final draft. The rubric is designed to help you think about your writing in anti-racist and inclusive terms.

Rubric

Score	Critical Language Awareness	Clarity and Coherence	Rhetorical Choices
5 **Skillful**	The text works to communicate cultural ideas using inclusive language and shows ample evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writer presents an artifact and describes it clearly with sensory detail and figurative language. The connection to culture is evident and successfully builds cultural context. The writer's ideas are well organized and linked with appropriate transitions.	The paper consistently exhibits strong cultural awareness in the author's rhetorical choices. It uses anti-racist and inclusive language to appeal to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
4 **Accomplished**	The text works to communicate cultural ideas using some inclusive language and shows some evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writer presents an artifact and describes it with some sensory detail and figurative language. The connection to culture is evident and builds cultural context. The writer's ideas are organized and linked with some transitions.	The paper exhibits some cultural awareness in the author's rhetorical choices. It uses mostly anti-racist and inclusive language to appeal to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
3 **Capable**	The text tries to communicate cultural ideas using limited inclusive language and shows limited evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writer presents an artifact with some description but uses little or no figurative language. The connection to culture and cultural context may sometimes be weak. Some, but not all, of the writer's ideas are presented clearly; the writing is choppy at times and needs more, or more appropriate, transitions.	The paper exhibits some, but not enough, cultural awareness in the author's rhetorical choices. It uses some anti-racist and inclusive language but needs work to appeal to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

TABLE 2.2

Score	Critical Language Awareness	Clarity and Coherence	Rhetorical Choices
2 **Developing**	The text attempts to communicate cultural ideas using emerging inclusive language and shows emerging evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writer presents an artifact with little connection to culture and only minimally develops cultural context. The description is basic, lacking sensory details and figurative language. The writer has used few transitions or has used them incorrectly.	The paper exhibits weak cultural awareness in the author's rhetorical choices. It uses minimal anti-racist and inclusive language and does not appeal to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
1 **Beginning**	The text begins to communicate cultural ideas but uses little to no inclusive language and shows little to no evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The writer does not describe an artifact in any detail and makes no mention of cultural connection or cultural context. The ideas are disconnected, and no transitions are used.	The paper does not exhibit cultural awareness in the author's rhetorical choices. It does not use anti-racist or inclusive language and does not appeal to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

TABLE 2.2

2.7 Spotlight on … Variations of English

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, diction, tone, level of formality, and structure.
- Identify linguistic structures, including American English dialects.
- Write a description in an authentic voice.

English and Its Dialects





Although English is the primary language of the United States, distinctive **dialects**, or forms of language specific to a particular region or social group, vary according to location, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other factors. American dialects may have their own grammar, vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, and common expressions. Many, mainly regional, differences in pronunciation are often marked by **rhotic** and **non-rhotic** accents. Speakers with rhotic accents pronounce the /r/ before consonants and at the end of a word. Those with non-rhotic accents do not pronounce the /r/; for example, think of the Boston accent pronunciation of *park* as *pahk* or the Coastal Southern (areas along the Gulf of Mexico) pronunciation of *better* as *bettuh*.

While the American Midwest has what might be considered the closest variation to **General American English**, the language spoken by most Americans, it has its own regional and cultural dialect variations. In characteristic **Midwest American English** words such as *cot* and *caught* are pronounced as homophones. As

in rhotic dialects, /r/ sounds are pronounced, even in words that don't contain the letter *r*: *wash*, for example, becomes *warsh*. And /s/ may be added to words as a grammatical construction: *Alls* we need is more ice cream.

Variations in pronunciation and dialect result from a host of factors. Dialects are formed when people are divided socially, geographically, or both. Despite the difficulties in categorizing such complex variations in language, most scholars agree that dialects can be classified on the basis of location and social groupings, despite the overlap between them. A **regional dialect** is a variation in language that occurs within a geographical region. A **social dialect** includes differences in speech associated with a social group or socioeconomic level.

Among the most common—and most debated—language variations is **African American Vernacular English (AAVE)**. AAVE, also referred to as **Black English Vernacular** or **Ebonics**, is a generalized term for a variety of dialects spoken by Black Americans. These dialects are influenced by American Southern dialects. With roots in the language patterns of people descended from enslaved Africans in the United States, AAVE has its own syntax, grammar, and tense system. Some common features include the absence of third-person singular and possessive pronouns and the use of double negatives.

AAVE has distinct grammar conventions. The speaker or writer will often omit forms of the verb *to be* from a sentence, as in these examples:

"What [omitted *is*] he talking about?"

"She [omitted *was*] the one who took it."

While General American English requires verb and tense agreement, AAVE features more variations. For example, in AAVE, the word *been* is often placed before a verb in order to convey a past event: for example, "He been married" rather than the General American English "He was married." This change in grammar can actually convey different meanings. In General American English, the sentence implies that the man is no longer married, whereas the sentence in AAVE indicates that the man is still married.

This is by no means an inclusive list of AAVE conventions, as languages are constantly evolving. Understanding that language differences result from culture, identity, and geography and that you, as a writer, have the opportunity to express yourself using your social norms is an important first step in recognizing the role of culture in language.

Although differences in pronunciation abound, English dialects are widely classified as "standard" or "nonstandard." **Standard dialect** follows specific rules for syntax, vocabulary, and grammar. This dialect is often perceived as more academic than nonstandard dialects and is used in formal situations. Other dialects, usually lacking such standardization and generally perceived as having less stature, are considered **nonstandard dialects**. For years, academic scholars and teachers have subscribed to the idea that so-called standard English should be the default dialect used in schools and academic writing. This dialect is spoken by newscasters, television news anchors, and a large percentage of middle-class Americans, especially those with formal educations.

And yet you, like others, have your own patterns of speech based largely on your culture, family, and region. **Code-switching**, or alternating between two or more languages or language forms, was taught explicitly in schools with the intent that students learn to speak and write standard English for certain academic and professional situations. However, newer research in best practices is revealing that allowing students to learn in and use their authentic voices, including nonstandard dialects, is a more equitable practice that is both culturally responsible and beneficial to learning.

"Students' Right to Their Own Language"

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) is the world's largest professional organization committed to writing research, theory, and teaching. It publishes the quarterly journal *College Composition and Communication* and holds an annual convention. The CCCC also publishes position

statements on writing and the teaching of writing based on research, best practices of writing pedagogy, and language practices. Recent research completed by the CCCC addresses the use of a wide variety of linguistic expressions and choices, including various regional and cultural dialects.

In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication adopted "Students' Right to Their Own Language," a statement that affirmed students' rights to use "their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture" or those that help them create their own identity. The statement recognizes that so-called General American English is aligned with a dominant White majority and includes implicit bias against students from other backgrounds. Finally, the statement reinforces the idea that a nation that praises and encourages diversity, particularly in academic circles, should not only accept diversity in language and dialect but also celebrate it. Doing so allows students to use the totality of their lived experiences, cultural language, and ideas to create fuller meaning in their writing. Over the years, the statement has undergone revisions and has been expanded to address students learning and writing in a second language.

This statement takes a step toward confronting the assumptions and hidden bias present in the educational system and works toward creating more equitable, anti-racist teaching for students, particularly from Black and other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) backgrounds. The most recent updated and reaffirmed statement (https://openstax.org/r/statementnewsrtol) stems from 2014.

Demand for Linguistic Justice

One position statement released by the CCCC in July 2020 was "This Ain't Another Statement! This Is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!" Responding to the historical and sociopolitical context of today's world, this statement coincided with #BlackLivesMatter, a movement to fight racism directed at the Black community, often at the hands of police and vigilantes. The statement shifts the narrative to composition and communication, asking how Black lives matter in language education, research, and scholarship.

The CCCC strongly promotes students' language rights based on their own cultural backgrounds, yet it acknowledges that language rights have suffered from a similarly "inadequate response" as other social justice movements. Specifically for Black students and writers, cultural traditions such as **AAVE/Ebonics** continue to be devalued and diminished in line with the devaluation of Black lives. The demand upholds the organization's earlier statement that Ebonics communicates Black traditions and social truths. The statement includes these demands:

- That teachers stop teaching only standard English as the communicative norm
- That teachers stop teaching Black students to code-switch and instead teach about linguistic racism
- That teachers teach "Black Linguistic Consciousness" and work to unravel anti-Black linguistic racism
- That Black perspectives be included in the research and teaching of Black language

You can learn more about the impact of linguistic bias in education in this TEDx Talk (https://openstax.org/r/thistedxtalk_QrTFJ5NlM1g).

Publication: Writing as Your Artifact

Try this short exercise to identify and practice writing in a dialect that directly reflects the culture your artifact comes from. Write a short three- to five-paragraph story from the perspective of the artifact you chose for this chapter's writing assignment. *What might your artifact see, hear, feel, or experience in its everyday life?* Concentrate on using an authentic dialect, including vocabulary, grammatical conventions, and sentence structure, when constructing your story. As you reread your writing, ensure that you can hear your authentic voice in the text.

When all stories have been written, consider collaborating with your instructor to collect them in a class book that includes illustrations of the artifacts and a short quotation from the point of view of each artifact, similar to the format of the Trailblazer sections of this book.

2.8 Portfolio: Decolonizing Self

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Write a reflection of your composition process and how it affects your work.
- Apply the composing processes as a means to discover and reconsider ideas.

After each writing assignment in this course, you will reflect on and write about the composition process. Doing so makes you a more thoughtful writer as you think about the ideas, audience, purpose, and cultural considerations of your work.

The Colonized Self

The colonized lived experience is an important topic of academic discourse. When one refers to a situation as colonized, they mean that the ideas, customs, and culture of one group of people have been imposed onto the Indigenous people of a land. For example, colonization occurred when European explorers arrived in the Americas between the 16th and 18th centuries to inhabit land already populated by various Native American peoples with their own culture and customs. Many scholars and students are interested in exploring what it means to remove this foreign experience from the curriculum and to discontinue operating under the assumption that groups in power determine customs and culture.

Such a process begins with an examination of individual identities and cultures. You have likely attended school in systems that privilege a mainstream culture over all others. The challenge is to figure out the identity of your authentic self, stripped of colonizing forces, the way Sequoyah, Cathy Park Hong, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others have tried to do. Essentially, two versions exist of the self: the **colonized self** that conforms to academic standards even when they do not align with personal cultural experiences and the **decolonized self** that challenges mainstream standards, especially when they do not include or make space for lived experiences. So what does the process of decolonizing look like?

The Decolonized Self

Throughout much of American history, education has focused on advancing the colonial purposes of assimilation. This practice can be harmful to everyone, especially to students identifying as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color). While outright racism and exclusion are now frowned upon in academia, colonial racism and exclusion persist through more subtle means: systems of oppression, curricula, and institutional structures.

As a student and writer, you likely have experienced the effects of colonization either to your benefit or your detriment. While it can be difficult to break through entrenched racism and exclusion, through the process of decolonization you can form your identity and better understand the identities of people from other cultures.

The word decolonization refers to the process of a nation or territory breaking free from an oppressive colonial power that controls it. In essence, decolonization is a statement of independence. When used in cultural terms, *decolonization* refers to challenging and changing the individual and collective consciousness rooted in racism and oppression. Essentially, then, it means undoing colonial practices that have influenced education in the past and continue to do so today. You can learn more about decolonizing education in this TEDx Talk (https://openstax.org/r/thistedxtalk_zeKHOTDwZxU).

As you work to develop your decolonized self, you will likely spend time on introspection, examining unconscious biases and how they affect your perspective on your culture and other cultures. Learning to be anti-racist and inclusive is a lifelong process, one that can be developed in part through the writing process. Continual questioning and reflection is the most important part of decolonization.

Reflection Prompt

In your portfolio for this chapter, imagine that other students in colleges and universities across the country

are talking about some of these same cultural issues. Think of it as one big conversation. American philosopher and rhetorician Kenneth Burke (1897–1993) created the metaphor of a *parlor* where academics across time and space have gathered to help you imagine what academic conversations must be like. Burke describes an academic conversation as "unending": "Others . . . are engaged in a heated discussion. . . . You listen for a while . . . then you put in your oar" (Burke 110). In other words, as you write, you are adding to a timeless conversation among thinkers and authors. Your words help define cultural understanding of the future. (More about this "conversation" appears in Glance at Genre: Introducing Research as Evidence.)

Consider Burke's concept of joining an unending conversation along with the intersections of your cultural identities. Write a reflection in which you imagine what happens in the Burkean parlor of your own making when you enter. *How does the conversation change as a result of your presence? What parts of yourself contribute to, or maybe even derail, the ongoing conversations? How does the parlor change after you leave? Do you leave the parlor bubbling like warm, nourishing soup or in (figurative) flames?*

[continued from previous conversation]

Former U.S. President Barack Obama: "The worst thing that colonialism did was to cloud our view of our past."

Nigerian Author Chinua Achebe: "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."

British Writer E. M. Forster: "And Englishmen like posing as gods."

American Professor J. M. Blaut: "Eurocentrism is quite simply the colonizer's model of the world."

American Theologian Catherine Keller: "Western dominology can with religious sanction identify anything dark, profound, or fluid with a revolting chaos."

Senegalese Author Mariama Bâ: "The assimilationist dream of the colonist drew into its crucible our mode of thought and way of life."

Antiguan American Author Jamaica Kinkaid: "What I see is the millions of people . . . made orphans: no motherland . . . no . . . holy ground."

African American Author Ralph Ellison: "When I discover who I am, I'll be free."

YOU: ". . ."

[to be continued]

Further Reading

To read more about the process of exploring language, identity, and culture, you may seek out the following authors and titles.

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