

Exploring Audience as a Concept - A Classroom Example

Charles Ellenbogen, a Baltimore City high school teacher, explained a particularly effective classroom activity through which he encourages students to look at the way in which acknowledging audience shapes a writer's task.

Transcript

"In general, I like using newspaper articles. I think they are often short pieces, you can use the topic that's accessible to them, that's current. So often the criticism students give about school is this book is 250 years old.

"So, I was thinking about a lesson on the audience, and it was one of those lazy Sundays where we bought the Baltimore Sun and the New York Times. And I noticed the pictures. I thought, 'This is exactly what I want to demonstrate, how audience affects writing.'

"And so we looked at two articles that were about the Bosnian memorial President Clinton was involved in constructing. And we didn't read the whole thing, we just read the headlines; we looked at the pictures.

"I was impressed students wanted to make comments about the caption. And we read about two paragraphs. And this came after we put on the board some ideas we had about, all right, 'Who were the writers in the Baltimore Sun trying to reach?' 'Who were the writers in the New York Times trying to reach?' 'How might that affect their writing?' And I thought the students were pretty savvy and they talked about the Sun being a more local paper, and the Times being a more national one. 'All right, what does it mean to be a local paper?' And some of them said 'Well, they're going to try to get more human interest stories.' All right, and the same question to the New York Times.

"I think what they found and why I picked the articles was the way the Sun really tried to get to the emotional angle first and then get into the facts of the story, whereas the Times just jumped into very declarative sentences, saying this is what happened and this is what Clinton was doing there and this is the quote from Clinton.

And, so they saw it."