

Black Rhetoric and Communication Style

Here are the definitions of Black rhetoric and communication style that we are working with:

- 1) “the use of language as a high art; in other words, *how and why* you say something is as important as *what* you say” (Redd and Schuster, p. 41);
- 2) a certain quality of language, oral and written, where specific cultural meanings and histories are communicated, where certain attitudes toward language itself are central;
- 3) what gets said in stories, dance, song, paintings, everyday banter and, as such, communicates belief systems, social values, a sense of the past, notions of shared identity, and communal aspirations.

Part I: The Most Theorized and Discussed Aspects of Black Rhetorical Style

Strategy	Explanation of Discourse Strategy	What examples of this discourse strategy did you see/hear/feel in the text? What does this rhetor hope to achieve with this discourse strategy? For whom? Why does the rhetor use language this way?
call-response and field-dependent	Rhetors become directly involved with their topics (also called direct address) and seem to be speaking to the audience. It is almost as if they are waiting for a response when they are asking questions, etc. This is very different from using the traditional academic/school convention of distancing yourself, staying neutral, or avoiding personal injections.	
Signifyin (or siggin)	This refers to an artistic use of indirection. It is an art of insult where humorous and/or decorous put-downs serve as an indirect form of serious criticism or casual joking. Such verbal indirection is also linked to cultural survivance as in the African American Spiritual during slavery, “Steal Away” which referenced slave escapes as well as a heavenly home.	
Tonal semantics	The sounds of things that get captured through repetition, alliteration, and rhyme. Think of talk-singing and intonational stresses. Related here is “intonational contouring” where there are specific stresses and pitches in pronouncing certain words (like PO-lice for police).	
Narrative sequencing	These are meandering stories that are narrated right alongside a main story. This is often referred to as topic-associated styles which feature “implicitly associated personal anecdotes.” Narrative sequencing remains a highly discussed aspect of African American children’s discourse styles in elementary classrooms since it often stigmatizes them. When asked to offer an explanation, Black children often tell a story (which is regarded as an incorrect answer).	

Directness (related to field-dependence)	This is verbal aggression that is regarded as confrontational and, therefore, not objective or distanced enough for academic/school writing. In other words, these rhetors get all up-in-yo-face and forego more Westernized and bourgeois notions of etiquette.	
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Part Two: Smaller units of expression as defined by Geneva Smitherman	
<u>Exaggerated Language</u> Unusual/ uncommon words, high talk, rarely used expressions	
<u>Mimicry</u> Imitations or mannerisms of someone else (for effect, ridicule, or authenticity)	
<u>Proverbial Statement & Aphoristic Phrasing</u> Sprinkling of a text with familiar Black proverbs or sayings	
<u>Punning & Play on Words</u> Use of common Black experiences to show verbal wit	
<u>Spontaneity & Improvisation</u> Use of spur-of-the-moment ideas, audience response, or new member participation	
<u>Image-Making & Metaphor</u> Use of images, metaphors, and imaginative language	
<u>Braggadocio</u> Boasts about one’s abilities and selfhood	

PLEASE NOTE: Please retain your notes and this worksheet. You will often be asked to perform an Black rhetorical analysis of a speech or performance. Use this vocabulary/these definitions for that work. The point is for these definitions to become a natural part of how you talk about and hear Black language and rhetoric.