



Characterization and Nonfiction: Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Grade 8

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Individuals reveal much about themselves when they deliver a speech. Careful listeners and readers of speeches can learn what opinions a speaker holds, what he or she values, or even what character traits a speaker consciously or unconsciously reveals through his or her word choice or illustrative examples. This lesson introduces students to a questioning strategy designed to help them analyze a text for what it reveals about a speaker’s character traits or beliefs.

TEXT COMPLEXITY

Passages for National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) English lessons are selected to challenge students, while lessons and activities make texts accessible. Guided practice with challenging texts allows students to gain the proficiency necessary to read independently at or above grade level. Readability scores for “Ain’t I a Woman?” place the speech in the Common Core text complexity band for sixth through eighth grades.

COGNITIVE RIGOR

ELA lessons for NMSI are designed to guide students through a continuum of increasingly complex thinking skills, including those outlined in taxonomies such as the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge levels. For example, in this lesson students will make inferences and apply context clues to identify meaning (DOK Level 2). They also will consider how rhetorical devices such as allusion, diction,

OBJECTIVES

Students will

- read closely for understanding and to gain insight about the speaker.
- cite textual evidence to support inferences made about the speaker’s beliefs, opinions, or character traits.
- write analytical commentary that reveals their understanding of how the textual evidence develops, enhances, and makes distinctions between the speech’s main ideas.
- use research skills to enhance understanding of classroom texts.
- write an essay that analyzes the text under timed constraints.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sojourner Truth. “Ain’t I a Woman?” 1863. Public Domain.

Digital Image. Norman B. Wood, via Wikimedia Commons. 11 March 2013. Public Domain. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/20/Sojourner_Truth.jpg



and rhetorical questioning impact meaning (DOK Level 3) as well as analyze complex/abstract perspectives (DOK Level 4). Students will move from the Understand Level of the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy to the Create Level.

This lesson is included in Module Two:
Understanding Text Complexity.

CONNECTION TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson

- RI.8.1:** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.8.2:** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RI.8.6:** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
- RI.8.10:** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently.
- W.8.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

- Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
- Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- Establish and maintain a formal style.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

- W.8.9:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- Apply *grade 8 Reading standards* to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced”).
- L.8.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grade 8 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
 - Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.

Implicitly addressed in this lesson

- W.8.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above).
- W.8.10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CONNECTION TO COMMON CORE LITERACY STANDARDS FOR HISTORY/ SOCIAL STUDIES GRADES 6–8

- RH.6-8.1:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- RH.6-8.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- RH.6-8.6:** Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- RH.6-8.10:** By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CONNECTIONS TO AP*

The ability to understand characterization and to recognize appeals based upon the speaker’s ethos are important college and career readiness skills. Understanding a speaker’s ethos is also required for students in both the free response and multiple choice sections of AP English Literature and AP English Language exams.

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MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- copies of the Student Activity
- highlighters
- Optional: video recording of speech <http://youtu.be/yq3AYiRT4no> (by actress Kerry Washington)
- Optional: video recording of speech http://youtu.be/4vr_vKsk_h8 (by actress Alfre Woodard)

ASSESSMENTS

The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:

- graphic organizer
- guided questions
- research assignment bibliography
- writing assignment

The following additional assessments are located on the NMSI website:

- Eighth Grade Formative Assessment—“Persuasion: Speech to Congress, President George Bush”
- Eighth Grade Posttest—“2009 Rhetorical Analysis: Lyndon Johnson speech”

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

This lesson introduces students to a close reading strategy that asks them to consider guided questions about a text and to pose analytical questions of their own. The lesson works well at the beginning of an academic year as an introduction to close reading skills. Because this strategy can be used with any complex text, you might consider using the approach with other classroom texts throughout the academic year. Because this lesson focuses on how Sojourner Truth’s character is reflected in her speech, it is a good lead-in for a more extended lesson on rhetorical analysis. A rhetorical analysis lesson could serve as a companion to this activity or as a separate study later in the school year, after students have more practice with close reading skills. The lesson will take 2–3 class periods to complete. Before introducing the lesson to students, be sure to thoroughly read and annotate the text so you can anticipate questions and consider which ideas in the text you wish to emphasize.

Activity One: First Reactions

- Give students the text as a “cold”* reading and ask them to note any reactions, questions, or comments in the right column.
*Because the graphic organizer at the end of the activity asks students to speculate about who Truth is and why she is speaking, we recommend that you do not frontload contextual or historical information about Truth and her famous speech, so that students can come to their own understandings based upon what they experience in the text.
- Follow the reading with a whole class brainstorm of first reactions, comments, or questions about the passage. Accumulate these on white board, on flipchart paper, or under the document camera.

Activity Two: Identifying Speaker and Purpose

- This activity asks students to use context clues to determine the text type, speaker, and

purpose of the text. This strategy helps foster independence in reading and prepares students for activities in which they will need to read and respond to unfamiliar texts. Depending on the needs of your students, you may need to review these terms for students and provide examples of genres/subgenres.

- Direct students to the graphic organizer (chart) and work through it as a whole group or in small groups (or independently for advanced learners) to require students to focus on their assertions about the text type, the speaker, and the purpose with evidence from the text. For example, we want students to look for textual clues that can help them identify the text as a speech (e.g., the reference to “children” in the opening; the parenthetical note about the audience; Truth’s closing in which she thanks her audience for “hearing” her).
- Using a document camera, project the graphic organizer and have students share their insights during whole group discussion.
- Compare their initial reactions and comments to their new insights based on textual evidence. Was any original comment clarified? Proven? Disproven? New information discovered?

Activity Three: Research

- After students have discussed their inferences about Truth, have them complete a research assignment, either as homework or, if you have access to the library or technology-enhanced classrooms, as part of your classroom work. Once students have gathered information about Truth, they should document their source material following whichever style guide your department or school prefers. You may need to review specific citation formatting rules

or direct students to websites or style guides that contain this information.

- One option for having students share the information they learn is to have them participate in a gallery walk. Post large sheets of paper around the room with categories written on them such as “Physical Characteristics,” “Education,” “Family,” “Name,” “Background,” etc. Ask students to write facts they learned about Sojourner Truth on the appropriate paper. Then, students can conduct a gallery walk and look at the information they and their classmates have gathered. Conclude the activity by leading a whole class discussion in which students share information they found interesting or surprising.
- If students do not mention Truth’s name change during their discussion, mention that Sojourner Truth chose her name deliberately to reflect how she identified herself. Students may recognize part of the word *journey* within the word *sojourner*. After students understand the denotative meaning of the word *sojourner*, ask them to think about the powerful connotative meanings of the words *sojourner* and *truth* as they consider what Sojourner Truth wishes to reveal about herself by choosing this name. Truth wants her audience to recognize her life’s physical journeys, beginning with her status as a slave and culminating in her position as an influential civil rights activist. Her name change also reflects her role as an itinerant preacher who discusses the truth of human experience as she travels from community to community. You also may need to elaborate on the 1851 Ohio Women’s Rights Convention and explain that women from both the Temperance and Abolitionist movements came together to organize this meeting to advocate for women’s rights. Many men also attended the convention, primarily to protest the meeting; Sojourner

Truth refers to one of these male protesters in her speech. For more information about the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention, see the Ohio History Central website at www.ohiohistorycentral.org. Sojourner Truth’s speech has an interesting history, and it is important to remember that the speech was not written down as it was delivered. Students may find it intriguing that different versions of the speech exist, some of which were heavily edited by journalists.

- If you have created an initial list of character traits and purpose statements at the end of Activity One, revisit the lists to see if there are any revisions or additions you and the students wish to make at this point. Ask students to consider the guided questions at the end of Activity Three during your discussion of Truth’s character traits and the speech’s purpose.

Activity Four: Close Reading and Guided Questions

- **PRIOR** to this activity, **review** with students rhetorical devices such as details, diction, imagery, and syntax and how those specific devices must connect to meaning in the text. Also, review with students how to write different levels of questioning. If students are unfamiliar with writing different levels of questions, the NMSI lesson “Reading and Questioning Strategies” guides students in how to create Level One (literal, on-the-line), Level Two (inferential, between-the-lines), and Level Three (thematic, beyond-the-lines) questions.
- Ask a student volunteer to re-read the passage aloud (or follow along with an audio or video recording), while all students are marking words, phrases, or sentences that reveal the speaker’s character, personality, or opinions, keeping notes about their observations in the right column. Consider modeling the annotation process as needed.

- Have students analyze the speech by using the guiding questions to help them develop their analysis of Truth’s character.
- This activity also is an opportunity to introduce students to the rhetorical devices of allusion, repetition, and rhetorical questions as a means to persuade an audience or to support an assertion. In this lesson, we want students to consider how these strategies also reveal character. For example, we want students to think about why it is significant to our understanding of Truth’s character and beliefs that she uses Biblical allusions to support her arguments. In addition, Truth’s repetition of “ain’t I a woman?” reveals her sense of outrage and urgency at the state of civil rights in America.
- As students encounter guided questions that ask them to consider rhetorical devices, be sure to monitor their group conversations and guide students so that their struggle with these ideas is productive.
- The logical structure of the argument in Paragraph 5 lends itself to a discussion of argumentation and rhetorical analysis. By using the following questions, you can introduce the concepts of claim, counterclaim, and valid reasoning to students.
 - Justify whether the reasoning of the “little man in black” is sound. What is Truth’s counterclaim? Is it valid? Evaluate the extent to which it is or is not valid.
 - How does this religious reference create an effective argument?
- Collaborative opportunity: The activity asks students to answer specific Level Two questions in the right column, and then has them create and answer their own Level Two questions as follow-ups or extensions. One technique you might use is to divide the class into collaborative learning groups and to assign each group a specific paragraph to consider. Students can work together to answer the lesson’s guided question and to pose questions and answers of their own. Each group can then become the discussion leaders during a whole-class discussion, sharing their questions with their classmates and soliciting responses from the entire group.
- The following questions are provided as possible follow-up questions to student responses:
 - What are the different meanings of the word “racket”? Which definition seems closest to the meaning Truth wants to suggest?
 - When Truth uses language like “racket,” “out of kilter,” and “in a fix,” what impression do we get of her character or personality?
 - What is the effect of the repeated lines “Look at me!” “Look at my arm!” and “ain’t I a woman?” What does the line “I have borne thirteen children . . . and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me!” suggest about Truth’s character?
 - Do you think Truth merely “pretends” to not know the word “intellect,” or is the slip accidental? What does her intention suggest about her character?
 - What parts of the speech seem designed to motivate or excite the crowd? How do you know?
- After groups have shared their questions and responses, revisit the list of character traits and purpose statements to see if students wish to add to or revise their thinking about these issues.

Activity Five: Writing Prompts

Writing over an extended period of time and writing in a timed setting are both vital college and career readiness skills that should be practiced routinely.

These prompts can be used in both timed writings and writings that allow revisions and editing.

Prompt 1 is accessible for all students, requiring students to analyze only one character trait;

Prompt 2 requires students to extend their analysis to include multiple traits. Prompt 3 requires students to synthesize information from their research with their analysis of the speech. Prompt 4 is appropriate for students who have some understanding of argumentation and who have considered the logical structure of Truth’s argument in addition to the other components of the lesson.

Prior to the writing activity, you may need to introduce or review skills such as thesis statements, topic sentences, transitional phrases, and embedded quotations. To assist you with this process, the NMSI lessons “Creating Effective Thesis Statements and Topic Sentences” and “Using Quotations Effectively” are available in Module Three: *Generating Text-Based Responses* and on the NMSI website. Allow students to use their notes and annotations to support their writing process.

Characterization and Nonfiction: Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Activity One: First Reactions

Read the text below and note any initial reactions, comments, or questions you have in the right column.

Text

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

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?

I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

First Reactions



Text

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

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

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

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

First Reactions

Activity Two: Identifying Speaker and Purpose

Using the chart below, describe characteristics of the text, the speaker, and the speaker’s purpose. Refer to specific examples from the text to justify your assertions.

Type of Text	Textual Evidence (How do you know?)
<i>(What are the characteristics of this text? What type of text is it?)</i>	<i>(What clues in the passage reveal the text type?)</i>

Speaker	Textual Evidence (How do you know?)
<i>(What are some character traits of the speaker?)</i>	<i>(What clues in the passage reveal to you those characteristics?)</i>

Speaker’s Purpose	Textual Evidence (How do you know?)
<i>(What is the speaker’s purpose?)</i>	<i>(What clues in the passage help reveal the speaker’s purpose?)</i>

Activity Three: Research

The name of the speaker in the passage you read is Sojourner Truth. Look up Sojourner Truth, either online or in a print reference book such as an encyclopedia. Write down five facts you learn about Sojourner Truth and create a citation for the reference site or book you checked.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Citation:

How do these facts change or reinforce your impression of the speaker?

Re-read the speech and your first reactions. How does this new information change your first impression of the speaker? Evaluate your first reactions and add additional reactions (perhaps in a second color) in the right column.

Based on the speech and everything you have learned about the speaker, write one sentence that illustrates Sojourner Truth’s character. Be prepared to share this with your classmates.

Activity Four: Close Reading and Guided Questions

Answer the guided questions in the right column. When prompted, create your own Level 2 (inferential, between-the-lines) question that may occur to you as you read, and then provide the answer based on the text.

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

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?

Why do you think the speaker uses the word "children"?

Write another Level Two question inspired by this paragraph and answer it.

Describe the speaker's attitude.

What do we understand about her character and her life?

Write another Level Two question inspired by this paragraph and answer it.

I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?

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

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

What else do we learn about Sojourner Truth’s character in this paragraph?

What evidence supports your assertion?

What does Truth’s metaphor about the “cup” reveal about her character?

What connection between “intellect” and civil rights is Sojourner Truth rejecting?

Write your own Level Two question inspired by this paragraph and answer it.

How does Sojourner Truth use the religious reference to Christ to counter the argument made by the “little man in black”?

What is the effect of Truth’s repetition of her rhetorical question, “Where did your Christ come from?”

What do the religious reference and the rhetorical question reveal about Truth’s character?

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

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

Who is the "first woman God ever made" and how did she turn the world "upside down"?

What does Truth's use of this Biblical allusion suggest about her character?

What is the effect of Truth's description of herself as "old Sojourner"?

What other Level Two questions are inspired by the last two paragraphs of the passage? Write your questions and their answers below.

Activity Five: Writing Prompts

PROMPT #1:

Write a response in which you select one character trait of Sojourner Truth and use textual evidence from “Ain’t I a Woman?” to support your assertion.

PROMPT #2:

Write a response that illustrates how Sojourner Truth’s words and actions in “Ain’t I a Woman?” reveal her values and character. You may use your annotations and answers to the guided questions to help you support your assertions about Truth’s character with textual evidence.

PROMPT #3:

Consider the background information you learned about Sojourner Truth during your research. Explain how that information adds meaning to her speech.

PROMPT #4:

Sojourner Truth argues for the rights of African-Americans and for women. In a well-developed essay, evaluate the extent to which her reasoning is clear and her claims are logical and relevant.