Context Shapes Voice

Trace how a speaker's viewpoint and moment shape a message.

11.T.C.2 "Authors & Speakers: Evaluate how authors' and/or speakers' perspectives influence texts and how circumstances shape their creation."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline words or phrases that reveal Baldwin's perspective, and circle details about the circumstances of his speech. Number each circled detail that helps explain his tone or purpose.

Baldwin Speaks to Teachers

(1) In 1963, James Baldwin published "A Talk to Teachers," based on a speech he gave during the civil rights movement. Baldwin, a Black American writer, addressed educators while segregation and racial violence remained central realities in the United States. He argues that schools should help young people question their society rather than simply accept its stories. His perspective comes from living in a nation that often denied Black citizens equal rights and honest representation.

(2) Baldwin's audience also shaped his approach. Because he spoke to teachers, he focuses on classrooms, textbooks, and the responsibility adults have toward students. He does not present education as neutral. Instead, he warns that teaching only comforting national myths can damage students by hiding injustice. His direct, urgent tone fits a moment when civil rights activists were challenging laws and customs that protected segregation.

(3) The circumstances of 1963 give Baldwin's argument special force. That year included major civil rights protests, the Birmingham campaign, and the March on Washington. Baldwin writes as change seems possible but incomplete, so his speech combines criticism with a demand for action. A reader who knows this context can see why he treats teaching as more than a private job. For Baldwin, it is a public choice that can either preserve injustice or confront it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What experience shapes Baldwin's perspective on education?

2. Why does Baldwin focus on classrooms and textbooks?

3. How do the circumstances of 1963 help explain Baldwin's urgent tone?

4. What does Baldwin believe can happen when schools teach only comforting national myths?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a student journalist writing after your school removes a book from the library. Write two sentences that show your perspective and explain how this circumstance shapes your word choice or tone.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline words or phrases that reveal Baldwin's perspective, and circle details about the circumstances of his speech. Number each circled detail that helps explain his tone or purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What experience shapes Baldwin's perspective on education?	**He lived as a Black American in a nation that often denied Black citizens equal rights and honest representation.**
2	Why does Baldwin focus on classrooms and textbooks?	**He is addressing teachers and sees educators as responsible for what students learn about society.**
3	How do the circumstances of 1963 help explain Baldwin's urgent tone?	**Civil rights protests and challenges to segregation made change seem possible but incomplete, creating a need for action.**
4	What does Baldwin believe can happen when schools teach only comforting national myths?	**They can damage students by hiding injustice and preserving it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As a student journalist, I would question the removal because students deserve access to ideas that make adults uncomfortable. Because the decision happened at my school, I would use a serious, urgent tone and ask who gets to decide what students may read.

Accept responses that connect a clear viewpoint to a specific circumstance and explain a fitting language choice or tone. Students may take different positions on the book removal if the connection is logical.