Words Under Pressure

Trace how a writer's experiences and audience shape a text.

9.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 details about Wells's experiences or circumstances. Circle words or phrases that show how those details shaped her tone, evidence, purpose, or audience.

Ida B. Wells Writes Against Lynching

1 In 1892, journalist Ida B. Wells published Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases after three friends, including Thomas Moss, were lynched in Memphis. Wells had known Moss, a successful Black grocer. Her anger and grief appear in her urgent tone as she challenges newspaper claims that lynching punished crimes. Instead, she collected reports and argued that accusations were often used to control Black communities and eliminate economic competition. As a Black woman reporting from Memphis, Wells wrote from personal loss as well as from her work investigating public violence.

2 Her circumstances changed within months. After Wells criticized the lynching in her newspaper, the Memphis Free Speech, a white mob destroyed the paper's office while she was visiting New York City and threatened to kill her if she returned. Unable to report safely from Memphis, she remained in the North and expanded her audience. Southern Horrors addresses readers beyond her hometown, asking them to examine evidence rather than accept familiar excuses. The pamphlet's direct claims and lists of cases show a writer trying to persuade people who might not have witnessed the violence.

3 Not every reader accepted Wells's perspective. Some white Southern newspapers attacked her, while many Black readers and allies supported her campaign. Her later lectures in Britain gave her a new platform, and she used that attention to pressure Americans to confront lynching. These responses reveal that texts are created within a debate, not in isolation. Wells's experience of racial violence, her forced departure from Memphis, and the resistance she faced shaped both the evidence she chose and her deeply forceful effort to make distant readers care.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two details from paragraph 1 help explain why Wells wrote with an urgent tone? Explain the connection.

2. How did the attack on the Memphis Free Speech change Wells's circumstances, and how did that change shape the audience for Southern Horrors?

3. Why does Wells use direct claims and lists of cases in her pamphlet? Use the passage to explain how these choices connect to her purpose.

4. How does the contrast between readers who attacked Wells and readers who supported her help explain her forceful approach?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that your school board has cut library hours to two afternoons each week. Write a 90 to 120 word opening to an informational appeal that shows your perspective, explains one circumstance shaping that perspective, and addresses a specific audience.

ANSWER KEY

Words Under Pressure

GRADE 9 · 9.T.C.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about Wells's experiences or circumstances. Circle words or phrases that show how those details shaped her tone, evidence, purpose, or audience. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two details from paragraph 1 help explain why Wells wrote with an urgent tone? Explain the connection.	**Wells knew Thomas Moss, who was lynched, and she was a Black woman reporting from Memphis. Her personal loss and experience investigating violence gave her reason to write urgently.**
2	How did the attack on the Memphis Free Speech change Wells's circumstances, and how did that change shape the audience for Southern Horrors?	**The mob destroyed the office and threatened Wells, so she could not safely return to Memphis. She remained in the North and wrote for readers beyond her hometown.**
3	Why does Wells use direct claims and lists of cases in her pamphlet? Use the passage to explain how these choices connect to her purpose.	**She wanted readers who had not witnessed the violence to examine evidence instead of accepting excuses for lynching. The claims and case lists support her effort to persuade them.**
4	How does the contrast between readers who attacked Wells and readers who supported her help explain her forceful approach?	**The contrast shows that Wells was writing within a public debate. Resistance to her perspective helped shape her forceful effort and her choice to use evidence to convince distant readers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After the school board cut our library hours to two afternoons a week, I have watched students wait in the hallway for computers and quiet places to work. As a student who uses the library to research, print assignments, and get help from our librarian, I see this decision as more than a scheduling change. Board members should restore daily hours because the cuts take away resources from students who cannot buy printers, books, or reliable internet at home. I am writing to families and board members so they understand how this choice affects work completed after class.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations of how Wells's identity, loss, displacement, opposition, and audience shaped her writing choices. For the open response, look for a clear perspective, a relevant circumstance, a named audience, and 90 to 120 words.