Whose Words Work?

Sort sentences by how they use language.

11-12.L.1.c "Understand the purpose or value of nonstandard English grammar and usage (e.g., artistic or stylistic choices, dialects, colloquialisms)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

PURPOSEFUL NONSTANDARD USAGE	STANDARD FORMAL USAGE
A writer may choose a colloquial word, a dialect form, or a sentence fragment to shape a voice or create an effect. A dialect follows patterns of its own.	The sentence follows conventions used in formal, edited English. It does not use a nonstandard form to shape a voice or create an effect.
In her comic, Mara says, 'Gimme a snack!'	Annual rainfall exceeded previous estimates.

1 SORT

8 items

Circle VOICE or FORMAL for each item, then choose one item from each category and explain which wording helped you sort it.

1. The survey results indicate a steady rise in ridership. VOICE FORMAL
2. 'That bus ain't coming,' Jalen muttered. VOICE FORMAL
3. 'You gonna tell me what happened?' she asked. VOICE FORMAL
4. The committee will review the proposal on Thursday. VOICE FORMAL
5. The fossils were found beneath layers of sandstone. VOICE FORMAL
6. The library will extend its hours next month. VOICE FORMAL
7. In the play, Lena says, 'We was halfway home when the rain hit.' VOICE FORMAL
8. The poem reads, 'No lights. No footsteps. Just wind.' VOICE FORMAL

2 PROVE IT

Explain your thinking

Pick two items from Part 1. For each one, tell how you knew where it belonged.

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

3 MAKE YOUR OWN

One of each

Write one new example that uses a nonstandard form for voice or effect and one new example in standard formal English.

VOICE _____

FORMAL _____

CHALLENGE

Rewrite your VOICE example in standard formal English, then write one sentence explaining what the original wording adds.

ANSWER KEY # Whose Words Work?

PART 1 · SORT

#	ITEM	CATEGORY	WHY
1	The survey results indicate a steady rise in ridership.	**FORMAL**	The sentence uses standard grammar and formal word choices.
2	'That bus ain't coming,' Jalen muttered.	**VOICE**	'Ain't' gives the character's speech a colloquial sound.
3	'You gonna tell me what happened?' she asked.	**VOICE**	'Gonna' and the omitted 'are' create a conversational voice.
4	The committee will review the proposal on Thursday.	**FORMAL**	The sentence follows standard formal usage.
5	The fossils were found beneath layers of sandstone.	**FORMAL**	The sentence uses standard grammar without a nonstandard form.
6	The library will extend its hours next month.	**FORMAL**	The sentence uses standard grammar and formal wording.
7	In the play, Lena says, 'We was halfway home when the rain hit.'	**VOICE**	'We was' is a dialect verb form used in the character's speech.
8	The poem reads, 'No lights. No footsteps. Just wind.'	**VOICE**	The fragments create a spare, rhythmic effect.

PART 2 · PROVE IT

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item.

PART 3 · MAKE YOUR OWN (SAMPLE ANSWERS)

- **VOICE**: The speaker says, 'That gig ain't over yet.'
- **FORMAL**: The orchestra will perform on Saturday.

Challenge: That performance is not over yet. The original wording gives the speaker a casual voice.

For Part 2, students should identify a specific clue in each chosen item, such as 'ain't' in item 2 or the standard wording in item 5. Treat dialect forms as patterned language, not as evidence of a speaker's ability.