Themed Article

FORGING THE FUTURE OF LITERACY WITH ANCIENT TOOLS

By James E. Warren, Staci Hammer, Tiffany Stokes, Sarah Endsley, and Elizabeth Kuhns

James E. Warren is an Associate Professor of English and Distinguished Teaching Professor at UT–Arlington. His research interests include English teacher education and rhetorical theory. He can be reached at jewarren@uta.edu.

Staci Hammer is the K-12 RLA Curriculum Coordinator in Aledo ISD. She earned her master's degree in English and is currently completing her doctoral degree in reading, literacy, and assessment with a focus on rhetorical literacy. She can be reached at shammer@aledoisd.org.

Tiffany Stokes is a fourth-grade reading and language arts teacher and a recent Marva Collins Teacher of the Year recipient in Aledo ISD. This is her sixth year teaching in Aledo at the elementary level after serving as a K-6 curriculum writer for Vacation Bible School. She can be reached at tstokes@aledoisd.org.

Sarah Endsley is a fourth-grade reading and language arts teacher in Aledo ISD. This is her fifth year teaching at the elementary level. She can be reached at sendsley@aledoisd.org.

Elizabeth Kuhns is a Secondary Intervention Specialist in Aledo ISD. This is her first year on the curriculum and instruction team after teaching for more than ten years at the elementary and secondary levels. She is currently completing her master's degree in educational leadership. She can be reached at ekuhns@aledoisd.org.

Abstract: The 2017 TEKS revision, the 2023 STAAR redesign, and the 2024 TCTELA conference theme call on literacy professionals to "forge the future of literacy" in Texas. Specifically, the future demands that we more fully integrate reading and writing instruction and that we help students develop a deeper understanding of author's purpose and craft. In this paper, we argue that one way to meet the literacy demands of the future is to return to rhetoric, the dominant approach to literacy instruction for some 2000 years. First, we describe how rhetoric came to define language arts instruction in the Western world and why it was largely abandoned in the late 19th century. Next, we explain why a rhetorical approach to literacy is particularly well-suited to TEKS standards and new STAAR question types. Finally, we relate how one Texas school district adopted a literacy strategy drawn from the rhetorical tradition and applied it across elementary and secondary grade levels. We hope to equip curriculum coordinators, literacy specialists, and classroom teachers with a scalable, transferable literacy tool that can work as both an individual classroom lesson and a district-wide initiative.

Keywords: rhetoric, rhetorical situation, literacy, TEKS, STAAR

The 2024 TCTELA conference directed our attention to the future. From general sessions that inspired us to continue working toward greater equity and inclusion, to concurrent sessions that taught us how to navigate the latest AI tools and education legislation, to

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

26

vendor booths that offered us materials designed to meet standards and assessments, the conference lived up to its promise to help us "forge the future of literacy." Why, then, look back to an approach to literacy that dates to 5th century B.C.E. Greece? What could we possibly learn from a language arts curriculum that originated in a semiliterate, patriarchal, slave-holding culture that peaked 400 years before the birth of Christ?

Quite a bit, we argue. As articulated in National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) policy research briefs and statements like *21st-Century Literacies* (2007), *Writing Now* (2008), and *Writing Instruction in School* (2022), the future of literacy demands highly flexible strategies that can be adapted to diverse and rapidly changing contexts. Furthermore, the addition of the "Author's purpose and craft" strand in the 2017 revised Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) means that students in Texas must deepen their understanding of the integrated nature of reading and writing, especially given the emphasis on author's purpose and craft in the revised State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The Greek rhetorical system of education was developed to meet similar needs. In the ancient world, a new technology, writing, had opened up unimagined possibilities for linguistic exchange, and those possibilities could be exploited only by those who understood the mutually informing activities of reading and writing. Rhetoric emerged as a holistic approach to literacy that emphasized flexibility and taught students to cope with a world of rapidly changing forms of communication. The rhetorical curriculum proved its effectiveness and versatility by remaining the dominant approach to language arts instruction for two millennia, adapting itself to forms of communication that had not even existed when the curriculum was first developed.

In this paper, we describe how one district in Texas has adopted a strategy drawn from the rhetorical tradition to help students develop 21st-century literacy skills.

What Was Rhetoric and Where Did It Go?

C. S. Lewis (1954) once wrote that when we compare modern language arts education to that which dominated from ancient Greece into the 19th century, we find that "rhetoric is the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors. … an invisible wall between us and them" (p. 61). To appreciate Lewis's claim, consider that whereas today language arts is merely one of several discrete subject areas, in the rhetorical era the *entire curriculum* consisted of language arts. As the literary historian John Guillory (2022) puts it, "From antiquity down through the nineteenth century, the Western school was organized at every level around the task of imparting the facility to use language well" (p. 128). Imagine a world in which school consists of nothing but English language arts and reading

(ELAR). The very strangeness of this notion suggests that, indeed, a conceptual "barrier" separates our schools from those of the past. Upon further reflection, however, even today it is the language arts—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—that tie together all subjects in the curriculum. Students move in and out of different academic discourse communities throughout the school day, but they never stop practicing language skills. In that regard, school remains relatively unchanged. No, the real difference between our schools and those of our ancestors, the true "invisible wall" between them, is that our schools severely limit students' *conscious* attention to language. In the rhetorical era, as Guillory writes, the language arts "comprehended whatever knowledge was expressed in language, about any subject" (p. 162); in our era, language arts gets a single class period.

The consequences of this difference are significant. Not only do today's students pay less conscious attention to—and receive less guided practice in—language skills, but also they learn to think of knowledge, "content," as something that can be separated from its manifestation in language. In contrast, students trained rhetorically were taught that knowledge is constructed through the skilled use of language and that language itself occurs within a social situation. In other words, students were instructed to pay equal attention to form and content, context and text. As students developed their skills as speakers or writers, they certainly learned the rules of language, but they also learned how to craft a persona, achieve specific purposes, and appeal to a variety of audiences. As students developed their listening or reading skills, they learned to decode, but they also learned interpretive strategies that helped them determine the speaker, the speaker's purpose, and the speaker's audience. The result was a robust language arts curriculum that makes our own seem thin by comparison.

But there was a catch: The rhetorical system was not scalable. It was an intensive, years-long, individualized program of study reserved for an elite. Among the many factors that led to the decline of the rhetorical tradition in the English-speaking world, none was greater than the commitment to mass education that crescendoed in the 19th century (Graff, 1979, 2022; Ilich & Sanders, 1989; Resnick & Resnick, 1977; Street, 2015; Vincent, 2000). As historians of literacy have pointed out, Western societies over the past 400 years have tended to develop education systems "aimed at attaining either a low level of literacy for a large number of people or a high level for an elite" (Resnick & Resnick, 1977, p. 370). Over the course of the 19th century, basic literacy for the many replaced advanced literacy for the few in the U.S. as public education became nearly universal (Neem, 2017). This shift required methods for teaching reading and writing that were more efficient than the labor-intensive rhetorical system, and these new methods

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

27

came to define what would become known as "literacy."[1] Guillory (2022) refers to this shift in American schools as an "epochal break" in which the long, arduous process of becoming lettered was replaced by an "understanding of reading and writing as *basic skills*" (p. 128). What made these skills basic was that they (1) required no in-depth knowledge of rhetorical contexts and (2) focused exclusively on meaning, not the linguistic techniques by which meaning gets made.

> " Now, in 2024, ELAR educators are tasked with helping the largest and most diverse student population in the history of the nation meet the highest literacy standards in the world. Our students need (and deserve!) the kind of advanced literacy once reserved for an elite, the kind of literacy provided by a rhetorical education. "

To be sure, the spread of literacy in the 19th century was an extraordinary achievement, arguably one of the proudest in the history of the U.S. We do not mean to denigrate this achievement by categorizing the literacy taught as "basic." We would point out, however, that literacy standards have risen exponentially over the past 150 years, and given its rather humble beginnings, mass literacy instruction has always struggled to keep up. Now, in 2024, ELAR educators are tasked with helping the largest and most diverse student population in the history of the nation meet the highest literacy standards in the world. Our students need (and deserve!) the kind of advanced literacy once reserved for an elite, the kind of literacy provided by a rhetorical education. We will never return to the old rhetorical system, but it might be possible to repurpose some of its tools to help forge the future of literacy.

---

[1] The term "literacy" first appeared in print in an 1880 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* (Oxford University Press, 2023). Of course, reading and writing have existed for more than 5000 years, and we now use the term *literacy* anachronistically to refer to the ability to read and write in any historical era. But the term was coined less than 150 years ago to refer to a new concept: standalone encoding and decoding skills taught to the youngest students.

Why Bring Back Rhetoric Now?

Rhetoric began to make a comeback in first-year college writing programs in the second half of the 20th century because it was seen as an effective approach for dealing with the increasing complexity of academic literacy (Gold & Hammond, 2020). As stated in a joint publication of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), NCTE, and the National Writing Project (2011), the best way to deal with exponential change in 21st-century writing demands is to "foster flexibility and rhetorical versatility" (p. 3), and at this point, rhetoric has become so dominant at the postsecondary level that CWPA (2019) lists "Rhetorical Knowledge" as the primary category of outcomes for first-year college writing.

Meanwhile, over the past 20 years, most states have committed to college and career readiness as the primary objective of K–12 education. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that an emphasis on rhetoric has emerged in state content standards. Consider the anchor standards for language arts in the Common Core (2010):

> To be college and career ready in language, students … must come to appreciate that language is at least as much a matter of craft as of rules and be able to … achieve particular functions and rhetorical effects. They must also … engage in purposeful writing about and conversations around content. (p. 51)

Similar language is included in the 2017 TEKS in the Composition strand (10A in Kindergarten; 11A in grades 1–5; 10A in grades 6–8, and 9A in English I–English IV) with students in grades 3-12 expected to craft writing "appropriate for various purposes and audiences" (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2017a, pp. 20, 26, 31; TEA, 2017b, pp. 4. 9, 14; TEA, 2017c, pp. 5, 9, 14, 18). Perhaps the most significant change to the TEKS in 2017 was the addition of the "Author's purpose and craft" strand, which, in asking students to in high school, "analyze the author's purpose, audience, and message" (TEA, 2017c, pp. 4, 9, 13), emphasizes the rhetorical nature of literacy and bridges the reading-focused "Multiple genres" strand and the writing-focused "Composition" strand (Winton, 2020). Beginning with the 2022–2023 school year, Texas's embrace of a more rhetorical approach to ELAR began to appear in STAAR assessments. The percentage of STAAR questions related to author's purpose and craft is on the rise, and the test now requires all students in grades 3–10 to write in response to readings (TEA, 2022).

One District's Turn to Rhetoric

In this section, we describe how one large Texas school district used a specific strategy drawn from the rhetorical tradition to help students become more versatile readers and writers and rise to the challenge of the 2017 TEKS and redesigned STAAR. In describing this shift from the

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

28

perspective of a curriculum coordinator, members of an elementary team, and a member of a secondary team, we hope to show how ELAR educators in a variety of roles can help make a district-wide rhetorical turn.

The Curriculum Coordinator: S. Hammer

The timing of my appointment as Curriculum Coordinator coincided with the adoption of the 2017 TEKS. Our two-fold objective for district-level work quickly became (1) to build a curriculum that would systematically grow students' literacy skills in alignment with the new standards and (2) to facilitate success on highly visible student performance data affected by the TEKS redesign. These objectives were embraced eagerly by district leadership precisely because the revised TEKS are more rhetorically informed and thus more responsive to changing contexts of communication. Research shows that rhetorical awareness is essential for students to become active agents and global citizens (Assad, 2019; Hogarth et al., 2022), so we saw our curricular revision as an opportunity to promote student success both in and beyond the classroom.

I knew we needed a literacy strategy that was simple and explicit but that would also allow for increased complexity as students progressed through higher grade levels. In their vast review of literacy instruction, Magnusson et al. (2019) found that students fail to take ownership of research-based instructional strategies that are not made explicit, a finding supported by others who have documented the difficulty in operationalizing strategies (Lee et al., 2021). Thus, we sought an explicit strategy that was simple enough for students in upper elementary grades to internalize and use with efficacy, even when reading or writing independently. We also believed that simplicity and explicitness were important because these qualities would facilitate transfer of the strategy to later grades and even other disciplines (Kim & Olson, 2020; Vaughn et al., 2020).

We found our strategy in the concept of the rhetorical situation, a scheme that traces its roots to Aristotle and is often represented visually as a triangle. One point of the triangle represents the speaker, a second represents the

speaker's purpose, and the third represents the speaker's audience, with the speech/text itself going inside the triangle (see Figure 1).
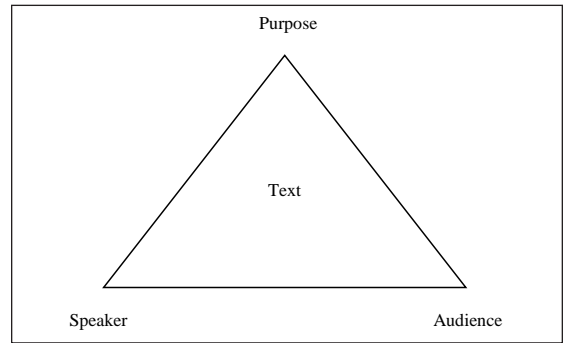

Figure 1. The Rhetorical Situation

Why a triangle? The sum of the interior angles of a triangle always adds up to 180 degrees, so a change to one angle necessitates changes to the other two angles, thus changing the shape of the triangle as a whole. By analogy, a change in the speaker *or* the purpose *or* the audience will change the rhetorical situation as a whole, thus modifying the text itself. In other words, the rhetorical triangle maximizes flexibility. It provides an analytical framework for every new act of communication while demonstrating that no two acts of communication are alike.

For a humorous example of how the rhetorical triangle works, consider a bit of text from Key and Peele's (2012) "Obama's Anger Translator" sketch. President Obama, played by Jordan Peele, sits in an armchair and speaks calmly into the camera, while "Luther," a menacing, knuckle-cracking Keegan-Michael Key, looms in the background and gives expression to Obama's repressed anger. At around the 1:45 mark of the YouTube clip (viewer discretion advised), Obama looks into the camera and gently reminds the American people that his administration has created "3 million new jobs." Immediately after, Luther leans aggressively into the camera and growls "3 million new jobs." As seen in Figure 2, the speaker point is the only difference between Obama's and Luther's rhetorical
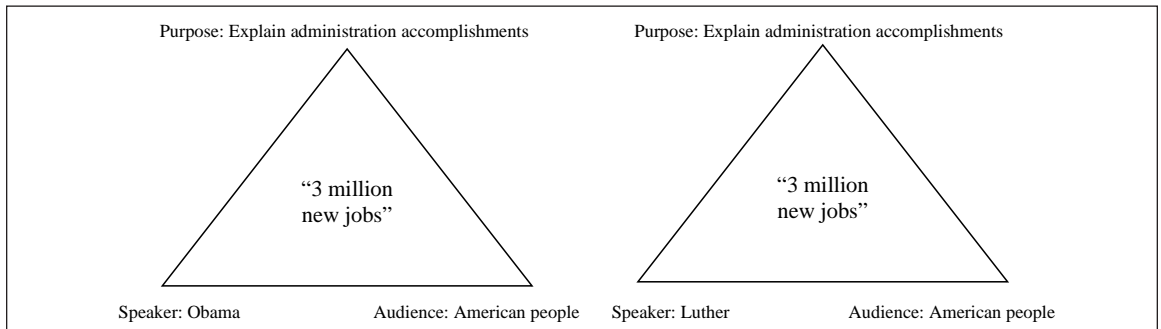

Figure 2. The Rhetorical Situation at Work

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

29

triangles. Obvious upon viewing the clip, however, is that one difference has changed everything, from the purpose, to the effects on the audience, to the very meaning of the words themselves.

In 2020, three years before STAAR began assessing the revised TEKS, we began training teachers to use the concept of the rhetorical situation to help students master the revised standards, especially the "Author's purpose and craft" strand. It was our hope that teachers would embrace this concept and make it their own, applying their own pedagogical expertise to make the strategy work for them and their students. As with any district-level initiative, many teachers resisted quick implementation, adopting a wait-and-see approach. Some were unsure whether STAAR would change significantly to include "Author's purpose and craft" questions. Others, like the instructional teams profiled below, immediately began to experiment with the strategy—and to see results.

The Elementary Team: S. Endsley and T. Stokes

Upon release of the revised TEKS, we knew we would have to revise our curriculum significantly, especially if we were to meet the new standard held by the "Author's purpose and craft" strand. We did not, however, turn to rhetoric immediately. Instead, we adopted the PIE strategy (Ells, 2017), which teaches that an author's purpose is either to persuade, inform, or entertain. Although this is a useful enough strategy, initial assessments revealed that students simply were not learning the deep analysis skills the new standards required. The problem, it seemed, was that students were examining texts in isolation, looking for key words and textual clues that would reveal the answer to the question of whether a particular text was intended to persuade, inform, or entertain. What they were *not* doing was thinking deeply about concepts of authorship and craft. In other words, while the PIE strategy was useful in helping students categorize texts according to purpose, it did not encourage students to investigate the full context of written communication, and this failure was showing up in formative and summative assessment results.

After our curriculum coordinator introduced us to the concept of the rhetorical situation, we felt confident that we could construct a strategy that would supplement PIE by directing students' attention to other aspects of an author's purpose and craft. Our team created a version of the rhetorical triangle we termed PAST, which begins with *purpose* before expanding out to consider the *audience* for whom a text is intended, the *speaker* who is attempting to achieve some purpose, and the *text* itself that constitutes the nexus of rhetorical exchange. Figure 3 shows PAST in the form of a worksheet we have students complete.

Below, we describe how our team teaches students to analyze an author's purpose and craft in any text they encounter by applying the PAST triangle.

Purpose

We begin by directing students to complete a sentence stem that identifies the author's purpose. The earliest version of PAST retained the PIE strategy, but we discovered that PIE was not flexible enough to account for the full range of authorial purposes students encountered, so we added "explain" and "describe" to the list of choices for author's purpose, resulting in the acronym—always good for a giggle with elementary students—IPEED. Once students can differentiate among these purposes, we work to help them adapt to textual variety by introducing synonyms that function as keywords for identifying authorial purpose. Students are taught to look for these keywords in the texts they read and to use them in the sentence stems they complete. For example, students are taught that "show," "notify," "enlighten," and "communicate" might mean *inform*, "urge," "argue," "suggest," and "justify" might mean *persuade*, and so forth. Whereas at the beginning of the year, students might write a sentence like, "The author's purpose is to inform the reader about Cabeza de Vaca," by the end of the year, students have advanced to writing sentences like, "The author's purpose is to inform the reader of Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca's difficult journey and to show how each of his hardships forced him to adapt to his surroundings as he traveled to Mexico City."

Of course, the main purpose of the author's purpose and craft strand is to emphasize the reciprocal nature of reading and writing, so we also use PAST to help students think through their own purposes as writers. In particular, we want students to understand that STAAR's extended constructed response questions specify the purpose that they as authors must adopt in order to write an effective response. For example, we teach students that when a prompt instructs them to "write a well-organized informational composition that uses specific evidence from the story," their purpose is to *inform* readers of what occurs in a reading passage.

Audience

We next have students consider a text's intended audience, the readers with whom the author is attempting to achieve some purpose. This step is essential to fostering students' rhetorical flexibility because initially, when elementary students are asked who the intended audience is for a text they are reading, they are inclined to answer, "Me!"—as though the author wrote the text directly to them. Without explicit instruction and practice, students continue to assume that the texts they read, no matter their purpose, are always written for them alone. Eventually, with further prompting questions (e.g., "Who was the author thinking of when they wrote this text?" or "What kind of reader does the text seem designed for?"), students begin to expand their thinking outward, often moving from "our

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts
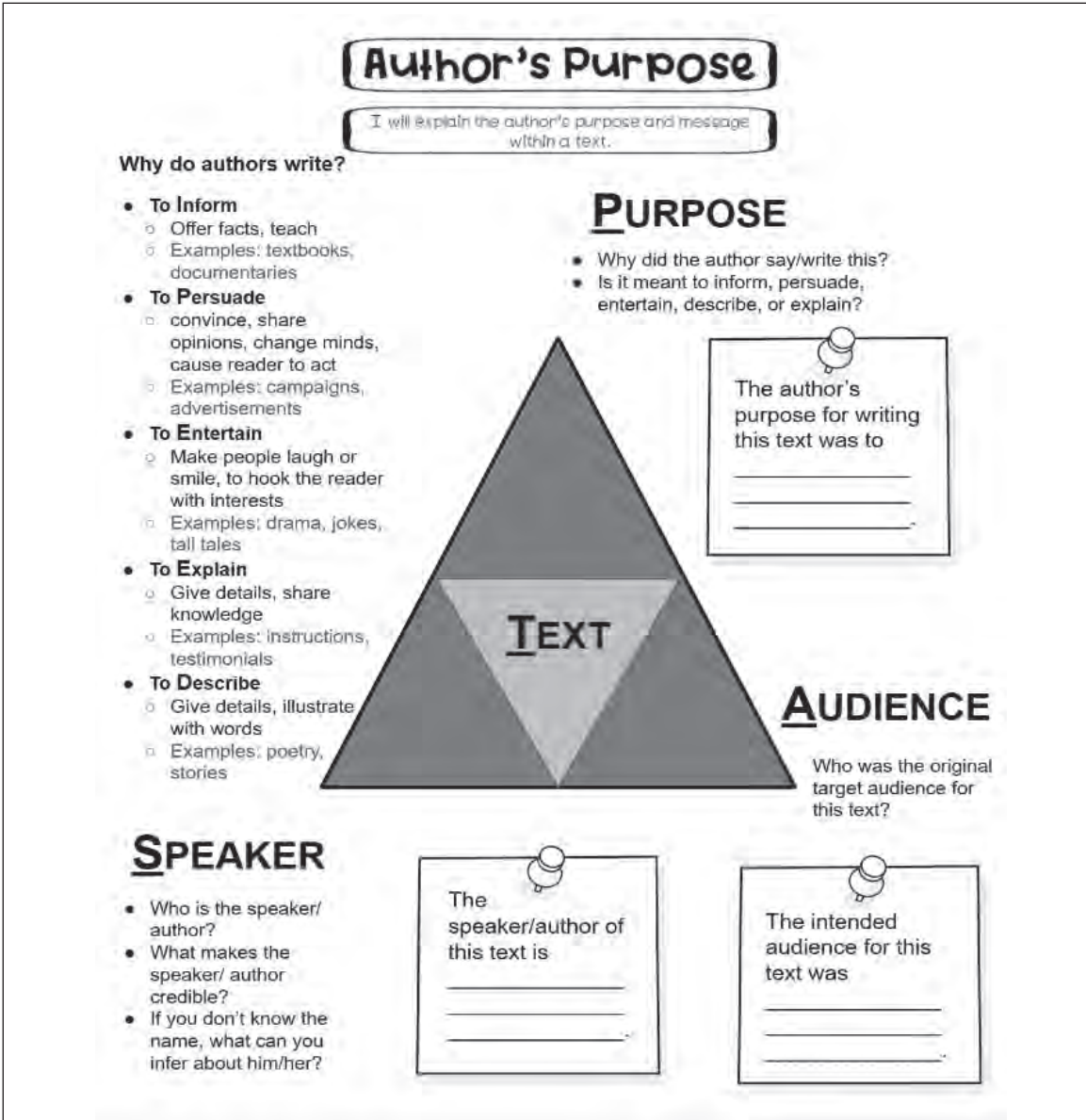
30

Figure 3. PAST Triangle

class" to "fourth graders" to audiences that might not even include them.

This focus on audience also helps students develop flexibility in their own writing, as they are taught to reflect deeply on their own intended audiences. Without this step, students assume their audience is always the teacher, which fails to help them craft writing "appropriate for various … audiences" (TEA, 2017a, Ch. 110, Subchapter A. pp. 20, 26, 31). We find that when teachers share their own writing, contrasting, say, an email to their principal with a text message to their teacher partner, students begin to see how messages that have the same purpose are crafted very differently depending on the intended audience. We reinforce this lesson in writing conferences, asking students probing questions about their intended audience that help them make intentional choices.

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

31

Speaker

Next, students are prompted to analyze the speaker component of PAST. One of the tricky aspects of teaching author's purpose and craft is to get students to understand that the author of a text is not the same thing as the speaker. This distinction is fairly clear when teaching fiction, but it takes time for students to grasp that even the writer of a nonfiction article constructs a persona by making craft-based decisions. If students assume that the speaker is identical to the flesh-and-blood human author, then this element of craft will escape their attention entirely, since a human being is obviously not a product of "craft." For example, a piece we often teach in fourth grade is Lauren Tarshis's "Night of the Grizzlies" (2020), a Scholastic *Storyworks* article. Tarshis is identified in the piece as the editor of *Storyworks* and the author of the *I Survived* series, so students are tempted to think they know everything they need to know about the speaker before they even begin reading the body of the text. Only after extended instruction do students begin to look beyond Tarshis's credentials and consider how she builds credibility *within* the text through techniques like tone, firsthand testimony, and outside research.

One reason it is so important for students to understand the difference between author and speaker is that they, of course, lack authorial credentials, so the only option they have for establishing their credibility as writers is to construct it within their texts. The revised STAAR's extended constructed response questions make the task even more difficult because students may not even draw on their firsthand experiences. Instead, they must do things like state their ideas clearly, develop those ideas fully, and use text evidence effectively if they are to establish their credibility as speakers.

Text

Of course, students must always be examining the text in order to complete the PAST triangle, looking for clues that will help them identify purpose, audience, and speaker. What is different about this final step is that students are encouraged to pay even more conscious attention to language and structure itself. For example, when analyzing "Night of the Grizzlies" (Tarshis, 2020), students are helped by seeing how Tarshis uses problem-and-solution and cause-and-effect text structures, subheadings that help readers navigate the different parts of the article, and graphics that provide visual support for her claims.

We teach students that just as they examine texts to form impressions of speakers, others examine *their* texts to form judgments about *them*. We want students to understand they are authors, not AI programs, and writing with craft involves more than following rules and algorithms. To write well is to achieve one's purpose with one's audience of fellow human beings, and we do this by crafting the written word. Yes, students must follow language conventions. For STAAR in particular, it is important that students write well-organized compositions that display command of surface-level features. Rather than teach language conventions as "rules of writing," we teach them as something more along the lines of good manners. We find that students are more motivated to craft their texts carefully when they realize that they are doing so for the sake of real readers.

The Secondary Team: E. Kuhns

Rather than reiterate what has already been written about the PAST strategy and the rhetorical situation, I will write briefly about two ways in which we at the secondary level build on the foundations established at the elementary level in order to increase students' rhetorical versatility and career and college readiness.

A main objective at the secondary level is to ensure that students have internalized the PAST strategy deeply enough to transfer it to contexts outside the ELAR classroom and even beyond school. One way to achieve this goal is to demonstrate for students that they *already* think and act rhetorically in their everyday lives, and the best textual evidence of this fact is found in students' smartphones. An effective classroom lesson is to have students read a text message they received recently and perhaps even volunteer to have it shared with the class. We then ask students whether they comprehend their text message or a STAAR passage more fully, and of course, the answer is always "text message." But why? After all, the language in students' text messages is often no less sophisticated than what they encounter on STAAR, so there is something more than Lexile level at work here. We teach students that the biggest difference between what they read on their phones and what they read on STAAR is that with their text messages, they activate deep knowledge of purpose, audience, and speaker. When it comes to STAAR or other classroom texts, however, students tend to train their attention on the words right in front of them to the neglect of the rhetorical situation that gives those words significance.

This lesson can actually be quite empowering for students because it emphasizes that any struggles they have with any classroom text are due more to a lack of attention to and familiarity with the rhetorical context than to any shortcomings in their intelligence. Students come to see that just as we struggle to comprehend conversations between strangers, we struggle to comprehend academic conversations that are unfamiliar. When we become friends with people who were once strangers, their conversations begin to make sense to us; in a similar way, academic texts get easier to understand as we become more familiar with their rhetorical contexts.

An additional objective at the secondary level is to more

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

32

fully integrate reading and writing, thus realizing the ultimate end of the author's purpose and craft strand of the TEKS. Rather than asking students simply to identify authors' purposes accurately, we also ask them to provide extended written justifications for their identifications. To accomplish this, we created a more advanced version of the PAST triangle (see Figure 4) and more complex sentence stems.

Building on the sentence stems they learned to complete as elementary students (e.g., "The purpose of this text is to …"), secondary students complete an additional sentence stem that begins, "I know this because …" After completing this second sentence, students must then support it by citing text evidence. Perhaps without even fully realizing it, students have moved seamlessly from reading to writing. Once this becomes habitual, they are better prepared for more challenging STAAR and STAAR end-of-course (EOC) multiple-choice questions related to author's purpose and craft. More importantly, this activity prepares them for new STAAR extended constructed response questions.

Conclusion

As they attempt to forge the future of literacy, language arts teachers find themselves under scrutiny. People have questions about what is happening behind school doors. Do teachers really need all the time and resources they claim? Might there be a way to educate the young that leaves out professional teachers entirely? Are teachers corrupting the young? Teachers answer that what they are doing is nothing less than cultivating civic virtue, teaching students how to use language skillfully to answer important questions, solve social problems, and resolve disputes peacefully. They claim that they are teaching the language arts because democracy itself depends on it.

The previous paragraph describes Athens, circa 390 B.C.E. If the situation sounds familiar, we might take solace from knowing that this crisis in Classical Greece passed, and the schools survived. Not only did they survive, but they also cemented themselves as essential institutions in civilized societies. They did so by committing themselves to teaching students rhetoric, the art of using language well. In this article, we have shared just one strategy drawn from the rhetorical tradition, but in its emphasis on the reciprocal nature of reading and writing, its alertness to both text and context, its attention to form and content, and its promotion of flexibility, the rhetorical triangle—PAST, as well call it here—evokes a past in which the entire curriculum revolved around literacy. That is a past worth honoring and a future worth forging.
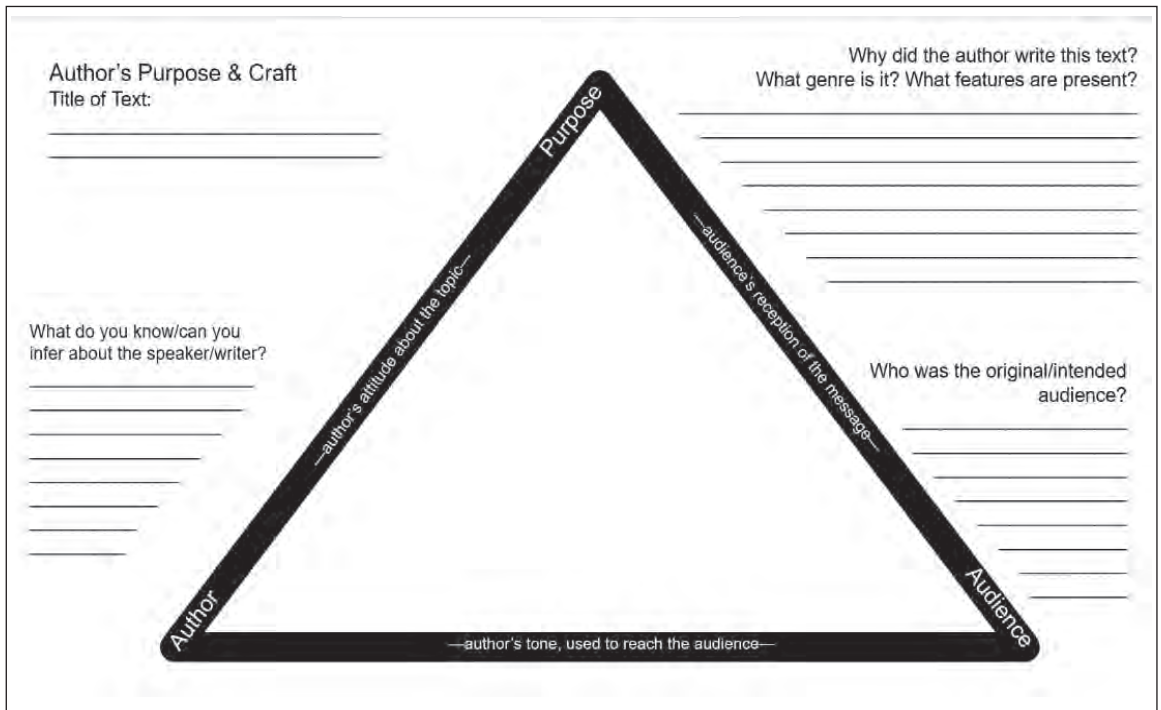

Figure 4. Advanced PAST Triangle

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

33

References

Assad, M. K. (2019). A wellness-centered approach to first-year composition: Curriculum design and course management strategies for promoting students' rhetorical knowledge and personal self-awareness. *CEA Critic*, *81*(1), 11–16. https://doi.org/10.1353/cea.2019.0002

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). *Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.* Retrieved from https://learning.ccsso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ ELA_Standards1.pdf

Council of Writing Program Administrators. (2019). *WPA outcomes statement for first-year composition (3.0).* Retrieved from http://wpacouncil.org/files/framework-for-success-postsecondary-writing.pdf

Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, & National Writing Project. (2011). *Framework for success in postsecondary writing.* Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED516360.pdf

Ells, K. (2017). Inform, persuade, other: Exhuming epideictic for speech and writing instruction. *Florida Communication Journal, 45*(2), 1–11. https://research-ebsco-com.uhd.idm.oclc.org/c/xx5ujp/search/details/d6ghp2lifz?db=ufh

Hogarth, C., Matthiesen, C., & Bakken, J. (2022). Advancing citizenship through language arts education: Conceptions of rhetoric in Scandinavian national curricula. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *54*(4), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1989050

Gold, D., & Hammond, J. W. (2020). Writing instruction in U.S. colleges and schools: The twentieth century and the new millennium. In J. J. Murphy & C. Thaiss (Eds.), *A short history of writing instruction* (4th ed., pp. 272–316). Routledge.

Graff, H. J. (1979). *The literacy myth: Cultural integration and social structure in the nineteenth century.* Academic Press.

Graff, H. J. (2022). *Searching for literacy: The social and intellectual origins of literacy studies.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Guillory, J. (2022). *Professing criticism: Essays on the organization of literary study.* University of Chicago Press.

Ilich, I., & Sanders, B. (1989). *ABC: The alphabetization of the popular mind.* Vintage Books.

Key, K.-M., & Peele, J. (2012, January 11). *Obama's anger translator.* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qv7k2_lc0M

Kim, D., & Olson, W. M. (2020). Using a transfer-focused writing pedagogy to improve undergraduates' lab report writing in gateway engineering laboratory courses. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *63*(1), 64–84. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2019.2961009

Lee, Y., Jang, B. G., & Conradi Smith, K. (2021). A systematic review of reading engagement research: What do we mean, what do we know, and where do we need to go? *Reading Psychology*, *42*(5), 1–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888359

Lewis, C. S. (1954). *English literature in the sixteenth century.* Oxford University Press.

Magnusson, C. G., Roe, A., & Blikstad-Balas, M. (2019). To what extent and how are reading comprehension strategies part of language arts instruction? A study of lower secondary classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *54*(2), 187–212. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.231

National Council of Teachers of English. (2007). *21st-century literacies* [Position research brief]. Retrieved from https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/resources/positions/chron1107researchbrief.pdf

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). *Writing now* [Policy research brief]. Retrieved from https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/resources/policyresearch/wrtgresearchbrief.pdf

National Council of Teachers of English. (2022). *Writing instruction in school* [Position statement]. Retrieved from https://ncte.org/statement/statement-on-writing-instruction-in-school/

Neem, J. N. (2017). *Democracy's schools: The rise of public education in America.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Oxford University Press. (2023). *Oxford English dictionary.* Oxford UP. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6268494087

Resnick, D. P., & Resnick, L. B. (1977). The nature of literacy: An historical exploration. *Harvard Educational Review, 47*(3), 370–385. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.47.3.27263381g038222w

Street, B. (2015). *Literacy in theory and practice.* Cambridge University Press.

Tarshis, L. (2020). Night of the grizzlies. *Storyworks.* Scholastic. https://storyworks.scholastic.com/issues/2020-21/100120/night-of-the-grizzlies.html?language=english.

Texas Education Agency. (2017a). Chapter 110, Subchapter A. *Texas essential knowledge and skill for English language arts and reading.* Retrieved from https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ch110a.pdf.

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

34

Texas Education Agency. (2017b). Chapter 110, Subchapter B. *Texas essential knowledge and skill for English language arts and reading*. Retrieved from https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ch110b.pdf.

Texas Education Agency. (2017c). Chapter 110, Subchapter C. *Texas essential knowledge and skill for English language arts and reading*. Retrieved from https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ch110c.pdf.

Texas Education Agency. (2022). *STAAR redesign*. Retrieved from https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/assessment-initiatives/staar-redesign

Vaughn, M., Jang, B. G., Sotirovska, V., & Cooper-Novack, G. (2020). Student agency in literacy: A systematic review of the literature. *Reading Psychology*, *41*(7), 712–734. https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2020.1783142

Vincent, D. (2000). *The rise of mass literacy: Reading and writing in modern Europe*. Polity Press.

Winton, S. (2020). Position statement on the ELAR TEKS. *English in Texas, 50*(2), 39–42. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1304609.pdf

English in Texas | Volume 54.1 | SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | A Journal of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

35