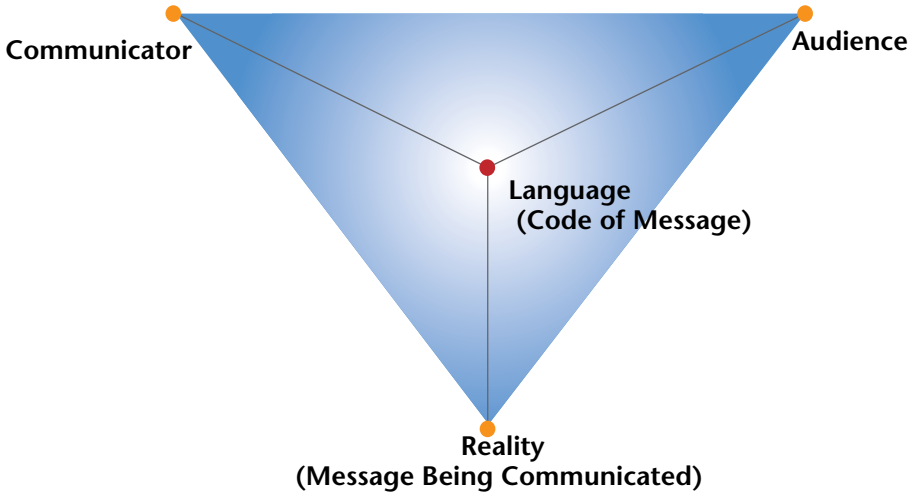
SKILLS IN GRACE ABOUNDING

Unit 1

Speaking and Listening Skills: Guidelines for Discussion

The Communications Triangle. Every act of communication involves certain parts that can be seen clearly in a diagram known as the **communications triangle.** Here's one version of that diagram:



So, for example, when a ship blows a horn to signal its presence, the communicator is the captain of the ship. The audience is other ships or boats in the vicinity. The reality, or message being communicated, is "I'm here." And the code of the message is the sound of the horn. Any communications situation, from a radio address by the president to a love note written in skywriting by an airplane can be analyzed in terms of the communications triangle.

Communications problems can arise because of problems between any of the parts of this triangle. For example, miscommunication can happen when a speaker uses language that doesn't properly describe the reality. So, for example, suppose that the largest forest fire in history were occurring in the western United States and that a federal official were to refer to the fire as "our little problem out West." This would be miscommunication because such language understates the situation and so does not correspond to the reality. If a speaker assumes background knowledge that the audience doesn't have, that, too, can cause miscommunication. If the audience is not familiar with the reality, that can cause misunderstanding and puts the burden on the speaker to explain what the reality is. Communication can also fail if the message cannot be heard by the audience because the channel along which it travels is too noisy or because the message is not loud enough or forceful enough to be heard. Thinking about the ways in which communication can break down between the parts of the communications triangle can help you to improve your ability to communicate well in any situation, from classroom discussion to public speaking.

Discussion is the art of talking about a subject with others in such a way as to learn from one another. It's a standard part of many human interactions, in classrooms, for example, and in businesses, and in meetings at all levels of government, from those of the local school board to those that take place in the United Nations.

It's one thing to hold a discussion. It's another thing altogether to hold a great discussion—one that is interesting and valuable for all involved. Here are some general guidelines to follow when moderating or participating in a discussion:

1. **Stick to the topic.** Make sure that the topic or subject of discussion is clearly articulated at the beginning. For some discussions, it is a good idea to make up an **agenda** beforehand—a list of the topics to be discussed.

2. **Be respectful and pay attention when others are speaking.** Look at the speaker and show by your body language and facial expressions that you are interested in what is being said. It's a good idea to take notes as others are speaking to keep track of the main points being made. If you don't agree with what someone else has said, remain respectful and avoid attacking the person. State your differing opinion, but do so with tact and without excessive emotionalism in your voice.

3. **Wait your turn to speak.** If you wish to speak, put your hand up and wait for the moderator of the discussion to call on you. You may want to make notes to yourself about what you want to say when your turn to speak comes.

4. **Make use of Rogerian listening.** Carl Rogers was a psychologist who taught a superb way to facilitate communication between speakers. When one speaker wants to respond to what a previous speaker has said, he or she begins by repeating, in other words, what was said by that previous speaker. So, for example, a speaker might begin his or her response by saying, "What I heard Sally say was that. . . . Did I get what you were saying, Sally?" The speaker would then give Sally a chance to respond and only then say what he or she has to say.

5. **Participate actively in the discussion.** Don't simply sit and listen. Take part. If you don't have anything of your own to add to the discussion, you can still play a role by reiterating or agreeing with what others have said or by asking questions (see the next point). If you are the moderator of a discussion, try to get participation from the entire group. Don't let one or two people monopolize the conversation.

6. **Ask clarifying questions.** A great way to keep a discussion moving forward is to ask questions to clarify what other speakers have said. So, for example, one might ask speakers to define terms that they have used or to elaborate on points that they have made or to provide supporting evidence.

7. **Sum up what has been said.** At the end of the discussion, the moderator, or someone called upon to do so by the moderator, should summarize the discussion. If the discussion is about some plan of action to be undertaken, then the summary should describe exactly what those actions will be and who is going to do them.

Assignment: Choose one of the following topics for a small group discussion:

Equiano's description of life in an Ibo village and how that life differs from life in the United States today

The question of whether reparations should be paid to the descendents of enslaved persons

The role of orature (proverbs, stories, jokes, nursery rhymes, campfire stories, family histories, bedtime stories, sermons, and so on) in contemporary culture. Is orature a dead form today? What examples of orature are still to be found in society today?

As a group, choose one student to serve as a moderator of the discussion. Have that student work up some questions to pose to the group, and have all the members of the group prepare for the discussion by doing some personal research beforehand. Then, hold the discussion in class and try to follow the guidelines for discussion described above. The moderator should keep a scorecard and mark pluses and minuses beside each participant's name to indicate when he or she is following or not following the guidelines. For example, a student might get a plus for saying something and so participating in the discussion but a minus for speaking without being called upon. At the end of the discussion, discuss as a group what went well in the discussion and what went badly. Try to come to a consensus about how the discussion could have been improved.

Unit 1 Writing

Critical and Expository Writing

1. **A Paragraph about Proverbial Wisdom.** Choose a proverb from "A Sampling of African Proverbial Wisdom," on page 8. Write a long paragraph on the subject addressed by the proverb. Plan your **paragraph** by first determining what the subject of the proverb is and by **paraphrasing,** or putting into your own words, what the proverb says about that subject. Then, decide whether you agree or disagree with the proverb and why. Come up with **evidence** in the form of examples or brief stories (anecdotes) to support your position. Outline a paragraph to present your point of view. The paragraph should begin by stating the proverb and then an opinion regarding it. The paragraph should then support the opinion expressed.

2. **Collection of Traditional Sayings.** Interview some adults whom you know and ask them to think about and share with you some traditional sayings (otherwise known as **proverbs** or **aphorisms**). When asking adults for these, make sure to give them time to think about the question and to come up with some good ones from their memories. Work with other students in your class to compile a little **booklet of traditional sayings** from your community.

3. **Description of a Rite of Passage.** A **rite of passage** is a ceremony or ritual that is held to mark a major transition in life. Olaudah Equiano describes how dances were often held to mark rites of passage in West Africa. Write an essay in which you describe in detail some rite of passage that occurs in your culture in the United States. For example, you might write about weddings or funerals or the prom or high-school graduation ceremonies or christenings or bar mitzvahs. Write as though you were explaining the ceremony or ritual to someone who knows nothing about it. Use lots of specific detail, and make sure to explain the significance of the items and actions involved in the rite of passage.

Creative Writing

1. **A Praise Poem.** A **praise poem** is a traditional African poem that is written to tell about the accomplishments and characteristics of an exceptional or noteworthy person. Choose someone about whom you would like to write a **praise poem**. Make a list of that person's outstanding qualities, or characteristics. Then come up with a list of **praise names,** or phrases that could be used to describe the person in a laudatory way. You can choose, if you like, to write in free verse, but try to earn some extra credit (and praise) by writing your praise poem in rhymed verse.

2. **Drama.** Rewrite a passage from the *Sunjata,* on page 44, as a **one-scene stage play.** Use stage directions and dialogue. Follow the format of the selection from *A Raisin in the Sun* on page 677. You may want to add a narrator to your list of characters in order to have someone to relate those events that do not translate easily to the stage.

3. **Fable**. A **fable** is a story with animal characters that teaches a moral. "A Tug of War," on page 27, is an example of a fable. Usually, fables confer traditional characteristics on the animals involved. For example, mice are usually meek and furtive. Elephants and owls are wise. Foxes are sly and wise. Snakes are devious and mean, and so on. Write a **fable** in which one of the animals does not live up to these traditional associations. For example, you might write about a snake who turns out to be unexpectedly kind-hearted. Make sure that your fable has a **central conflict,** or struggle, and that it teaches a moral lesson.

Delving Deeper

Speaking and Listening

Storytelling. From the dawn of human history, people gathered with other members of their group, or clan, in the evening. Throughout most of history, people did not have televisions and music players and computers and other means for entertaining themselves. In many traditional cultures and societies, even today, such items are still rare.

What did people do when they gathered around their campfires in the evening, long, long ago? They told stories, sang songs, drummed, and danced. In every culture around the globe, there are ancient stories and poems and songs that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Storytelling is an important art form. The oldest form of storytelling is **dramatic interpretation** in which a solo performer tells the story, varying his or her voice for the different characters. With the invention of writing, stories were written down, and a new way of telling stories became possible: **reader's theater,** in which several people read different parts. One person might read the part of the **narrator,** the voice telling the main parts of the story, and various people might read the dialogue of the various characters in the story. Stories can also, of course, be acted out, or presented as **drama.**

Whether a story is told as a dramatic interpretation, as reader's theater, or as drama, there are several techniques that can be used to make the story come alive for the audience. Here is a list of points to keep in mind when telling a story:

1. Vary your **pitch,** how high or low your voice is.
2. Vary your **volume,** the loudness or softness of your voice.
3. Vary your **tone,** the manner in which you speak, to convey different emotions. If you are reading a sad passage, try to read it in a sad voice. If you are reading a bit of dialogue, try to imagine what the character is feeling and to convey that emotion in your voice. Is the character angry, scared, joyful, worried, scornful, or lazy? Let your audience hear that in your voice.
4. Vary your **pace,** how quickly you say the words, to fit the action and emotion in different parts of the story. If something exciting is happening, speak more quickly and excitedly.
5. Vary the **quality** of your voice to suit each character. Try to express the character's tone. If the character is big and strong, use a deep voice. If the character is young, use a more high-pitched voice.

Practice telling this story alone and with others. See if you can make it an exciting, fun piece for others to listen to.

Delving Deeper

Understanding Literature

Rhyme Scheme and Couplets. A **rhyme scheme** is a pattern of rhymes at the ends of the lines in a poem. A rhyme scheme is labeled using letters of the alphabet, tas follows:

The weevil's got a long, thin nose (*a*)
An' sticks it in where it don' belong (*b*)
He causes blight where the cotton grows (*a*)
And does the po' farmer wrong. (*b*)

We would refer to the rhyme scheme in the poem above as *abab*.

Exercise A. Answer the following questions.

1. What is the rhyme scheme of Jean Toomer's sonnet?
2. What happens when you get to lines 11 and 12?

In standard English, the words *saw* and *before* in lines 11 and 12 do not rhyme. However, in some dialects of English in the Southern United States, the consonant sound spelled *re* in the word *before* is barely pronounced. When the word *before* is pronounced in that way (that is, as /befo/), then it almost rhymes with the word *saw.*

A **couplet** is a pair of rhyming lines that expresses a complete thought. Jean Toomer's poem is made of seven couplets. The final couplet, as in many sonnets, sums up the main idea of the sonnet as a whole.

Exercise B. Complete one of the following couplets by writing a line that rhymes with the line provided. Possible rhymings are provided in parentheses.

These things I wish to do before I die:	(lie, try, sigh, cry, fly, why, pie)
A true friend's worth is measured by his deeds.	(needs, leads, bleeds, succeeds, creeds, pleads)
How few the days we spend beneath the sun	(run, fun, everyone, done, won)

Understanding Literature

The Elements of a Story. Even though "Tug of War" is a simple folktale and fable, it nonetheless has many of the elements of a sophisticated short story. The following are some common elements of stories:

Setting. The time and place of the story and all the details that help to convey this time and place. Some stories have more than one setting.

Protagonist. The main character in the story.

Antagonist. The person, persons, or force against which the main character struggles.

Motivation. What moves a character to act as he or she does.

Central Conflict. The main struggle that the main character is involved in.

Plot. The series of events in a story.

- **Inciting Incident.** The event that introduces the conflict of the story.
- **Resolution.** The event that ends, or resolves, the conflict of the story.

Theme. The main idea, or lesson, that the story teaches. In a fable, the theme is a moral lesson that the story teaches.

Work with other students to answer the following questions about "Tug of War":

1. What is the setting of the story? Where does it take place?
2. Who is the protagonist of the story, and what is he like? Why is he considered a "trickster"?
3. Who are the antagonists in the story?
4. What motivates the protagonist? How does he want to be thought of? How would you answer the question posed in the last line of the story?
5. What is the central conflict in this story? For what does Turtle struggle?
6. What is the inciting incident in the story? In other words, what happens to set the conflict in motion?
7. How is the conflict in the story finally ended, or resolved? Who prevails, or succeeds, in the end—the protagonist or the antagonists? What characteristic makes it possible for this character to prevail?
8. What lesson does this story teach? Why would parents tell this story to their children, in addition to wanting to entertain them?

Delving Deeper

Understanding Literature

Allusion. An **allusion** is a reference in a literary work to some external source, such as another literary work. In this section from his famous speech, Douglass makes an allusion to Psalm 137:1–6. This psalm tells the story of an event that occurred after the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem in 586 BC. In the **psalm,** or hymn, a group of Jewish slaves are encamped with their Babylonian captors "by the rivers of Babylon," probably the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Babylonians ask the Jews to "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." Zion is the hill near Jerusalem on which Solomon's Temple was built and is symbolic of Israel as a whole. The singer of the psalm answers, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Douglass uses this allusion to point out that he, too, has a difficult time, as an escaped slave, feeling mirth and "singing" at an Independence Day celebration.

Understanding Literature

Autobiography and Cultural Studies. As you know, an **autobiography** is the story of a person's life, as told by that person. By reading an autobiography, you can extend the range of your experience. In other words, you can imagine what it would be like to experience things that haven't happened to you personally.

A **culture** is the sum of all the things that people create and pass down from one generation to another, including homes, ways of finding and preparing food, beliefs, stories, proverbs, and social hierarchies and relationships. Reading an autobiography by someone from a very different, foreign culture can be particularly interesting because much of that culture will be new to you, and thinking about the differences between your culture and that of the autobiographer can be revealing. Look back over this selection and make a list of ten ways in which the culture of the West African Ibo people described by Equiano is different from the culture in which you live.

Handbook of Literary Terms

act A major division of a play. Both Roman and Elizabethan plays (including those of Shakespeare) were divided into five acts. In modern theater, plays most commonly have three acts.

action An event or sequence of events that occurs in a literary work. In drama, action refers to events that occur on stage as opposed to events that happen off-stage or before or after the events covered in the play. Sometimes these events are covered in flashbacks. See *flashback.* In the literary form known as the epic, the action sometimes begins *in medias res* (Latin for "in the middle of things"). Homer, for example, began the action of the *Iliad* near the end of the Trojan War, not at its beginning.

actor One who performs the role of a character in a drama.

adaptation A presentation of literary work in another form. The novel, *Little Women,* for example, has been adapted for stage presentation as a musical. Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet* has been adapted several times as a film.

aesthetics The philosophical study of beauty having as its goal the development of principles to guide the creation and evaluation of works of art. Commonly accepted aesthetic principles change from age to age. As a result, what is beautiful at one time may not be considered beautiful at another. The Greek philosopher Aristotle considered art to be most beautiful when it best imitated life or nature. Followers of another Greek philosopher, Plato, believed, in contrast, that beauty could be found by rising above the accidental, natural, earthly things and seeking sublime,eternal, idealized forms. Ideas about beauty give rise to schools of aesthetic thought. Neoclassicists, for example, hold that beauty derives from order, harmony, and balance, features that characterize Greek and Roman classical art and architecture. Romantics favor the intense expression of emotion and prefer nature in a wild state rather than in a controlled state. To a romantic, for example, an uncut forest is preferable to an ordered garden. Realists believe that art should imitate life and show both light and dark, reason and emotion, the human capacity for good and for evil. Naturalists tended to emphasize in their work or to prefer works that held that people's lives are governed by forces or circumstances beyond their control. Sterling A. Brown (See page 403) developed an aesthetic based upon using folk language and folk customs to represent in art the lives of African Americans. Alain Locke (See page 290) helped to define and nurture the aesthetic vision of the Harlem Renaissance; he encouraged artists to use their work to transform society and to create self-awareness. W. E. B. Du Bois developed an aesthetic based upon using art to achieve social and political purposes and articulated this aesthetic of art as propaganda in his essay "Criteria of Negro Art."
See *Neoclassicsm, Realism, Romanticism, and Naturalism.*

aim The primary intention that the writer of a work tries to achieve. The aim of a piece of writing, for example, might be

to persuade to inform others, or to express oneself. One aim of most works of art is to move the audience or the reader. Tragedy, claims Aristotle, aims to move the audience to terror and pity by witnessing the fall of a once great man through some fault of his own. Comedy, on the other hand, aims to have the reader or viewer rejoice at the success of the hero or main character. The term aim is most often used in the discussion of nonfiction informative or persuasive writing. The aim of Langston Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," for example, is to convince people that a specifically African-American art is possible and desirable. The aim of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was to demonstrate to people the horrors of slavery and so convince them to support its abolition.

allegory A work in which each element represents or stands for something else. It is possible to read Lorraine Hansbury's play *A Raisin in the Sun* as an allegory in which each of the characters in the Younger family represents a commonly unrealized aspiration, or dream, of African Americans in the mid twentieth century.

alliteration The repetition of initial consonant sounds. Robert Hayden uses alliteration when he describes Frederick Douglass as being "superb in **l**ove and **l**ogic."

allusion A reference in a writing, speech, or work of art to another work or to an external person, place, object, or event. In his speech "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" excerpted on page 122, Frederick Douglass describes asking an ex-slave to speak at a Fourth of July celebration as like the Babylonians asking their captives, the Israelites, to sing one of the songs of Zion. Douglass thus makes an allusion to the Biblical story of the Jewish captivity. Derek Walcott's "Map of the New World," on page 624, makes allusions to the destruction of the ancient city of Troy by the Greeks and to Odysseus, a Greek warrior who encountered many adventures on his way back home from Troy. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, on page 523, contains numerous allusions to the Bible.

ambiguity A statement that has more than one meaning, or speech that can be interpreted in more than one way so that the meaning cannot be clearly resolved. For example, the statement "Yolanda cannot bear children" might mean that Yolanda doesn't like children or that she is not able to give birth to them. Writers often make intentional use of ambiguity. For example, in Mari Evans's "I Am a Black Woman," for example, on page 000, the word tire/d is ambiguous. It can mean either "rubberlike," like an automobile tire, or "exhausted."

analogy A comparison of two things that suggests or shows they way or ways in which they are alike. The comparison is explicitly or directly made, not just implied. In the statement "He ran like a gazelle," the speed of the runner is compared to that of a gazelle. The title of the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child" is an analogy, comparing the speaker to a child without a mother.

analysis A thought process in which one breaks a subject into parts and then examines the relationships among the parts and the relationships of the parts to the whole. In the literary analysis of a play, for example, one might examine how the plot is developed by exposition (the description of the conflict and the introduction of characters involved in it), the rising action, the climax, the resolution

and the dénouement. The two final parts of the plot show how the conflict is resolved, how the theme is brought to a close and how all the characters introduced have been affected. For an example of an analysis of a period in African-American history, see "A Glossary of Key Terms and Events from the History of Jim Crow," by Ronald L. F. Davis, on page 224.

anapest A poetic foot consisting of two unstressed syllables, followed by one stressed syllable. The rhythm of this triple meter is sounded *da, da, dah* as in the word *interrupt* or the phrase *"on the loose."* The third foot in the last line of "The Day Breakers," by Arna Bontemps, on page 409, is an anapest: "Beating | a way | for the ris | ing sun."

anecdote A brief story, usually one that demonstrates a specific point or teaches a specific lesson. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," on page 314, Langston Hughes tells an anecdote about an African-American woman who paid to hear someone sing Andalusian folksongs but who would not pay to hear someone sing African-American folksongs. He told the anecdote to make the point that some African-Americans in his time had insufficent pride in or respect for their own culture. In the phrase *anecdotal evidence,* the word *anecdote* implies knowledge derived from hearsay (that is, from a story that someone told) rather than from scientifically verifiable sources.

antagonist A character in a story who is in conflict with the main character, or protagonist. In the West African epic Sunjata, the antagonist, Sumanguru, is destroyed because the sister of the protagonist, Sunjata Keita, coaxes from Sumanguru the secret of his vulnerability.

antihero A character who lacks the qualities usually associated with heroes, such as courage, compassion, grace, intelligence, vigor, beauty, or virtue, but who is nonetheless attractive to audiences for some reason. The heroes of the so-called "outlaw songs" like "Po' Lazarus" and "Stagger Lee" are antiheroes. (See pages 212 and 447.)

antitheses The rhetorical technique of drawing a strong contrast between words or ideas. Speakers and writers often emphasize the contrast by using parallel verbal structures, as in the sentence "What we're saying today is that you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem," an often-repeated statement by Leroy Eldridge Cleaver, one of the leaders of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s.

aphorism A brief saying that makes a point, usually a moral or philosophical one. An aphorism that is retained in a language for a long time can come to be called a proverb or an adage and be an expression of folk wisdom. "A hyena cannot smell its own stench" is an aphorism from Kenya.

apology As a literary term, a kind of defense of some point of view or cause. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" is an apology for breaking a discriminatory law based on the contention that the law was unjust.

apostrophe A literary technique in which a person, place or thing is directly addressed even though it is not present. Sometimes the thing or phenomenon is addressed as if it were a person. "The Great Hymn to the Aten" on page 38 is an apostrophe to the sun.

apposition A grammatical term used to describe a word, phrase ,or clause that renames something in different words. In the title *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave,* the phrase *An American Slave* is an apposition.

archaic language Language that is ancient or dated. Compare, for example, the archaic but beautiful language of the King James Bible

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

with the more modern, informal language of James Weldon Johnson's "The Creation," on page 328:

As far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

archetype An inherited and perhaps unconscious ancestral memory or motif that appears again and again in dreams, thoughts, or cultural artifacts like literary works and paintings. The psychologist Carl Jung believed that archetypes formed an inherited "collective unconscious" with considerable influence on human behavior. More generally, archetypes are familiar patterns in a culture that people can easily identify. So, for example, the call-and-response format might be considered archetypal for people of the African Diaspora. It has deep roots in the culture and appears again and again in many forms, from West African ceremonies to contemporary blues songs. A poem like Hughes's "A Negro Speaks of Rivers," on page 354, is a celebration of archetypal memories. Countee Cullen's "Heritage," on page 382, presents a speaker who cannot escape his archetypal memories of Africa.

argument 1. A prose summary of the theme or meaning of a poem or play. 2. In nonfiction pieces, the case made by the author for accepting a particular point of view or adopting a particular course of action. Thus one might speak of the argument made by Sojourner Truth for the equality of women in "Ar'n't I a Woman," on page 144.

article A brief work of nonfiction created for a periodical such as a newspaper or magazine or for a collection of works such as an encyclopedia. Sometimes *article* is used interchangeably with *essay,* although the latter term suggests a more serious or involved treatment of a subject. George Schuyler's "negro-Art Hokum" and Langston Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" were both articles written for the June 1926 edition of the *Nation,* a magazine.

aside A statement made by a character in a play but not meant to be heard by other characters. In the past, such as statement was sometimes directed to the audience, but in modern practice might be simply the character talking to himself or herself and being overheard by the audience. Walter's line "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds," from Act I of A Raisin in the Sun (See page 684) can be delivered as an aside to suggest that Walter would not dare say such a thing to his wife's face.

assonance The repetition of vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds, especially in stressed syllables. Consider, for example, these lines from James Weldon Johnson's "Lifet Ev'ry Voice and Sing," on page 332: