

“Word Crimes” by “Weird Al” Yankovic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Gv0H-vPoDc>

Standard addressed

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2](#)

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Key questions

- How do readers perceive writers who don’t use Standard Written English online?
- What is the main idea of this work, and how does the writer develop the idea? What details support the idea?

Assessment

The student will write a paragraph that identifies theme of a text and provides details to support the theme’s development.

Pre-viewing

Slide presentation

Show and discuss the slide presentation on the importance of writing. To what extent do students agree? Disagree? Their upcoming writing task is to write a paragraph in response to this prompt: What does “Weird Al” Yankovic suggest about people who use nonstandard English?

Words to know (See also Student Handout at end)

Because the video moves so quickly, students may have trouble determining meaning of unfamiliar words in context. Make sure everyone knows these words before viewing:

- **Conjugate** – to change the form of a verb to indicate person or tense, as in “I am, you are, he/she/it is, they are” and “I was, you were,” etc.
- **Nomenclature** – a system for naming things
- **Syntax** – arranging words and phrases to build sentences
- **Dangling participle** – a misplaced modifier, as in “I saw the trailer peeking through the window.” (Strunk & White)

- **Oxford comma** – the comma before “and” in a series
- **Homophone** – Words that are pronounced alike but have different meanings, as “your/you’re,” “to, too, two.”
- **Figurative vs. Literal language** – Literal language means exactly what it says. Figurative language means something other than what it says.
- **Errant** – mistaken, poorly chosen
- **Incoherent** – unclear, confusing
- **Emoji** – ideograms, “smileys”

During Viewing

The video runs 3:46. Let students watch it once to get an overview. Discuss the main idea as a class, and then show it a second and maybe a third time so they can take notes on specific details. It may be helpful to allow students a few minutes to jot down details between each showing.

Post Viewing

After discussion, students will write paragraphs in response to this writing prompt:

In the song "Word Crimes," what does "Weird Al" Yankovic suggest about people who use nonstandard English?

The teacher will determine how much direct instruction is needed for students to write a paragraph with summary and supporting evidence successfully.

Rubric

Standard: determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Writing prompt: In the song “Word Crimes,” what does Weird Al Yankovic suggest about people who use nonstandard English?

| Trait | Novice | Competent | Proficient | Exemplary |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Writer provides an objective summary of the text. | Writer’s summary is not objective or is incomplete. | Writer’s summary is objective and complete. | Writer’s summary is objective, complete, and clear. | Writer’s summary is objective, complete, and clear, and expressed with style and voice. |
| Writer identifies the theme or central idea of the text. | Writer does not identify the theme or central idea or states it only vaguely. | Writer states the theme or central idea. | Writer states the theme or central idea clearly. | Writer states the theme or central idea clearly with insight. |
| Writer identifies details that reveal the theme or central idea. | Writer does not identify details or identifies only one detail that reveals the theme or central idea. | Writer identifies at least 3 details but does not use quotations. | Writer identifies 3 details using quotations. | Writer identifies more than 3 details using quotations. |
| Writer identifies details from throughout the text. | Writer does not identify details or identifies only one detail. | Writer’s details are drawn from about the same point in the song. | Writer’s details are drawn from different places in the song. | Writer’s details are drawn from throughout the song. |

Extension

- The song begins, “If you can’t write in the proper way...” Illustrate 5 situations in which “proper” (Standard) English is important and 5 others in which it’s optional.
- Beginning at 0:34 in the song, the lyric says, “OK, now here’s the deal. I’ll try to educate ya.” The song uses nonstandard “ya” instead of Standard “you.” Find 5 other examples of nonstandard usage in the song. Write a paragraph explaining what the combination of nonstandard and nonstandard usage adds to the song.
- Look up the terms *grammar* and *usage*. Create a presentation (poster, slides, Prezi, etc.) that makes the difference clear. Find an example of each one in the song.
- The song mentions dangling participles at 1:43. Find five amusing examples of dangling participles (not in the song). Write one of your own. Prepare a handout, blog post, or web page that explains how to avoid dangling participles.
- Research the Oxford comma. What are its advantages, if any? What are its disadvantages, if any? Make a poster, infographic, Prezi, or other presentation that helps other people understand.
- Explore the difference between figurative and literal language. Illustrate some examples when “literally” can’t really mean “literally.”
- Emoji, emoticons, and smileys: how are they alike and how are they different? Make a poster, infographic, Prezi, or other presentation that will help others understand.

Differentiation

- The words of the song appear onscreen, which will be helpful for hearing-impaired and ELL students.
- The teacher may wish to provide a handout/glossary of unfamiliar words.
- The teacher may allow additional time for viewing the video again and/or for completing the writing task.
- Some students may wish to collaborate on the writing. Ask them to document their contributions as an accountability task.

Words to know

- **Conjugate** – to change the form of a verb to indicate person or tense, as in “I am, you are, he/she/it is, they are” and “I was, you were,” etc.
- **Nomenclature** – a system for naming things
- **Syntax** – arranging words and phrases to build sentences
- **Dangling participle** – a misplaced modifier, as in “I saw the trailer peeking through the window.” (Strunk & White)
- **Oxford comma** – the comma before “and” in a series
- **Homophone** – Words that are pronounced alike but have different meanings, as “your/you’re,” “to, too, two.”
- **Figurative vs. Literal language** – Literal language means exactly what it says. Figurative language means something other than what it says.
- **Errant** – mistaken, poorly chosen
- **Incoherent** – unclear, confusing
- **Emoji** – ideograms, “smileys”

