

FIND THE AUDIENCE

A working session on authentic audience in the English classroom

“The drama of education is the constant and persistent drama of possibility and transformation.”

WILLIAM AYERS

Writing is the most audience-dependent act a student performs, and we routinely strip the audience away. We assign the essay, collect the essay, grade the essay, file the essay. The only reader is the one required by contract to read it. Today we are going to pick one unit that could use new life — and we are going to find it a real audience.

BY THE END OF THIS HOUR

You will leave with one concrete idea for a real audience and a real product, for a unit you already teach. You will not solve the whole unit today. You will find the door.

PART ONE • DIAGNOSIS

Work quietly for six minutes. Be honest. The unit will not be offended.

1 Name a unit, project, or assignment that’s ready for a refresh.

What’s it called? What course? What do students make?

2 When did it start to feel that way — and how do you know?

The signal might be in your students, in your own energy, or in what you find yourself grading at 10 p.m.

3 Who is the audience for the student work right now?

Be honest. If the answer is “me,” write “me.”

4 What happens to the work after it is graded?

Where does it go? Who, if anyone, sees it again?

TABLE TALK · 8 MINUTES

Share the unit you named. Listen for patterns in each other's answers.

- What patterns do you hear across your table's units?
- What was alive in this unit the first time you taught it? What's worth preserving?
- Whose unit at your table is most interesting to you — and why?

PART TWO · REDESIGN

The question that matters now: who, specifically, will read this — and what will they do with it?

An authentic audience can be tiny or enormous. One person who matters to a student is often more powerful than three hundred strangers. Start small and specific.

A MENU OF REAL AUDIENCES

ONE PERSON

A grandparent. A former teacher. A coach. A younger sibling. A future self. A parent who has never read their writing.

A SMALL CIRCLE

A team. A club. A class of elementary buddies. A friend group. A family group text.

THE SCHOOL

Morning announcements. Next year's section of the same course. The lit mag or paper. The PTA, board, or administration.

THE TOWN

The local paper. A board or council meeting. The library, historical society, or senior center. A local business.

A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

A Discord server or subreddit. A fan community. A real letter to an author or artist. A contest or journal in the field.

THE PUBLIC

A podcast or channel with real listeners. A magazine like Teen Ink. A zine. A public performance or open letter.

THE AUDIENCE TEST

If you answer “no” to any of these, it's not authentic yet.

- ☐ Does this audience actually exist and can they actually receive the work?
- ☐ Do your students care what this audience thinks — even a little?
- ☐ Would the work change — in voice, form, or care — because the audience is real?
- ☐ What is the lowest-friction way to actually put the work in front of them?

SKETCH YOUR REDESIGN

The unit

The audience Name a person, group, publication, or body.

The product What students will actually make.

What changes when the audience is real?

“What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.”

PAULO FREIRE