

Another Example of an Essay on ‘Living Between Two Cultures’

This online activity will let you look at our 3rd reading for our course, Taneisha Grant's "To Speak Patois." This is another 'personal essay' that explores two identities -- based on speaking different languages -- and how to reconcile them in the writer's own life experience.

As you read this short essay, ask yourself, how does the writer end her piece? (Actually, it's with a short poem -- but it has language that can tell what she means about the importance of her home language to her life experience.)

REMEMBER TO LOOK AT THE *ENDINGS* OF EVERY READING FOR CLASS. In a personal essay, the ENDING is important to understand what the author is trying say about their life experience.

- In groups of 2 (or 3):
- First, read “To Speak Patois” after you look over the questions below.

1) What kind of a character does Grant develop early in the essay? Is she confident about her abilities in school and with people? What details does she give us?

2) While some stories of immigration describes the hardships of living in one’s home country, the experience of Grant seems different. How does she describe life in her native Jamaica? As a group, select two details that strike you as ‘effective’ or ‘memorable.’ Do you think she is telling the truth about how beautiful life was in Jamaica, or is she perhaps ‘idealizing’ or ‘romanticizing’ it? Why?

3) Why do Grant’s parents choose to come to New York City? What details about city life are different and ‘challenging’ to the author? What emotion does she feel at leaving her home country?

4) How does Grant reconcile ‘living between two cultures’ at the end of the essay? On balance, is she successful or not at this? As a group decide if Grant’s solution is ‘optimistic’ or ‘pessimistic’ about reconciling both cultures and why? Also, as a 19year-old author, did anything surprise you about Grant’s skills as a writer? (Take a look at the poem at the end of the essay, for example).

(~20 min.)

- **Reporting Out** – Select a reporter for your group, who will be able to give your group’s responses to the above questions to the class.