



Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

2.4 Putting the People Back into Language

Objectives

Identify passive constructions.

Develop an awareness of how the use of passive constructions can obscure meaning, perpetuate oppression, deflect responsibility, or deprive people of identity or of agency (autonomy) in their actions.

Materials needed

Copies of the handout

Time needed

Twenty to thirty minutes, depending on variation

Instructor directions

Ask your students to consider the use of passive constructions in the sentences provided.

Have them discuss how the use of passive constructions can obscure meaning, perpetuate oppression, deflect responsibility, or deprive people of identity or agency (autonomy) in their actions.

Variation

Have your students locate a print or online news article that uses passive constructions and discuss the article in class with reference to the given instructions.



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Directions

Identify the passive constructions in the sentences below.

Discuss how use of passive constructions can obscure meaning, perpetuate oppression, deflect responsibility, and deprive people of identity or of agency (autonomy) in their actions.

Compare the effects of using the passive voice to those of using euphemisms in language (see Identifying Euphemisms). What are the similarities?

Rewrite the sentences in the active voice. (Note: You may need to insert an appropriate subject noun or pronoun.)

In 1920, American women were given the vote.

The bus driver was attacked by an unknown assailant.

Mistakes were made.

She was the first woman awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The victim was brought to the shelter after it was discovered that she had been severely beaten.

The book was removed from the library's shelves.

A decision was made not to observe the recommendation to delay the launch.

Private Golden was wounded by friendly fire.

Ming Wu was admitted to the conservatory in 1997.

The test, which was administered to freshmen and sophomores, yielded results in the 50th percentile.

The demonstrators were subdued with rubber bullets and tear gas.

An investigation was performed, and it was determined that no hazing occurred.

In what year was America discovered?

Variation

Locate a print or online news article that uses passive constructions. Discuss the article with reference to the instructions above.