The Disenfranchised Learner

Vivian Yenika-Agbaw
Laura Hudock
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Young me in class
“Sound out that word”
I sound it out
Not like that
Again
I do . . . not a clue why
. . . not a clue what it means . . .
Not a clue at all!

Middle me at my desk
“Dramatize that scene”
Like this? I skipped one way
Not like that
I skipped another
. . . not a clue why
. . . not a clue what –
And . . . not a clue how it connects with anything!

High school me: digital native!
“Digitalize this”
What?
“This story!”
I smile nodding in agreement.
Like this?
Hmm! It scratches its head

Like that?
It stares at the ceiling
Okay, I get it: Like . . .
Sure . . . but what is that?
I shrug . . . I thought that was what you wanted . . .

Okay, class,
Everyone, settle down:
“What is this novel about?”
I take a deep breath then raise my hand
“Yes?”
A commentary on . . .
“Incorrect!”
Uh? Eyes bulging
Furrows aging me
Completely drenched in sweat!

A chair creaks . . . perhaps mine
and the footsteps approach
“What is the author saying in this novel?”
Should I know?
Exasperation!
Steps retreat.
I feel stupid recoiling
into
My cultural hole of silence!
Don’t “I” MATTER
Vivian Yenika-Agbaw  
Laura Hudock  
Paul Ricks  
Rene Rodriguez-Astacio

Young me in class  
"Sound out that word"  
I sound it out  
Not like that  
Again  
I don't, not a clue why  
... not a clue what it means ...  
Not a clue at all!

Middle me at my desk  
"Dramatize that scene"  
Like this? I skipped one way  
Not like that  
I skipped another  
... not a clue why  
... not a clue what –  
And ... not a clue how I connect with anythings!

High school me: digital native!  
"Digitalize this"  
What?  
"This story,"  
I smile nodding in agreement.  
Like this?  
Hmm! It scratches its head  
Like that?  
It starts at the ceiling  
Okay, I get it. Like ...  
Sure... but what is that?  
I shrug. I thought that was what you wanted ...  
Okay, class,  
Everyone, settle down:  
"What is this novel about?"  
I take a deep breath then raise my hand  
"Yes?"  
A commentary on ...  
"I correct"  
Uh? Eyes bulging  
Furrows again me  
Completely drenched in sweat!

A chair creaks ... perhaps mine  
and the footsteps approach  
"What is the author saying in this novel?"  
Should I know?  
Exasperation!  
Steps retreat.  
I feel stupid recoiling  
into  
My cultural hole of silence  
Don't "I" MATTER.
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Young me in class
“Sound out that word”
I sound it out
Not like that
Again
I do . . . not a clue why
. . . not a clue what it means . . .
Not a clue at all!

Middle me at my desk
“Do it one way”
Like that
Not a clue why
Not a clue what –
And not a clue how it connects with

High school me: digital native!
“Digitalize this”

I smile
In agreement.
Like this
Nods its head

I stare at the ceiling
Like . . .
What is that?
I shrug
I thought that was what you

Everyone,
I take a deep breath
Raise my hand
A commentary on . . .
“Incorrect!”
Uh? Eyes bulging
Furrows aging me
Completely drenched in sweat!

A chair creeps . . . perhaps mine
and the feet of each
“What do you say in this novel?”
Should I know?
Explain.
Stare.
I feel a word receding
into
My self.
But “I MATTER”
Vivian Yenika-Agbaw is professor of Education at The Pennsylvania State University where she teaches children’s and adolescent literature both in the residential and World Campus programs. She has authored or co-edited several books including, *Adolescents Rewrite their World: Using Literature to Illustrate Writing Forms*, and presented numerous papers at national and international conferences such as the National Council of Teachers of English, Literacy Research Association and the International Reading Association. A former high school teacher of English, she is passionate about literature, literacies, learning and how these intersect with culture! She can be reached at vxy102@psu.edu

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