

Back in Time

Hey everyone, my name is Coby Hawkins and you are listening to Back In Time. For those of you who don't know me, I am currently a student enrolled at UC Davis, and I am studying theater and dance. I was raised in a small city in the Bay Area called Union City, and in this city I attended James Logan High School which was home to just over 4,000 kids. I've been an athlete practically all my life, and in high school this remained the case. I played basketball for all 4 years and if you paid very close attention to the news a few years ago, you might have caught a glimpse of my high school basketball team playing in the California State Championship game. Yea, it's a subtle flex but I try to work it into as many conversations as I can. Now today we are joined by a very, very special guest. He is someone who I have known my entire life, and he has known me for all of his. In today's talk we are going to be addressing a topic that I found im rather passionate about, which is something I never would have thought before to be honest. We will be discussing literacies, MY literacies in particular. And before we start I want to address, 'well what is literacy?' For those of you who don't know, in its simplest form literacy is defined as 'the ability to read and write', however it is far more complex than this. In the context of this discussion, literacy will be more loosely defined as 'a unique form of English used in communication'. In my life, I typically switch between 4 core literacies, and have come to define these literacies as my 'First Literacy', 'Creative Literacy', 'Slang Literacy', and my 'Athletic Literacy'; all of which my guest here has either developed already or is going to develop. Of course there are a multitude of experiences that have helped me develop and refine these literacies, but I really only want to touch on the most significant; starting with my 'First Literacy'.

The first experience, or string of experiences that I can vividly remember shaping my literacies came when I was very young. Right around the age my guest here is now. Growing up, our dad was always big on reading books to us, and because of this we were exposed to so many different children's books. These books were things like the pigeon books, where the wild things are, or if you give a mouse a cookie; little simple stuff like that. But the books I feel had the most profound impact on our "first literacy" were Dr. Seuss books. When dad first read me, or us, a dr. Seuss book, it felt like- like we were introduced to this wonderous world of speech we never knew existed; and we immediately fell in love with it. It's hard to pinpoint exactly why these books resonated with us so much, but I think it has a lot to do with the unique rhyiming and rhythm patterns found within each and every book dr. Seuss wrote. There were a variety of these books that dad read to us, but our favorite by far was 'oh the places you'll go'. Once dad realized we loved this book so much, it became something he would read to us every night. This constant exposure to the unique style of dr. Suess is the experience I really want to highlight here. It served as a mold for our 'First literacy'. A literacy utilizing flow and rhythm, and of course rhyme, to enhance the beauty of my speech almost to the point where it could be considered- music. Now this was significant to us because we always had a charismatic and extravagant personality, one that was always forming these imaginative ideas. But these ideas felt confined by the limited form of speech we knew at the time; and now, with this new literacy our words could reflect the thoughts we constantly had brewing in our head. We had developed such a creative way of speaking that we utilized daily. And speaking of this creativity, I want to mention the next significant experience that has helped shape another one of the current literacies in my life.

This next experience came when I was in 8th grade. I had an English teacher named Mr. Varela. When I first met him I figured he'd be like any other teacher, one who taught a subject that I wasn't very fond of, assigned me a lot of work I didn't want to do, and then gave me a grade that- at the time I didn't really care about; but I could not have been more wrong. Varela asked everyone to bring a brand new notebook with them on the first day of class, so like I was asked, I bought a brand new notebook and brought it with me to class on the first day. Rather than starting with an icebreaker, or a real introduction, the moment we got to class Varela asked us to write a story- any story. I mean this was a huge shock for me because I loved creative writing but never really got the chance to use it in school. I wrote a story about two boys on the road after running away from home, which I was very proud of at the time, but Varela assured me that with more detail the story would be so much better. Over the next year this is exactly what we worked on in class, and our notebooks became our most valuable asset. Practically every activity we did in this class was tailored towards expanding on the creativity and the detail found within our writing. We performed many different writing activities in our notebooks, things like writing short stories or describing scenery down to the smallest detail, or one of my personal favorites was when we were given a topic, and we had to come up with as many words as we possibly could that fit within that topic, and not to brag but I was pretty damn good at it. Varela's class truly allowed me to express how I was feeling through my writing, and gave me a chance to see just how vivid I could make my writing. At the end of the year we were tasked with going back to the first story we wrote in class, and re-writing it, keeping in mind all that we had learned over the year. When my story was complete I finally understood how much I had grown as a writer. My storytelling had improved tremendously, and the detail that I was able to incorporate into the story was nothing like I could have ever imagined using before. Mr. Varela and his class helped shape another one of the four core literacies I use in my life, a literacy I now refer to as my 'Creative Literacy'. Like I mentioned earlier this literacy consists of heavy detail to vividly describe something, which is why it is my primary literacy when writing stories or anything creative.

The third of the four core literacies that I primarily use is something I call my 'Slang Literacy'. Now this one is pretty self-explanatory, as it encompasses all of the 'slang' terminology and speech I use in my daily life. Out of all my core literacies, I would say that this literacy is the one I use most often. But I want to mention that when people hear the word 'slang', there is typically some sort of negative connotation associated with it. In my eyes slang is just a more casual way of speaking. My 'slang' includes - specific phrases I have heard over the years - shortened versions of words - and there is a specific way that I speak that's hard to describe but think of it as taking everything you learned about how to speak properly and setting it aside for a little. Now there are A LOT of experiences that have helped shape this literacy, but if I were to point out one experience that has influenced it the most it would have to be my years in high school. See I went to a very diverse high school with a wide variety of kids, and there were definitely some really really smart kids but it was almost as if they were- outliers. Like it seemed as if there were a lot of kids who had no intention of going to college, it was like they didn't want to be in school altogether. And because kids like this made up a vast population of the school it became a culture in a way to focus on popularity rather than academics, and it was almost a necessity to learn how to communicate within this distinct culture otherwise you would be alienating yourself from a large portion of students. Right now it may seem a little confusing so let me explain what literacy was like in this

culture. In this culture, literacy was more- broken. Now I don't mean this in a bad way, rather it's really the only way I can describe it. It utilized unique speech patterns, shortened words and phrases, a specific tone that oozed with confidence and swag, and a lot of cussing. But I would understand if people would want to avoid this culture altogether, and a lot of kids did, I wasn't one of them. I was constantly code-switching at school from my time in the classroom to my time outside of it, and by doing this so often while remaining intertwined in this culture for 4 years, it was only natural that it played a massive role in shaping one of my core literacies.

And with all of this being said I want to touch on my final core literacy, a literacy I refer to as my 'athletic literacy'. We grew up in an athletic family with both of our parents playing sports in college, so I mean it was only natural that we gravitated towards sports at a very young age. And when I say we gravitated towards sports I MEAN it. Matter of fact I bet If you name a sport right now, we have played it at some point in our life. And we have always been just intertwined in a sports environment. All of my friends now have either played or currently play sports, and there is always some sort of sports game on in my house. Now I really want to say that it is simply impossible to pinpoint just one experience that has had the most significant impact in shaping this literacy because I have always been so deeply invested in sports and athletics. So this literacy consists of a culmination of phrases, terms, references, and tones that I have picked up from all of the different sports I have played in my life, and the specific athletic environment that is always brewing in my household. Many of the coaches I have played for had specific terminology and phrases that they used regularly, and I took many of these and implemented them into my own literacy. Within this overall core literacy, there were separate subsections that separated each of the sports and the specific literacy that I acquired from that sport, so as you can probably guess it is one of my most vast literacies. The only thing is that sports teams and fandoms are a specific discourse community, and because of this my athletic literacy is one I can only really use with those who also find themselves in this community. And those who aren't in it will just be utterly confused and for very good reason, as not only are there confusing terms that are used, but there are also many many references that are made that just won't make sense. In terms of the certain subsections of this literacy, I would say the most prominent one I have developed came from the sport of basketball. I have played basketball longer than any other sport, having played for over 8 years, so it is rather obvious that this sub-literacy is the most extensive out of the bunch. It has gotten to the point where I have started using basketball terminology in everyday conversations. But all 4 of these core literacies play a massive role in my life, and I honestly don't know what I would do without them.

To wrap things up I want my guest here to know something. Look kid, I really just want to make one thing crystal clear. Each and every one of these literacies adds to who you are as a person. They are your history, your past experiences; they are a piece of you. And I do want you to understand that they aren't the only thing that has shaped you, but they are a big contributing factor. And don't get me wrong, it is invaluable that you learn some common form of English so that you always have some way to communicate with people, but at the same time you need to embrace these distinct forms of English that you have created and will eventually create more of. They are special and should be treated as such. I mean, this is only a portion of the many, many experiences that have and will inevitably shape your future literacies, so make sure you always remain open-minded. But I would be naive if I tried to claim that

everyone will accept these different literacies that you use. There are many people out there who will reject them, and refer to you as “uneducated”, “illiterate”, and “ignorant” as they have done before; all simply because your literacies don’t fit their textbook definition of “English”. And I mean if you want to become a stale “one-trick pony” by all means be my guest, but in my opinion that doesn’t sound too fun. Look, you don’t have to change who you are. As Dr Seuss once said, “be who you are, and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter, and those who matter, don’t mind.” Just be you, just be Coby.