1.1 Authority and texts

Important concepts in your study of English are ‘author’ and ‘text’. These are associated with a notion that you deal with in your daily life: ‘authority’.

Supporting activity

Before you begin, make sure you know the meaning of the words in the left-hand column below. Match the words with their definition in the right-hand column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Communications of meaning including sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia representations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Power or right to enforce obedience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Writer of books, essays etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etymology</td>
<td>Duty or binding agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associations</td>
<td>Account of the origins of a word and the development of its meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Mental connections between related ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>Authority, influential body or thing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Look up the etymology of ‘author’, ‘authority’ and ‘text’. A quick way is to go to http://www.etymonline.com/ which outlines the etymology of the word and also links directly to a dictionary definition.

Individual task

1. Develop a spider diagram to explore the different definitions of each of the words ‘author’, ‘authority’ and ‘text’. Write the word in the centre circle, its various definitions on the diagonal and your associations with these definitions on the horizontal lines. Make sure you include the etymology as one of its definitions.
In your groups

2. Compare your spider diagrams and discuss:
   - Do any of the words have a wider range of meanings than you realised before you did this exercise?
   - Do any of the meanings or your associations seem unexpected or incongruent with the others?

3. Using some of the less common definitions of the terms, discuss the validity of the following statements.
   a. The author is the creative genius behind a text.
   b. Our role as readers is to discover the meaning of the text that the author intended.
   c. The authority to interpret a text lies with the reader.
   d. When readers exercise authority over a text, they need to realise that their power to interpret is shaped by their personal and cultural contexts.

Who is at the wheel?
Text: RTA webpage: Who we are and what we do

We can apply these ideas to our own society by considering a body like the Roads and Traffic Authority in the following way:

Author = RTA
Text = RTA regulations and publications

But where does authority lie? With the RTA, pressure groups or the community? The following activities help you explore this question.

List any words or structures (of language or layout) that infer the Roads and Traffic Authority’s power to act as well as those that suggest its obligations to the community. Use these resources to write a paragraph on the nature of authority. An example has been given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE OF POWER</th>
<th>LANGUAGE OF OBLIGATION</th>
<th>THE NATURE OF AUTHORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>‘established…under the…Act’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional activities**

In pairs discuss the following:

1. What is the purpose of the text, Who we are and what we do?
2. Who is the target audience? Choose the most appropriate from the list below:
   a. Learner drivers.
   b. The general community.
   c. People interested in types of roads.
   d. Government officials.
3. Which forms and features of language suggest this audience to you?
Compare the language of the Who we are and what we do text with the RTA’s Legislation webpage which has another version of its role:


Is the Legislation text written for the same audience? Explain your answer by close reference to the language of both pages.

(The Legislation webpage may be included as close textual study for outcomes 1 and 4, and ESL outcomes 1 and 6.)
**Who’s driving?**

**Text: Image**

Look at the image below. Imagine that the driver of this vehicle is the Roads and Traffic Authority. There are passengers and back-seat drivers as well. From your reading of the Who we are and what we do webpage (and the Legislation webpage) on the Roads and Traffic Authority website, consider these questions:

- Who are the passengers?
- Who do you think those back-seat drivers might be?
- Which ones would you put up front next to the driver?
- How well does this image work as a representation of the responsibilities of the RTA?
- Can you think of other ways of representing its role, functions or responsibilities?

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**Additional activity**

The image shown on the previous page is allegorical. It represents an abstract idea through characters, figures, or events in a picture. What other allegories do you know?

**In your groups**

Do a Google image search on ‘freedom’ and ‘authority’. Choose an allegorical image for each idea and discuss:

- which specific aspects of freedom are symbolised and the ways in which freedom is represented
- which specific aspects of authority are symbolised and the ways in which authority is represented
- whether you agree with the representations of these ideas.

How would your group represent freedom and authority for a contemporary audience? You can choose to do so in an image or an allegorical narrative. Present your ideas to the class in the form or medium you believe will be the most effective way to communicate your ideas.

**Reflection**

What is your understanding of the words ‘text’, ‘authority’ and ‘author’ now that you have completed the work in this section?