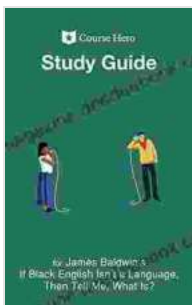


Study Guide for James Baldwin: If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is

Summary

In his essay "If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is," James Baldwin argues that Black English is a legitimate language with its own unique grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. He challenges the notion that Black English is simply a "corrupted" or "inferior" form of Standard English and argues that it is a valid and expressive language in its own right. Baldwin also discusses the social and political implications of the debate over Black English, arguing that the denial of its legitimacy is a form of racism.



Study Guide for James Baldwin's If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is? by Frances Hodgson Burnett

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 603 KB

Print length : 248 pages

Lending : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported



Main Arguments

Baldwin's main arguments in "If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is" are as follows:

* Black English is a legitimate language with its own unique grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. * The denial of the legitimacy of Black English is a form of racism. * Black English is a valuable asset to the African American community and should be celebrated, not stigmatized.

Close Reading

The following is a close reading of the opening paragraph of Baldwin's essay:

> I have been astonished, over the years, at how often I have heard white people, otherwise intelligent and well-meaning, refer to black people as "articulate." This is always intended as a compliment, but it is a compliment that always strikes me as profoundly patronizing. It is as though one were praising a black person for being able to speak English without an accent, or for being able to put two sentences together grammatically.

Baldwin begins his essay by discussing the common perception of black people as being "inarticulate" or "uneducated." He argues that this perception is based on the assumption that Black English is not a legitimate language. Baldwin challenges this assumption by pointing out that Black English has its own unique grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. He also argues that Black English is a valuable asset to the African American community and should be celebrated, not stigmatized.

Baldwin's use of language in this paragraph is very effective. He uses the word "astonished" to convey his surprise at the frequency with which he has heard white people refer to black people as "articulate." He also uses the word "patronizing" to describe the way in which this compliment is often

given. These two words help to set the tone for the essay, which is one of challenge and defiance.

Baldwin also uses repetition to emphasize his main points. He repeats the phrase "black people" three times in the first sentence, and he repeats the word "articulate" twice in the second sentence. This repetition helps to drive home Baldwin's point that the perception of black people as being inarticulate is based on a false assumption.

James Baldwin's essay "If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is" is a powerful and persuasive argument for the legitimacy of Black English. Baldwin challenges the racist assumptions that underlie the denial of Black English's status as a language, and he argues that Black English is a valuable asset to the African American community. Baldwin's essay is a must-read for anyone interested in the study of language, race, and education.

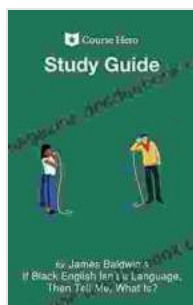
Questions for Discussion

1. What are Baldwin's main arguments in "If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is"? 2. How does Baldwin challenge the notion that Black English is simply a "corrupted" or "inferior" form of Standard English? 3. What are the social and political implications of the debate over Black English? 4. How does Baldwin use language in "If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is" to convey his main points?

Additional Resources

* [James Baldwin's "If Black English Isn't Language, Then Tell Me What Is"] (<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2021/september-october/if-black-english-isnt-language-then-tell-me-what>) * [The Language of Black English]

(<https://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/blackenglish/>) *
[Ebonics](<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ebonics>)



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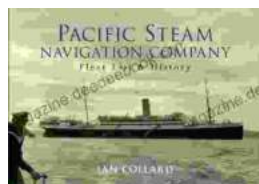
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