

Do actions speak  
louder than words in  
consider the lobster  
by david wallace



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In this passage from David Wallace's *Consider the Lobster*, there are many deep thoughts ingrained within the passage and the author himself discusses many of his actions with regards to what he is saying. Given this, he is not always recognized for being consistent - at points he will address a section stating something about it and then he seems to act in the opposite manner when continuing on with his footnotes. But do his actions speak louder than his words in this sense or are they just looked upon differently?

He starts off this particular excerpt with a strong sentence stating, "the issues surrounding 'correctness' in contemporary American usage are both vexed and highly charged, and that the fundamental questions they involve are ones whose answers have to be literally worked out instead of merely found" (293). This relates back to how actions have some stance with that of words, in that sometimes to better understand what someone is trying to communicate, it is best to experience it yourself. Some of Wallace's experiences are discussed in the footnotes, particularly ones about how he is a college professor himself, and how he has to engrain information into students proper English the beginning of each semester. But at the end of the day, what he lays out for students could be completely disregarded until it pertains to them later on in their life. Wallace kind of critiques Garner for not necessarily connecting with his audience, as Wallace acts in a manner through his passage to make more of an effort to do so.

As readers ourselves, Wallace brings up a strong point when he mentions that, "we regular citizens tend to go to The Dictionary for authoritative guidance. Rarely, however, do we ask ourselves who exactly decides what gets in The Dictionary or what words or spellings or pronunciations get

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deemed correct” (295). This is a fault of pretty much any person that has used a dictionary, we as a society depend on it when we aren't clear and just trust what is presented before us. Alongside this, Wallace praises Garner for his creation, then the next he degrades him by critiquing how said words are spelled. He attacks his actions with regards to numbers in the footnotes, when Garner uses numerical symbols for words after “ ten”, when Wallace emphasizes he was taught it was correct to physically spell out the number until it reached “ nineteen”. At another point right after the quote above, Wallace includes in his footnotes that we do not question what is laid out in front of us, and includes a personal story about how his father is still mad at those who decided decades ago in 1984 that meringue should be spelled the way it is. This creates a discrepancy for what Wallace expresses for readers, where at points they are torn with to side with Wallace himself or with Garner. On one hand, Wallace creates this personal connection or relationship with readers themselves, per say while Garner is distinguished on paper and has his accomplishments with the dictionary he got published. Based off his footnotes, it seems as though Wallace has a great appreciation for Garner and for his work, but he brings into the question of why is what he says what follows for the remaining society. By incorporating these experiences and opinions, Wallace is encouraging readers to not always accept what is plain said, and how people get more out of a simple definition when it relates somehow to them.

As the saying goes, “ actions speak louder than words”, but it is clear that this is not always the case with this given passage. David Wallace uses his words in the passage, his footnotes more specifically, to connect with

readers and allow for a stronger understanding of the ideas being conveyed. Yes, at a few points, his actions with his experience can tend to shy away from what he has previously said, but as a whole Wallace uses this way of communication to leave readers with a bigger message to walk away from the excerpt with.