

Bell hooks, talking back, and female writers

Literature



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One of the primary messages in Bell Hooks' essay " Talking Back" is the concept that talking back or responding in any way other than submission to authority figures meant she was daring to disagree or express an opinion as to if she were equal to the person she is talking with. This was always considered inappropriate because she was a woman and women were not supposed to have any authority. This idea is seen in many of the things we've read this semester as it is expressed by several female authors including Bell Hooks, Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Kate Chopin. Bell Hooks starts off the discussion by blatantly writing about women's lack of authority and the attitudes she faced every time she tried to express her ideas. She says, " had I been a boy, they might have encouraged me to speak believing that I might someday be called to preach," but because she was a girl she was supposed to just stay quiet and accept what she was told. Women's speech, she says, was reduced to just " giving orders [within the home], making threats [that had no weight], and fussing [which was ignored]." Since she couldn't express what was on her mind in verbal speech, she turned to write as a means of getting her ideas out. This opened her up to harsh criticism by her community once it was discovered, but it also sent the message out to other women that their ideas were not necessarily worthless just because they were women and it helped to expose the degree to which women were being subjugated by their own society. These ideas of subjugation and a need to express the self can also be found in the work of Kate Chopin. In her short story " The Story of an Hour," she introduces the main character as a very sickly young woman who has just been told that her husband died in a train crash. When she gets alone in her bedroom, she starts to celebrate her newfound freedom and her blood

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begins to flow. “ There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself.