

Reading: Understanding Intent

Writers express their intent through techniques such as the use of italics or quotation marks to emphasize certain words or phrases, and direct speech to personalize the writing or create drama.

A. A Read the article.

Think: Would you have stopped to listen? Why or why not?

Does Beauty Transcend?

You've seen them on sidewalks, in subway stations, in front of bus stations. You may even have stopped to listen for a minute. Known as street musicians or "buskers," they play for free to a largely indifferent passing crowd, hoping to earn a few dollars for a hot meal, or in a wildly improbable scenario, to be noticed by someone in the music industry who likes their style.

On a work day like any other in Washington, D.C., I was hurrying to catch the subway. I happened to be with a colleague I had run into at a coffee shop on the way, and we entered the station together. As we walked along the subterranean passageway, we could hear strains of violin music coming from somewhere beyond us. We rounded a corner and saw a young man in jeans with an open violin case at his feet. There was one dollar in the case" Whoooo-wee," said Joe eloquently. "That boy sure has what it takes to play the fiddle."

Joe is from Louisiana, which explains why he would refer to what I later learned was a 3.5 million dollar violin as a "fiddle". It turned out that the "fiddle player" in the subway had been none other than premier violinist Joshua Bell, who had, in fact, recently played in the Boston Symphony Hall, and people had paid upwards of \$100 a seat for the privilege of hearing him. Bell was posing as a busker that day in the subway for an experiment set up by The Washington Post to find out whether people recognize and appreciate talent and beauty taken out of context.

So, as our title asks, does beauty transcend? If it is moved from an elegant context to a mundane one, will people still recognize it as something extraordinary?

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Apparently not. In the 45 minutes that Joshua Bell performed difficult and intricate classical pieces, 27 people gave him money, for a grand total of \$32.17. Only seven actually took the performance seriously enough to stop to listen.

After reading The Washington Post article, I told a friend who works in marketing what had taken place in the subway. His take on it was that people are so busy these days that they don't want to take time out to "do their homework." They want things explained and categorized for them. He cited market surveys in which people classify one of two identical products as being better than the other when it is a nicer, classier package. My uninformed reaction to this was, "Are you *serious*?"

The fact is that we take it for granted that "what you see is what you get", so if a musician looks like a busker and is playing where one would expect a busker to play, then logic dictates that he is a struggling street musician and not a world-class violinist. We toss him a few coins, certain that we have done our good deed for the day, never imagining that we may have missed a once-in-a lifetime performance simply through not othering to think out of the box!

B. Look back at paragraphs 2, 3, and 5 and think.

1. Direct speech is used in paragraphs 2 and 5 to
Distance the writer from someone's opinion.
2. The writer uses quotation marks in paragraph 3....
Because it is ironic that Joe calls the violin a fiddle.
3. In paragraph 5, *serious* is in italics because.....
The speaker emphasized the word.

C. Vocabulary: idiomatic expressions with *take*.

1. If you ask someone what their take is on something.
You want to know their opinion
2. If you take something for granted.
You don't question it.

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3. If you *take something seriously*.
You believe it to be important.
4. If you *have what it takes*.
You have the right qualities for success.
5. If something *takes place*.
It happens.
6. If you *take time out* to do something.
You take a break from work to enjoy it.