# Unit 6 — The Non-Fiction Essay — Teacher copy

Track E · Klasse 12 · Niveau E (Basisfach / Leistungsfach)

**Niveau E**

## 1. Reading

Read the text and use it for the activities below.

**Reading — *Speaking in Tongues*, opening (paraphrased)**

*The essayist begins with a small autobiographical scene: code-switching between two voices in her own family. The anecdote is small, specific, domestic. By the third paragraph, the anecdote has become an argument about voice and authenticity. By the fifth, the argument has opened onto a moral turn — that single voice* is a political demand, not a personal achievement. The closing returns to the autobiographical scene with new resonance.

**Vocabulary — essayistic prose**

*premise, claim, qualification, anecdote-as-argument, register shift, moral turn, essayist's I*, address, periodic sentence, elliptical close.

## 2. Practise

**Niveau E — controlled**

1. Match: anecdote-as-argument → small story doing argumentative work; moral turn → the essay's ethical shift; elliptical close → unfinished but resonant ending.
2. T or F: the essayist's *I* is the same as the fiction-writer's narrator; non-fiction essays always open with the thesis.

**Niveau E — productive**

3. Build 3 sentences using essayistic-prose vocabulary on Smith's opening.

## 3. Your turn

**Non-fiction essay (your own), 400 words.** Use the *anecdote-as-argument* move: open with a small personal scene, develop into an argument by paragraph 3, hit a moral turn by paragraph 5, return to the scene at the close. Use 4 academic discourse markers + 2 hedges + 1 cleft.

**Sample**

*The first time I noticed I had two voices, I was fourteen and on the phone with my grandmother. The voice I used with her — slower, vowel-heavier, permitted to be sentimental — had nothing in common with the voice I used at school the next morning. The realisation was not interesting in itself; everyone has more than one voice. What was interesting was my unease. I felt, briefly, as if one of the two were the real* one and the other a small daily betrayal. Accordingly, I tried for some weeks to merge them — to bring the school voice home and the home voice to school. Both attempts embarrassed everyone, including me. By contrast, the more I read essays by writers who code-switch professionally — Zadie Smith, James Baldwin, Jhumpa Lahiri — the more clearly I saw that the anxiety I had felt was a borrowed anxiety. It is precisely the demand for a *single* voice that is the political problem. The literary problem, by contrast, is the harder one: how do you keep two registers without flattening either? The essayists who do this best, in my reading, do not pretend the two voices are identical. They let the reader feel the join. Smith's *Speaking in Tongues* (2009) is, in this regard, a small instruction manual: the essay's own register shifts twice in the first three pages, and the shifts are part of the argument. Caution is warranted; complacency with one's own voice is not. The phone call with my grandmother, returning at the close of this essay, no longer feels like a betrayal. It feels like a craft problem I have begun to solve.

## 4. Further reading / listening

- Zadie Smith, *Feel Free* (essays).
- James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*.
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *In Other Words* (memoir-essay).

## 5. Teacher answer key

**Controlled.** 1. all true.

2. F (different conventions: the essayist's *I* carries personal accountability), F (often the thesis lands later, after an anecdote).

**Productive.** 3. Open.