

# The Vernacular Process of Haiku's Moral Compass

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## Abstract

In Writing and Rhetoric Foundations, for the introduction of Task 3, we were told to use an excerpt from David Barton and Mary Hamilton's "Defining Vernacular Literacies" as our main source to draw from. For the task, we were told to select and analyze a vernacular literacy in our lives and to make a convincing argument of why that literacy would be considered vernacular or not. Within Barton and Hamilton's excerpt, not only did they present their definition of vernacular literacies but what would be considered to be its antonym, in this case, dominant literacies. My chosen vernacular literacy was a tattoo that I had done on my inner left ankle and for Task 3, I explain why it is that my tattoo is considered vernacular literacy and a form of writing. In some ways, my tattoo (The Moral Compass) serves as a constant reminder to myself of certain values I hold dear, such as spirituality, creativity, and more direction.

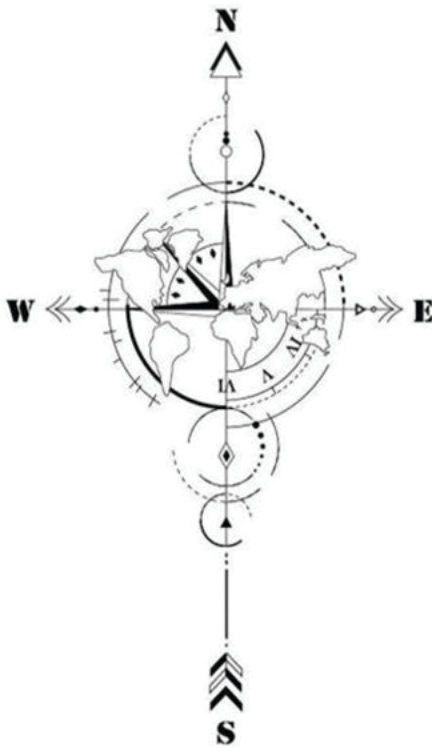
Tattooing is the art of reminders, and I have come to understand that the tattoo I have imprinted onto my body serves as a constant communicator. Even though the composition of my tattoo wasn't my own, it combined all the parts that I was looking for throughout the process of selecting it. Not only does the tattoo itself come from a place of creativity and improvisation, but the process of the artist putting the tattoo onto my body does as well. Regarding my tattoo process (selecting it and getting it done), authors of the book, *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, David Barton and Mary Hamilton make the point that "They [vernacular practices] may also be a source of creativity, invention, and originality, and the vernacular can give rise to new practices—improvised and spontaneous—which embody different sets of values from dominant literacies" (253). Like their elaboration on the meaning of vernacular, my tattoo process embodies improvisations, originality, and creativity,

and is not a formal activity that is to be followed strictly by structure and rules. With Barton/Hamilton's description, I consider the improvisation of the tattoo process and the originality of my tattoo to be a vernacular, literate activity.

Before going forward, I want to acknowledge my "moral compass," which is the name that I've given my tattoo which can be seen in figure 1. There were five key components that I wanted to incorporate into my tattoo:

- The earth that is shown across the entire middle portion of the tattoo
- A quarter of a clock (south-east quadrant)
- A quarter of a compass (north-west quadrants)
- Geometric circles & shapes around the tattoo
- Arrow accompanied by the four cardinal directions

I know there are many reasons why people get tattoos, but my moral compass has a spiritual and personal connection. This tattoo communicates my understanding of where I belong in society, reminding me of the parts of myself to engage with, reminding me not to be influenced by societal pressures.



From Barton/Hamilton's understanding of vernacular literacy, we know that for something to be considered vernacular, it has to focus on learning that has developed personally or from a home environment (251-253). The vision of my tattoo was taken from multiple different forms of literacies that I encountered daily. For example, my connection with time and counting the hours as I waited at work (the clock), or when I started to take more interest in understanding the Earth and began my journey as a plant father (the Earth). When I first started this tattoo journey, I knew I wanted something that I would be comfortable seeing and referencing every day. It would be a visual

reminder of the things I always loved and encountered, and the composition of my moral compass checked off many of those boxes. Barton/Hamilton go on to say that “Personal Networks have a particular importance when people confront the official worlds” (254), which goes to support their earlier claim on vernacular literacies regarding how it is viewed and learned outside of a professional setting/formal education. Given that vernacular literacies “focus on learning developed personally/from home” and that “personal networks have a particular importance,” I can say that the design of my tattoo is a good example of a vernacular activity.

My tattoo is a written/visual form of literacy (that takes place on my body) that was developed from my understanding of the different things I wanted to keep as a reminder on my body constantly. At the same time, the reason why I selected these particular portions of the tattoo was because of the personal networks I had around me. The people I encountered before and during the time of me getting my tattoo (which were my mother, sister, and mentors) had a great deal of influence when I was thinking about my tattoo process subconsciously. By having another person’s perspective of my tattoo, I was able to rethink how much that portion of the tattoo mattered to me. Depending on how deeply I felt about that person’s opinion, I would consider changing parts of my that “are integral to the social relationships people develop in their local lives. They are closely connected with feelings of identity and self-worth within a significant community.” Even though the decision of my tattoo is my own, I know that the process of selecting my tattoo and getting it done was influenced by my social relationships and the people I knew locally. Where should I get the tattoo? Who will be doing my tattoo? How big should my tattoo be? Should I take this off my tattoo or put it back on? The thought process behind answering these questions reference Hamilton/Barton’s many definitions of what is considered vernacular literacies. Having these sources of creativity, invention, and originality that are influenced in some way by our personal/local networks connects to that feeling of belonging, self-worth, and identity.

Bringing our attention back to figure 1, the parts of my tattoo stemmed from some form of dominant literate activities. Parts of my tattoo, such as the arth, draw heavy resemblance to a world map, and taking a closer look, you can see the four cardinal directions accompanied by both quarters of the clock and compass—all forms of dominant literacies. All of these literacies were used in a formal setting to chart the direction and set a course to travel across the great seas. If a captain of a ship did not have any of these requirements to set sail, they would never leave the port or get lost in trying to get there; this is the same as how I feel about my life, hence the tattoo. Barton/Hamilton enhances this and explain that “the text is official, but what people do with them, the practices themselves, can be vernacular” (257). Drawing attention to the concept of getting the tattoo itself, I want to point out that the entire process is a vernacular activity that stemmed from dominant ones. I compare it to a doctor’s office. In a doctor’s

office, you have how needles and pens (ink) are professionally used in that setting. You see the official use of these tools—what they were intended for. However, when we shift perspective to the tattoo industry, we use that same concept of the needles, but instead of in dominant use (injecting someone), it is being used and seen in its vernacular form (drawing/inking onto someone's body).

If you take a look at figure 2, you will see a more detailed and accurate representation of my tattoo, including the birds going up the right side. The birds represent my migrative nature towards the north, having come up from Jamaica to America, from South Florida to central Florida, and the continuation of that process of always going up. This brings me back to the vernacularity of the tattoo and how it is derived from those dominant literacies. Hamilton/Barton further makes a distinctive connection between both the dominant and vernacular of text by saying, “These are the text of the everyday life,



the text of personal life, generated in the course of everyday activities; often these are created by people and circulated locally” (258). I can say that my interaction with my tattoo constantly creates that feeling of understanding when I look at each part differently. The art comes from my strong connection to nature and noticing the natural world around me, the compass and cardinal directions came from the place of confusion that I was in when I first wanted to get that tattoo and how desperately I wanted to get out of that headspace. The quarter of the clock represents my Timeline Project (a life-long project that I have dedicated myself to the development of), and the geometric circles show my connection to everything that is the stars and above and my spirituality. These dominant forms of literacies that I encounter, whether it be every day or occasionally, found a way

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to morph into vernacular literacy while using a vernacular process.

The tattoo itself is a form of vernacular literacy because not only does the concept of getting a tattoo not follow traditional standards of literacy, but the tattoo also represents that I do not follow traditionalized standards of living in society. Barton/Hamilton says, “Vernacular literacies are as diverse as social practices are” (252). Though vernacular literacies may not be as regulated as dominant literacies, these vernacular activities are regulated by social groups, families, friends, and social interactions. Like my tattoo, the intended purpose for the tools’ uses and the parts of the tattoo somehow become more diverse/open once we ignore the dominant use/view of that activity. The parts of my tattoo stemmed from some type of dominant literacy first, but now that they have been broken down and reused for my tattoo. Stripped of their dominant title, they have merged to become what is representative of a vernacular activity.

## Works Cited

Barton, David and Mary Hamilton. “Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community.” *Routledge Linguistics Classics*, 1998, pp. 251-258.

## Convergence Rhetoric



Haiku is a junior attending UCF obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in Writing and Rhetoric with a certificate in Editing and Publishing. Originally from Jamaica, Haiku found writing to be a coping mechanism for culture shock, but as he grew his writing did as well. No longer using it as a coping mechanism, his writing now takes the form of dramatic fantasy epics, articles on arts and design, and research on chakras and spiritualism.