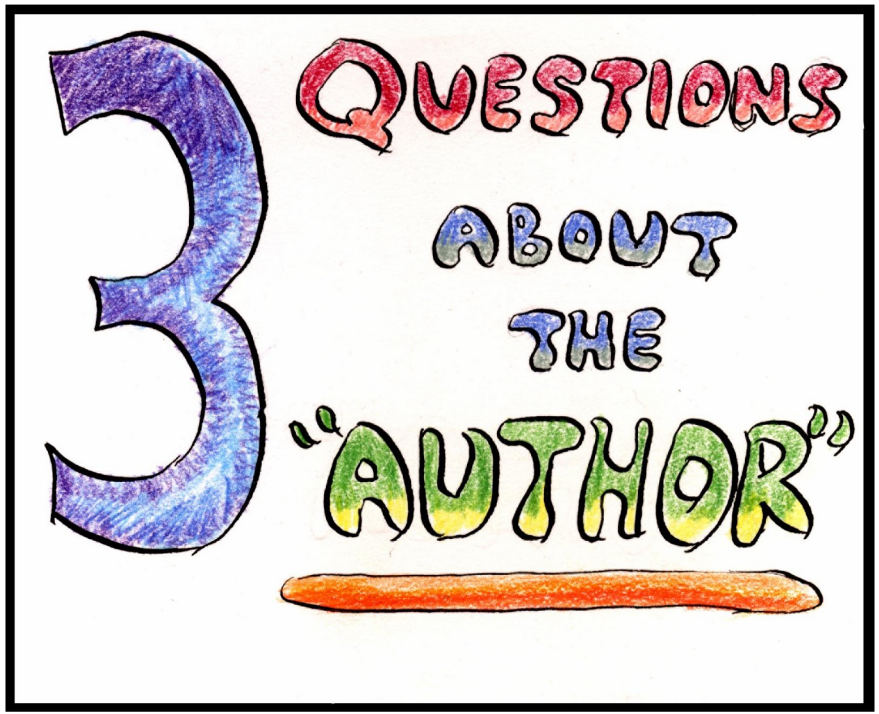
"Everyone knows that train is the worst!"

Using a funny skit to crack open questions of credibility

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College (City University of New York)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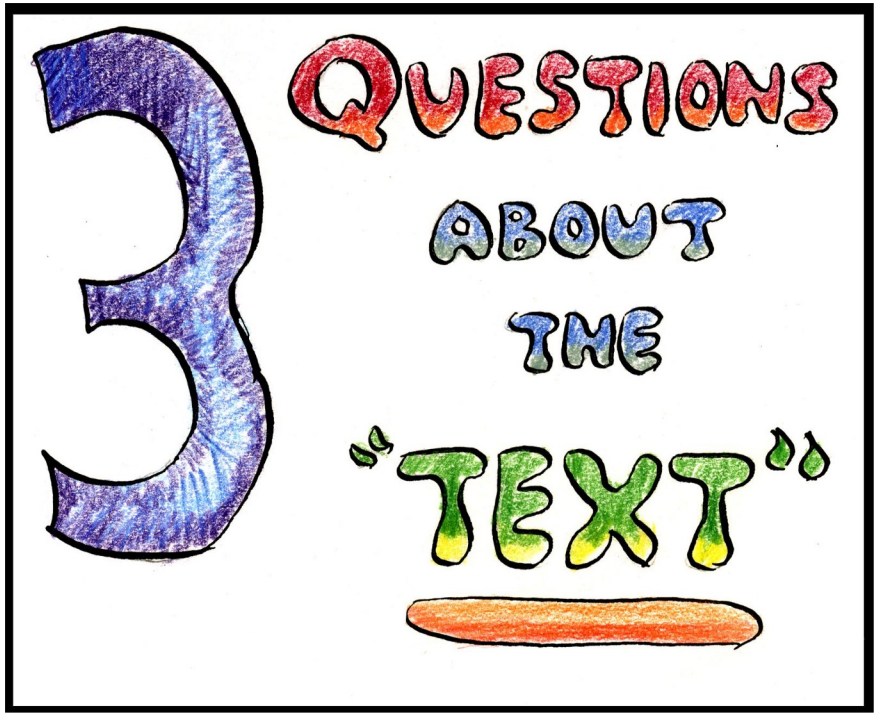
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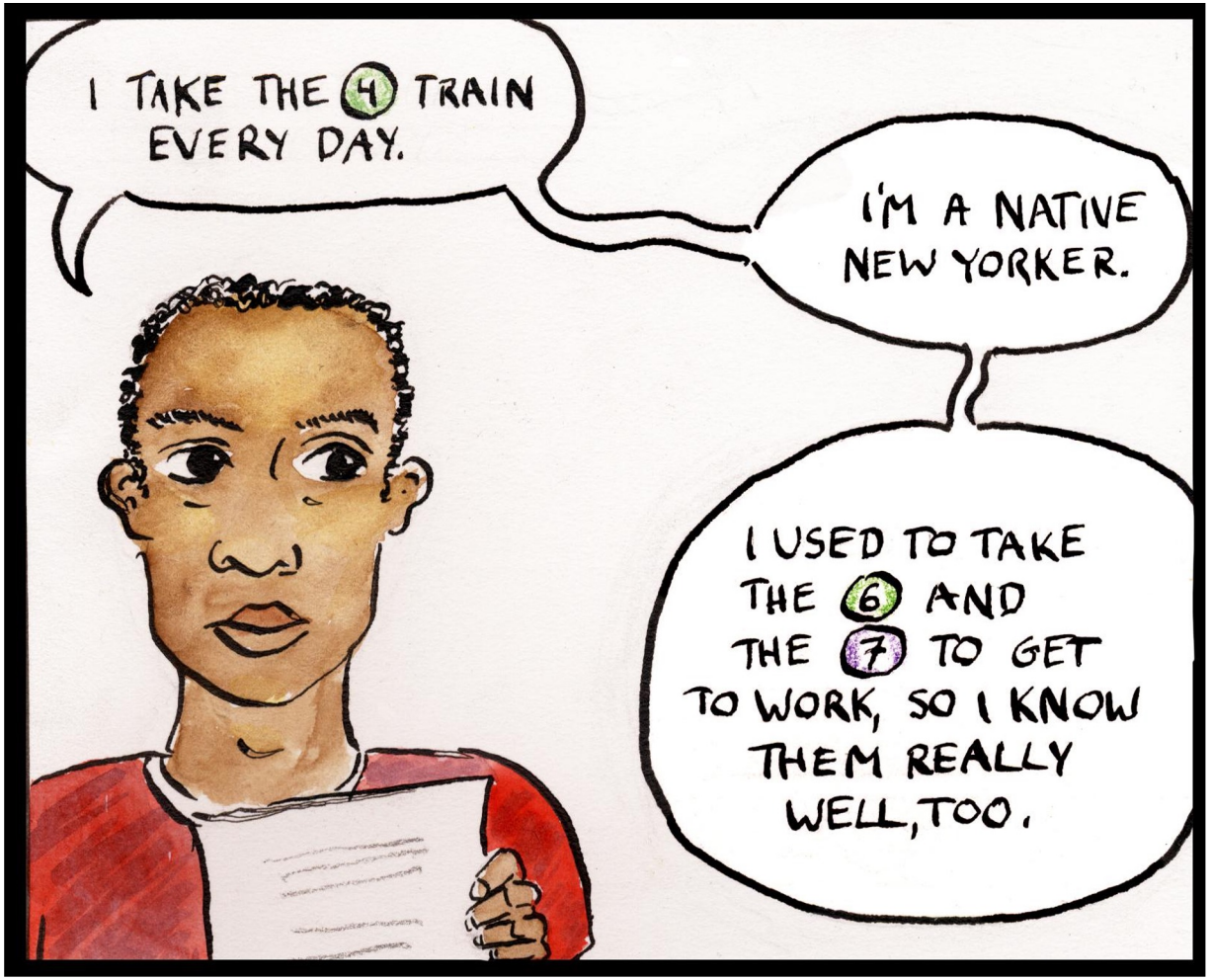
@Kia4Realz/Twitter

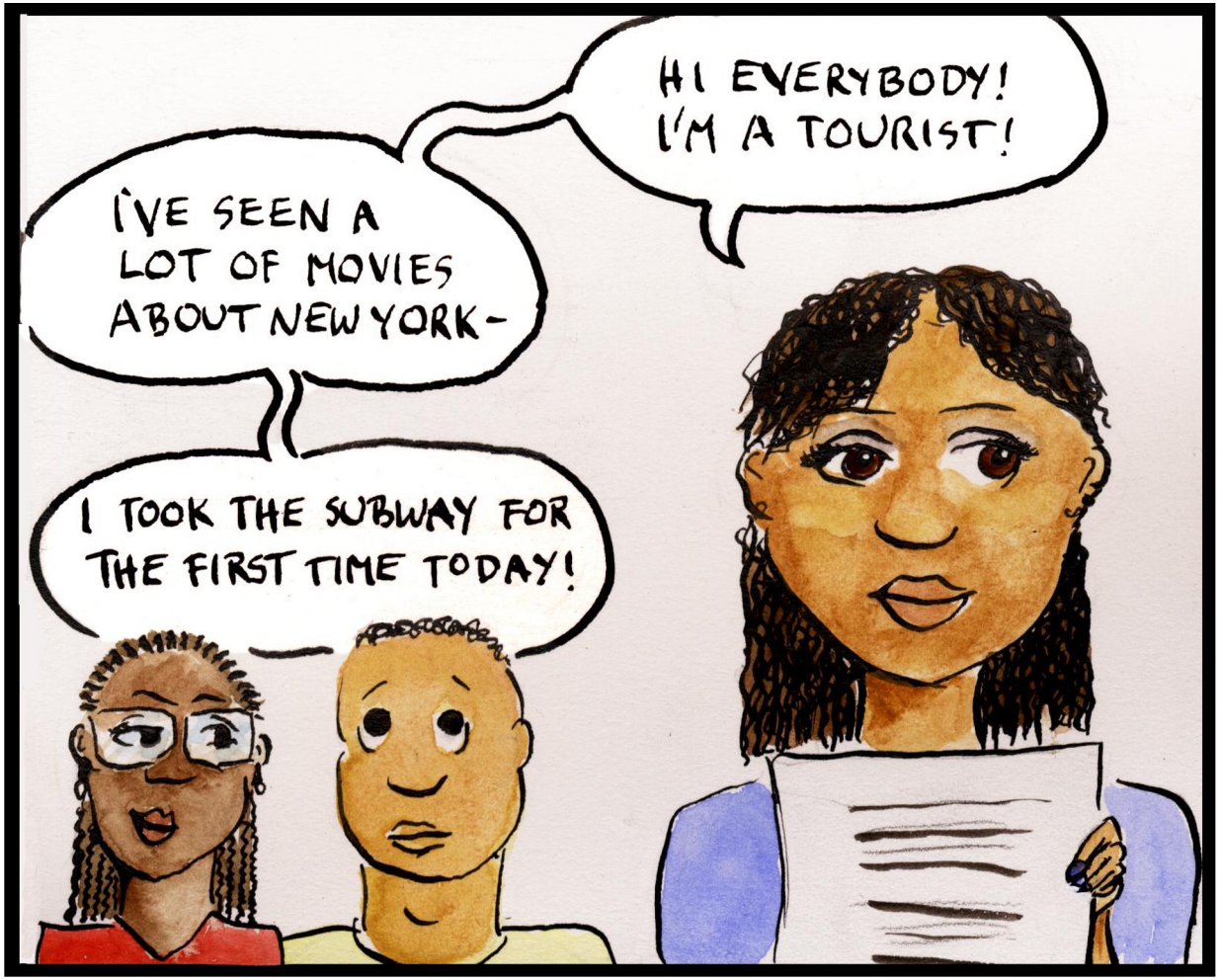
Person A

I'VE BEEN STUDYING SUBWAYS IN NEW YORK, LONDON, AND CHICAGO FOR TWENTY YEARS, AND EARNED A MASTER'S DEGREE IN HOW DIFFERENT TRAIN SYSTEMS WORK.
I ALSO WORKED FOR THE MTA FOR TEN YEARS.

Person B


I TAKE THE 4 TRAIN EVERY DAY.
I'M A NATIVE NEW YORKER.
I USED TO TAKE THE 6 AND THE 7 TO GET TO WORK, SO I KNOW THEM REALLY WELL, TOO.

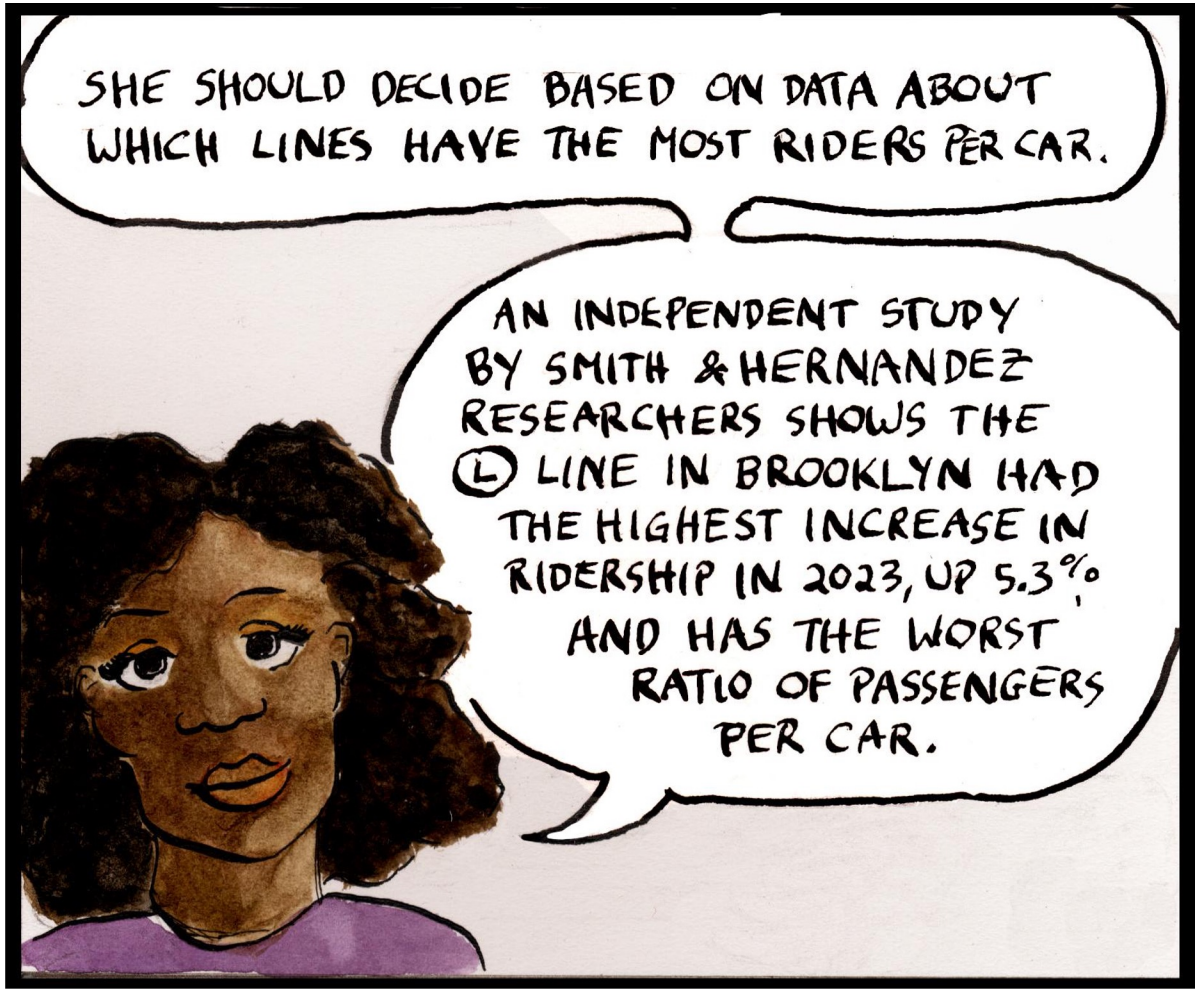
Person C


HI EVERYBODY! I'M A TOURIST!
I'VE SEEN A LOT OF MOVIES ABOUT NEW YORK-
I TOOK THE SUBWAY FOR THE FIRST TIME TODAY!

The question at hand

If Gov. Hochul were to give the MTA more money, which subway line should get the *most* increased number of trains during rush hour?

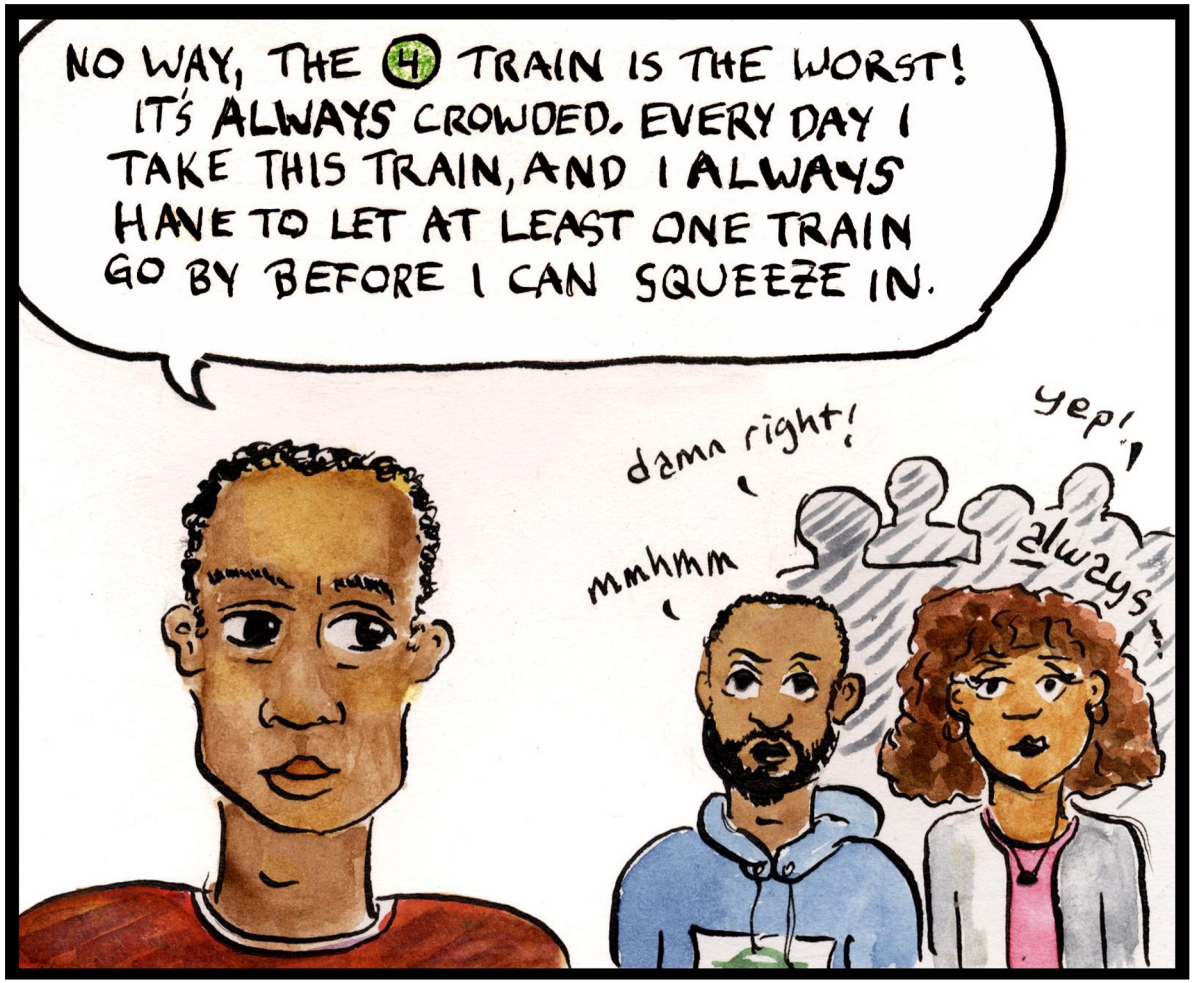
Person A


SHE SHOULD DECIDE BASED ON DATA ABOUT WHICH LINES HAVE THE MOST RIDERS PER CAR.
AN INDEPENDENT STUDY BY SMITH & HERNANDEZ RESEARCHERS SHOWS THE (L) LINE IN BROOKLYN HAD THE HIGHEST INCREASE IN RIDERSHIP IN 2023, UP 5.3%, AND HAS THE WORST RATIO OF PASSENGERS PER CAR.

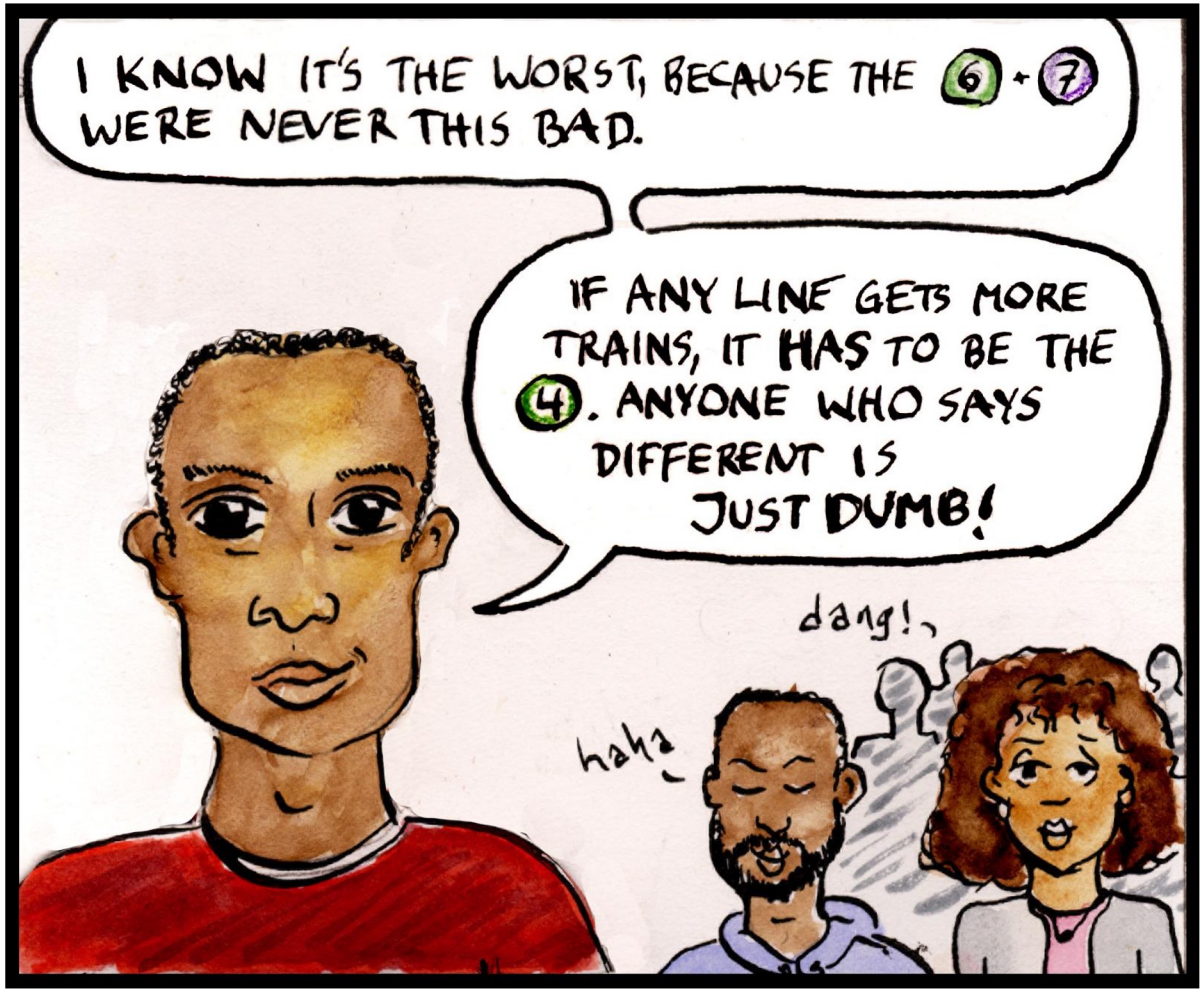
Person A

YOU CAN SEE DETAILS OF THAT STUDY ON THE MTA'S WEBSITE, WWW.MTA.INFO
I SAY THE L TRAIN SHOULD GET THE BIGGEST INCREASE IN TRAINS.

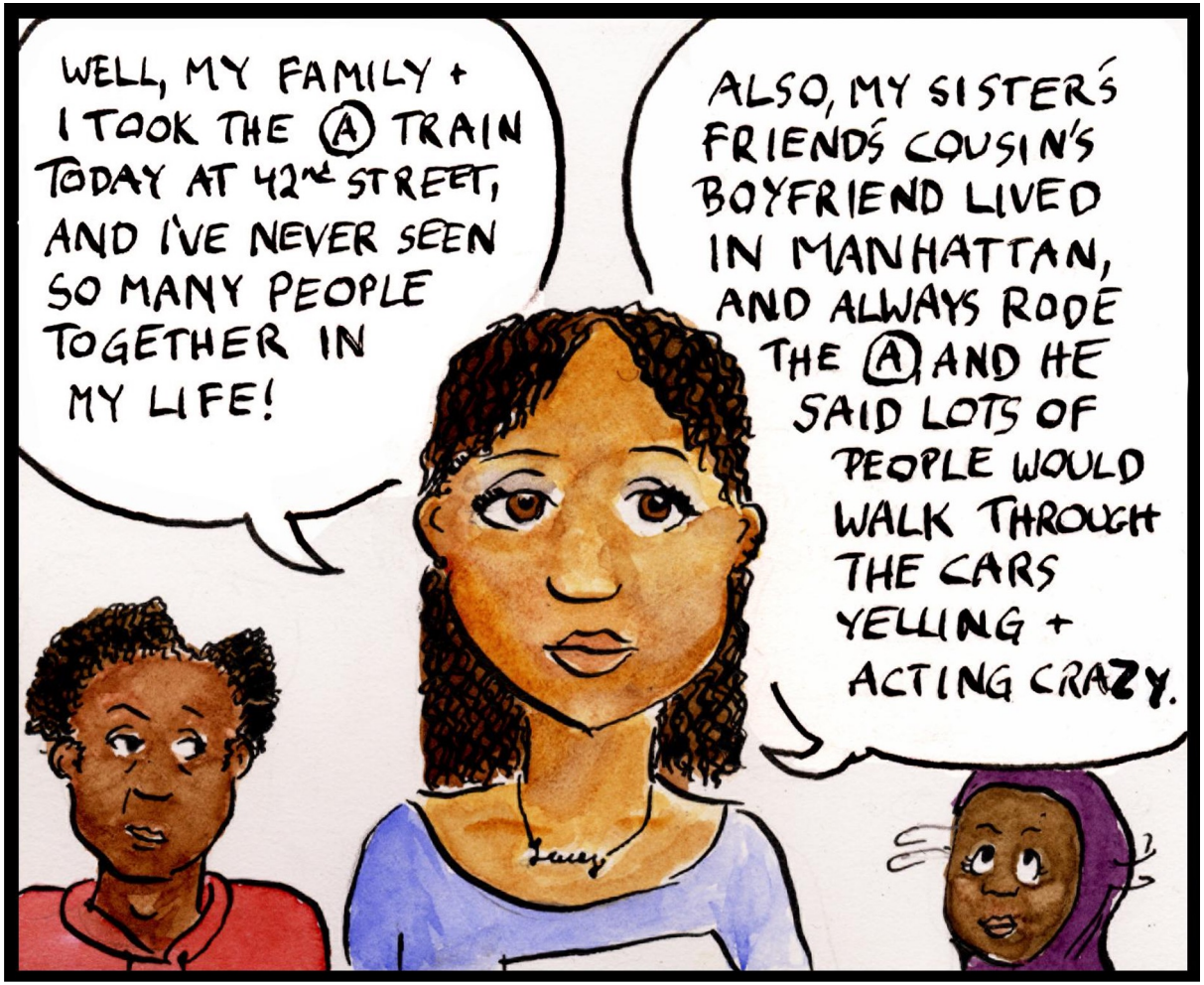
Person B


NO WAY, THE 4 TRAIN IS THE WORST! IT'S ALWAYS CROWDED. EVERY DAY I TAKE THIS TRAIN, AND I ALWAYS HAVE TO LET AT LEAST ONE TRAIN GO BY BEFORE I CAN SQUEEZE IN.
dama right!
yep!
mmhmm
always

Person B

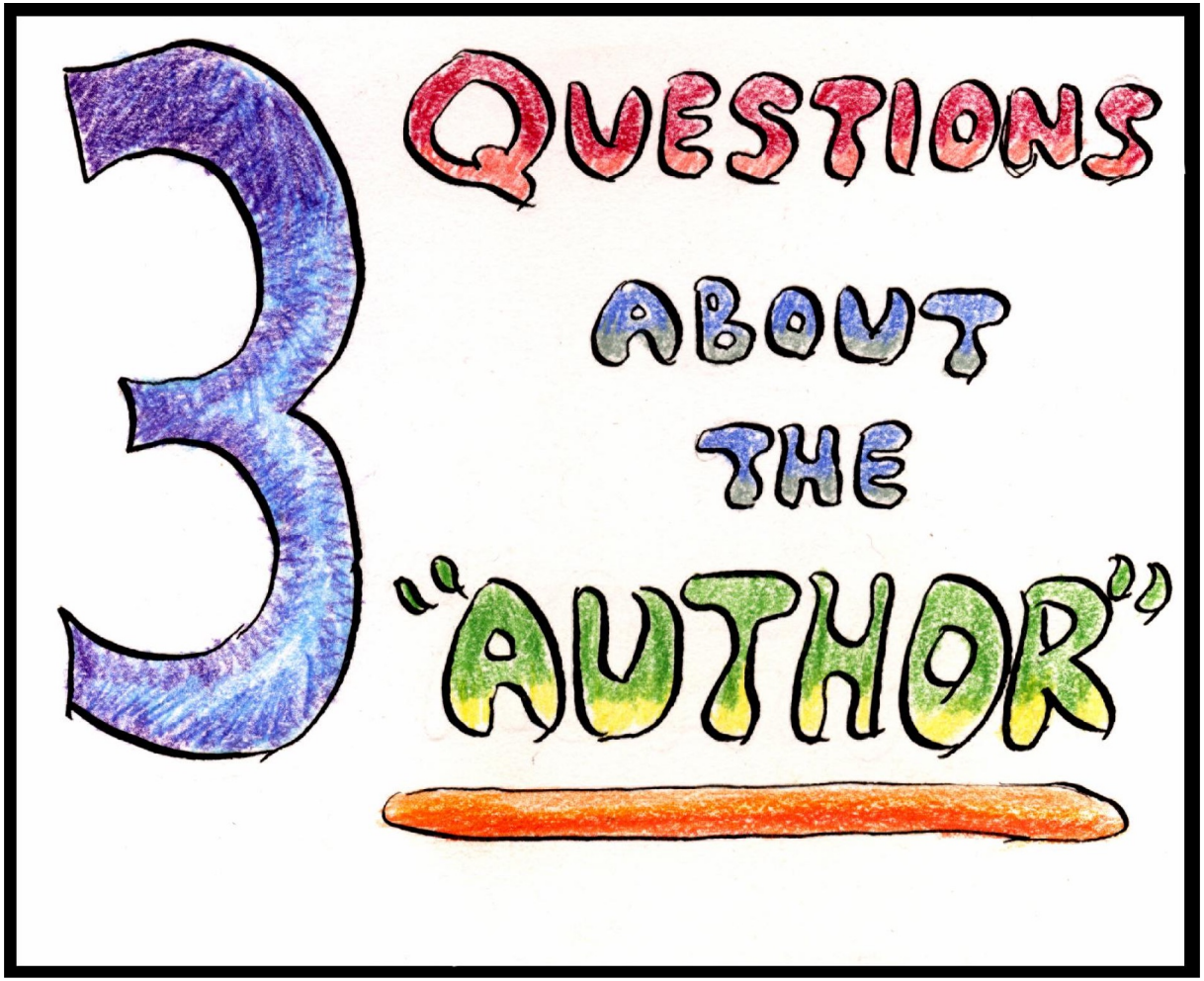

I KNOW IT'S THE WORST, BECAUSE THE 6 + 7 WERE NEVER THIS BAD.
IF ANY LINE GETS MORE TRAINS, IT HAS TO BE THE 4. ANYONE WHO SAYS DIFFERENT IS JUST DUMB!
dang!
haha

Person C


WELL, MY FAMILY + I TOOK THE (A) TRAIN TODAY AT 42ND STREET, AND I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY PEOPLE TOGETHER IN MY LIFE!
ALSO, MY SISTER'S FRIEND'S COUSIN'S BOYFRIEND LIVED IN MANHATTAN, AND ALWAYS RODE THE (A) AND HE SAID LOTS OF PEOPLE WOULD WALK THROUGH THE CARS YELLING + ACTING CRAZY.

Person C

SO I SAY THE (A) SHOULD GET MORE TRAINS, SO IT'S NOT SO CROWDED AND CRAZY!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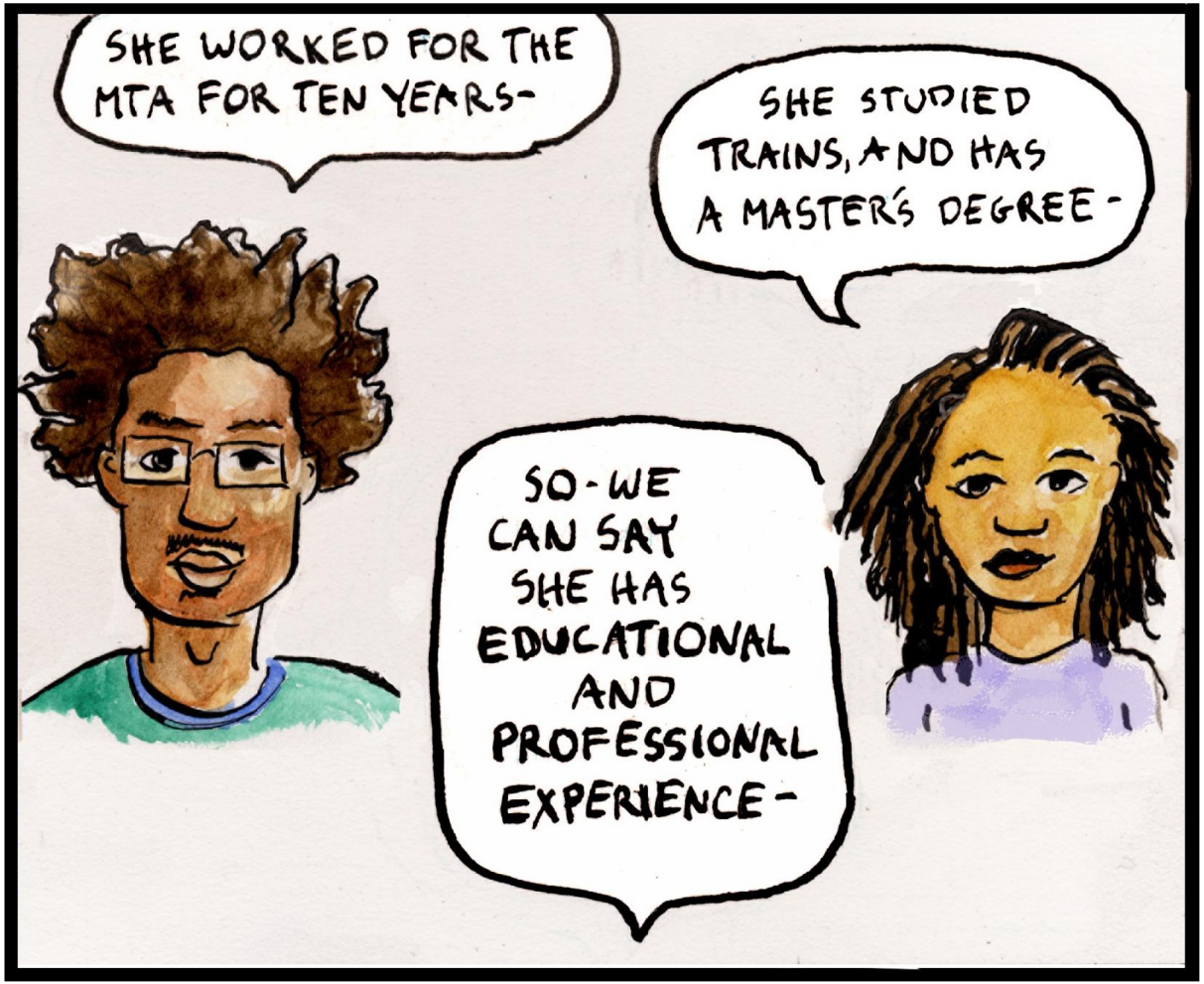
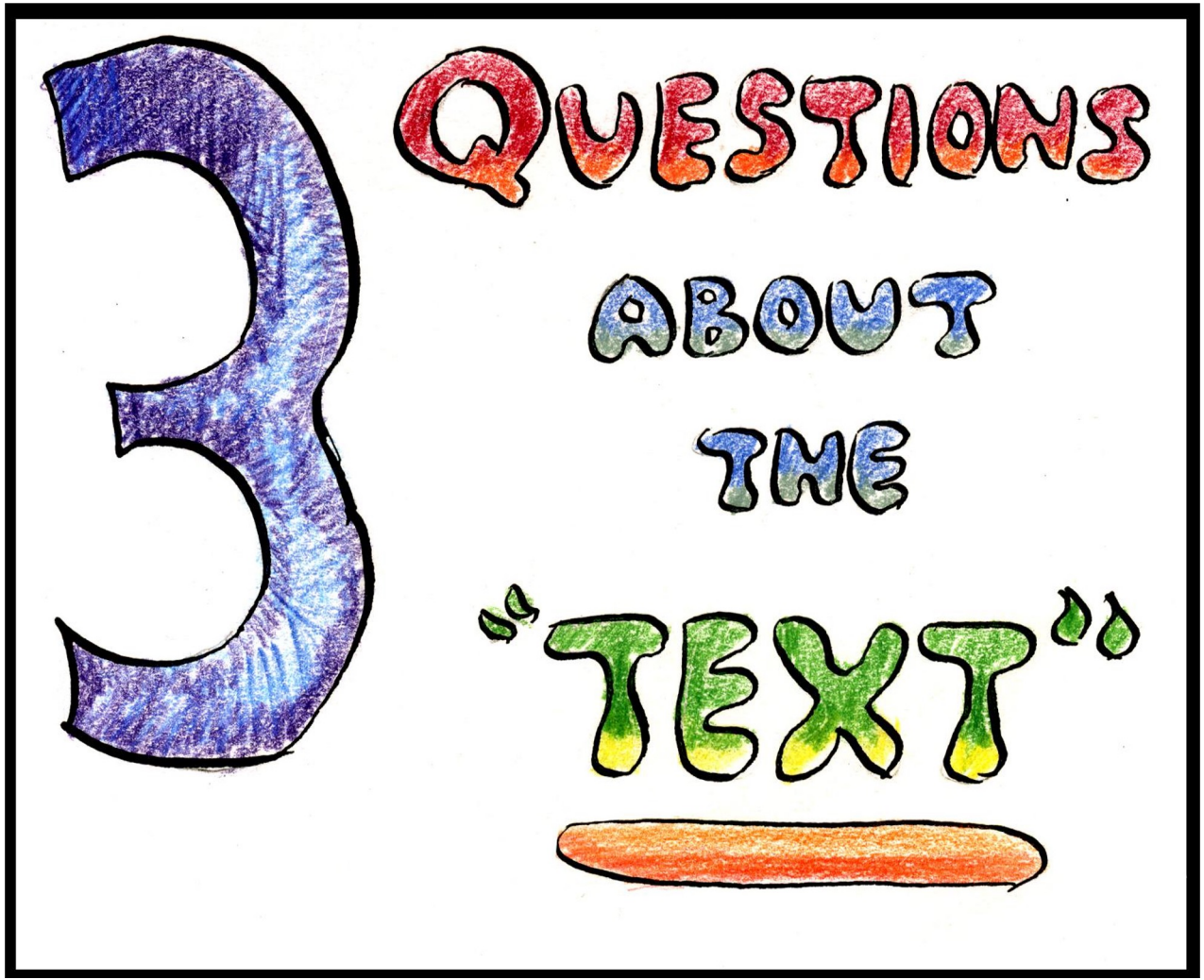

SHE WORKED FOR THE MTA FOR TEN YEARS-
SHE STUDIED TRAINS, AND HAS A MASTER'S DEGREE-
SO-WE CAN SAY SHE HAS EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE-

Person B

HE'S A NEW YORKER-
HE TAKES THE 4 EVERY DAY-
OK- SO HE'S GOT LOTS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, RIGHT?

Person C

A TOURIST!
absolutely nothing!
NONE!
NOTHING AT ALL!
OK- BUT A TINY BIT OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE--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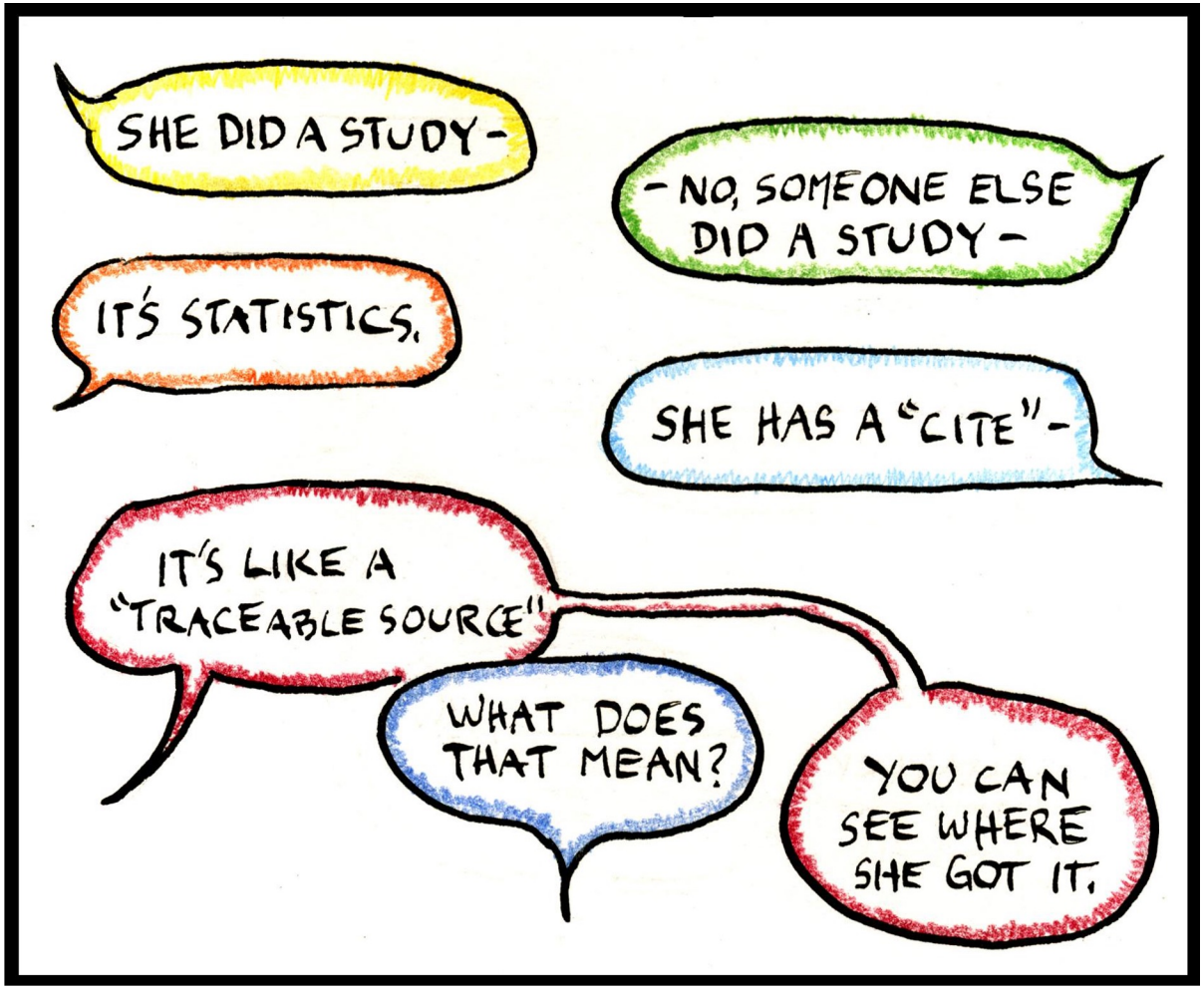
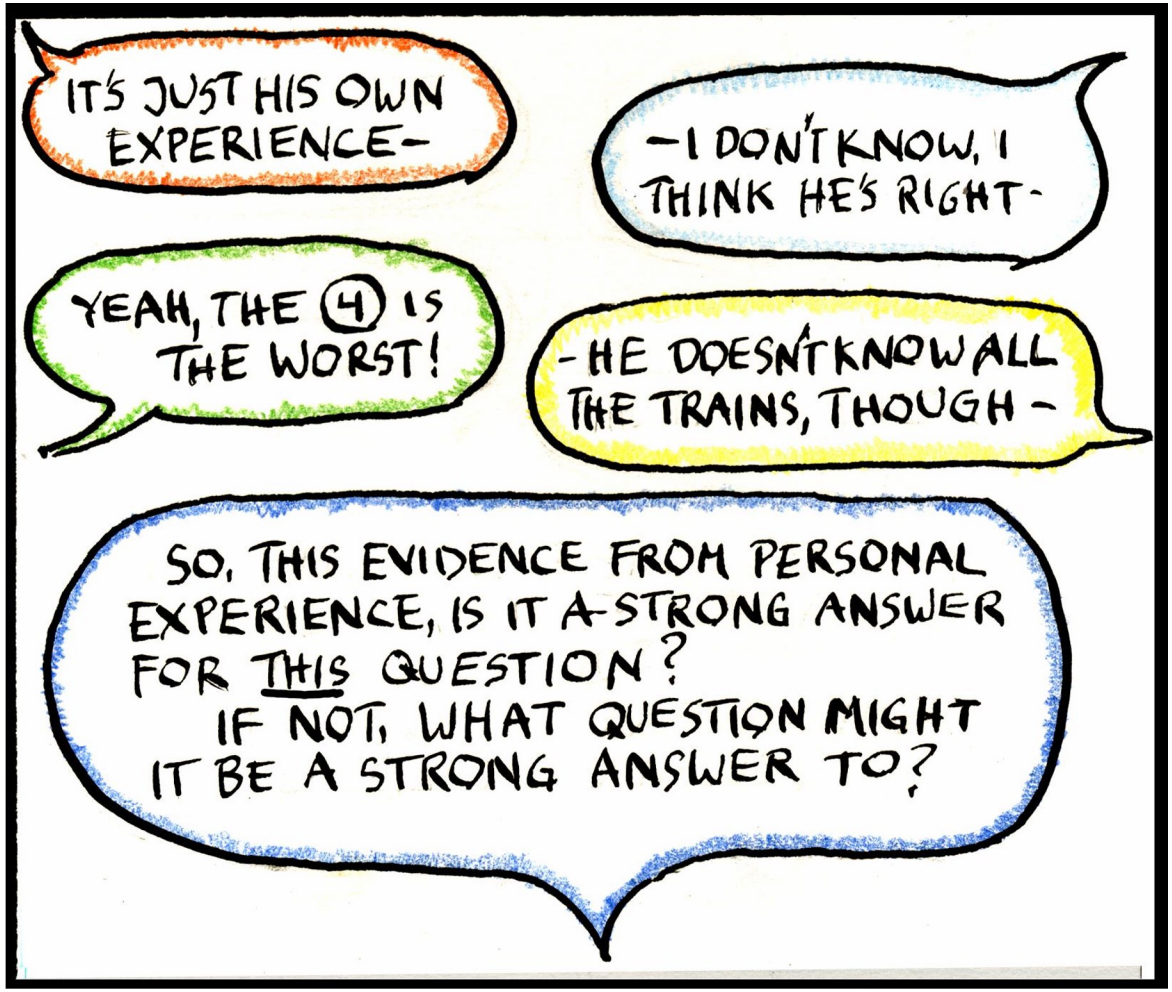
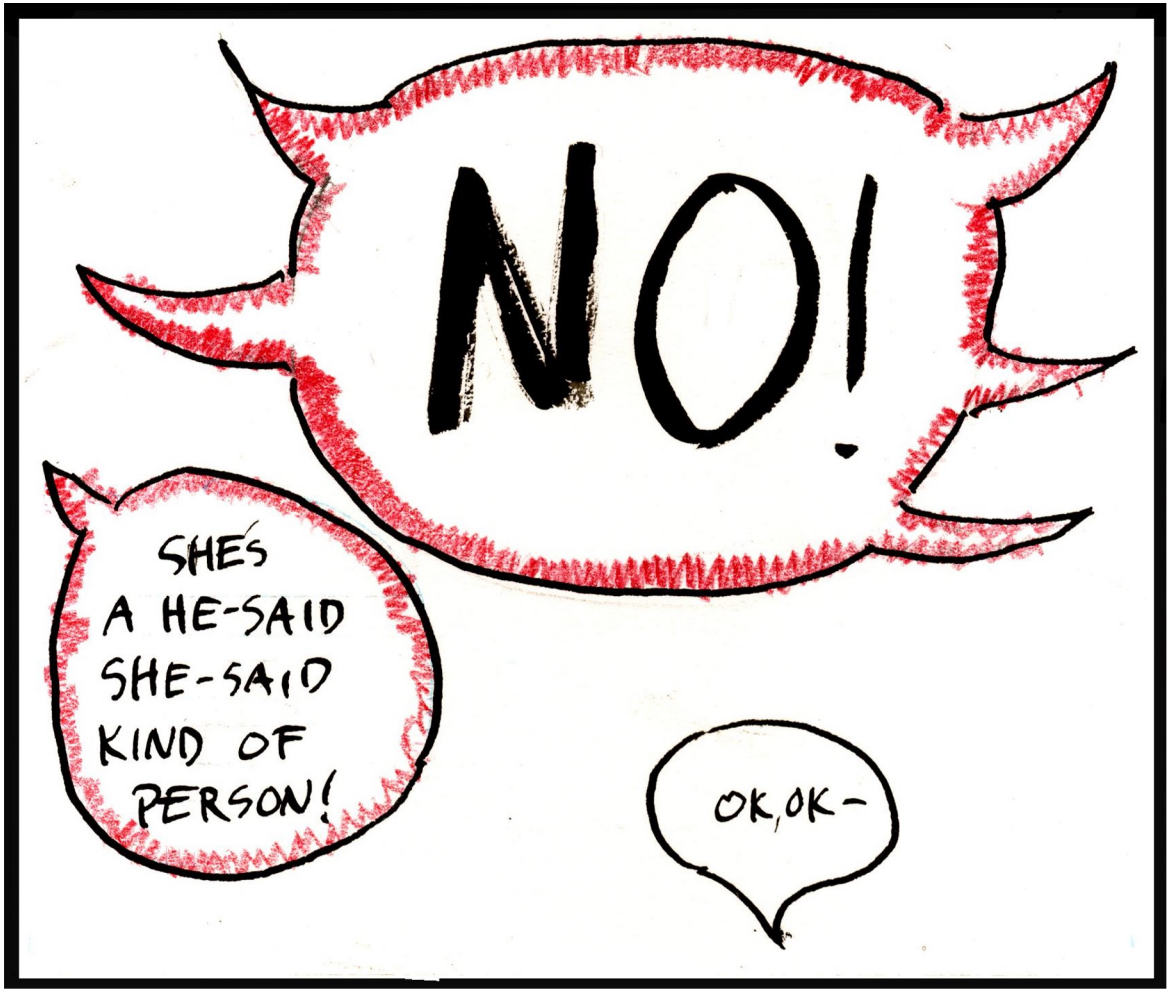

SHE DID A STUDY -
- NO, SOMEONE ELSE DID A STUDY -
IT'S STATISTICS.
SHE HAS A "CITE" -
IT'S LIKE A "TRACEABLE SOURCE"
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
YOU CAN SEE WHERE SHE GOT IT.

Person B


IT'S JUST HIS OWN EXPERIENCE-
-I DON'T KNOW, I THINK HE'S RIGHT-
YEAH, THE 4 IS THE WORST!
-HE DOESN'T KNOW ALL THE TRAINS, THOUGH -
SO, THIS EVIDENCE FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, IS IT A STRONG ANSWER FOR THIS QUESTION?
IF NOT, WHAT QUESTION MIGHT IT BE A STRONG ANSWER TO?

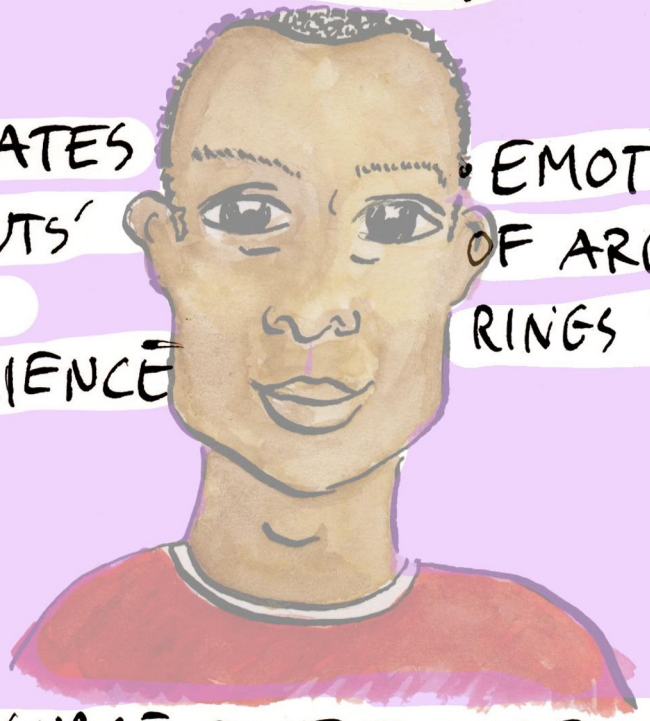
Person C



INTENTION

- EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS
- INFO THAT IS RELEVANT TO INQUIRY
- PROFESSIONAL/ JOB EXPERIENCE AS VALID, NON-ACADEMIC BASIS OF AUTHORITY
- EMPIRICAL DATA
- CITED SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

REALITY



- VALIDATES STUDENTS' OWN EXPERIENCE
- EMOTION OF ARGUMENT RINGS TRUE
- LANGUAGE DIRECT AND BLUNT

HUMOR

- SHARED EXPERIENCE/KNOWLEDGE
- SHARED EMOTIONAL REACTION OF EXASPERATION
- SHARED GROUP IDENTITY

PLAY

- SHORT, SCRIPTED ROLE = LOW STAKES, TRANSPARENT
- QUESTIONS OF AUTHORITY, CREDIBILITY, AND EVIDENCE ARE MADE RELATABLE

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCUSSION

- DOES THE ARGUMENT FIT THE SCOPE OF THE QUESTION?
- WHAT IS CONFIRMATION BIAS?
- WHAT IS ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE?
- WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITS OF USING STATISTICS FOR EVIDENCE?

→ PROF. WITNESSES STUDENTS' GRAPPLING WITH QUESTIONS OF EVALUATION

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City University of New York

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