

THE DEATH OF WRITING? Every day, people around the world send almost 50 billion text messages. This represents a major change in how people communicate with one another— and it's also having a significant impact on language itself. As text communication becomes faster and more commonplace, it has led to an array of space-saving abbreviations from IRL ("in real life") to JK ("just kidding"). Some people think these changes aren't for the best. As linguist John McWhorter says in his TED Talk *Txtng is killing language*, "we often hear that texting is a scourge; it spells the decline and fall of literacy, or at least writing ability, among young people. <sup>4</sup> But McWhorter believes that texting isn't really writing. Rather, it's a new and unique form of communication. To understand McWhorter's ideas about texting, it's useful to take a look at what language really is. Human language is primarily oral. In other words, it is based in speech. McWhorter points out that while spoken language has existed for at least 80,000 years of human history, most experts agree that writing was invented only around 3200 B.C. He adds, "If humanity had existed for 24 hours, then writing only came along at about 11:07 P.M. That's how much of a latterly thing writing is." Speaking is the fundamental mode of human communication. Children speak before they write. And while just about everyone learns to speak, not everyone learns how to write. McWhorter in fact, describes writing as "a kind of artifice," a clever device that provided a new way to communicate.