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Cookies and Concepts

“Have you ever wondered how we will be remembered a thousand years from now?” Edward O. Wilson asks at the beginning of chapter six of his book, *The Future of Life* (129). This one question prompted my entire’s group presentation. By focusing on the critical thinking that Wilson demonstrated in his own writing, my group was able to effectively produce a presentation that, for the most part, was a reflection of our own, newly developed critical thinking skills.

That effectiveness, as well as the idea for our presentation, developed very slowly. Our group met up on several occasions, each time showing up empty-handed. We felt a little overwhelmed by the idea of having to teach a chapter of a book that we did not fully understand. We were all struggling with our impediments of the book being a scientific work. Even though I am accustomed to scientific studies and written reports as a psychology major, I still had trouble *letting* myself understand the chapter because of the language and the

concepts he discusses. After I started to read the chapter with an open mind and to go around the circle with my group members, it started to make better sense. Once we were all able to get past our barriers we were able to effectively put together a critically-successful presentation.

To have a broad enough presentation, the elements that my group covered in our presentation were purpose, question at issue, concepts, and consequences/implications. From the class responses, I feel that we covered the important elements. However, some students said that we should have included assumptions into our presentation. As a group we had decided to focus on the elements that we were most comfortable with, and assumptions weren't on that list. As we split up who would cover which element, each person chose the elements she considered to be her strengths. Even though this was the logical way to split up the elements, we should have discussed elements that we were not as comfortable with. That way, we would have grown even more as critical thinkers.

As a group, we decided that we needed a visual for our presentation in order for our audience to relate sufficiently to what Wilson was conveying in the chapter. To begin our presentation we introduced our team mascot, Wall-E, from the Disney movie (*Wall-E*). Though this was a solid idea, at times we focused on Wall-E a little too

much. The clips we showed the class were meant to be a visual representation of the implications/ consequences that Wilson implied in chapter six. For the most part the audience gave positive feedback to our approach of using Wall-E. However, there were a few critics who felt they learned more about Wall-E than Wilson. Even though we used Wall-E to showcase Wilson's ideas, to some, it seemed that we replaced Wilson.

To achieve depth, the first activity we presented to the class was a metaphor for the beginning of the chapter. In the first few pages, Wilson asks if we scientifically can recreate nature if need be, should we destroy it out of carelessness: "Should we go ahead, and for short term gain, allow the original species and ecosystems to slip away? Yes? Erase Earth's living history? Then also burn the libraries and art galleries..." (130). In order to demonstrate this we had everyone write down things they loved. After a few people shared what they had written, everyone was instructed to rip the paper in half. This made a connection between the species that are in danger of being destroyed and the own things they cherished. Critically, this was an excellent metaphor to show the class; however, I think it could have been executed better. To further the connection between the species and things they loved, we should have assigned each person a species that Wilson mentions. They would have written down that species as well as other things they loved.

The second activity we presented to the class was where we gave everyone home-made cookies and they were all randomly assigned a country. We did not explain the purpose of the cookies/country until the very end of the activity. Everyone in the class, besides one person, had devoured their cookie. Once we made the connection that the name of the country was connected to their cookie, we pointed out how careless actions without thinking could lead to destruction. Even though this was a very far-out metaphor, it seemed to get the point across.

Throughout the presentation we tried to create depth by facilitating discussion; however the class didn't always participate. I think this is due to the approach we took. The majority of the groups put more focus on a summary of the chapter instead of the elements. The approach we took to the lesson was assuming that everyone had read the chapter so they did not need an overview. Instead of focusing on the summary of the chapter, we tried to focus on all the elements. Our idea was to have group discussion and then discussions as an entire class; however, this did not go as planned. There were only a few people in the class who partook in the discussion so we were unable to hear everyone's opinions like we had hoped. This was a weakness in our assumptions; we assumed everyone would have done the assigned reading and would be eager to discuss it, but this

apparently was not the case. Again, this shows that assumptions are not one of our strong points when it comes to the circle of elements.

However, our presentation was clear, accurate, and provided important information. We were praised for giving updated statistics on extinction and for our clear explanation of the savannah hypothesis (Wilson 136-38) in our peer reviews. The audience; however, reported mixed responses on whether our presentation used enough depth and breadth. Over half reported that we did an excellent job on all of the CAIR standards, while the remaining people commented they thought we could have gone deeper with our presentation. Looking back on the presentation, I feel that with better class participation we could have gone to a deeper level of critical thinking.

Overall, I feel that my group demonstrated successful critical thinking in our presentation. Even though there were a few parts that needed to be fine-tuned, we were able to effectively teach our chapter in a way that demonstrated our own critical thinking skills. And we all addressed some of our FBIs about the content of the book and about giving presentations, so this helped our growth as critical thinkers, readers, and speakers as well. Thus, I feel we met the standards of the assignment effectively.

Works Cited

Wall-E. Dir. Andrew Stanton. Perf. Ben Butt and Elissa Knight.

Disney/Pixar, 2008. DVD.

Wilson, Edward O. *The Future of Life*. NY: Vintage Books, 2002. 129-148. Print.