



Present

The Wrinkle-Free World of English Composition

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ASSIGNMENT

SKINNER'S BOX: Observing an Environment and Its People

Assignment One

Final Draft Due: 3 wks. from today

Page Length: 4-6 double-spaced

First Step:

Think back to an environment or a setting from your past. This place could be your home or workplace, a vacation spot, school, or some other place where you have spent time and can think back to what it was like. A second option is to go to a particular place where you've spent only a little time, like a park, library, or sports arena, and spend some time observing and interacting with people there.

Second Step:

After you've thought of a place and have either spent some time observing people there or thinking back to what it's like, consider the following: How do people act there? Do some people act differently from others? For example, you could pick a college party. Do freshmen act differently from seniors? Do women act differently from men? Do certain men act differently from others there?

Third Step:

Define the social dynamics of this place. Describe how people look and act. You will describe this environment based primarily on your observations, memories, and analysis of how people interact in this place. After you've taken some notes from your observations, look at what you've written. Step back and analyze why people act the way they do. Do freshmen cower in the corner? Are seniors the center of attention? Why or why not? Are there social rules that guide this place? Certain things you can or can't do? You will be describing this place but you'll also be making an argument. Take a position on this environment. If your paper was about a college party, you might argue that, "Seniors are the most powerful people at a college party because. . ."

Based on your observations, you will need to construct an argument, in which you take a position about how and/or why people interact the way they do within the specific setting. You'll support your argument with description and analysis of your environment. Your position should be based upon your personal experience and observations, yet you need to support your argument with at least three (3) sources. You should also draw some conclusions about why or how people interact and/or behave a particular way in a particular setting.

Your Paper Must Have The Following:

- a specific thesis statement stating your position
- a clearly delineated, original argument with observations and supporting evidence
- a logical organization with transition sentences
- accurate citation of supporting evidence
- proper use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar

PAPER #1

High School Groups

Groups. They're everywhere. You see them on the streets and in people's houses. Separation through grouping manifests itself in countless places. But it seems as though high school is the place where cliques and groups are most common. The divisions that students create among themselves is evident to anyone whose ever completed grades 9-12. Its hard to describe the structure of cliques in high school without sounding like a poorly written John Hughes film. Students in public high school can be broken down into three general groups and into a number of subgroups.

The largest social group are the **group in the middle**. It's hard to classify this group into any smaller groups. The person in this class is still trying to figure out their identity. They scoff at the occasional superficiality of the popular people, but still envy them. They feel sympathy for the Nerd's, but lack the social confidence to befriend them, fearful that they too will be mired in the lowest social group.

The popular kids are the ones at the top of the social food chain. They're lucky. They have all the perks. **Jocks** are easy to spot because they have obvious characteristics. First, they play sports. It's almost impossible to be a jock and not play a sport. They play lots of different sports, such as football and soccer. Second, beer is king. The Jocks are the people who'll go to college and parade around in shirts that read, "Got Beer?" They think this kind of humor is really clever.

Another prominent social group is the **G.I.W.R.W.B.W.T.T.M.'s**. This is an acronym for Girls I Want Relations With But Won't Talk To Me. Of course, this is written from a male perspective, so one can easily change the "G" to a "B". In any case, the characteristics of this group remain the same. Those that fall into this category are aesthetically gifted. They're face men. They're beautiful women. Often, they've relied on their looks so much that they never found the need to find any "common sense" and sometimes even "learn to spell." They are occasionally vain, sometimes superficial, and not always kind. But, I would cut off a portion of my thumb to sleep with any of them. Sad, but true.

The last facet of the popular kids are the Wise Asses. This individual relies on their sense of humor to propel them up the social ladder. It's fairly easy to become a member of this group. You don't need to be good looking, athletic, or smart. All you have to do is not respect anything or anyone. The Wise Ass attains his social status by assuming that he is wittier, smarter, *better* than the teacher and tries to make him look foolish. Allow me to illustrate.

Teacher: Okay, let's discuss the use of pronouns.

Wise Ass: You suck!!!

(Other popular kids roar with laughter.)

It's just that simple! You make others laugh by embarrassing those who educate you and you're on the road to being popular. Though the Wise Ass is one of the popular kids. He does rank behind the Jock and the. . .long acronym. None the less, their social ranking is far above any of those subgroups in the 'nerd' class.

Nerds can be broken down into three subgroups as well. All of these Nerd

subgroups share certain characteristics. They're usually not attractive and are very socially awkward, and, if you believe certain films made in the late eighties, they run in packs.

The **S.U.P.**s are the first nerd social group. **S.U.P.** is the abbreviated form of Socially Uncomfortable Person. The socially uncomfortable person is shy by nature, this shyness often makes for awkward conversation. A conversation with a **S.U.P.** might go something like this:

Pretty Girl: Hey, Alex. What are you having for lunch?

S.U.P.: Lunch...(nervous laughter) ahh, yes...Mmmm.

(Wise Ass swarms in to mock SUP in front of girl)

The **O.A.** is another Nerd subgroup. O.A. stands for Overzealous Academe. These individuals are usually ridiculed for committing the most heinous of crimes. They *enjoy* school. They make jokes using the symbol pi. To the teacher, they're bright overachievers. To the Wise Ass, they're just something to make fun of.

The final subgroup of the Nerd division is the **B.U.S.P.**'s. This group is the most unfortunate as B.U.S.P stands for Butt Ugly Stupid People. This label is offensive, yes, but sadly enough, it is accurate. These folks are usually not very attractive *and* not very intelligent. They were in the low reading group in first grade *and* lacked the good looking mug often useful in compensating for lack of knowledge. Ultimately, you can't feel anything but bad, they lurk quietly near the punch bowls at school dances. They are the lowest members on the social food chain.

Of course there are individuals who aren't represented by these three categories. There are the drug fiends and loners. But all of these groups are symbolic of high school kids insecurity and lack of an identity. The classification of these groups is based on my own experience. But regardless, it's hard for these observations to be any thing but subjective. High school was a subjective world.

PAPER #2

High School Groups

Groups. They're the cornerstone of social order. From the caste systems of India, to the terrifying pecking order in federal prison, separation through grouping manifests itself in countless arenas. But it seems as though high school is one of the places where cliques and groups are most common. The divisions that students create among themselves is amusingly evident to anyone whose ever completed grades 9-12. By "amusing" I of course mean, "gut wrenchingly painful." It's hard to describe the structure of cliques in high school without sounding like a poorly written John Hughes film. When you try to label people stereotypes and generalizations abound. But here, for the sake of humor and social justice, I will blatantly label and mock, based on my experiences in public high school. The forces that operate to bring individuals together in groups are effective in part because others are kept out. The boundaries that identify friendships and groups imply barriers for entry and penalties for exit. (Cairns) Students in public high school can be broken down into three general groups, the **Coolies**, the **Nerds**, and the **Fledgling Middle Class**. These groups, once defined,

can then be broken down into a number of subgroups.

The “Coolies” are the group at the top of the social food chain. They’re the popular ones. They lead charmed lives. They have all the perks. The Coolies can be divided into three basic categories, the Jocks, the G.I.W.R.W.B.T.T.M’s and the Wise Asses.

Jocks are easy to spot; they have obvious characteristics. First, they play sports. It’s almost impossible to be a jock and not play a sport. Soccer and football are usually the sports of choice for Jocks, though basketball and baseball are acceptable. Second, beer is king. The Jocks are the people who’ll go to college and parade around in shirts that read, “Got Beer?” and pat themselves on their backs for their laugh out loud cleverness.

The next prominent social group is the **G.I.W.R.W.B.W.T.T.M.’s**. This is an acronym for Girls I Want Relations With But Won’t Talk To Me. Of course, this is written from a male perspective, so one can easily change the “G” to a “B”. In any case, the characteristics of this group remain the same. Those that fall into this category are aesthetically gifted. They’re face men. They’re beautiful women. Often, they’ve relied on their Darwinistic advantage for quite some time and never found the need to establish what is known as “common sense” and in extreme cases “learning to spell.” They are occasionally vain, sometimes superficial, not always kind...and I would cut off a portion of my thumb to sleep with any of them. Sad, but true.

The last facet of the “Coolie” division is the **Wise Asses**. These individuals rely on their intricate canon of humor (scathing insults, funny noises, mock laughter in response to the jokes of others) to propel them up the social ladder. It’s fairly easy to become a member of this group. You don’t need to be good looking. You don’t need to be athletic. You don’t need to be smart. You just need not have respect for anything or anyone. The Wise Ass attains his social status by assuming that he is wittier, smarter, *better* than the teacher and continually strives to make him or her look foolish. Allow me to illustrate.

Teacher: Okay, let’s discuss the use of pronouns.

Wise Ass: You suck!!!

(Other Coolies roar with laughter.)

It’s just that simple! Make others laugh by embarrassing those who educate you and you’re on your way to social superiority. Though the Wise Ass is a Coolie, he or she does rank behind the Jock and the...long acronym. None the less, their social ranking is far above any of those subgroups in the “Nerd” class.

“**Nerds**” are the group at the opposite end of the social spectrum from the coolies and can be broken down into three subgroups: the **S.U.P.’s**, the **O.A.’s**, and the **B.U.S.P.’s**. All of these Nerd subgroups share certain characteristics. They’re not generally what America defines as attractive, they’re occasionally awkward in conversation and, if you believe certain films made in the late eighties, they run in packs.

The **S.U.P.**s are the first nerd social group. **S.U.P.** is the abbreviated form of Socially Uncomfortable Person. The socially uncomfortable person is shy by nature. This shyness often makes for awkward conversation. Put simply, to a **S.U.P.** witty repartee might as well be the click-tongue language of the Bushman tribe...impossible to learn. A conversation with a **S.U.P.** might go something like

this:

Pretty Girl: Hey, Alex. What are you having for lunch?

S.U.P.: Lunch...*(nervous laughter)* ahh, yes...Mmmm.

(Wise Ass swarms in to mock SUP in front of girl)

Though life might be somewhat difficult for the S.U.P., the difficulty the **O.A.** undergoes day to day is far more severe.

The **O.A.** is another Nerd subgroup. **O.A.** stands for Overzealous Academe. These individuals are usually ridiculed for committing the most heinous of crimes. They *enjoy* school ...and they're good at it. They won't let others borrow their homework assignments. They won't let others cheat off their tests. They make jokes using the symbol pi. To the teacher, they're bright overachievers. To the Wise Ass, they're cannon fodder. And for their sins, they ultimately grow up to own the Microsoft Network

The final subgroup of the Nerd division are the **B.U.S.P.'s**. This group is the most unfortunate as B.U.S.P stands for Butt Ugly Stupid People. This label is offensive, yes, but sadly enough, it is bone chillingly accurate. These folks are usually not very attractive *and* not very intelligent. They were in the low reading group in first grade *and* lacked the good looking mug often useful in compensating for lack of knowledge. Ultimately, you can't feel anything but bad, as they lurk quietly near the punch bowls at school dances. They are the lowest members on the social food chain.

The final social group is known as the **Fledgling Middle Class**. This is the largest group, so large that it has no discernible subgroups. The people in this class are still discovering who they are. They scoff at the occasional superficiality of the Coolies, but still envy them. They feel sympathy for the Nerds, but lack the social confidence to befriend them, fearful that they too will be mired in the lowest social group. At the risk sounding cliché, they're stuck in the middle.

Of course there are individuals who are not represented by these three categories. The **Drug Fiends**, for instance, those that eat hallucinogens with their breakfast cereal, are hard to classify. The **Reticent Loners**, those that speak softly and carry a big attitude, while adorning themselves in black, are also difficult to place.

The classification of these groups is rooted in personal experience and is most likely biased and inaccurate to many. Yet whether or not my classifications are skewed, peer group formation as a phenomena does exist. "The most important determinant of a trend, however, is neither merchandisers nor the media. It's the vast, ineffable plasma of intra-teen peer pressure." (Newsweek) It's hard for these observations to be any thing but subjective. High school was a subjective world.

PAPER #3

Lions and Tigers and Nerds, Oh My!

Groups. They're the cornerstone of social order. From the caste systems of India to the terrifying pecking order in federal prison, separation through grouping manifests itself in countless arenas. But it seems as though high school is one of

the places where cliques and groups are most common. The divisions that students create among themselves is amusingly evident to anyone who has ever completed grades 9-12. (By “amusing,” I of course mean “gut wrenchingly painful.”) However cruelly unnecessary these group divisions may seem to someone who has long since graduated from high school, they do fulfill important needs during adolescent development. The formation of groups among high school students serves to draw distinctions between who is “in” and who is “out.” Each subgroup is defined by distinct characteristics, thus creating barriers among members and nonmembers (Cairns 91). These distinct social groups provide adolescents with intimacy and identity during a time of increased separation and independence from family (Blyth and Traeger 171). The phenomenon of social groups among adolescents occurs across racial, gender, and economic divisions, in rural and urban areas, and in both public and private high schools. This paper will concentrate on my own experiences: that of a white, middle class male at a public high school.

When one tries to label people, stereotypes and generalizations abound. With this understanding, nonetheless, I will blatantly classify particular peer groups, based on my experiences in public high school, for the sake of humor, social justice, and argument. Students in public high school can be broken down into three general groups: the **Coolies**, the **Nerds**, and the **Fledgling Middle Class**. These groups, once defined, can then be broken down into a number of subgroups, each with distinct characteristics which function as boundaries and barriers among students within the high school culture.

The **Coolies** are the group at the top of the social food chain. They’re the popular ones. They lead charmed lives. They have all the perks. The Coolies can be divided into three basic sub-categories, the Jocks, the G.I.W.R.W.B.T.T.M.’s and the Wise Asses, each with characteristics which create boundaries between each group.

Jocks are easy to spot and have distinct and obvious characteristics. First, they play sports. It’s almost impossible to be a jock and not play a sport. Soccer and football are usually the sports of choice for Jocks, though basketball and baseball are acceptable. Second, beer is king. The Jocks are the people who’ll go to college and parade around in shirts that read, “Got Beer?” and pat themselves on their backs for their laugh-out-loud cleverness. Boundaries created between the jocks and other groups are both physical, dependent on whether one is athletically-inclined, and behavioral, dependent on strutting proudly through the halls and traveling in packs to “away” games.

The next prominent social group is the **G.I.W.R.W.B.W.T.T.M.’s**. This is an acronym for Girls I Want Relations With But Won’t Talk To Me. Of course, this is written from a male perspective, so one can easily change the “G” to a “B.” In any case, the characteristics of this group remain the same. Those that fall into this category are aesthetically gifted. They’re face men. They’re beautiful women. Often, they’ve relied on their Darwinistic advantage for quite some time and never found the need to establish what is known as “common sense,” or in extreme cases, “learning to spell.” They are occasionally vain, sometimes superficial, not always kind. . . and I would cut off a portion of my thumb to sleep with any of them. Sad, but true. Boundaries between this group and others are quite clear. Finding a niche within this group is primarily dependent on your genetic make-up. Identifying behavioral characteristics such as occasionally being vain, sometimes superficial, and not always kind seem to follow as a result

of the physical characteristics.

The last facet of the “Coolie” division is the **Wise Asses**. These individuals rely on their intricate canon of humor (scathing insults, funny noises, mock laughter in response to the jokes of others) to identify them within the group. From a physical perspective, it’s fairly easy to become a member of this group. You don’t need to be good-looking. You don’t need to be athletic. You don’t need to be smart. You just need to not have respect for anything or anyone. The Wise Asses identify with one another by assuming that they are wittier, smarter, and *better* than the teacher, and continually strive to make him or her look foolish. Allow me to illustrate.

Teacher: Okay, let’s discuss the use of pronouns.

Wise Ass: You suck!!!

(Other Coolies roar with laughter.)

It’s just that simple! Make others laugh by embarrassing those who educate you, and you’re on your way to belonging to one category of Coolies. Though the Wise Ass *is* a Coolie, he or she does rank behind the Jock and the...long acronym. Nonetheless, their social group is far removed from any of those subgroups in the “Nerd” class.

“**Nerds**” are the peer group at the opposite end of the social spectrum. They can be broken down into three subgroups, the **S. U. P.’s**, the **O.A.’s**, and the **B.U.S.P.’s**. All of these Nerd subgroups share certain characteristics. They’re not generally what America defines as attractive, they’re occasionally awkward in conversation and, if you believe certain films made in the late eighties, they run in packs.

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Though life might be somewhat difficult for the **S.U.P.**, the difficulty the **O.A.** undergoes day to day is far more severe.

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group in first grade *and* lacked the good-looking mug often useful in compensating for lack of knowledge. Ultimately, you can't feel anything but bad, as they lurk quietly near the punch bowls at school dances. They are the lowest members on the social food chain.

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Of course there are individuals who are not represented by these three categories. The **Drug Fiends**, for instance, those that eat hallucinogens with their breakfast cereal, are hard to classify. The **Reticent Loners**, those that speak softly and carry a big attitude, while adorning themselves in black, are also difficult to place.

The classification of these groups is rooted in my personal experience and is most likely biased and inaccurate to many. Yet, whether or not my classifications are skewed, peer group formation as a phenomenon does exist. Never underestimate the power of peers and the pressure they can apply. For example, a recent article chronicles the development of the torn jeans fad, noting, "The most important determinant of a trend, however, is neither merchandisers nor the media. It's the vast, ineffable plasma of intra-teen peer pressure" (Newsweek 41). MTV can inundate us with images of body piercing, but until peer pressure takes hold, it will not become a trend. Regardless of my subjective experiences, one thing is true. Across the country, in high school after high school, these pressures are creating social groups, defining who is in and what is out.

Take me, for instance. In high school, I was a confirmed member of the fledgling middle class. But now that I'm in college, the pressures are such that I'm doing things I wouldn't have done there. Why, just the other night, when I was leaving the library with a few books under my arm, one of my old high school friends met me on the quad. "Are you rushing, too?" he asked, his speech, I thought, a bit slurred. Then he saw the books under my arm. He laughed. "Don't tell me you're becoming a nerd!" As he started to walk off, still laughing, I shouted to him, "I'm just trying to do well in my first semester." He turned and shouted back, "Yeah, that's what I said. A nerd."