

Sample Discussion Posts and Replies to Peers

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Discussion Posts

Poor discussion post:

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down is about how different cultures view medicine. The doctors at the hospital and their Hmong patients can't get along because the Hmong people view medicine from a more spiritual lens and the American doctors view it as entirely biochemical.

This post shows comprehension of the assigned reading but nothing more.

Good discussion post:

The author of *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman, effectively establishes ethos as a writer. As we talked about in class, one important way to establish ethos is by showing empathy. I notice Fadiman shows a lot of empathy for both the American doctors and the Hmong families on page 28, where she writes, "Dan had no way of knowing that Foua and Nao Kao had already diagnosed their daughter's problem as the illness where the spirit catches you and you fall down. Foua and Nao Kao had no way of knowing that Dan had diagnosed it as epilepsy, the most common of all neurological disorders." In this passage, Fadiman shows that she has not only considered both groups' perspective but also understood why it was so hard for them to communicate with one another. On the other hand, in my American studies class this semester, we've been talking about the idea of who gets to speak, especially when it comes to issues of identity like race and gender. As much empathy as Fadiman shows for various perspectives, I wonder if it's right that this book has gotten so much attention, as opposed to a book actually written by a Hmong person. I wonder how this book might be different if a Hmong person had written it. What do you all think?

This post evaluates the assigned reading and makes an argument about the effectiveness of the author's rhetoric. It references the reading, as well as making connections to other ideas both from this course and from another of the student's courses. It concludes by asking an open-ended question for further discussion.

Poor discussion post:

Bluets by Maggie Nelson is divided into numbered sections. Each section has a different focus. It's an interesting technique.

This post makes an observation about the assigned reading but does little more. There's little about this post that could be further debated or discussed.

Good discussion post:

Nelson's choice to divide the book into sections is part of what makes it lyric nonfiction. The different sections are a little like stanzas in a poem. The book is also very poetic because the reader has to read

between the lines to see a lot of the connections that Nelson is making. For example, on page 14, Nelson writes, "Goethe describes blue as a lively color, but one devoid of gladness." Even though she doesn't say so explicitly, I think Nelson here is also describing the romantic relationship she narrates throughout the book: "lively...but...devoid of gladness." I'm curious, though, about whether the more poetic techniques could also be alienating to some audiences. The reader has to do a lot of work to make sense of what Nelson is saying. Do the rest of you think the book may have benefitted from more reflection?

This post makes an argument that could be discussed or debated further, in addition to making connections to other concepts, referencing the reading, and asking questions for further discussion.

Replies to Peers

Poor reply:

I disagree. That's clearly not what the author is saying.

This reply expresses disagreement but adds no substance to the discussion.

Good reply:

That's an interesting point. Thanks for sharing! I too found the passage about tattoos and criminals to be interesting, but I understood it in a slightly different way. I don't think Gay saying that she *is* a criminal. I think she feels that she is *treated* like a criminal. Throughout the book, Gay writes about feeling ostracized because of her weight and her race. In this chapter, she writes that the tattoos allow her to take "some part of [her] skin back" (Gay 186). Therefore, I think Gay chose to get the tattoos not because she wanted to "rebel," as you put it, but because she's already seen as rebellious no matter what she does, so at least the tattoos give her some sense of power over her own body. I see a connection to the idea from our reading last week about the "closest cliché." When Gay first mentions tattoos, the reader expects her to say something familiar and kind of cliché about rebellion, but I think Gay actually wants her reader to think about the idea in a new way.

This reply respectfully adds new ideas to the discussion. It references the reading and makes connections to other reading and concepts.

Poor reply:

You make a good point! I hadn't thought about it that way before.

Like the previous poor reply, this reply adds nothing new to the conversation.

Good reply:

You make a good point! At first, I thought that Caparrós doesn't use ethos in "Counting the Hungry" at all because he doesn't say anything about himself. After reading your post, I can see how his extensive research contributes to ethos as well as logos because it shows how much work he's put in. I actually

think the last few paragraphs also give Caparrós some ethos as a credible writer because he doesn't oversimplify the problem. He writes that the way the F.A.O. manipulates statistics "is not conscious corruption. It's a symptom of an institutional culture that has to prove it's achieving important progress." What Caparrós means is that the F.A.O. believe they're doing the right thing but aren't willing to admit to their mistakes. If he were too negative or critical of the F.A.O., his audience might not want to listen to him because they'd think he's biased.

This post makes a new argument, references the reading, and makes connections to course concepts.