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Professor Little

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Montaigne

Growing up in a house with three brothers and Roman Catholic parents has really served me well in taking a more positive outlook on life. The way my parents raised me inspires me to do the best that I can no matter what I am doing. Whether it is a simple essay or a final exam, they have always encouraged me to do my best and not give up on whatever I was attempting to accomplish. From what I understand of Montaigne from his essay, “Of Cannibals,” he tries to give the same advice that my parents give to me and even more.

Montaigne’s essay, or attempt, told a story of the New World and the people that can be found in the Americas. He tries to make the reader understand the way these people live and what they do is not wrong, but rather is more a matter of perspective. Living in the long-standing societies across the ocean, the Europeans saw the inhabitants of this foreign land as barbaric for their cannibalism and other bizarre practices. Montaigne, being one of the most brilliant writers of the 16th century, tried to think of the newly found foreigners from a different angle, the angle of the foreigners themselves. He believed that these practices were right and just according to their own laws and what they accept as a society, but Europeans have become so content on their own societies that they fail to see past the cloud of judgment and fail to understand that people can live a different way than themselves.

This essay shed a new light onto my way of thinking. Ever since a young age I have consistently heard the saying of “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Never would I have thought to apply this to such an extreme. Montaigne did not judge these people in the slightest way; in fact, he tried to view them with absolutely no preconceived notions. In doing so, he was able to make an assessment of these people based on what they were thinking, as opposed to seeing cannibalism and giving up on them all together. Montaigne certainly had some good ideas based on this essay from what I can see. Some may be content with the way they are living, but others including myself are eager to learn more on the philosophy on how to live.

Although Montaigne is a brilliant author and I have come to admire him through this essay, I am reluctant to say that have not read the summer reading book “How to Live, or A Life of Montaigne” by Sarah Bakewell. Reading this article has inspired me to learn more about this man and the way he lived his entire life. I regret not reading that book this summer, but may use next summer as an opportunity to pursue a greater knowledge of what Montaigne has to offer. His writings would be nothing but helpful in trying to make one’s life the best he or she can actually make it.

I have never been a big supporter of summer reading, but then again, which students are? Last summer I spent a major portion of my time working in a restaurant. When I was not working, I was working out at the gym or spending time with my friends. In spite of all of that, I could have made time in my busy schedule to sit down and read Bakewell’s book. Not only would it have given me advice as to how to live life in general, but I think it would have helped me to have a more enjoyable summer. I feel the effects of his writing immediately, judging from reading “Of Cannibals.” I feel as though this summer reading book was a perfect choice to start off the college years, I only regret that I did not read it. The school could not have chosen a better book, next time I will try to take the summer reading assignment more seriously as to build more knowledge and accomplish what the school wants each student to do, build character and become better people.

Reading this book next summer will help me feel more at ease with my current position as I move forward through life. There is a saying that says “Man plans, and God laughs.” I mention this because a message of both my parents and of Montaigne is to live life to the fullest, but be content with where you stand. Even though I am making plans for my major and what will happen after being here, if they do not work out, I must be ready to move on and accomplish what I can. Montaigne’s messages on how to live will be an ideal tool in helping me experience a certain fulfillment every person looks for in their life.

In conclusion, Montaigne, being one of the most influential writers of the 16th century, developed the essay in an attempt to make people think about the philosophy of life. My parents did a pretty good job in raising me with proper values and philosophies of life, but one can always delve deeper into different philosophies and understand more about what others have to say, and Montaigne is great realizing this goal. Even after reading that one essay, my thinking process has changed about expressing myself and saying the correct thing. People are who they are, and no one can change that, so I choose now to accept them as who they are, rather than forcing them through something they do not want to do. It is amazing how a man living in the 16th century is able to talk about social problems of this current day and age, making us rethink the way we view not only our society, but others too. Although I did not read Montaigne’s book, I look forward to further researching what this man thought and did throughout the course of his life. Montaigne will always come to mind when I hear of a crime of prejudice and racism due to this essay, which had a different approach to tolerance than the modern way. Montaigne can help each of us realize our true life’s goal and meaning.