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Un-Essay Project Statement

For my Un-Essay, I chose to make a children's book targeted for pre-K to Kindergarten age children about Neanderthals. The book is 14 pages including the title page and covers the basics about Neanderthals including when they lived, where they lived, their appearance, foods they ate, and a little about their culture. I chose to write a children's book for a young children for a few different reasons. In my hometown, I am a reading tutor at my local library and often many of the children that stop by are pre-K-2nd grade. Every single book I read with the children are either educational or have a lesson for the children to learn.

Specifically, I was reading a book with a 5 year old boy about dinosaurs. He picked it out and instead of the book having dinosaurs with common names like T-Rex or raptor they were like Brachiosaurus, Spinosaurus, and Diplodocus. I was having a hard time pronouncing the names as I was reading the book and his mother turned to him and said, "What's that dinosaur?" as she pointed to the page. Since the boy was 5 years old, I was surprised when he immediately named it off as a "Parasaurolophus." She told me that he loves dinosaurs and that he knows all of them.

After our unit on Neanderthals and modern humans, it made me think about the stereotype of "cavemen" and Neanderthals not being smart. I don't remember when I first heard about that stereotype, but I think it was from movies and books I read when I was young. This made me think about the dinosaur book I read with the boy and how he knew every dinosaur. Things that you learn when you are young stay with you for a long time. For example, I remember being interested in Ancient Egypt in 1st grade and I looked up all the books I could on

the mummification process. I can still today vaguely describe it in simple terms. Therefore, I thought it would be fun to write a book about Neanderthals targeting young children to fuel their interest and teach them the correct information about Neanderthals.

I started the project by doing research on Neanderthals. I found general information on websites like the Smithsonian Human Origins, the London Natural History Museum, and the Britannica Encyclopedia. For more specific details like what the Neanderthal cave art looked like or their jewelry, I found websites from places like the National Geographic and an article from Nature. I tried to find legitimate sources from more than one institution/website. I started my research by making lists of the basic information that I definitely wanted include like the time period they were alive, their appearance, and other basic facts. After, I started making a list of fun facts that I wanted to include if I had room like how Neanderthals were one of the first groups to make cave art.

When I finished gathering my information, I made an outline of what I wanted to put on each page and the images I wanted to go with them. Using my iPad, I drew all the images I wanted to include basing some of them off pictures from my sources to ensure my drawings would be accurate. I visited the Michael's craft store and I bought paper that looked like leather for the cover and cardstock for the pages. After a lot of trial and error, I decided to assemble the book on PowerPoint, print out the pages, and attach them to the cardstock. I cut everything to size and bound the book with yarn to finish it off.

Un-Essay Self-Reflection

From this project, I learned more about Neanderthals and their habits. In class, I learned a lot about Neanderthals that I hadn't known like how they had a medical care support system to take care of others. While doing this project, I also learned that Neanderthals made simple jewelry and that they were one of the first groups to make cave art. I had not realized the true extent of the Neanderthal culture and while making the book, it was really interesting to be able to learn about them and write about what I had learned.

The main challenge I faced was how long it took for me to draw all the pictures for the book. I had decided to start my project the week before Thanksgiving as I knew I had a lot of exams the week we came back. However, that was when I realized how long it would take to do all the drawings. A second challenge I faced was simplifying the language so it would engage a 5-6 year old with bright simple pictures, but would also be informational so they could understand it. Lastly, when assembling my book, I had some trouble with the printers on-campus and I changed my mind a few times on how I wanted the book to look before I finally decided to do everything through PowerPoint.

Luckily, since I started early on my project, I was able to dedicate a lot of time over Thanksgiving break to finish all the pictures and assemble the book. When simplifying the language, I tried to strike a balance between using the correct terms and simple language. A few times when I couldn't substitute a word, I tried to explain what it meant in simpler language. Therefore, if a child was reading it, they would know what the correct term was and would also be able to understand it. Finally, after changing some settings on my laptop and experimenting with a few different ideas, I figured out what worked best to assemble my book.

I do think that I was successful with my final product and I am really happy with it. If I were to do it again, I wish I found a way to assemble it differently, so I didn't just print off the slides and paste them on the cardstock. Also, while I am happy with the pictures I chose, I think some of the pages could be more engaging or informative like the page about shelters. Finally, while I ultimately decided against adding more pages because many children's books are quite short, I would experiment with the length of the book to pack in more information.

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