

***Dancing Skeletons* Ethnography – Critical Analysis¹**

Online version

In this assignment students will read a biological anthropological ethnography. An ethnography is one of the ways that anthropologists publish their information. Ethnographies are not peer-reviewed so often take less time to publish than journal articles. Ethnographies do not take the place of journal articles; many anthropologists try to do both as ethnographies are often accessible to a wider audience.

Instructions:

1. Read *Dancing Skeletons*.
2. Critically analyze the book using the following questions:
 - a. The main purpose of this ethnography is...
 - State as accurately as possible the author's purpose for writing the book
 - b. The key question the author is addressing is...
 - Figure out the key question in the mind of the author when she wrote the book
 - c. The most important information in this book is...
 - Figure out the facts, experiences, data the author is using to support her conclusions
 - d. The main inferences/conclusions of the book are...
 - Identify the key conclusions the author comes to and presents in the book
 - e. The key concept(s) we need to understand in the book is (are)...
 - Figure out the most important ideas you would have to understand in order to understand Dettwyler's line of reasoning
 - f. The main assumption(s) underlying the author's thinking is (are)...
 - Figure out what the author is taking for granted [that might be questioned]
 - g. If we take the author's line of reasoning seriously, the implications are...
 - What consequences are likely to follow if people take the author's line of reasoning seriously?
 - h. If we fail to take the author's line of reasoning seriously, the implications are...
 - What consequences are likely to follow if people ignore the author's line of reasoning?
 - i. The main point(s) of view presented in the book is(are)...
 - What is the author looking at and how is she seeing it?
3. Write up your answers. This does not have to be in essay form; bulleted lists are fine.
4. Evaluate your critical thinking using the following questions:
 - a. Clarity
 - Could you elaborate further?
 - Could you give me an example?
 - Could you illustrate what you mean?
 - b. Accuracy
 - How could we check on that?
 - How could we find out if that is true?
 - How could we verify or test that?
 - c. Precision
 - Could you be more specific?
 - Could you give me more details?
 - Could you be more exact?
 - d. Relevance
 - How does that relate to the problem?
 - How does that bear on the question?
 - How does that help us with the issue?
 - e. Depth
 - What factors make this a difficult problem?

¹ From Paul, Richard and Linda Elder. 2008. *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools*. Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking, p. 10-11.

- What are some of the complexities of this question?
 - What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?
- f. Breadth
- Do we need to look at this from another perspective?
 - Do we need to consider another point of view?
 - Do we need to look at this in other ways?
- g. Logic
- Does all this make sense together?
 - Does your first paragraph fit in with your last?
 - Does what you say follow from the evidence?
- h. Significance
- Is this the most important problem to consider?
 - Is this the central idea to focus on?
 - Which of these facts are most important?
- i. Fairness
- Do I have any vested interest in this issue?
 - Am I sympathetically representing the viewpoint of others?
5. Write a short essay that reflects on your critical thinking skills. Using the evaluation rubric above identify your strengths and weaknesses regarding your critical thinking skills. What area do you most want to improve and how might you do that?
6. Upload your work to the assignment folder in ANGEL.
7. Discussion. Post your thoughts about the ethnography on the Dancing Skeletons discussion forum. You must make at least two substantive comments on at least two of your classmates' posts. For those of you who turn this in early, it may entail you checking the discussion forum several times after you turn in your assignment.

Course Outcomes

The following highlighted course outcomes are met by this assignment.

A. Illustrate their level of cultural literacy by:

i. Demonstrating a working knowledge of holism (the multiple aspects of humankind across time and space) (1.a)

ii. Interrelating individual experiences and societal forces in the context of anthropology (1.a, 1.c)

iii. Identifying ethnocentrism through an examination of human variation and cultural diversity (1.c)

B. Demonstrate their critical thinking and problem solving skills by:

i. Recognizing key principles of human biology and behavior (2.a)

ii. Synthesizing and critically assessing anthropological scholarship and claims about humankind and the natural world from an anthropological perspective (1.a, 1.b)

iii. Recognizing, identifying, and addressing possible multiple perspectives on issues related to biological anthropology (2.b, 3.a)

iv. Drawing conclusions about human behavior and biology that are consistent with anthropological theory (1.a, 1.b)

v. Generalizing from qualitative and quantitative data and assumptions (2.a, 2.b)

vi. Navigating the intricacies of team-based discussion, activities, and assignments (3)

C. Illustrate their level of information literacy by:

i. Searching scholarly research databases and formulating simple research questions (2.b, 2.c)

ii. Recognizing differences in the quality of information presented in the popular press from that of the scholarly literature (2.b)

iii. Demonstrating the ability to find and evaluate anthropological information in general and scholarly sources with instructor and librarian support (2.a)

D. Show their communication skills by:

- i. Conducting fieldwork and observation through the utilization of technology-enhanced simulations or real-world research and presenting their findings through written and/or verbal means (2c, 4)
- ii. Communicating ideas and information that demonstrates an understanding of connections between biology, paleoanthropology, geology, psychology, etc., both verbally and through the written word (1a, 2b)
- iii. Working with peers to successfully participate in and/or complete team-based discussion, activities and assignments (3)