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English 389

*Bird by Bird* pg. xi-20 Reading Journal

Through the humor and charm of Anne Lamott's work here in *Bird by Bird,* a theme presented in the beginning part of the book is the need to understand and find meaning in ourselves and the people around us. In her introduction, she tells us that “all my life I’ve felt that there was something magical about people who could get into other people’s minds and skin, who could take people like me out of ourselves and then take us back to ourselves” (Lamott xxvii). This not only speaks to how we should understand ourselves and others, but it also expresses the importance of having empathy. As a writer, one of most skillful and powerful abilities to have is to allow for the readers to see into the worlds and lives of other people, and then from that, give the readers the opportunity to learn more about themselves from understanding others. Similar to this, she also discusses later on in the book that “writing can be a pretty desperate endeavor, because it is about some of our deepest needs: our need to be visible, to be heard, our need to make sense of our lives, to wake up and grow and belong” (Lamott 19). This answers the question of what we want from reading, writing, and empathy, which is to ultimately be understood and to be inspired to help others to feel visible and understood. I think that all of this is important to consider when doing the site description part of this essay. It is important to depict the people that are being observed and interviewed in a way that is honest, but also in a way that one can gain a better sense of empathy and understanding towards them.

Another important point from *Bird by Bird* is that it is more important to work towards improvement in writing that it is to work towards getting published or getting famous. When it comes to some of the students she has taught, Lamott recognizes that “the problem that comes up over and over again is that these people want to be published. They *kind* of want to write, but they *really* want to be published” (Lamott 13). It’s similar to the high school or college student who just wants to get A’s. They kind of want to improve on their school work, but they will end up only learning enough to get an A on a test, which will land them an A in the class, which will allow them to get into the undergrad or grad program that they want to get into. However, Lamott argues that as a writer, it is better to improve writing skills for the sake of being a better writer. It is better to think deeply about information being taught in class, and to go out and genuinely learn from the world, so that when the time comes when a student is in that undergrad or grad program that they are in, they are more prepared than the student who just memorized words to get an A on a test. This concept is important for all aspects of the final paper we are writing. For all of the aspects, whether in is writing in her place, site description, research, or analysis, it is important to really understand the purpose of each part and to learn how to do them well.

Lastly, another important aspect of *Bird by Bird* that helps when understanding the reasoning for each section of the final paper is the actual meaning of the saying “bird by bird.” She says at the end of the chapter called “Short Assignments” that “all we’re going to do for now is to write a description of the river at sunrise, or the young child swimming in the pool at the club (...) we are just going to take this bird by bird. But we are going to finish this *one* short assignment” (Lamott 20). Oftentimes students (like myself) get overwhelmed when faced with a large paper that is due at the end of the semester. But if that large paper is broken up into smaller pieces that are to be done throughout the whole semester, then it seems a bit less stressful. That is the beauty of this final paper we are doing. We are able to work on and structure the paper in individual pieces, to create an entire whole. For future papers, this project also helps students to get out of the habit looking at the whole right away, as this method better and less stressful way to write a large paper.