

John widemen our time eassy essay



**ASSIGN
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8: 00 English 110 Paper 1, Rough Draft Response to John Wideman “ Our Time” John Wideman’s “ Our Time” portrays a different side of a convicted felon that is often never seen. His brother Robbie was sentenced to life in prison after being involved in a murder and robbery. Writing a book about his brother was something he had never done before and shows a very interesting approach to getting the reader’s attention. Due to the fact that he had never written a book like this before Wideman had to overcome some obstacles he had never faced before.

As Wideman began writing the book he realizes that he has a hard time grasping the fact that he is a successful novelist and his brother a felon. Throughout the passage Wideman speaks to the reader often expressing the necessity to learn how to put himself in his brother’s shoes and listen to his story, without distorting it with his own perception, in order to truly understand his brother. With no true begging, middle, and end the passage is broken up into three parts that show how the book comes together.

Wideman begins the text with one of Robby’s close friend’s deaths, Garth.

John, a highly educated man, does an excellent job in describing the cause of the death, the funeral, and the way it affected Robby but the detail and the words used to explain foreshadow one of Wideman’s struggles he has in writing this book. John then expresses some experimental writing strategies in order to give his readers a true since of not only who Robby is, but how he actually talks and the message he tries to get across. John visited Robby for the maximum time he could which was three hours. It wasn’t easy to get the conversation going. John says “ we were ready to talk.

It was easy to begin. Impossible. We were neophytes, rookies (Wideman 674). Wideman had kids that Robby had never seen before thus giving them something to start their conversation. Even though the amount of time they got to spend talking was very limited John acknowledges the fact that the time they spent having a conversation beat their previous record by two hours and thirty minutes. As they continue talking, John is somewhat shocked as to what Robby is saying. He explains how as a kid he escaped the stereotypes and the temptation of the gangs and the violence that surrounded him as he grew up.

He thought that because Robby was hanging around the wrong crew that his personality was tainted in a way by thinking that he was a “cool cat” that didn’t follow the rules and sold drugs. But if you go back and read the opening of the passage John shows the audience that his brother deep down inside is a good person. Now that being said the story John gave us in the beginning of his draft was not Robby’s true words which shows the reader his first problem. Wideman states “the hardest habit to break, since it was the habit of a lifetime, would be listening to myself listen to him.

That habit would destroy any chance of seeing my brother on his terms; and seeing him in his terms, learning his terms, seemed the whole point of his story.”(672). after reading the beginning again, I then realized that the way the story of Garth’s death was described couldn’t have been the voice of Robby. There is no exact explanation as to why Wideman interrupts the narrative to talk about his writing problems. Or why he started it with Garth’s death. I think he includes this to catch the reader’s attention rather than writing a traditional beginning, middle, and end.

Writing the narrative with no specific beginning and stating the problems he has writing it makes the reader inquire why he goes through all of the trouble. Is it to help young inspiring writers learn how to not make his same mistakes? Or is it simply to show how talented of a writer he is, overcoming his setbacks and providing his readers with a good book? Who knows? From what I inferred I believe it was his attempt at writing a book about his brother which in the end had to be the truth and only the truth. Something he had never done before.

Although Wideman has already been successful as a writer I see this book as a challenge to him, showing the audience his skill and his ability to write a book from his brother's perspective without exploitation. Wideman questions, which leads to his second problem, why he writes. Unlike this book, the works of art he wrote before were never about his brother, which explains why he has such a hard time writing this one. John questions himself, asking " Do I write to escape, to make a fiction of my life" (672). As a child, Wideman chose a more promising path to succeed in life.

He didn't get sucked in by the bad influences most young kids, where he came from, faced. John, now a college professor, can't exactly explain what made him become what he is today. Could this be another reason as to why he wrote this book? After speaking with his mother and visiting with Robby for a while John starts to realize what was actually happening while he had left, escaped. Their family wasn't the type to speak to one another about their feelings. It was just assumed that because they were family they cared about one another.

So, just like the book, this was all very new to him. John recalls the first time he visited his brother in prison, he explains We were both rookies. Neither of us had learned very much about sharing our feelings with other family members. At home it had been assumed that each family member possessed deep, powerful feelings and the very little or nothing at all needed to be said about these feelings because we all were stuck with them and talk wouldn't change them. Your particular feelings were a private matter and family was a protective fence around everybody's privacy.

Inside the perimeter of the fence each family member resided in his or her own quarters. What transpired in each dwelling was mainly the business of its inhabitant as long as nothing generated within an individual unit threatened the peace or safety of the whole (673). After reading those lines I finally realized the number one problem that was preventing John from listening to Robby's story and actually hearing his voice. It was indeed the fact that the two brothers, from the time they were born, had never shared their feelings.

John wouldn't have been able to fix his " first draft", the beginning of the book; unless he and his brother learned how to speak to each other and gain a sense of what the other is sharing. That skill, in my perspective, is one of hardest things to do and was also Wideman's greatest challenge in writing this book. Compared to most narratives I have read, Widmen's is very unique. His use of three beginnings compared to the generally common writing style, almost every child is taught, to include a beginning, middle, and end and the way he explains to his audience the struggle he went through is like none I have ever seen before.

The passage really makes the reader search for answers as to what message he is trying to portray. It could be that after you are done reading the book he wants you to adapt his writing style or to show the process he went through to write it. The way he constructed the story may not be adopted by many as a way to write story, even though it has three parts. I view the overall composition of his story as a first attempt or what is called a rough draft, a confession of his struggle and the writing strategies he tries, and the last part of the passage where the reader gets a better sense of who Robby is and how he talks.

With that being said the next question is, as the reader what benefit or should I say information is to be taken from “ Our Time”? A book or a story generally has a moral or a theme that the author portrays throughout the book. What I got from Wideman’s writing is that by him taking on the challenge to write a book about Robby it was a way for them to reconnect and be a part of each other’s lives. Even though they were brothers, John and Robby didn’t talk when he was sentenced. It was John’s idea of writing the book reunited them for better or worse. John learned how to shut off his incorrect perception of Robby and listened.

Robby spoke in a voice he could never hear until now. Lastly, I Think Wideman did a great job writing “ Our Time”. The way he confesses his struggle and the sort of trial and error he went through to write it shows that he is not only talented but that he has improved as a writer by gaining the ability to write a story from someone else’s perspective. His use of three different beginnings, giving an example of his main struggle in the

beginning, with the death of Garth, Grasps the attention of the reader almost instantly, setting up the rest of the passage very well.