

Perception vs.
insight-literature
analysis of american
immigration essay



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Perception vs. Insight Experiences allow people to make future decisions based on what happened in their past. People use their background knowledge in order to help make informed decisions. Although one person may interpret what happened one way, another will see it completely different. It is like being in a classroom and learning from a teacher. We take certain pieces from the lesson and each come up with an interpretation based on their prior knowledge. Learning from one's own experiences is a central theme found in a quote by Mary Catherine Bateson and a few selections from class.

Knowledge is the development of ideas about specific topics. What we do with that knowledge is a different matter. Mary Catherine Bateson once said, " Insight, I believe, refers to the depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another. " This means that we can learn a lot for the things that we experience throughout our life and what those around us have learned from their own personal experiences.

However, we all interpret these events differently. Everyone grows up in a different environment, generation, culture, or educational background. We may have a new ways of thinking about something that maybe our parents never did. Richard Frethorne's " Letter to His Mother and Father" is an example that showed me how parents may have a different perspective than that of a son. Richard was writing a letter to his parents about what he was experiencing in America. His parents were sending their son to a country they thought would give their son a better life.

Richard writes, “ This is to let you understand that I your child am in a most heavy case by reason of the country, which is such that it causeth much sickness...And when we are sick there is nothing to comfort us; for since I came out of the ship I never ate anything but peas, and lablollie (that is water gruel) (Frethorne 1). ” He is writing to say that what his parents are being told about America is not true. He is not experiencing a land that is supposed to offer opportunities for success. Richard’s experience teaches him that America is not about the “ American Dream” his parents were told about.

A parents dream is not necessarily the dream that their child will wish to experience. Richard’s experience in America proves that dreams and experiences will be different from their initial thoughts. In the end Richard writes to his parents that his experience has made him want to die and be in a better place. His experience teaches him that he needs to find a new way to live. Richard writes to his parents, “ And indeed so I find it now, to my great grief and misery; and I saith that if you love me you will redeem me suddenly, for which I do entreat and beg (Frethorne 3). ” His experiences influence his decision to want to leave America.

He takes what his parents think of America and the experience he has to influence the knowledge he gains while in America. Mary Catherine Bateson’s quote refers to gathering an insight from the experiences that we have. In Frethorne’s reading Richard realizes that America is not what he expects. He takes the knowledge that his parents have, combines it with the experience he has in America and forms a decision for himself. He is able to combine the old with the new, his parents with his own, and then holds them

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side by side and decides that America is really not what everyone believes it to be.

The character in John McElgun's "Annie Reilly" gathers a lot of insight in his first days in America. One of the first experiences that the main character has is one that he will never want to repeat again. "He had been swindled out of the last penny by an 'intelligence agent'; and after traveling up and down the streets, looking at every sign, stopping to make enquiries at every clothing establishment, he found himself at nightfall by the East River, footsore, weary, and dejected (McElgun 66)." His experiences in his old country influenced his decision to trust the "intelligence agent. Based on the experience he has in America, he looks at experiences he has had in the past and creates a decision in his mind that not everyone will cheat him and treat him poorly. James, the main character in "Annie Reilly" chooses to keep his trust in people. This is evident when he meets another man on the docks. This man talks with James and hears the story about what happened with the "intelligence agent". The stranger offers to take the main character in and help him through the first night in America. The main character does not let one poor experience get in his way of trusting the stranger.

McElgun writes, "The agreeable, honest, good-natured manner of the man did make James feel much easier in mind than he had felt for some time (68-9)." Most people would not be as trusting as James if they ever got swindled. In most cases, strangers are the last people that are trusted. In James' case, his trust pays off. "One important point to James came out from this conversation, and that was he learned that his host, who worked along the docks, would find him employment at the same business the following day <https://assignbuster.com/perception-vs-insight-literature-analysis-of-american-immigration-essay/>

(McElgun 69). " His trust will ultimately get James a job and a new start in America.

McElgun's main character gains insight about America just with a few simple experiences. McElgun's reading coincides with Bateson's quote in that James takes what he knows about his old country and compares it to what he learns in America. Most of the experiences that James had in his old country were positive therefore he trusts that America will offer him with the same positive experiences and more. He does not think that someone in America will try to take all of his money, trick him into thinking that he can find a job, and then run off.

America is supposed to be the place where people can start a new life and have better experiences. After James gets swindled he meets up with a stranger. Most people would be hesitant to accept anything for this person. However, James is not the typical person. He shares his story and then puts all of his trust into the stranger. He ways in the fact that he has had better experiences with people and not everyone is trying to hurt him. He looks at both experiences and makes a decision to trust that the better ones happen more often than not.

Once he takes the time to understand these experiences, he is able to make an insightful decision. Insight is the ability to clearly understand a complex situations or even people. Roger Wilkins writes about his experience of assimilating into a society of white people. He writes, " I had been ashamed of my skin, my genes, and myself. Those realizations and the rage that flowed from them impelled me toward a stronger feeling of kinship with

other blacks than I had ever experienced before (Wilkins 131). In “Confessions of a Blue-Chip Black,” Wilkins writes about his struggle of accepting who he is and where he comes from. The society he lives in makes him believe that black people are inferior and that they cause all of the problems. By experiencing this as a boy, Wilkins gains insight about how he needs to act and then starts to accept that insight. Even though he is enraged about how he is being treated he makes the decision to assimilate into the “American” culture (131). Wilkins’s experiences lead him down a path that many other black people will not take.

This is the idea that people perceive things differently. Perception is something that every person has and it is unique for each and every person. Our backgrounds, beliefs, values, families, friends, and education help us to make perceptions about the things that happen in our life. Bateson’s quote states that we “learn by letting them speak to one another.” We make decisions by allowing all of our experiences to determine what we do. Experiences guide us towards decision-making. When people come up to a difficult experience we find that they start to think back to see if they have had an experience like it before.

If they have, then they use the previous experience to help influence what they will do to get passed the present experience. Wilkins takes several of his experiences as a child and uses them to shape how he lives the rest of his life. Events lead to experiences, experiences lead to knowledge, and knowledge lead to insight, which is the theme found in Mary Catherine Bateson’s quote and the readings from class. Bateson explains that people

take their experiences, experiences of others, and think about them together in order to develop a better understanding of what is happening around them.

Frethorne's "Letter to His Mother and Father" discusses a character that experiences something completely different to the perceptions that his mother and father formed about America. He writes about a character that hates the experience he is having in America and wishes to return home. His experiences lead him to an insight that America is not what everyone thinks it is. In McElgun's reading, "Annie Reilly" James takes the old and the new and melds it into an insight that not everyone in America will treat him poorly. If James had put the trust in the stranger then he would not have the possibility of getting a job. In Wilkins's reading the main character uses the insight from his experience to help shape the rest of his life. Experiences will either lead you to change your opinion about a concept or it will strengthen your opinion about that concept. The important thing is that we are willing to take our experiences, understand them, and learn from the insights we get from our experiences.

Works Cited
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