

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY | SUMMER READING

Welcome to Introduction to Cultural Anthropology. This next school year we will journey through different cultures, using the concepts and theories of Anthropology to explore the cultural frameworks and social structures of different societies around the world. We will also look critically at our own society and the different ways it is linked to these other peoples. The problems and prospects of intercultural communication, ethnographic fieldwork, and writing ethnography will also be critically reviewed and debated. Our summer reading, which is historical fiction, takes us directly into key themes of this course, such as socialization, culture, language, and what it means to be a human being.

Summer Assignment:

Students are required to read [“Wild Child” by T.S. Boyle](#). It is an extremely well researched but fictionalized account of the “wild boy” of Aveyron, France (he lived from approximately 1788-1828), who is one of the best documented feral children in the literature. Victor, as he came to be called, was apparently abandoned in the woods as a toddler and was not brought into human society until about the age of twelve. Boyle’s recreation of the discovery and of the attempts to bring Victor into society raises important questions about the nature of culture, socialization, and language, and what happens to a human being if these are lacking.

Please read the selection (you can skim pp. 261-269) and then write three paragraphs summarizing the reading and answering the following questions:

- What does this story tell us about the nature of culture, language, and socialization in the formation of human beings?
- Did Victor ever become a social and cultural being? How so and to what degree? Explain your answer.
- What generalities can we make about the French culture described in the story, and how did this impact attempts to socialize Victor? Here you can reference social mores of the time regarding food, sex, gender, dress. etc.
- What is “culture” for you? Provide a definition in your own words.

This summer work is due the first day of class and will be the basis for discussion that day. Please come well prepared to discuss this interesting reading.

Enjoy your summer and I look forward to seeing all of you in September.

Sincerely,

Paul Gelles
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