

- What does the word values mean? How do Steve’s values affect the way he views the world? The way he acts?
- *After the First* is a parable – a story that has a moral or teaches a lesson. To figure out the moral of the film, ask yourself what lesson Steve’s father wanted him to learn. What lesson did his mother want him to learn? How do you know her feelings? What did Steve actually learn? Then decide what the film taught you.
- What do people mean when they say, “Don’t be so quick to judge?” How does it apply to the film?
- Make an identity chart for Steve. What words or phrases would he use to describe himself? What words or phrases might his father add to the chart? What might his mother add?
- How does the father’s attitude toward hunting apply to violence on a larger scale? (To war, for example.) Are there forms of violence that are not physical?
- Most cultures have rites of passage – ceremonies that mark the beginning of a new stage in a person’s life. Many of those rites focus on the passage from childhood to adulthood. A hunting trip is a rite of passage in Steve’s family. What event, if any, seems to mark the end of childhood in your family? In your community? Is that rite of passage the same for boys as it is for girls? You may want to research and then compare rites of passage in several different cultures. What do they all have in common? What differences seem most striking? Is there a universal rite of passage?

Sigmund Freud once posed a fateful question for humankind: To what extent can culture overcome the violence caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction? Is there a human instinct of aggression? What insights does *After the First* provide?

READING 2

“Little Boxes”

Categories and labels can help us understand why we act the way we do. But sometimes those labels obscure what is really important about a person. Student Anthony Wright’s difficulties in filling in the “little boxes” on an application form explains why reducing individuals to a category can be misleading.

Little Boxes. “How would you describe yourself? (please check one)” Some aren’t as cordial. “Ethnic Group”: These little boxes and circles bring up an issue for me that threatens my identity. Who am I?

Unlike many others, I cannot answer that question easily when it comes to ethnicity. My mother is Hispanic (for those who consider South American as Hispanic) with an Asian father and my father is white with English and Irish roots. What does that make me? My identity already gets lost when my mother becomes a “Latino” instead of an “Ecuadorean.” The cultures of Puerto Rico and Argentina are distinct, even though they are both “Hispanic.” The same applies to White, Asian, Native American or Black, all vague terms trying to classify cultures that have sometimes greater disparities inside the classification than with other cultures. Yet I can’t even be classified by these excessively broad terms.

My classification problem doesn’t stop with my ethnicity. My father is a blue-collar worker, yet the technical work he does is much more than manual labor. My family, through our sweat, brains and savings, have managed to live comfortably. We no longer can really be classified as poor or lower class, but we really aren’t middle class. Also, in my childhood my parents became disillusioned with the Catholic religion and stopped going to church. They gave me the option of going or not, but I was lazy and opted to stay in bed late Sunday mornings. Right now I don’t even know if I am agnostic, atheist or something else, like transcendentalist. I just don’t fit into categories nicely.

My biggest conflict of identity comes from another source: education. In the seventh grade, I was placed in a prep school from P.S. 61. The only similarity between the two institutions is that they are both in the Bronx, yet one is a block away from Charlotte Street, a nationally known symbol of urban decay, while the other is in one of the wealthiest sections of New York City. Prep for Prep, a program for disadvantaged students that starts in the fifth grade, worked with me for fourteen months, bringing me up to the private-school level academically and preparing me socially, but still, the transition was rough. Even in my senior year, I felt like I really did not fit in with the prep school culture. Yet I am totally separated from my neighborhood. My home happens to be situated there, and I might go to the corner bodega for milk and bananas, or walk to the subway station, but that is the extent of my contact with my neighborhood. I regret this, but when more than half the teenagers are high-school dropouts, and drugs are becoming a major industry there, there is no place for me. Prep for Prep was where I would “hang out” if not at my high school, and it took the place of my neighborhood and has been a valuable cushion. At high school, I was separate from the mainstream majority, but still an inextricable part of it, so I worked there and put my effort into making it a better place.

For a while, I desperately wanted to fit into a category in order to be accepted. Everywhere I went I felt out of place. When I go into the neighborhood restaurant to ask for *arroz y pollo*, my awkward Spanish

and gringo accent makes the lady at the counter go in the back for someone who knows English, even though I think I know enough Spanish to survive a conversation. When I was little, and had short straight black hair, I appeared to be one of the few Asians in my school, and was tagged with the stereotype. I went to Ecuador to visit relatives, and they could not agree about whether I was Latin or gringo. When the little boxes appeared on the Achievements, I marked Hispanic even though I had doubts on the subject. At first sight, I can pass as white, and my last name will assure that I will not be persecuted as someone who is dark and has “Rodriguez” as his last name. I chose Hispanic because I most identified with it, because of my Puerto Rican neighborhood that I grew up in, and my mother, who has a big influence on me. However, many people would not consider me a Latino. And by putting just “Hispanic,” “White,” or “Asian,” I felt as if I was neglecting a very essential side of me, and lying in the process. I now put “Other” in those little boxes, and when possible indicate exactly what I am.

I realize now the problem is not with me but with the identification system. The words *Black*, *White*, *Hispanic*, *Asian*, and *Native American*, describe more than one would expect. They describe genealogy, appearance and culture, all very distinct things, which most people associate as one; but there exists many exceptions, like the person who grows up in the Black inner city and adopts that culture, but is white by birth; or the Puerto Rican immigrant with blue eyes and blond hair. Religion can also obscure definitions, as is the case in Israel recently with the label “Jewish,” which can be a race, culture or religion, and the definition of being Jewish by birth. The classifications especially get confused when appearance affects the culture, as with non-White cultures due to discrimination. Defining what is “culture;” and the specifics also confuses the issue. For example, it can be argued that almost every American, regardless of race (genealogy), is at least to some degree of the white culture, the “norm” in this country. With more culturally and racially mixed people like myself entering society, these classifications have to be addressed and defined.

My mixture helps me look to issues and ideas from more than one viewpoint, and I like that. Racial, economic, social and religious topics can be looked upon with a special type of objectivity that I feel is unique. I am not objective. I am subjective with more than one bias, so I can see both sides of an argument between a black militant and white conservative, a tenant and a landlord or a Protestant and a Catholic. I will usually side with the underdog, but it is necessary to understand opposing viewpoints in order to take a position. This diversity of self that I have, I enjoy, despite the confusion caused by a society so complex that sweeping generalizations are made. I cannot and don't deserve to be generalized or classified, just like anybody else. My background and position have affected me, but I dislike trying to be

treated from that information. I am Anthony E. Wright, and the rest of the information about me should come from what I write, what I say and how I act. Nothing else.³

CONNECTIONS

Construct an identity chart for Anthony Wright. How does it help explain why he called his essay “Little Boxes”? Why does he find it so difficult to classify himself? When does a special designation become a box that limits a person?

Psychologist Deborah Tannen writes, “We all know we are unique individuals, but we tend to see others as representatives of groups. It’s a natural tendency, since we must see the world in patterns in order to make sense of it; we wouldn’t be able to deal with the daily onslaught of people and objects if we couldn’t predict a lot about them and feel that we know who and what they are. But this natural and useful ability to see patterns of similarity has unfortunate consequences. It is offensive to reduce an individual to a category, and it is also misleading.”⁴

Give examples of the ways that generalizing can be useful. Give examples of its “unfortunate consequences.” How does Wright’s essay support Tannen’s observation?

What is Wright’s dilemma? Do you or people you know share that dilemma? If so, how do you or they resolve it? Does the reverse of Wright’s dilemma ever cause problems? That is, do people ever feel hurt because their membership in a group is not acknowledged?

How do Tannen’s comments help explain why Wright concludes that “I cannot and don’t deserve to be generalized or classified, just like anybody else”? Do you share his feelings?

READING 3

“Race” and Science

Race is one of the categories people use to identify themselves and others. In biology, race refers to those who share a genetic heritage. Most biologists today believe that it is a meaningless concept. As one scientist noted, “Human ‘racial’ differentiation is, indeed, only skin deep. Any use of racial categories must take its justification from some other source than biology. The remarkable feature of human evolution and history has been the very small degree of divergence between geographical populations as compared

What things objectively *are* is often less significant to human beings than what things *mean* in cultural frameworks of beliefs, values, and attitudes.