English

ENG 111 – 12G

Summary Assignment

June 2002

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The Homeless and their Children

by

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English 111 – 12G

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## “The Poor and their Children” by Jonathon Kozol

In his article “The Poor and their Children”, Jonathon Kozol describes a visit he made to a New York welfare hotel and one of the many poor, illiterate families that lived there.

Kozol describes meeting Laura, “a broken stick” of a woman, the apartment she lives in and some of the trials that the woman faces. The apartment is run down; even the borrowed television has “a metal hanger that serves as an antenna” and “a storm of falling flakes and unclear lines.” Despite complaining to the hotel management defects in the accommodation go un-repaired.

Perhaps the most serious aspect of the accommodation is the fact that one of her children is ill due to eating some of the lead paint that was used to decorate it. That Laura cannot read exacerbates the problem. Letters go unread and unanswered. One letter that “has been buried in a pile of other documents that she cannot read” tells her that her son needs to go to the hospital for treatment. The state of the accommodation brings other health problems. All of her four children have rashes. Her youngest, a girl of four months, has scabies.

Another letter she failed to reply to meant that her welfare would not be forthcoming that week, despite the fact that yet another letter says that the rent is due.

Jonathon Kozol’s article shows some of the problems faced by poor, illiterate families. If you’re poor life is tough is enough, being illiterate puts an extra burden on Laura and her children.

Her accommodation seems unsanitary, unhealthy and even dangerous with steam leaking from the radiators, yet despite complaints to the hotel management, nothing is done to improve the conditions. The manager says that “you people bring us trouble” and carrying a gun seems to threaten, or at least intimidate, those who complain.

Being unable to read means that Laura misses information vital to the well being of both herself and her children. Her oldest son has lead poisoning from the paint on the walls yet she cannot read the letters from the hospital, neither can she read the instructions on the medicines. Letters from the welfare also go unanswered, which means she misses out on the benefits that she is entitled to. Even simple chores like shopping are made more difficult. Laura cannot read the labels on the containers. “If there are no pictures, I don’t buy it.” she says.

Situated where it is, in a “commercial district”, people at the hotel find it difficult to get to areas that offer cheaper shopping. This is a major problem and as Kozol says “cannot be overstated.” People who live in welfare hotels are poor, not having access to cheaper food and services ensures they’ll eat and live less well than they otherwise could.

Kozol paints a bleak picture of Laura’s life and prospects. Despite praying, she faces many problems, not all of which are of her own fault. She’s embarrassed about her accommodation and knows she’s missing out on some of the finer things of life, as she says, “Pretty things you don’t got.”

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Watching the Eyewitless News

by Elayne Rapping

(page 333 of the Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers)

by

### Ray Thomas

In “Watching the Eyewitless News”, Elayne Rapping argues that local newscasts now provide what people want to see rather than what they need to know.

Rapping explains that this trend started in the 1970’s and that the news is now based not on the “respect [of] the audience’s intelligence or diversity” but on the need to raise program ratings.

Rapping reasons that this happened because local news is the only form of programming that many local stations produce themselves. Most, if not all, of the others are provided by the large networks. Local news is now the “single most profitable non-fiction programming in the country.

Stories of national importance, Rapping argues, now make up around two minutes of a half hour news program. Serious local issues take another three or four minutes and even these issues are trivialized, and confined to “sound bites and head shots.” As to the man-in-the-street responses; “If someone comes up with something serious and intelligent, rest assured it would be cut in favor of a more sensational, emotional response.”

The bulk of local news programs, according to Rapping, are now made up of the weather and sports presented by the “Goofy Gil or Snappy Sam” breed of presenters. The rest of the time is devoted to presenting a “Disney World presentation of American life.”

Rapping concludes that viewers actually welcome this view of the world. Local news anchors act as a salve for the troubles of the world. As she says; “They [the audience] are getting … an utopian fantasy of a better, kinder, more decent and meaningful world than the one that entraps them.”