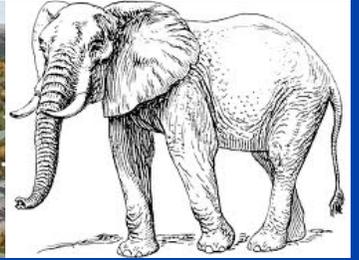


Composition Weekly



September 19, 2012

Elephants vs. Rats

Northern Highlights



The first consideration springing to mind is the distinction in size between elephants and rats. But when I think of elephants, I think of the zoo down south I visited during my childhood. My family would crunch through the snow, open the door to the enclosed pen and a stench would cover us. The zoo never put rats in cages and I've never smelt a rat. I'm rather gullible.

After thinking about elephants I think of Africa. And I have to include India and Asia. I must be

exhaustive in my list. And because of so many boats and trade routes through the millennia, I'll assume rats are across the continents (except Antarctica, but I could be wrong).

And there is the joke: *an elephant is a rat built to government specifications.*

But when a student in my first English 111x course stepped to the front of the class to present her paper on overpopulation, I learned



another difference between elephants and rats. Elephants have roughly a two year gestation period when pregnant and rats gestate for just under a month. A single offspring over a long period of time verses an almost instant litter. The analogy



Resolution S.298: Use Your Words!

This October will mark UAF's first participation in the National Day on Writing (NDW). NDW was passed by the US Senate in 2009, marking October 20th a dedicated day to reflect on the importance of writing in daily routines.

This Friday will be the second meeting to continue planning the event at 4:00pm in the library's Kayak Room. So far, the event centers around five themed rooms, with three half hour sessions, ranging from collecting and recording literacy narratives to live readings in the Schaible Auditorium. The Celebration of Writing event will begin at 11:00am and conclude at 3:00pm in October.

EGO Reading

The first EGO reading of fall '12 will be held at Chartreuse, located downtown, at 8:00pm on October 5th. Represented genres are poetry and fiction.

(Elephant vs. Rats Continued)

caught my attention--how was she going to tie this back into her thesis? She says *Europe and America, they are like Elephants and Africa is like rats*. She continued her presentation without a pregnant pause hanging in the classroom.

I shifted my eyes across the room. A few students had their heads propped with their hands, leaning to the side, and others sat straight in their chairs. They had been in those poses from the start. They did not even fidget at the anthropomorphism, the racism. I thought of other places rats have been: the pages of comic books, posters, political literature inspired by eugenics. I was unsure how to manage the elephant in the room.

At the very least, it was a misjudgment on the wrong side of post-colonialism. At worst, it was malicious. But how aware was the presenter and the audience of the implications? I felt implicated by not addressing her example with the class. And if the metaphor had gone over their heads, did I have a greater responsibility to point out what the metaphor was saying? Upon reflecting, the student was, in a clumsy way, trying to discuss levels of assessable birth control between the west and the impoverished.

There were things I could have done to mitigate the circumstance. She sat among

seven other students she attended high school with. I could have dispersed the clique and de-familiarized her education experience. Her attendance had been irregular and resulted in missing conversations devoted to rhetorical considerations. The student had also been late with her draft--preparing her presentation just the night before.

Because I had not addressed the student's disconcerting behavior, this incident must have been my punishment. All the possible actions I could have taken prior to her presentation could have afforded me the means to avoid the awkward comment. Perhaps, I would have explained before hand why such a metaphor would betray her without being in front of the other students.

If I had the fortitude to halt the presentations to discuss the rhetorical concerns her metaphor presented, inside and outside the classroom, would the students have leaned forward in their seats instead of leaning on their elbows? Had I approached the front of the classroom and wrote *elephants* and *rats* on the whiteboard, asked for associations these creatures have, would it have been enough to deconstruct the metaphor without targeting the student? Would the one black student in the class participate in this hypothetical conversation instead of sitting quietly, politely, while we learned who it was, exactly, overpopulating the world?

WriteAlaska

Over the summer, Tara Knight re-imagined the WriteAlaska Wiki. She streamlined the navigation system by directly linking pages based on the Observation, Analysis, Synthesis, and Reflection units of the Composition Program's curriculum. Suggestions to improve the site are welcomed. Also, if you have a good class room activity, now is a good time to become a communist and share.

Midnight Sun

Visiting Writers Series

The second visiting writer in this year's series will be John Morgan reading poetry at 7:00pm on September 28th at the Schaible Auditorium.

Brown Bag

On the first Friday of every month, there is also the Brown Bag discussions that are held at the pub. Past articles have centered around ghost writing, hillbilly discourses, and pedological concerns of teaching composition. Faculty from both literature and creative writing have attended these conversations.

An article for October has not yet been selected, but is forth coming. It will be available for download on the WriteAlaska site under Professional Development. An email reminder will be sent out as first Friday nears.