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ES Senior Seminar
Literature Review

For organizational sake, my literature review is broken down into three categories: Homecomers, Local Knowledge, and Education. These are the three major parts of my research project, and the authors whom I researched fit quite nicely into these categories.

Homecomers:

Orr, David W. *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1994.

Much of this book is incredible, but it doesn't relate completely to my project. Therefore, I mostly used David Orr's essay *Refugees or Homecomers? Conjectures About the Future of Rural America* within his book *Earth in Mind*.

Orr sounds off as an extreme voice, calling for rural literacy now! I understand him, and his passion to figure out how to set the world aright, but I don't believe that the revolution of American culture will be so extreme. Orr seems much more convinced than I about populations moving in droves back into rural America. I do however, subscribe to the idea that when (and in my understanding, if) populations return to farming as a way of life, we need to be knowledgeable about how to go about doing it.

His booming voice, calling for localness and rural knowledge, helped shape the working framework for my project.

Perry, Michael. *Population 485: Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

I used this book primarily as a starting point from which to consider people's real stories. Perry writes his entire book about rural life without romanticizing it at all, and I find that really valuable, and powerful. He writes about real people, and tells their stories. His style was something that I wanted to attempt to emulate.

Perry was a homecomer himself. He grew up in New Auburn, Wisconsin, and he left to go to school, to become a nurse, a profession that the men in town didn't exactly smile on. Like he said at a reading that he did in Northfield, he left town a farmer's son and a good football player, and he came back to town a nurse and a writer. He tells good stories about it all.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Homeland: and Other Stories*. New York: HarperCollins, 1989.

This book is full of fictional stories about place. I read this book over spring break, while on vacation. This book, along with many others, helped me to focus what I wanted my project to be about. The title essay, *homeland* especially inspired my thinking about place. The story is about a Great-grandmother, who is Native American. The "Great Mam" is very old, and her family brings her back to the land where she grew up to die. Upon arrival, Great Mam learns that the place that she left has changed so much, that it is as if she had never been there before.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Small Wonder*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

I was reading this book as leisure reading during the first half of the While our class reading helped to formulate my ideas about the hypothetical importance of local knowledge, storytelling, and homecoming, Barbara Kingsolver's book helped show the importance of it all. She didn't talk about definitions of homecomer, or local knowledge. I'm not even sure if she set out with the purpose of illustrating those issues so well, but it helped me immensely.

Local Knowledge:

Berry, Wendell. *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition*. Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000.

I really feel that any project about local knowledge, staying put, and homecoming would be incomplete without a Wendell Berry essay or two. I used this book primarily as a blueprint, which I inserted my original ideas into.

Jackson, Wes. *Becoming Native To This Place*. Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1994.

We read this book in class in the first few weeks of our seminar. This is *the* book that inspired my final project. Wes Jackson writes in his chapter "Becoming Native to Our Places" about the necessity of a "homecoming major" at universities. Within this, he calls for ecological accounting, an educated group of people who understand a cost-benefit relationship with the earth.

A group of my peers and I lead one of the many class discussions attempting to dissect Wes Jackson's book. For my portion of the discussion, I lead the class

through an exercise requesting that people make a list of classes that would be on their “mandated by Wes Jackson” individualized homecoming major.

My personal list included: local politics and group organizing, wise family baking, child healthcare, how to tend a productive garden, clothes making and mending, and money management. I have great faith in education, but to my horror, none of those things that I passionately needed to know, had ever been taught to me in a classroom.

All of this raised my awareness of the validity of local knowledge and the importance of homecoming. All of the things that I wanted to learn were things that I could learn from my mom, from our neighbors, from spending time working in a family business, but I didn’t know any of these things yet, and I was a senior in college.

In fact, within my project, Wes Jackson even inspired the word “homecomer,” as one word.

Sanders, Scott Russell. *Staying Put: Making a Home in a restless world*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

This book is the backbone on which my project was built. Scott Russell Sanders has attempted to describe and explain what makes having “fidelity to place” important. My copy of this book is tattered and underlined when I found something essential, written in and scribbled in, when I disagreed with him. It has become my bible during this project.

The chapters of *Settling Down* and *The Force of Moving Water* were especially essential to my project. In each, he writes about his personal native

history as a boy growing up in Ohio, and he ruminates on the value of other's personal native histories. He paints every point with a story about his childhood, or the childhood of people whom he knows well.

Sanders believes completely in the value of local knowledge and "staying put." His book does the important work of convincing his readers why he's chosen the life he's chosen. His belief in the importance of rootedness opens my project, and it's the meditation that I have come back to each step of the way when expanding my project.

What I tried to do more exhaustively in my project was to convince people of the importance of knowing a place, and coming home, **without** my personal story. I believe that my own insecurities about returning home, are essential to the effectiveness of the project. I'm trying to convince myself of the goals of my project, while at the same time attempting to influence the readers of my project. I feel that because I come to the project with the views of someone who is not a homecomer, I can successfully fill in the gaps that Sanders may have left unfilled.

When deciding which questions to ask my homecomers, I thought back to the text of this book, and what sort of questions I would have had to ask Sanders, for him to divulge the same stories that he wrote about willingly. He weaves text of authors that make a liberal arts student head spin. Authors as diverse as: Mark Twain, Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, George Washington, Robert Frost, and Walt Whitman.

I believe that my project does the investigative work in project form that Sanders does in book form.

Education:

Sukhomlinsky, Vassily. *How Much Truth Do We Tell the Children? First and Foremost Books*. Minneapolis: Marxist Educational Press, 1988.

This book was really an odd place to find this essay, I realize. This is one of the books that I stumbled across when I started to research about children's literature, and writing for children. This essay documented, using scientifically researched data, the importance of literature for children. Books are essential to the formation of our early years. This book documented my hunches.