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Exploring Oceanic Pollution Through Several Different Genres

Thousands of marine animals die each year due to human pollution (Kilduff). Plastics and metals dumped into the oceans create detrimental conditions for the mammals and fish that live there. Many authors have chosen to write about this topic, but they don't all use the same techniques or even make the same points. *Garbage Guts* is a children's book that describes the journey of a seagull, who interacts with many animals impacted negatively by oceanic pollution. This is a mainstream source, available to the majority of the public and easy to read. *Interactive Effects of Metal Pollution and Ocean Acidification On Physiology of Marine Organisms* is a scholarly journal article that details how CO₂ and metals combine in the ocean to disrupt the homeostatic functions of marine organisms. It is an academic source meant to inform the reader about the mechanisms of that process. Finally, "The Extent of Marine Pollution is Overwhelming, but Art Can Help Prevent It." is an online article that depicts a series of informational sculptures from a volunteer group based out of Oregon. This source is popular while the sculptures themselves are visual. Although these three sources speak on the same subject – the effects of ocean pollution on marine animals - their genres are very different. A genre is a classification of composition with distinct similarities. All three articles have similar goals (informing the public about the problem at hand), but the way they shape the material to the audience and the way the audience reacts to the material separates them into different genres.

Audience is a key factor that impacts how the writer styles their work into a final product. The scholarly article assumes that the people reading the article are as educated as the people who performed the experiment, or belong to the discourse community of scientists. The author does not put explanations of acronyms or definitions of sophisticated words into her writing. Ivanina says, “Changes in seawater chemistry due to OA can affect solubility, speciation and distribution of metals in water and sediments potentially affecting the metal toxicity to marine organisms,” in the first few pages of her work. This means that people who have not completed advanced schooling will not have full access to the journal article, because they can’t understand parts of it. The writer does not write to individuals who will not comprehend her language, so to them the work becomes less desirable. However, the book *Garbage Guts* is aimed toward a child-based audience, and is understood by even illiterate people, who can look at the pictures. The author simplified the writing and had an illustrator add the visuals on purpose to broaden the possible audience that the book could reach. The title of the children’s book is simple and meant to sound disgusting. This is because she wants the reader to feel disgusted by the topic. While the book talks about the same topic, the scholarly article would use the terms entrails or innards instead of guts. The brief synopsis on the back cover of the book says, “With its imagery-laden prose, emotional poetry, and delightful illustrations, *Garbage Guts* becomes a call for action to preserve some of our planet’s most fragile habitats for the wildlife that depends on them.” (Auman). The title, pictures, and easy vocabulary attract children, while the concepts attract parents who wish to educate their child about pollution.

The sculptures (Figure 1), as a directly visual source, attract everyone. They are able to be understood by all, because they are visual and abstract. Someone does not need to know at what rate plastic decomposes to understand the significance of the sculpture made out of plastics

that have been found in the ocean. The online article displays the sculptures as a secondary source, and adds words into the mix. The article's title is very straight forward, and also appeals to all audiences. The language and sentence structure is less advanced than the scholarly article, but more so than the children's book. It appeals to any common person who stumbled upon the web page. Often times the first impression of the work determines which audiences are attracted to it.

When distinguishing between genres, what the reader sees influences their perception of the work. Each genre talks about the same broad topic. But when the writer narrows the topic to something more specific than "oceanic pollution", the audience it will reach becomes smaller. In this way, specificity of topic and size of audience are directly related. We can see evidence of this within the academic source, whose title is long and contains some high level vocabulary. This indicates to others the work will probably be lengthy and challenging to read, unless they are a part of the discourse community. The language in the title also notifies the public that it is a more formal work. The book's title is only two words in comparison, and uses alliteration to sound more poetic. Also, the larger than normal print and pictures on the cover exude a childlike feel. Assigning capital letters to an entire title, as exemplified by the online article, attracts more attention because it makes the topic seem more important, and can be seen easier due to the larger letters. This functions to draw more people who surf the web. The places that one is able to locate the three works further separate the audience. The sculptures can be found in highly trafficked areas, and the article about them can be found online. The scholarly article can be found through advanced searches in databases accessed through high schools or universities. The children's book can be found at a book fair or a library. Different people frequent these various

places, and are exposed to the sources in these locations only. Thus, the audience is constricted indirectly by the author, whose discourse community usually decides the location.

Oppositely, some techniques broaden the audience. The book and article utilize pictures to accomplish this. For the book, the pictures are there for illiterate people, mainly babies or children, and to add color for entertainment value. The article allows the reader to see a concrete image of what the author is talking about, instead of constructing an image in their mind (Figure 1). Although they appeal to a specific set of readers, all people who see the pictures will comprehend them and integrate the visuals into their impressions.



Figure 1: A great white shark made from collected bits of trash. (Croissant)

These pictures are utilized differently depending on the targeted audience, and even can invoke different feelings depending on what text accompanies them.

The use of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* within literacies is very common and allows the person who created the work to almost mold the viewer's thoughts in the direction that they please. These three concepts are used to appeal to people's sense of ethics, logistics, and emotions, respectively. The sculptures and the children's book use colors to attract attention from a specific audience (children or visually inclined individuals). The children may see the sculptures before their parents, but not understand the meaning. Meanwhile, the parents may understand the meaning but choose to focus on other things, like what kinds of germs are on the stale French fry their child picked up and is chewing on. The implemented visuals also utilize *pathos* by allowing the reader to see what happens to animals and what the trash that kills the animals looks like. It makes the events seem more relevant to people if they can picture the participants or culprits. However, the figures also use *ethos* and *logos*, by talking about how much trash the volunteers have picked up. "In just 5 years, Washed Ashore and its thousands of volunteers have collected over 17 tons of plastic pollution from beaches and made more than 65 sculptures." (Croissant) The children's book talks about the dangers of pollution and how bad it is by describing what happens to the main character, Aria the Albatross. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator says, "With a cough and a splatter, she threw up a pink plastic toothbrush, a red plastic cigarette lighter, and a white plastic bottle cap onto the soft white sand." (Auman) This affects the parents who read the book to their children, who will internalize these thoughts and later think twice before littering or throwing the recycling in with the trash on garbage day. It also affects the children, because to them Aria is their friend and they don't want her to be hurt. Once again, the blight is made personal to the people reading about it. The article about the

sculptures uses a copious amount of *pathos*, but for a purpose. “You can help Washed Ashore in its mission to save the seas by making a donation or volunteering.” (Croissant) By advocating for their organization, the article forces the reader to acknowledge that they have a choice. They can donate and help without expending much energy, volunteer, or keep scrolling and click to view another page. This choice invokes guilt in most cases, or causes the reader to become directly involved. The scholarly article is loaded with *ethos* and *logos*, to show the reader that the author knows what she is talking about. To do this she says, “OA will decrease the concentrations of OH^- and CO_3^{2-} ions and result in the elevated levels of the most bioavailable free ionic form of these metals,” which uses a lot of topic-specific words. (Ivanina) The object of the academic source is to inform the reader, but it also aims to prove its thesis and persuade the reader that the material is factual. Each of the separate works utilizes a different ratio of *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*. If they had employed adjusted ratios, the collective audience may have been altered.

All three sources could have added further adjuncts to change the scope of their audience. The sculptures could have nearby signs that provide interesting statistics on the percent of each trash type the organization found on their pick-ups. The article also could have talked more about the people involved in the organization to enhance the *logos* aspect of the article. This would not only provide more evidence for their argument, but also make the association seem more organized and valid. Garbage Guts could have talked more about how to prevent the pollution instead of just the depressing aftereffects. The author focuses on the negative by saying, “Monk Seal is trapped by a strapping band, Humpback Whale is hopelessly tangled in a ghost fishing net, and Sea Turtle is choking on a plastic bag he thought was a jellyfish.” (Auman) This would provide more information about the topic. Although, it would be less impactful; people being

presented a problem without a solution instinctually think of ways to fill that need. In this way, the author inspires the readers to think on their own about the issue.

Certain topics can be portrayed in a variety of different ways depending on which genre they come from. The author's choice of style, formality, visual aids, vocabulary, structure, and tone all come together to formulate the desired elements that attract a specific audience. The more specific the topic becomes, the smaller the affected audience becomes. The affected audience is determined by location, display, grammar, vocabulary, style and subject matter. The genres may have similar goals and techniques, but the separate discourse communities compelled the pieces to become individualistic and fashioned into the unique style of that community.

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