

*First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 3*

Episode Transcript: Langston Riddle on “Cultivating Self-Awareness and Integrity”

[INTRO SONG]

Good evening and welcome to season 3 of *First Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast*, an exploration into college writing and its connection to real-world issues, skills, and experiences. My name is Langston Riddle, a freshman and International Relations major at Cottey College, and tonight I'll be taking you through global awareness and what I believe to be its core tenet. What does it mean to be “globally aware”? How can we implement these ideals in our day-to-day lives? And how can we utilize these lessons to confront injustices at home and abroad? These questions and more will be answered through a personal vignette about debate, justice, and landmines. Before we begin today's episode, please be advised that there may be some potentially triggering content, including descriptions of war, serious injury and death, and poverty.

[TRANSITIONARY SONG]

“I believe” that dimension one, cultivating self-awareness and integrity, is the most crucial pillar of global awareness. Being a well-rounded global citizen means first being able to take responsibility for your own actions, beliefs, and words, as well as recognizing how they take place within the broader context of community. None of our beliefs or values exist in a vacuum, so it's important to acknowledge where they come from and how we can deconstruct potentially limiting and harmful views. But how does this look in practice, you may wonder?

Well, I did Speech and Debate for an upwards of six years, wherein I engaged in hours upon hours worth of battle - in a metaphorical sense, of course. I was taught how to speak fast, to undermine my opponents' cases, to essentially perform my intelligence for others. I could yell as loud as I wanted about basically anything, and I could even do so in the form of poetry or song. There really were no limits to what I could do as a high school and collegiate debater. But what really struck me - and what was genuinely the most important aspect of debate - was developing the ability to consider different policy positions and how they would affect people, whether that meant economically, socially, or politically, especially on a global scale.

Prior to joining Speech and Debate, I had a very limited understanding of how politics and policy in particular could affect others. I had constructed my identity based on my own experiences within an insular, majority-white town in the middle of Arkansas, and at the ripe age of 13, I had no conception of self-awareness or integrity. But it was debate that spurred a change in me, one that allowed me to take more seriously how my actions and words affect others.

One case in particular took place in the 2016-2017 debate year. I participated in policy debate, perhaps the most rigorous type of them all, and the topic that year was whether the United States should substantially increase its economic and/or diplomatic engagement with the People's Republic of China. The vagueness of this topic allowed for a lot of creative freedom

when it came to constructing arguments, so my partner Anastasia and I went for a more unconventional route. While everyone else talked about Taiwan or North Korea, we decided to discuss landmines.

Again, as a barely-cognizant teen, my knowledge about the ins-and-outs of war were lackluster at best; I was aware of landmines, but I had no idea just how dangerous, brutal, and pervasive they were. According to the United Nations, there are potentially tens of millions of landmines affecting 58 countries and four states, including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Mozambique, and dozens of other communities. And there's a reason these numbers are so obscured: landmines are designed specifically to be untrackable by enemy forces, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and sandstorms can move them, making their positions incalculable. Furthermore, new reports surface every year of landmines and other antipersonnel weaponry still being utilized in countries such as Syria. Everyday, a community discovers new landmines, and their methods are often accidental and tragic.

My research into this subject revealed to me the large and often devastating part the United States military played in deploying these indiscriminate tools. Though the Vietnam war ended nearly half a century ago, there are still millions of landmines in rural communities across Vietnam, Cambodia, and other battlegrounds used during this time period. They continue to kill and horrifically maim innocent civilians, as well as routinely deny them access to water, farming land, schools, and hospitals. Their lives are forever and tragically changed, and it is because we as a nation did not take the time to consider how our policies could potentially affect innocent people.

Researching this greatly changed my perspective on how politics can affect the lives of others; from that point on, I viewed policy, politics, and diplomacy as tools that can forever vastly impact the lives of people around the world. It is something we should all take seriously and invest ourselves in deeply.

But even on an interpersonal level, this taught me the importance of considering the consequences of my actions and words and really thinking about how I could affect others. It taught me that taking responsibility and considering how our actions could impact generations even decades from now are incredibly critical concepts. You cannot foster compassionate, comprehensive global awareness without first having the courage and integrity to step outside of and question your long-held beliefs, just as I did so many years ago.

This is why "I believe" dimension one of global awareness is the most important of them all.

[TRANSITIONARY MUSIC]

Thank you for joining me in diving deep into the depths of self-awareness, integrity, and global awareness. I hope you're able to consider, just as I did years ago, how your actions and advocacy can impact your community in new and beneficial ways, as well as what you can do to

examine your own biases and take responsibility for breaking them down - for the good of everyone, everywhere.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

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