

*First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 2*

Episode Transcript: Kayla Portwood on “Cultivating Self-Awareness and Integrity”

“This I Believe: Animal Crossing and Self-Awareness”

I believe the most important dimension of global awareness is ‘cultivating self-awareness and integrity’. I believe self-awareness is the most important dimension of global awareness because we must know ourselves before we can change the world. I believe that by knowing what makes us who we are, we are able to make improvements on our lives and the lives of others.

I rely on playing video games regularly to regulate my emotions. Video games provide an outlet for me to express my emotions and relax after a hard day. However, this isn’t something I truly realized until I started playing Animal Crossing this past summer.

Compared to games like DOOM and Dark Souls, Animal Crossing is a simple game. How could a video game so simple help me regulate my emotions and reflect on myself in a healthy way? I believe this is because Animal Crossing has caused me to do something no other game has done. Animal Crossing has forced me to slow down. In other games, I frequently run from task to task, eliminating one enemy after another without hardly taking a breath. However, there isn’t any of that in Animal Crossing. In Animal Crossing, I am tasked with taking life one step at a time; collecting a rock or stick here and there, planting flowers and fruit, and, most importantly, making bonds with our animal neighbors. Animal Crossing provides the player with a lot of time to do as they please and offers no objectives that must be completed before a timer runs out. In this way, Animal Crossing creates a calm environment and a clarity unseen in other games. Animal Crossing creates a lot of time for me to self-reflect.

At least, that is what I have experienced. While completing daily tasks in-game, I must convince myself to slow down and enjoy the little things. I can reflect on what I’ve done around my island and consider changes that need to be made. I have self-reliance and responsibility- after all, those flowers aren’t going to water themselves. I remember to take time every day to run around in this fictional world because I know having some way to defuse myself is important in the rush of today’s society.

Animal Crossing also offers its players unique rewards for taking care of their island. One memory I have of this is when I unlocked the upgraded Nook’s Cranny shop. The Nook’s Cranny shop is a location in game where players can go to purchase new decor, tools, and seeds for growing flowers. By playing the game consistently, the player eventually spends a number of bells in the shop, and the game rewards the player with a bigger shop. The bigger shop contains more decor, tools, and seeds than the previously smaller shop. Unlocking the upgraded shop made me feel achieved because of the effort I had put into my island. By buying and selling at the Nook shop, I had unlocked more items to decorate my island with. Flowers are a big part of

my island, so this experience was particularly rewarding for me, because I could then purchase new seeds and flowers to enlighten my island.

In the same way, I remember a few months ago when I reset my island. Why would I ever want to remove all of the work I've put into completing an island to my liking? Well, I reset my island because I hadn't taken the game for what it was supposed to be. Bells, the in-game currency, are the way players pay for items in the Nook shop, as well as paying for house and island upgrades. Instead of seeing what was in the now, I became fixated on making the most bells. This resulted in me flattening and dedicating my island to growing nothing but peach trees- the best source of income on my island. Now, having reset my island, I've been sure to play the game how I believe it should be played. I take things slowly and take time to enjoy my villagers and my island for what it is and, one day at a time, I've made improvements to make my island both bell-efficient and enjoyable. I no longer view my island as a way to make bells, but as a small community that, when nurtured, has the potential to become something inspiring.

Animal Crossing has forced me to look back at what I've done and to be aware of the changes I can make next. This is what self-awareness is. I must be aware of my own disciplines before going out to change the disciplines of others. Self-awareness is the most important factor of global awareness, because in order to do good, we must first do good on ourselves. In Animal Crossing, tools are going to break sometimes. In the same way, our familiarities, or the 'tools' of our real lives, are going to break from time to time as well. As humans, we must have the strength to repair and build ourselves up, and that starts with knowing who we are. Once our own tools are mended, we can go on to build the foundations of better futures globally. The first step to building this foundation is having a good set of tools. This I believe.