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IB English 1A

Reflective Statement – Red Sorghum IO

Word Count (Reflection text only) – 400 words

How was your understanding of cultural and contextual considerations of the work developed thorough the interactive oral?

As a presenter in the Red Sorghum Interactive Oral, I was given an opportunity to delve into the background of both the novel and Mo Yan. Researching Mo Yan gave me an understanding of how Red Sorghum had the detailed descriptions of many of the events that occurred, both in the fields, during the Sino-Japanese War in addition to smaller cultural details I would have otherwise ignored.

Learning that Mo Yan was a Social Realist writer gave me an understanding of how the book was written in an unglorified way that reflected the hardships of the daily lives of citizens. In addition, the fact that Mo Yan was a farmer during the Cultural Revolution which gave him first-hand experiences in the fields bettered my contextual understanding of the daily struggles of the farmers and the reliance on crops like sorghum to survive. Because of this understanding, I now understand why Sorghum became a common symbol of protection and survival in the book, be it when they store it for winter or the crop saving Father and Commander Yu from being killed by the Japanese cavalry.

The Japanese are depicted in the book as Weasels and heartless killers with a strong double-standard, and learning about the horrors of the Three-all’s policy of the Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese War and how Mo Yan was a writer for the People’s Liberation Army gave me an understanding of the context this book was written in: to depict the horrors of Chinese history and the struggle the citizens went through against foreign powers and national infighting. In addition, it shows why the Chinese government, even today, has an engrained adverse relationship with Japan in their culture.

The IO spent a large amount of time describing Chinese culture, and this helped me understand the significance of Grandma’s tightly bound feet as they were seen as beauty in the historic culture of China with over 50% of women having bound feet. From the IO, I realized the book even emphasizes the Chinese government’s policies of reducing local religion when it depicts how the Iron Society’s ideas of mysticism couldn’t protect the men fighting for it and the necessity to support modern technology and industrialism over traditional religious practices and beliefs. These are just many aspects of the book I wouldn’t have understood the meaning of if I hadn’t seen or participated in the Interactive Oral Discussion.