Cover sheet

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

SP1541 EXPLORING SCIENCE COMMUNICATION THROUGH POPULAR SCIENCE

Assignment: Book Chapter Reflection

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Tutorial Group: S19

Major(s): Data Science and Analytics

Selected book chapter (only for Book Chapter Reflection): Napoleon's Buttons (Chapter 12; p.223-245)

*Delete as appropriate

Reflection

The author uses description and exemplification to inform and engage the reader.

In p.229 section 2, the author gives a brief description of the structures of the various cardiac glycoside molecules used by William Withering and ancient Romans as mentioned in the previous two paragraphs. The molecules are described as having “the same structural feature” and “five-membered lactone ring” as well as “an extra OH” which gives rise to the “cardiac effect”. This description is largely effective in informing the reader that molecules that have the same structures and chemical properties have largely similar effects, otherwise, the reader would not know that the structures of chemicals determine their effects

In p.231 section 3, the author gives specific examples of physiological effects that are “often welcomed by humans” of the different members of alkaloids. These range from acrecaidine which is used as a stimulant, to reserpine which is used to treat high blood pressure. This strategy is largely effective in engaging the reader as they can clearly grasp the concept of beneficial physiological effects of alkaloids through the examples, as well as appreciate the molecules’ far-reaching impacts as they are still in use as medicine even today. However, there are technical terms that might not be understood even by an educated reader such as “decongestant” and “bronchodilator”, and thus these effects are not really clear. Overall, this strategy is still effective as other well-known examples such as Vitamin B and blood pressure treatment can still illustrate alkaloids’ beneficial effects.

(248 words)

References (including the book chapter):

Couteur, L. P., & Burreson, J. (2014). Molecules of Witchcraft. In Napoleon's buttons: 17 molecules that changed history (pp. 223–245). Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.