*Breaking Free of Preconceived Notions by Being Open To Multiple Interpretations*

One piece of information that our group easily understood was that Syrian refugee, Hayann al-Baghdadi, was affiliated with ISIS due to post 911 depictions of Muslims, especially current views of Syrian refugees. Our group automatically assumed that a Syrian refugee would play a significant part in a scenario that concerned both an oil tanker hijacking and an explosion on American oil production infrastructure. We believe the reason for quickly drawing this conclusion is due, not only to stereotypes presented in the media but also attitudes expressed by Republican presidential candidates and more specifically their nominee. This party often taps into the emotion of fear to motivate instead of modeling thoughtful deeper reflection on complex situations. The importance of pursuing a deeper level of thought processing was stated numerous times throughout the rhetorical analysis lecture given by Dr. Levin. We have decided to use this information, along with the video that was shown, to further demonstrate our point.

Inspired by the short-film “This is Water,” we tried to stop interpreting things at face value and consider that there could be more going on than what was initially thought. We used this insight in order to see deeper into the al-Baghdadi’s situation. We soon realized that Hayan is not just simply a caricature; but a multidimensional being who struggled to overcome a horrible situation. This occurred when learning al-Baghdadi’s story presented in a newspaper interview with him and his wife. While seeking this deeper understanding, we encountered the FBI interrogation of al-Baghdadi. This dialogue between FBI agents and al-Baghdadi further revealed the prevalence of surface level thinking. The agents continually spoke to al-Baghdadi as if he was guilty or as if he was automatically associated with the guilty party. America has a history of using cognitive bias in decision making concerning threats in war time as seen with the militarily unnecessary internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. It may be more cognitively efficient to assume the worst from anything perceived as “other”, however this thought process may cause more harm than good by creating tensions and suspicions between us and potential allies or ostracize otherwise law abiding citizens. Furthermore, operating from preconceived notions like this one concerning a Syrian refugees may cause us to miss or overlook important data that helps us find the actual threat or cause of an unfortunate event.

Strengthening our ability to deeply think when problem solving, like at Cyber Discovery, can be achieved with this style of “abstract thought;” a thought process that is based upon “thinking outside the box” or “standing from the outside world, looking in” where we actively challenge our automatic assumptions. We better understand how this can help us break free from stereotyping and surface level thinking to see complexity in situations, for example choosing not to automatically see all Syrian refugees that come to America as people trying to cause harm. Choice is the important word here, we all can actively choose how we understand the events around us; nothing is self explanatory. We all can actively decide what has meaning and significance, we do not have to allow automatic thinking to decide how we understand our world.