

WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

SECTION 1: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

Chapter Three: The Descriptive Mode

Description: Reading 1

Annie Dillard, "Living Like Weasels"

Annie Dillard is an acclaimed American writer of both fiction and non-fiction. This piece appears in her collection of essays, Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters (1982).

<http://citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=940459&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Questions for Reading and Discussion

- 1) Dillard describes the weasel and her encounter with it, and then extracts from that encounter a lesson on how to live her life. What is that lesson? What might a life lived according to that lesson look like?
- 2) Humans have historically been content to believe that animals are inferior in terms of complexity and intelligence. How does Dillard challenge that longstanding hierarchy that places humans above all other animals? What valuable experiences do animals have access to that humans do not?
- 3) Select an example of Dillard's imagery to discuss. Where does her language surprise you? In other words, how does her language make you see seemingly familiar objects or themes in a new way?

Questions for Writing and Research

- 1) Look up "weasel" in a standard dictionary, taking note of the various meanings of the word; then, write your own definition of "weasel" according to Dillard's description of the weasel. What aspects of the standard definition are present in the essay? What aspects are absent from it?
- 2) Find and read another essay in which an author discusses his or her encounter with an animal, then write a response paper in which you try to answer the following questions: Why do humans write about animals? What do humans learn from these encounters, and from writing about these encounters?

3) In a short essay, describe your own encounter with an animal or object and state what you learned as a result of this encounter.



Original content by Ashar Foley.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).