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Writing for the Sciences

Children’s Book Reflection

**Reflecting upon Victor the Virus**

When I was first introduced to this project, the first thing that popped into my mind was a show I used to love when I was younger. Zoboomafoo, featured a talking lemur along with two zoologists that showed off the many animals of the wild to future scientists like me. A very popular show that took advantage of the curiosity of kids. I though of basing my book on this. Perhaps make an adventure through the jungle and showcase animals. But I started thinking about perhaps covering a more pressing issue, the global pandemic we are enduring.

The new Coronavirus pandemic is just a result of humanity’s irresponsibility and ignorance. Over the last years, many theorized about the devastating effect a novel virus could pose to humanity. Many have even profited from the idea of a pandemic. Successful movies like Contagion and Pandemic and video games like The Last of Us have alluded to humanity not being ready for a novel virus. So, if society knew, and mainstream media was aware of the dangers, why were we not prepared for the novel Coronavirus?

Aiming to solve this lack of information, I wanted to create a story that would create a strong base for those young children interested in science. I wanted to create a fun, entertaining story that could was scientifically accurate. A story which would accurately depict the principles of virology and our body’s immune response to them. Through this accuracy, we could provide the children with a reliable base for the molecular understanding of a viral infection. By making the story scientifically accurate, I was not expecting the target children to become experts after reading the book, but to achieve two main goals. The first goal was to ignite the spark of curiosity in those interested children, so that they can pursue in the future a profession in the field of epidemiology or virology. Those who study these infectious agents and come up with the countermeasures for them.

The second goal involved the creation of a solid, accurate base of knowledge in which the children could build knowledge upon. This goal was of the most importance for me. As a Biology major, the study of life has been a never-ending story. Every year, every lecture you build upon what you know from the last. All topics connect to each other. The level of understanding the child achieves in lower level education will help or hinder the learning process at the next level. If we provide those future scientists, the right information so that they create accurate schemas of knowledge from as early as possible, we invest in the future of the world. Those scientists will spend more time discovering new things, rather than filling holes and modifying the understanding of topics.

Now that I had determined the purpose my project, I needed to determine the techniques I would use to achieve this goal. I wanted to grasp the attention of children around the age of 8-10. Children that had been exposed to a bit of science and cellular structure but not so much of virology and immunology. Like I said, I wanted it to be captivating and entertaining, but also accurate yet easy to understand. To achieve this fine balance, I first wanted to know how much a child at this age range knew about science. My cousin Carlos is 9 years old, conveniently at the middle of our range. I called him and asked him a couple of questions about cellular biology. He was familiar with the anatomy of the common eukaryotic cell and organelle functions; however, he was not particularly familiar with how viruses cause illness and our bodies combat them.

Now that I had a broad idea of what my audience knows about the topic, I knew what I needed to explain and what I could expect my audience to know. Still, the processes involved in fighting infection involve a lot of enzymes and proteins and I did not want to confuse the children. I turned for inspiration to the movie Osmosis Jones. The movie depicts almost the same subject I wanted to talk about and does it in a masterful way.

It drew my attention how accurate the movie is, and the creative ways it describes many ongoing processes of the cells. The movie anthropomorphizes, the cells and the processes inside the body. For example, Osmosis Jones who is the main character of the story is a hilarious white blood cell that polices the body; looking to catch infectious agents in the body. He carries a badge and a gun; he protects the body. It is easy then, for children, to associate white blood cells to immune response.

I wanted to incorporate this technique to my book. However, I wanted to scale down the gaze of the audience one level. I wanted to familiarize the audience with the different molecules that orchestrate the immune response in the body. To familiarize them with the proteins I named them with the last name as their actual molecular name. This is one of the examples of how I attained that scientific accuracy.

I must say I really enjoyed working in this project. It made me research a bit more into what I already knew of immunology and virology. It also challenged my understanding of some of these complex topics, since I had to digest the most important parts of the process to achieve that accuracy. Like Einstein said: “ If you can understand it simply, you don’t understand it well enough”.