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“Humanity” in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

The Oxford Dictionary’s definition for the word “humanity” is “the fact or condition of being human; human nature”. This definition explicitly means that humans are humanity, but it also includes the description of “human nature” which implies that anything that possess human nature can also be described as humanity. The human nature aspect of the humanity definition is specifically addressed in season two of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in episode thirteen *Surprise.* In this episode, a demon named the “Judge” is raised, and he kills anything that possesses humanity whether human or demon. Therefore, he acts as a “judge” of what constitutes humanity and while doing this he emphasizes the “human nature” part of humanity. Be careful. Try to speak more broadly before jumping into the show/your major paper 2 topic. Make this paper about the keyword and its contexts rather than your pop culture text. Here, it would be reading “humanity” into non-human beings, especially given the recent spate of mythical creature, monster, and animal shows as well as animal studies as an emerging field of literary study.

Historically, the term “humanity” emerged as a new academic discipline during the Renaissance in the fourteenth century and it marked a leaving from the previous “backward-thinking” dark-aged perspective to a new “enlightened” way of thinking. With the Renaissance came a revival of the classic Greek and Roman texts, which emphasized themes like secularism and the achievements and expressions of man. These classic Greek and Roman ideas formed the philosophy known as “humanism”, which was the basis of the Renaissance thinking. Humanism called for the questioning of received wisdom especially from the Catholic Church and thus humanism marked a departure from accepting everything that was said in the Bible and instead using observation and experimentation to learn about the world. The concept of humanity in terms of learning is exemplified in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* when the Judge remarks on the humanity in the scholarly vampire because of his knowledge. Thus, the modern view of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on the subject of humanity encompasses the original view of humanity in that humanity exists in learning and knowledge.

Revival of classical Greek and Roman works also brought about humanism in the context of citizenship. Citizenship, according to classic Greek and Roman philosophy, underscored the importance of putting aside one’s own desires for the good of the community. However, citizenship, a major part of humanistic ideals, was very exclusive in ancient Roman society because the rural population, under-aged males, women, and lesser artisan guiles were not considered citizens. Therefore, since citizenship was originally viewed in this narrow scope, this was representative of how the concept of humanism was also narrow in who constituted as having humanism. This parallel between humanism and citizenship and its small encompassment of people is articulated by Walter Mignolo in his essay *Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity* when he states, “The paradigm of the “human” defined by Christian men of letters during the Renaissance became the paradigm of the “citizen” defined by secular philosophers during the European Enlightenment” (Mignolo). Mignolo remarks on the model of human being defined by the “Christian man” during the Renaissance, which is an emphasis on the early model of human and citizen being centered around the educated, religious, man. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shows how modern views of humanity are more inclusive and are not just made of educated, Christian males when the Judge proclaims the vampires Spike and Drusilla to have humanity due to their love for each other. Not only is Drusilla a woman, but she and Spike are also vampires, which are defined in the show to be soulless demons. However, their inclusion in the definition of humanity shows how humanity doesn’t just strictly apply to humankind but also to those that exhibit qualities of human nature like benevolence and love. Therefore, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* demonstrates a broader scope of the term humanity in that the model of humanity is no longer embodied only in white, educated men or even in humans, but rather in anything with human nature characteristics. This connection between humanism and citizenship/what it means to be a citizen and how is granted citizenship is interesting and could serve as the basis for this entire keyword essay.

The word “humanity” developed during the European Renaissance in the fourteenth century in terms of academia and white, enlightened, male scholars as the model of humanity and citizenship, but since then the concept of humanity has expanded to include more groups. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* demonstrates this transition in the concept of “humanity” through many of its characters, but especially through the Judge in the episode *Surprise*. This episode demonstrates the concept of “humanity” transitioning from just including educated, Christian males to anything with aspects of human nature. This conclusion is a little too circular. Again, you’re making passive connections more than constructing a stake-driven claim.

Works Cited

“Humanity.” *The Oxford English Dictionary.* 3rd ed. 2011.Web. 5 May, 2014.

Mignolo, Walter D. "Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity." *American*

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Writer’s Memo

I picked this keyword because I have been watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* recently, and I thought the way the show represented the concept of “humanity” was interesting. After investigating the definition of the word humanity, its origin, and how it is portrayed in *Buffy,* I knew that it would be a good topic to talk about because of how broad its definition is, and how it’s context has changed over time. I will be able to apply this word to my second major paper because many of the characters in *Buffy* are representative of the different viewpoints of what constitutes humanity, and the humanity apparent in the non-human characters demonstrates how the show portrays humanity as being a part of human nature whether those with the aspects of human nature are human or not. While the show may seem to revolve around a theme of combatting humans versus demons or more simply in terms of good versus evil, the show blends this boundary between good and bad. There are some episodes where the evil being conducted is not through demons, but through people, which transitions the emphasis on physical demons to the demons and imperfections in humankind. Thus, Buffy portrays the full extent of humanity within the boundaries of humankind and outside of it as well as the full range of human nature going from the more positive aspects like love and benevolence to the more negative like aggression and jealousy. All of these traits are exhibited in the characters of *Buffy* whether they are human or not, which demonstrates the show’s implications on humanity being imperfect and flawed. The main potential drawback of my keyword is that it is very broad so it could be easy to get lost in its vast implications and contexts. This specific genre of writing required me to do a lot more research than I would normally do for a regular paper, and it also let me have a less articulated and concise argument. I was doing a lot more research and stating of facts and contexts rather than doing much developing of my arguments and claims.

Chanelle,

You very nicely articulate the purpose of a keyword essay immediately above, but you’re even doing too much argumentation with regard to Buffy. That is not to say that a keyword essays cannot make an argument (a good one will), but that you need to keep that argument much more limited in scope. You’re trying to establish a conceptual framework for your readers, introduce them to a specific way of thinking about humanism. With that in mind, you can flesh out your historical and/or citizenship narratives to serve as the foundation for the paper as a whole. As it is, you raise a number of really interesting points, but they feel largely disjointed and underdeveloped. Say more, but talk about less. ☺