

Some of you may have reactions such as “I hate this book, I hate this author, this is offensive, it almost made me drop this class.” Those may be valid reactions. We chose this book as our first seminar text for several reasons. Not because it’s great literature – it’s not. Not because the author is always right – he’s not. We chose it because it’s engaging, reasonably substantial, and controversial. If we take good advantage of this book, it can be a vehicle for lively seminar, and it can motivate deeper learning. We can learn from the practices, strong and weak, of some of Crichton’s characters.

Some of you have had Evergreen seminars before. What are strategies that we can use to make this work? Let’s talk about those strategies together.

If you feel “I hate this book,” well, that can be a starting point for your pre-seminar conversation. Why do you hate it? Go beyond feelings and opinions. If you disagree with the facts, demonstrate what’s wrong with Crichton’s facts. **Seek out better data to share with us**, or better interpretations of the data.

If you take issue with the tone or the politics or details of the storyline, that may be more personal. Can you find a way to analyze the problems you perceive with the tone or politics, to make it bigger than personal? If you feel “I hate this author,” that’s more difficult. Could the author be taking a satirical stance? (Always be alert for irony.) Unless we really know the author, we should avoid personally attacking him or her, and perhaps even then. *Ad hominem* arguments are often a sign that an opponent can’t muster a strong case against the substance of an author’s writing, and is resorting to emotional attacks. Get past that in pre-seminar. **In seminar we want to know more about what you think** than how you feel.

Go ahead and have emotional responses to the reading, and vent about them **in your pre-seminar meeting**. Then work with your teammates to try to get at the root of your feelings with some analysis of the text. Why do you feel this way? What’s really engaging you in the text?

**You always want to check that you have understood the text well.** Once you have stepped back and re-read and discussed, so that you’re sure about that, then start analyzing the text. Bring your questions and your analyses to seminar. Feelings may motivate your engagement, but your intellect should take a leading role.

**We will engage in questions and analyses together, as a learning community** seeking deeper understanding and wisdom about the important issues raised in the text, and raised as we read the text.

**First Seminar on Climate of Fear.** Take it at face value and bring your powers of reason to bear. Don’t worry about doing outside research to refute questions of fact. Be open to strengths and weaknesses. **Are there messages in the text that can serve us well in our learning? Are there questions you really want addressed?**

**Second Seminar on Climate of Fear.** You will use outside sources to research some of those questions. Next week we will also read Carl Sagan’s *Baloney Detection Kit* for guidance on critical thinking and valid reasoning techniques, and McKibben’s article for more information on the facts.