

Low-Stakes Observation Activity

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Go to a park, theater, restaurant, zoo, or any public place. (Subways and buses are excellent places for this assignment). Sit down and look around you. Choose a person (a stranger) who interests you and observe this person over a period of time (no less than 5 minutes). Think about this person in English! Is he or she old or young, single or married, rich or poor, happy or sad, tired or full of energy? What kind of life does this person have? Does he or she work—and if so, in what job? Does this person have children? If so, does he/she live with them? Or with a girlfriend/boyfriend? Or alone? Is he or she intelligent, athletic, artistic? Does he or she have someone to love?

Do a little mental detective work. What are the clues? Do you think that this person had a happy childhood or a painful one? Did he or she grow up in NY? If not, where did he or she come from? Was the past difficult for this person? Why? Or was the past heavenly, but the present a real challenge? Discuss how this person's past shaped the present. What do you think this person is really like? Discuss his or her character. What will happen to this person in the future? Make a prediction about this person's life over the next 5 years.

Obviously, you have to use your imagination on this one. (Unless you're psychic, you can't really know for sure.) Don't talk to the person! And don't stare! (You have to do this carefully and politely!). If you have a notebook with you, you might want to write down some notes—but if not, just remember what you see and then write it up later. The more time and attention you put into this, the better it will be. Write your report clearly and be prepared to read it in class. Have fun!