

context - the circumstances relevant to something under consideration.



When you are trying to determine the context under which a person is writing, you must consider the circumstances that are relevant to that person, in other words, what kind of environment he or she is in. This could include physical, mental, emotional, historical, social, etc...

In the article listed below, Dr. Suzuki is making the point that from our context, or perspective, "Survivor" was a titillating game show that had us hooked over the summer, yet from the context of those who actually live in "Survivor"-like conditions, the world of "Survivor" would actually be a luxury. Therefore, it is very important to determine the context from which the writer writes - it affects his or her entire position.

Who are the real survivors?

(David Suzuki - Science column - *Red Deer Advocate*, Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2000)

You'd have to have been living under a rock this summer not to have heard about the mega-hit television show "Survivor". Somehow, this "reality" game show actually became news and regularly made its way to the front pages of newspapers across North America.

The game revolved around 16 contestants stranded on a desert island in the South China Sea who competed to "Outwit, Outplay and Outlast" the others for 39 days to win the prize of \$1million.

It was a novel idea, to be sure, and viewers seemed to enjoy the show's social dynamics and exotic tropical setting. But unintentionally, the show also gave us an indication of how far removed people in the developed world are from the reality of life that still faces the majority of the inhabitants of our planet.

Human civilization has existed for thousands of years. But most of the modern conveniences that the contestants so badly missed, like telephones, refrigeration, e-mail and television, have only been around since the turn of the last century. Some are even less than a decade old!

Like most people in the developed world, the majority of the castaways on "Survivor" had a hard time fending for themselves without the help of modern technology.

They managed to crack a few coconuts and found some tapioca, but other than that, they had no idea which plants were edible and which were poisonous, or how to obtain enough protein.

Only one member of the group (the eventual winner) was capable of catching fish.

Although the contestants were certainly roughing it, they were hardly abandoned. They received ample rice to eat and had access to basic medical items like insect repellent, sun screen, Band-Aids and iodine. And they had helicopters waiting to airlift them to a hospital in case of an emergency.

But seemingly lost on the contestants, crew and producers is the fact that, while the survivors pined for “normal” food like Big Macs and pizza, not too far away, millions of people actually are living off of a couple of bowls of rice a day - many for their entire lives. These people are not even afforded the very basics of health care, like vaccines or antibiotics.

For them, insect repellent to help ward off malarial mosquitoes is an unattainable luxury.

According to the World Bank, the real survivors are the 1.3 billion people who live on \$1 or less a day and the three billion who live on \$2 or less a day.

While the contestants and crew of “Survivor” complained about the lack of hot showers and gourmet food, 1.4 billion people still do not have access to safe drinking water.

In Indonesia and Vietnam, near the island where “Survivor” was filmed, more than one-third of children are underweight. In some South-Asian countries, up to 50% of children are born with low birth weights caused by malnutrition.

The reality is that “Survivor” is a rich person’s game. We can afford to be titillated by the idea of struggling to survive with a bare minimum of resources. For us, it’s a spectator sport - a pleasant diversion from our hectic modern lives. For the contestants, it was fun because they know they got to go home at the end and one would be \$1 million richer.

Their Asian neighbours have no such incentives.

If the lesson learned by contestants on the show was that they should not take modern life for granted, perhaps the next “Survivor” should take place in the slums of Calcutta or Manila. Then, perhaps, contestants wouldn’t just learn to appreciate all that they have at home, but also what most others do not.

David Suzuki is a geneticist, environmentalist and broadcaster.