DINOSAUR HIGH SCHOOL

DESCRIPTION

Dinosaur High School asks, "If dinosaurs were alive and in high school today, what high school social category would each dinosaur species belong to?" In other words, would a Tyrannosaur be a goth, a geek, or a jock, etc.?
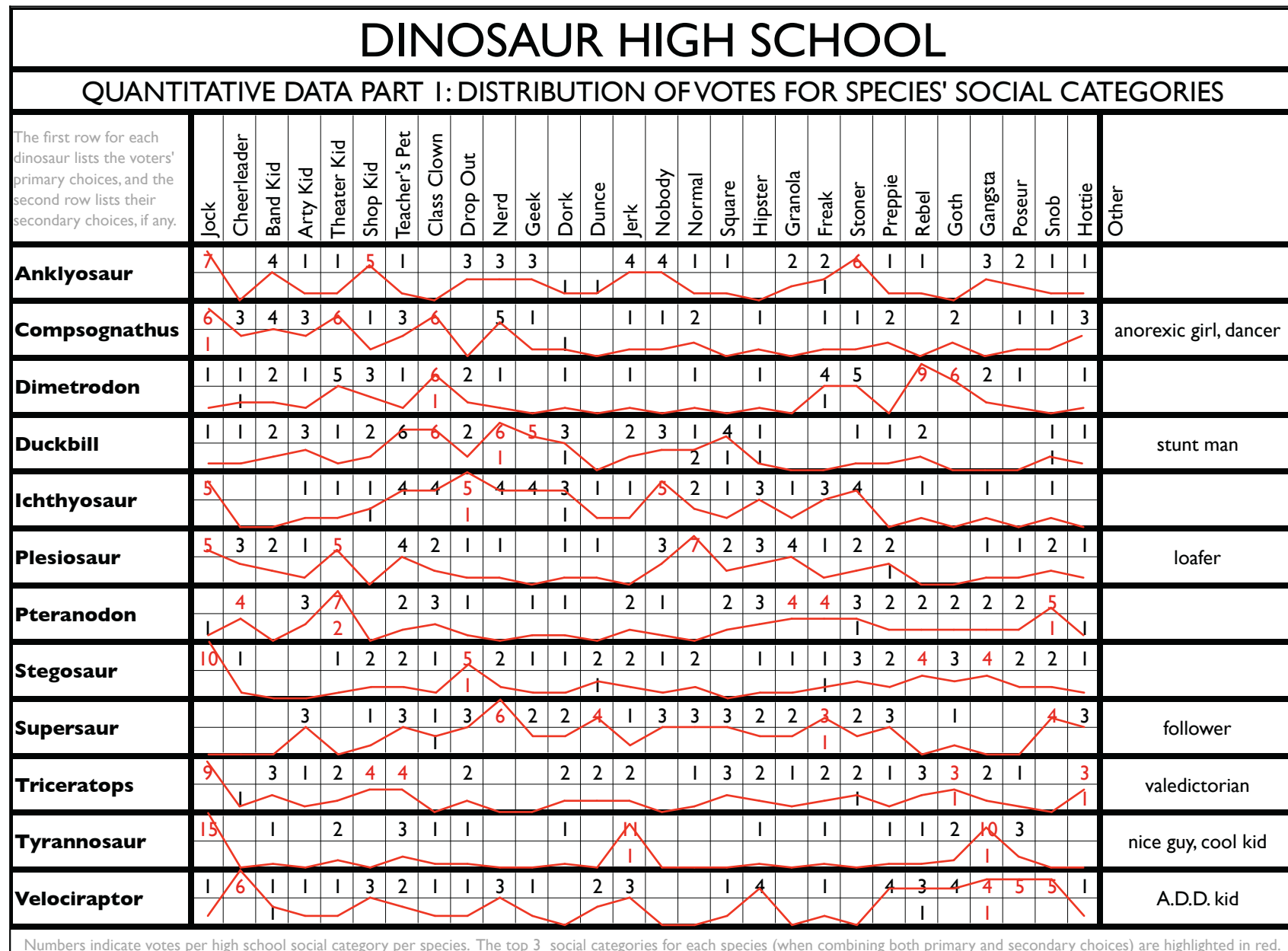
The idea here is that we, as individuals and as a society, construct our images of what dinosaurs were like. Beyond simply looking at the visual aesthetics of dinosaurs, we can also investigate all of the different attributes that we tend to ascribe to each particular species. How does the popular conception of a Tyrannosaurus differ from that of a Triceratops--does one tend to be more brightly colored, more agile, more humorous, or just generally "cooler"? High schools are infamous for being crucibles of social construction, and so they make a perfect model for testing our perception of dinosaurs' relative social status and identities.

The dinosaurs in this project are Anklyosaurus, Compsognathus, Dimetrodon, Duckbill (Anatosaurus), Ichthyosaurus, Plesiosaurus, Pteranodon, Stegosaurus, Supersaurus, Triceratops, Tyrannosaurus, and Velociraptor. Chris chose them due to their popularity in various media from both the scientific and entertainment worlds. Because they are among the most popular, they should also have the most fully-formed personas in the public mind, and thus be the easiest for survey participants to respond to.

The High School Social Categories tended to be chosen only if they would be defined as such both by members of the group and by those outside the group. They are the Jock, Cheerleader, Band Kid, Arty Kid, Theater Kid, Shop Kid, Teacher's Pet, Class Clown, Drop Out, Nerd, Geek, Dork, Dunce, Jerk, Nobody, Square, Hipster, Granola, Mallrat, Freak, Stoner, Preppie, Rebel, Goth, Gangsta, Poseur, Snob, and Hottie. These were derived from careful study of such pop cultural touchstones as *Back to the Future*, *That 70s Show*, *South Park*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *My So-Called Life*, *Ghost World*, *Happy Days*, and *American Pie*...not to mention Chris' personal experience!

The first of these charts, below, is a simple summary of the results so far. It shows how many people voted for a dinosaur to belong to a particular social category. When filling out the form, people could list both primary (top line) and secondary (second line) social categories for each dinosaur. The top 3 vote-getting social categories, per dinosaur, are listed in red. The red line shows the same information found in the numbers, but reflects it visually instead of numerically in order to communicate the information in a different format. On the very right-hand side are write-in social categories for those who couldn't find the perfect answer from the supplied categories.

The second chart is more complicated. When filling out the form, people were asked *why* they chose the social categories they did--what attributes does the dinosaur possess that led them to choose that social category? This chart correlates the social categories with those attributes. Again, the numbers reflect the total votes within each category, and these numbers are then reinforced by visual aids, this time in the form of circles. The bigger the circle, the more votes that category received. The social categories (vertical axis) are shown in warm colors; these colors were then used for the interior gradient of any circles found in their rows. The horizontal axis lists all the attributes (the reasons why the categories were chosen), which are represented by cool colors, and which were used for the exterior gradient of any circles in their columns. The very right-hand column and the very bottom row add up each column and row to clarify trends in the selection of social categories and attributes.

ANALYSIS

Clearly the Jock is a runaway Social Category, and Physiognomy, Posture, and Attitude are very influential Attributes. This tends to lead to the conclusion that people read dinosaurs as very physical animals. When people rated the dinosaurs, they did so based on pictures of their skeletons. Skeletons were used because they provide a more objective, unbiased image than any image of their exteriors. However, the skeletons' postures, which are unavoidable, clearly contributed to the way they were interpreted. Attitude can be seen as at least partially deriving from posture, although it arises independently from dinosaurs' representation in culture as well.

Each dinosaur has a few social categories that received many more votes than the other categories. In addition, a dinosaur's strongest social categories do not only fit one archetype, but tend to create a interlocking matrix of consistent personality characteristics. This lends evidence to the idea that we see dinosaurs fulfilling different psychological or behavioral archetypes; we fill in the blank slate of their bones with our selves. For instance, Ankylosaurus correlates with being a Jock, a Shop Kid, and a Stoner, all somewhat brainless and lackadaisical personalities. Compsognathus ranks highly as a Jock, Theater Kid, and Class Clown, which may seem less connected, but all relate to aspects of its "character": it runs fast, so it's a Jock; it's thin and apparently show-offy due to its speed, so it's a Theater Kid; and it's sort of spastic and overly energetic like a Class Clown. The Dimetrodon is also a Class Clown due to its funny-looking sail, and is also a Rebel and a Goth because of the same mohawk-like sail. The Duckbill is a Class Clown, a Nerd, and a Geek because it is just silly looking. The Ichthyosaur is a Jock because it can swim, but also a Drop Out and a Nobody because its swimming and big eyes make it a loner. The Plesiosaurus is a Jock (swimming again), a Theater Kid (weird and scrawny neck), and a Normal (which makes less obvious sense but the participants were very sure about this!). The Pteranodon is a Cheerleader (flapping its wings), a Theater Kid (scrawny and show-offy again), a Granola (no idea), a Freak (crazy head protrusion and wings), and a Snob (looking down on everyone from above). The Stegosaurus is a Jock (very physical body), a Drop Out (it's infamously dumb), a Rebel and a Gangsta (spikes). The Supersaur is a Nerd, a Dunce, a Freak, and a Snob, based on opposing ideas of its small brain as well as its ability to look down on people from its long neck. While Triceratops is a Jock, Shop Kid, and Goth for obvious reasons (big, strong, and quiet but with pointy horns), its roles as a Teacher's Pet and Hottie are more unusual (it seems to have a reputation as "the nice dinosaur," which explains the Teacher's Pet, but its role as a Hottie seems more mysterious--yet again, as with the Normal Plesiosaur, the participants were very certain about this!). Tyrannosaurus, as always, is the focus of much thought, and has the highest correlations of all, with very big voting spikes as a Jock, Jerk, and Gangsta. Velociraptor is a Cheerleader (thin and energetic), but also a Gangsta (violent) and a Poseur and Snob (it seems to be seen as the upstart of the dinosaur world, attempting to steal the spotlight from T-rex, which seems to be creating a backlash against it).

Thus, the correlations between the dinosaurs and social categories seem to be very strong, and seem to derive from obvious characteristics found in their basic bodies and common postures, as well as popular representations of their personalities in the media ("nice" Triceratops, "bully" Tyrannosaurus). Their social categories often derive from different, and even opposing, characteristics, but often are found in related groups (for instance, all "dumb" or "energetic" categories). Thus, the test seems to be gathering results that support its hypothesis and provide for some thought-provoking data (...hottie Triceratops?!).

DINOSAUR HIGH SCHOOL
QUANTITATIVE DATA PART 2B: SUMMARY OF DISTRIBUTION OF VOTES FOR ATTRIBUTES BY SOCIAL CATEGORY

SOCIAL CATEGORIES	Intelligence	Physiognomy	Posture	Physical Ability	Sexuality	Ambition	Attitude	Humor	Style/Taste	Individuality	Social Status	Social Skills	Skill Set	Cultural Interests	Hygiene	TOTAL FOR EACH SOCIAL CATEGORY
Jock	3	27	8	25	2	2	8	0	0	3	0	0	3	1	0	81
Cheerleader	0	4	4	6	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	23
Band Kid	2	8	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	24
Arty Kid	2	4	2	0	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	21
Theater Kid	3	4	10	8	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43
Shop Kid	4	4	6	4	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	33
Teacher's Pet	2	5	7	0	0	1	8	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	30
Class Clown	3	10	6	2	0	0	5	4	2	3	2	2	0	0	0	39
Drop Out	3	4	7	4	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35
Nerd	6	8	14	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40
Geek	3	11	5	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33
Dork	0	6	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	24
Dunce	5	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Jerk	0	9	5	5	0	3	16	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	39
Nobody	0	8	5	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	36
Normal	0	9	4	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Square	0	4	6	2	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	24
Hipster	0	3	2	2	0	0	7	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
Granola	0	3	4	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	19
Freak	0	11	4	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
Stoner	0	8	9	5	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	36
Preppie	0	2	5	2	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Rebel	0	7	4	0	0	0	9	0	9	4	0	0	2	0	0	35
Goth	0	7	2	0	0	0	5	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
Gangsta	0	4	6	2	0	0	13	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	33
Poseur	0	3	4	0	0	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
Snob	0	5	7	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Hottie	0	6	5	8	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
Other: Anorexic Girl	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other: Dancer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Other: Loafer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other: Valedictorian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other: Nice Guy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other: A.D.D. Kid	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other: Follower	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other: Stunt Man	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other: Cool Kid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL NUMBER OF EACH ATTRIBUTE	42	201	130	93	11	33	151	9	49	22	28	22	31	14	6	871

DINOSAUR HIGH SCHOOL
QUANTITATIVE DATA PART 1: DISTRIBUTION OF VOTES FOR SPECIES' SOCIAL CATEGORIES

(Dinosaurs listed: Ankylosaur, Compsognathus, Dimetrodon, Duckbill, Ichthyosaur, Plesiosaur, Pteranodon, Stegosaur, Supersaur, Triceratops, Tyrannosaur, Velociraptor — with write-in "Other" categories including: anorexic girl, dancer; stunt man; loafer; follower; valedictorian; nice guy, cool kid; A.D.D. kid.)