

only for a decent burial, give the causes for the awful results; on the other hand, if you succeeded in not making your family or guests ill, make sure your paragraph tells clearly *why* you managed to cook reasonably well.

Follow the cause-and-effect format on pages 205–208 as you structure your paragraph. Begin with what you achieved; then explain the reasons for the meal that resulted, whether it was good or bad.

Assignment 3: Writing an Essay

Will you, like Nancy Eng, be among the “new breed” of men or women who have left behind the expectations and stereotypes of previous generations? Is this possible, or are certain characteristics innate within each gender? Do we want to disturb all fundamental male and female qualities as we know them?

Write a prescriptive (how-to) process essay about *your* views on “the new man” or “the new woman.” Does each really exist? Do you know any examples of either? What elements would make up such creatures? Would there be changes in personality, in behaviour, in appearance? How much do we really want men and women to change, and why?

Here is your chance to play Dr. Frankenstein: Construct a new being. Tell your readers how to become “the new man” or “the new woman” in the traditional “three easy steps.” Because this is a direct-advice process essay, address your reader directly as “you.” If there are things you would rather not change about the gender in question, say so, but tell the reader how and why he or she should retain an existing quality you value.

Before beginning your outline, review the chapter on process writing (pages 183–194). Decide on your viewpoint first of all. You may take a reverse or comic view, and give instructions on how to become “a traditional gentleman” (which may, in fact, be a new creature) or “a real lady” (perhaps equally mythical). Consider what ingredients may be needed. In either case, list your steps, then put them into logical stages that become your three body paragraphs, and give your instructions with careful details about becoming the “gender-perfected creature.” Watch out for potential pitfalls or problems in your stages, and give transitional help. Remember, you may be creating a new being.

THE UNEXPECTED MATZO

Anna Baum

In this gentle and touching story, Anna Baum reaches back into her memory to relate a significant moment she experienced. This was during World War II, and Baum was living a life of hunger, hard work, and deprivation during one of the coldest winters in living memory. Yet, in contrast to this stark scene, Baum's story tells of a heart-warming gesture by members of her extended community, that not only helped her and her family through this dark time, but still resonates with her many years later.

The winter of 'forty-two–'forty-three was the coldest in living memory in war-stricken Europe: farther east, beyond the Ural Mountains, the cold was of extreme

severity, and the temperature kept steadily at about minus forty degrees Celsius. The abundant snows buried the long communal dwellings and log cabins almost to the top of their windows, keeping the interior dark but warm and cozy. The streets and narrow lanes seemed devoid of any life except at shift-change time, when tens of thousands of gray-faced, haggard, and bent people, wrapped in everything they could tie around themselves, all at once hurried to their bare rooms and dormitories in complete silence.

2 The Germans, though with considerable difficulty, were still pushing into the Russian hinterland, annihilating everything in their path. As if the cold was not enough, the food rations were unbearably meager and of the poorest quality. There were no trains to bring anything in. Everything was needed for the front, which was understandable enough, but then how was one to survive?

3 We relied on potatoes, which were our main food staple, but after that rainy summer, not much was left, and the potatoes turned black very quickly. Every day Mother boiled a few of them and prayed that they would last a bit longer. For a while we had a substantial supply of dried and pickled mushrooms which Mother had picked in the fall in the *taiga*. Cooked with a few potatoes, they made a nourishing meal. But now our stock was diminishing at a frightening speed, and the future seemed grim, almost hopeless.

4 Mother desperately tried to get some flour instead of a bread ration, or exchange some pieces of clothing we still possessed for a cup of cereal or flour, but neither was possible. Those luxuries could only be obtained on the black market, where the going currency was alcohol or bread.

5 One evening, after school, I had to go back to the office to complete some urgent work. I worked through the night and returned home around nine o'clock the next morning, tired and worn out. Mother, as usual, was busy. I hastily swallowed my potatoes and fell asleep instantly.

6 As if in a dream, I heard a muffled knock at the door, and then somebody coming in. Half asleep, I made out some strange whisperings. I tried to wake up. But suddenly, some half-forgotten words shook me out of my torpor. I woke with a start, in the belief that something of importance was happening, and that I should not miss it.

7 Sitting at the table were two young women. They were simply though decently dressed, and spoke Yiddish: a soft, melodious Yiddish which I had not heard for a very long time; not in this part of the world, anyway. At first I could not make out anything, but gradually everything fell into place.

8 Our guests were two Chassidic women from the vicinity of Ekaterinburg. Their grandparents and parents had been resettled at the end of the last century by the Czar, and, since then, had lived, worked, and practised their religion there. The Chassidic community was, and always had been, a closed one, but counted among its members many highly educated people working in very specialised fields, including the government. They had undergone much suffering during the Civil War. But always, they kept mostly to themselves. Because they were so far removed from any large centre, not many outsiders knew about them, and thus they quietly managed to survive so far, and, God willing, they would continue to do so in the future.

9 I heard the women say that members of their community were aware that there were some Jewish families scattered throughout this vast province, and that

the community would like to let them know that they were not forgotten. They were used to coping with food shortages. Since the outbreak of war, food supplies had been more limited than ever, and that year was a particularly bad one, and they could store up only a minimum of grain and flour. Soon it would be Pesach and they had nevertheless managed, as usual, to bake some matzot, and wanted to share it with the less fortunate.

They asked to be forgiven for having brought so little: they had travelled more than five hundred miles by train, and had done their best. Everything had to be hidden and be done in secret. One of the women opened her canvas bag and took out a small package of round matzo sewn up in grayish linen: the other took out from her muff a little bag, also sewn up in linen, containing matzo meal. 10

Mother was searching for words appropriate for the occasion, but the women would not accept any thanks. Finally, Mother offered some tea, murmuring quietly that she only had "kipiatok," boiling water, but no tea and no sugar. "We know," the women answered, "and you should not be ashamed of it." Asked how they had known about us, they smiled radiantly. "We know about a lot of people, but have to be careful. We visit only one family at a time, and carry only one single package. The name and address? They are in our heads." 11

We helped them with their coats and embraced three times, Russian style. 12
 "May I know your names?" Mother asked. "Malka and Esphira," said one after the other. "And may you have a healthy and happy Pesach."

• • • Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Which of the following would be the best alternative title for the selection?
 - a. Hard Times
 - b. The Horrors of War
 - c. The Compassionate Guests
 - d. Mother Makes Do
2. Which sentence best expresses the main idea of the reading selection?
 - a. even during the most desperate times, people can help each other.
 - b. young people should not be forced to work through the nights.
 - c. nobody is safe during a war.
 - d. humans cause each other to suffer.
3. The author suggests that
 - a. modern societies will never again face shortages of basic necessities.
 - b. the visiting women should have brought more supplies.
 - c. her mother should have provided for her family more carefully.
 - d. humans can endure much as long as they feel connected to their communities.
4. The author implies that
 - a. all Jews had been deported from Russia.
 - b. only German Jews lived in great danger.
 - c. they lived in a forced-labour camp.
 - d. everyone in the community was forced to contribute to the war effort.

5. *True or false?* The main reason the family was suffering was because the mother had not prepared for a harsh winter. _____
6. The two women who visited came to the author's family because
 - a. they were lost in a storm.
 - b. they knew of the family's straightened circumstances.
 - c. they were spies.
 - d. they had been displaced and needed a new home.
7. The author implies that
 - a. Chassidic Jews lived safely in Russia.
 - b. the two young women looked down on the author's family.
 - c. people will help others even at great risk to themselves.
 - d. Yiddish was her only language.
8. From this story, the audience can infer that
 - a. understanding history is unimportant.
 - b. the gift of matzo at Pesach still holds great significance to the author.
 - c. cultural and religious symbols do not matter during times of starvation.
 - d. the family would have been better served if the women had brought a nutritious meal.
9. The phrase *devoid of* in the sentence "The streets and narrow lanes seemed devoid of any life except at shift-change time . . ." (paragraph 1) means
 - a. empty of.
 - b. full of.
 - c. strange with.
 - d. limited to.
10. The word *meager* in the phrase "the food rations were unbearably meager" (paragraph 2) means
 - a. disgusting.
 - b. delicious.
 - c. limited.
 - d. expensive.

• • • **Discussion Questions**

About Content

1. According to the information that the author provides, what are at least three reasons for the family's poverty?
2. Why does the author explain is the only source for food during this story? Why does the family not use that source?
3. What Jewish elements does the author use? Does she explain what they mean? Why, or why not?
4. What is the author's role in the events of this story? Why does she present herself this way?

About Structure

5. In which paragraph does Baum switch from setting the scene of the story, to telling the actual events? How does a description of the scene enhance the details that follow?
6. Is the main idea of the story clearly stated? Why has the author chosen this structure?
7. How does the story progress from one idea to the next? Does the author use clear transitional terms to indicate changes in the events?

About Style and Tone

8. How does the author's description of the setting contribute to the tone of the entire story?
9. The setting and subject matter of this story are bleak; however, the message contains some optimism. How do the sombre details of the story compare or contrast to the positive message of the story?

* • • • Writing Assignments

Assignment 1: Writing a Paragraph

Small acts of kindness can often be as important as large or official actions. Have you ever been a part of, or witnessed, a situation where a simple gesture of kindness has had a profound effect on the recipient? Think of an experience that happened in a limited time and place—over the course of a day, perhaps, and in a setting such as a school, home, or community—and relate that in a paragraph. Identify the importance of the act of kindness in your topic sentence, and provide three supporting reasons for your point. Explain each with adequate details and provide specific examples for each. Conclude with a thought that emphasizes your original point.

Assignment 2: Writing a Paragraph

Anna Baum's story describes the conditions of Eastern Europe in World War II. She shows the depth of the winter, the living conditions, and the deprivation that all of her town, along with the entire region, endured. Her simple but vivid descriptions help her audience to understand not only the events, but also the sombre mood of the times.

Consider a location that is an important element in the description of an activity. For example, the way a hockey arena looks or feels could contribute to the sensations of a paragraph about a hockey game; the physical presence of a school, college, or workplace may help to depict an activity held there.

Write a paragraph about an activity or event with a specific setting. Determine how the setting depicts a sense of the point of your paragraph. Support your point with three reasons that also depend upon the physical description. As you explain and provide details, pay special detail to those elements which help your audience "see" the scene you are describing. Conclude with a sentence that refers your audience, again, to the image you depicted in your topic sentence.