seeking to grasp the significance of the event for Dillard—what it meant to her both at the time she experienced it and years later when she wrote about it—as well as the meaning it holds for you. Then, you will reread the essay like a writer, analyzing the parts to see how Dillard crafts her essay and to learn the strategies she uses to make her autobiographical writing effective. These two activities—reading for meaning and reading like a writer—follow every reading in this chapter.

ANNIE DILLARD

An American Childhood

Annie Dillard (b. 1945) is a prolific writer whose first book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek *(1974), won the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction writing. Since then, she has written meditations on nature and religion, including* For the Time Being *(1999); several collections of poetry, most recently* Mornings like This *(1996); a novel,* The Living *(1992); an account of her work as a writer,* The Writing Life *(1989); and an autobiography,* An American Childhood *(1987), from which the following reading is excerpted. Dillard also coedited* Modern American Memoirs *(1995), a collection of autobiographical works originally published between 1917 and 1992.*

"An American Childhood" relates an event that occurred one winter morning when the seven-year-old Dillard and a friend were chased relentlessly by an adult stranger at whom they had been throwing snowballs. Dillard admits that she was terrified at the time, and yet she asserts that she has "seldom been happier since."

As you read, think about how this paradox helps you grasp the autobiographical significance of this experience for Dillard. Annotate anything that helps you appreciate the drama and significance of the event. Annotating involves writing on the text as you read—noting parts you think are important, identifying words or references you do not know, and writing comments and questions in the margin. (To learn more about annotating, see Appendix 1, pp. 648–54.)

1 Some boys taught me to play football. This was fine sport. You thought up a new strategy for every play and whispered it to the others. You went out for a pass, fooling everyone. Best, you got to throw yourself mightily at someone's running legs. Either you brought him down or you hit the ground flat out on your chin, with your arms empty before you. It was all or nothing. If you hesitated in fear, you would miss and get hurt: you would take a hard fall while the kid got away, or you would get kicked in the face while the kid got away. But if you flung yourself wholeheartedly at the back of his knees—if you gathered and joined body and soul and pointed them diving fearlessly—then you likely wouldn't get hurt, and you'd stop the ball. Your fate, and your team's score, depended on your concentration and courage. Nothing girls did could compare with it.

2 Boys welcomed me at baseball, too, for I had, through enthusiastic practice, what was weirdly known as a boy's arm. In winter, in the snow, there was neither baseball nor football, so the boys and I threw snowballs at passing cars. I got in trouble throwing snowballs, and have seldom been happier since.

3 On one weekday morning after Christmas, six inches of new snow had just fallen. We were standing up to our boot tops in snow on a front yard on trafficked Reynolds Street, waiting for cars. The cars traveled Reynolds Street slowly and evenly; they were targets all but wrapped in red ribbons, cream puffs. We couldn't miss.

4 I was seven; the boys were eight, nine, and ten. The oldest two Fahey boys were there—Mikey and Peter—polite blond boys who lived near me on Lloyd Street, and who already had four brothers and sisters. My parents approved Mikey and Peter Fahey. Chickie McBride was there, a tough kid, and Billy Paul and Mackie Kean too, from across Reynolds, where the boys grew up dark and furious, grew up skinny, knowing, and skilled. We had all drifted from our houses that morning looking for action, and had found it here on Reynolds Street.

5 It was cloudy but cold. The cars' tires laid behind them on the snowy street a complex trail of beige chunks like crenellated castle walls. I had stepped on some earlier; they squeaked. We could not have wished for more traffic. When a car came, we all popped it one. In the intervals between cars we reverted to the natural solitude of children.

6 I started making an iceball—a perfect iceball, from perfectly white snow, perfectly spherical, and squeezed perfectly translucent so no snow remained all the way through. (The Fahey boys and I considered it unfair actually to throw an iceball at somebody, but it had been known to happen.)

7 I had just embarked on the iceball project when we heard tire chains come clanking from afar. A black Buick was moving toward us down the street. We all spread out, banged together some regular snowballs, took aim, and, when the Buick drew nigh, fired.

8 A soft snowball hit the driver's windshield right before the driver's face. It made a smashed star with a hump in the middle.

9 Often, of course, we hit our target, but this time, the only time in all of life, the car pulled over and stopped. Its wide black door

seeking to grasp the significance of the event for Dillard—what it meant to her both at the time she experienced it and years later when she wrote about it—as well as the meaning it holds for you. Then, you will reread the essay like a writer, analyzing the parts to see how Dillard crafts her essay and to learn the strategies she uses to make her autobiographical writing effective. These two activities—reading for meaning and reading like a writer—follow every reading in this chapter.

ANNIE DILLARD

An American Childhood

Annie Dillard (b. 1945) is a prolific writer whose first book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek *(1974), won the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction writing. Since then, she has written meditations on nature and religion, including* For the Time Being *(1999); several collections of poetry, most recently* Mornings like This *(1996); a novel,* The Living *(1992); an account of her work as a writer,* The Writing Life *(1989); and an autobiography,* An American Childhood *(1987), from which the following reading is excerpted. Dillard also coedited* Modern American Memoirs *(1995), a collection of autobiographical works originally published between 1917 and 1992.*

"An American Childhood" relates an event that occurred one winter morning when the seven-year-old Dillard and a friend were chased relentlessly by an adult stranger at whom they had been throwing snowballs. Dillard admits that she was terrified at the time, and yet she asserts that she has "seldom been happier since."

As you read, think about how this paradox helps you grasp the autobiographical significance of this experience for Dillard. Annotate anything that helps you appreciate the drama and significance of the event. Annotating involves writing on the text as you read—noting parts you think are important, identifying words or references you do not know, and writing comments and questions in the margin. (To learn more about annotating, see Appendix 1, pp. 648–54.)

Some boys taught me to play football. This was fine sport. You thought up a new strategy for every play and whispered it to the others. You went out for a pass, fooling everyone. Best, you got to throw yourself mightily at someone's running legs. Either you brought him down or you hit the ground flat out on your chin, with your arms empty before you. It was all or nothing. If you hesitated in fear, you would miss and get hurt: you would take a hard fall while the kid got away, or you would get kicked in the face while the kid got away. But if you flung yourself wholeheartedly at the back of his knees—if you gathered and joined body and soul and pointed them diving fearlessly—then you likely wouldn't get hurt, and you'd stop the ball. Your fate, and your team's score, depended on your concentration and courage. Nothing girls did could compare with it. 1

Boys welcomed me at baseball, too, for I had, through enthusiastic practice, what was weirdly known as a boy's arm. In winter, in the snow, there was neither baseball nor football, so the boys and I threw snowballs at passing cars. I got in trouble throwing snowballs, and have seldom been happier since. 2

On one weekday morning after Christmas, six inches of new snow had just fallen. We were standing up to our boot tops in snow on a front yard on trafficked Reynolds Street, waiting for cars. The cars traveled Reynolds Street slowly and evenly; they were targets all but wrapped in red ribbons, cream puffs. We couldn't miss. 3

I was seven; the boys were eight, nine, and ten. The oldest two Fahey boys were there—Mikey and Peter—polite blond boys who lived near me on Lloyd Street, and who already had four brothers and sisters. My parents approved Mikey and Peter Fahey. Chickie McBride was there, a tough kid, and Billy Paul and Mackie Kean too, from across Reynolds, where the boys grew up dark and furious, grew up skinny, knowing, and skilled. We had all drifted from our houses that morning looking for action, and had found it here on Reynolds Street. 4

It was cloudy but cold. The cars' tires laid behind them on the snowy street a complex trail of beige chunks like crenellated castle walls. I had stepped on some earlier; they squeaked. We could not have wished for more traffic. When a car came, we all popped it one. In the intervals between cars we reverted to the natural solitude of children. 5

I started making an iceball—a perfect iceball, from perfectly white snow, perfectly spherical, and squeezed perfectly translucent so no snow remained all the way through. (The Fahey boys and I considered it unfair actually to throw an iceball at somebody, but it had been known to happen.) 6

I had just embarked on the iceball project when we heard tire chains come clanking from afar. A black Buick was moving toward us down the street. We all spread out, banged together some regular snowballs, took aim, and, when the Buick drew nigh, fired. 7

A soft snowball hit the driver's windshield right before the driver's face. It made a smashed star with a hump in the middle. 8

Often, of course, we hit our target, but this time, the only time in all of life, the car pulled over and stopped. Its wide black door 9 opened; a man got out of it, running. He didn't even close the car door.

10 He ran after us, and we ran away from him, up the snowy Reynolds sidewalk. At the corner, I looked back; incredibly, he was still after us. He was in city clothes: a suit and tie, street shoes. Any normal adult would have quit, having sprung us into flight and made his point. This man was gaining on us. He was a thin man, all action. All of a sudden, we were running for our lives.

11 Wordless, we split up. We were on our turf; we could lose ourselves in the neighborhood backyards, everyone for himself. I paused and considered. Everyone had vanished except Mikey Fahey, who was just rounding the corner of a yellow brick house. Poor Mikey, I trailed him. The driver of the Buick sensibly picked the two of us to follow. The man apparently had all day.

12 He chased Mikey and me around the yellow house and up a backyard path we knew by heart: under a low tree, up a bank, through a hedge, down some snowy steps, and across the grocery store's delivery driveway. We smashed through a gap in another hedge, entered a scruffy backyard and ran around its back porch and tight between houses to Edgerton Avenue; we ran across Edgerton to an alley and up our own sliding woodpile to the Halls' front yard; he kept coming. We ran up Lloyd Street and wound through mazy backyards toward the steep hilltop at Willard and Lang.

13 He chased us silently, block after block. He chased us silently over picket fences, through thorny hedges, between houses, around garbage cans, and across streets. Every time I glanced back, choking for breath, I expected he would have quit. He must have been as breathless as we were. His jacket strained over his body. It was an immense discovery, pounding into my hot head with every sliding, joyous step, that this ordinary adult evidently knew what I thought only children who trained at football knew: that you have to fling yourself at what you're doing, you have to point yourself, forget yourself, aim, dive.

14 Mikey and I had nowhere to go, in our own neighborhood or out of it, but away from this man who was chasing us. He impelled us forward; we compelled him to follow our route. The air was cold; every breath tore my throat. We kept running, block after block; we kept improvising, backyard after backyard, running a frantic course and choosing it simultaneously, failing always to find small places or hard places to slow him down, and discovering always, exhilarated, dismayed, that only bare speed could save us—for he would never give up, this man—and we were losing speed.

15 He chased us through the backyard labyrinths of ten blocks before he caught us by our jackets. He caught us and we all stopped.

16 We three stood staggering, half blinded, coughing, in an obscure hilltop backyard: a man in his twenties, a boy, a girl. He had released our jackets, our pursuer, our captor, our hero: he knew we weren't going anywhere. We all played by the rules. Mikey and I unzipped our jackets. I pulled off my sopping mittens. Our tracks multiplied in the backyard's new snow. We had been breaking new snow all morning. We didn't look at each other. I was cherishing my excitement. The man's lower pants legs were wet; his cuffs were full of snow, and there was a prow of snow beneath them on his shoes and socks. Some trees bordered the little flat backyard, some messy winter trees. There was no one around: a clearing in a grove, and we the only players.

17 It was a long time before he could speak. I had some difficulty at first recalling why we were there. My lips felt swollen; I couldn't see out of the sides of my eyes; I kept coughing.

18 "You stupid kids," he began perfunctorily.

19 We listened perfunctorily indeed, if we listened at all, for the chewing out was redundant, a mere formality, and beside the point. The point was that he had chased us passionately without giving up, and so he had caught us. Now he came down to earth. I wanted the glory to last forever.

20 But how could the glory have lasted forever? We could have run through every backyard in North America until we got to Panama. But when he trapped us at the lip of the Panama Canal, what precisely could he have done to prolong the drama of the chase and cap its glory? I brooded about this for the next few years. He could only have fried Mikey Fahey and me in boiling oil, say, or dismembered us piecemeal, or staked us to anthills. None of which I really wanted, and none of which any adult was likely to do, even in the spirit of fun. He could only chew us out there in the Panamanian jungle, after months or years of exalting pursuit. He could only begin, "You stupid kids," and continue in his ordinary Pittsburgh accent with his normal righteous anger and the usual common sense.

21 If in that snowy backyard the driver of the black Buick had cut off our heads, Mikey's and mine, I would have died happy, for nothing has required so much of me since as being chased all over Pittsburgh in the middle of winter—running terrified, exhausted—by this sainted, skinny, furious redheaded man who wished to have a word with us. I don't know how he found his way back to his car.

READING FOR MEANING

This section presents three activities that will help you reread Dillard's autobiographical essay with a critical eye. Done in sequence, these activities lead you from a basic understanding of the selection to a more personal response to it and finally to an analysis that deepens your understanding and critical thinking about what you are reading.

Read to Comprehend

Reread the selection, and write a few sentences briefly explaining what happened that winter morning when Dillard was seven years old. Also make a list of any words you do not understand—for example, *crenellated* (paragraph 5), *translucent* (6), *perfunctorily* (18), *righteous* (20). Look up their meanings in a dictionary to see which definition best fits the context.

To expand your understanding of this reading, you might use one or more of the following critical reading strategies that are explained and illustrated in Appendix 1: *outlining, summarizing, paraphrasing,* and *questioning to understand and remember.*

Read to Respond

Write several paragraphs exploring your initial thoughts and feelings about Dillard's autobiographical narrative. Focus on anything that stands out for you, perhaps because it resonates with your own experience or because you find a statement puzzling.

You might consider writing about

- how a particular scene—such as the iceballing (paragraphs 5–8) or confrontation (15–21) scene—contributes to your understanding of the event's significance for Dillard.
- why you think Dillard uses such words as "hero" (16) and "sainted" (21) to describe the man who chased her, even though she dismisses what he said when he finally caught her as "redundant, a mere formality, and beside the point" (19).
- how Dillard's experience reminds you of something you experienced.

To develop your response to Dillard's essay, you might use one or more of the following critical reading strategies that are explained and illustrated in Appendix 1: *contextualizing, recognizing emotional manipulation,* and *judging the writer's credibility.*

Read to Analyze Underlying Assumptions

Write several paragraphs exploring one or more of the assumptions, values, and beliefs underlying Dillard's autobiographical story. As you write, explain how the assumptions are reflected in the text, as well as what you now think of them (and perhaps of your own assumptions) after rereading the selection with a critical eye.

Notice that even when Dillard states her feelings and thoughts directly (such as in the opening paragraph, where she explains why football is a "fine sport"), readers have to analyze her word choices and examples to understand her values and beliefs—that is, her underlying assumptions. For example, what about the way she learned to play football makes it courageous? Why is "diving fearlessly" to tackle an opponent a good thing? Is it good in every situation or only in a sport? The Duke of Wellington famously said that the Battle of Waterloo, marking the final defeat of Napoleon, was won on the playing fields of Eton (a school in England). What he meant was that teaching children to play sports the way that Dillard learned to play football teaches them to become heroic and fearless soldiers.

Analyzing Dillard's assumptions, as we have begun to do here, would not necessarily lead you to conclude that Dillard is in favor of teaching children to become soldiers. But her use of words associated with war, courage, and heroism reveals a set of assumptions that would benefit from critical scrutiny. While most of us value courage and heroism, we seldom stop to think critically about why we hold these values or what they are based on. The purpose of analyzing underlying assumptions in a reading is to give us an opportunity to think critically about unexamined assumptions—the writer's and our own, many of which may be ingrained in our culture, our education, and even our language.

You might consider writing about

- Dillard's belief that "you have to fling yourself at what you're doing, you have to point yourself, forget yourself, aim, dive" (paragraph 13).
- the value system underlying Dillard's statement that she and the Fahey boys "considered it unfair actually to throw an iceball at somebody" (6).
- the values and beliefs underlying Dillard's proud assertion, "We all played by the rules" (16).
- the observation that "[n]othing girls did"—at least when Dillard was a child—"could compare with" the way the boys taught her to play football (1).
- why Dillard uses words like "joyous" (13) and "glory" (19) to describe the chase and words like "hero" (16) and "sainted" (21) to describe the stranger who chased her.
- what Dillard assumes when she refers to "the natural solitude of children" (5).

To probe assumptions more deeply, you might use one or more of the following critical reading strategies that are explained and illustrated in Appendix 1: *reflecting on challenges to your beliefs and values, exploring the significance of figurative language,* and *looking for patterns of opposition.*

READING LIKE A WRITER

This section leads you through an analysis of Dillard's autobiographical writing strategies: *narrating the story, presenting people, describing places,* and *conveying the autobiographical significance.* For each strategy you will be asked to reread and annotate part of Dillard's essay to see how she uses the strategy to accomplish her particular purpose.

When you study the selections later in this chapter, you will see how different autobiographers use these same strategies for different purposes. The Guide to Writing Autobiography near the end of the chapter suggests ways you can use these strategies in your own writing.

Narrating the Story

Whether focusing on a single event or a person, writers nearly always tell a story or several brief stories called *anecdotes.* Stories are so pervasive in our culture, indeed in most cultures, that we are all familiar with what makes a story effective. A well-told story draws readers in by arousing their curiosity and often keeps them reading by building suspense or drama, making them want to know what will happen next.

Storytellers use a variety of techniques to dramatize events. One way is to speed up the action and heighten the tension. This activity will help you see how Dillard uses active verbs and other verb forms to make her story dramatic.

Analyze

1. *Reread* paragraphs 12 and 13, underlining as many verbs and verbals as you can. Do not worry if you miss some. Verbals are verb forms that usually end in *ing,* as in "staggering" and "coughing" (paragraph 16), or *ed,* as in "blinded" (16) and "smashed" (8), or that begin with *to,* as in "to fling" and "to point" (13).
2. *Put a second line* under the verbs or verbals that name an action. For example, the verb "chased" in the following sentence names an action (double underline), whereas the verb "knew" does not name an action (single underline): "He chased Mikey and me around the yellow house and up a backyard path we knew by heart . . ." (12).
3. *Find* two or three sentences in which the action verbs and verbals help you imagine the drama of the chase.

Write

Write several sentences explaining what you have learned about Dillard's use of verbs and verbals to represent action and to make her narrative dramatic. *Use examples* from paragraphs 12 and 13 to support your explanation.

Presenting People

Autobiographers describe people by depicting what they look like, by letting readers hear how they speak, and by characterizing their behavior and personality. Often, one or two specific details about the way a person looks, dresses, talks, or acts will be sufficient to give readers a vivid impression of the person. As you will see when you read the essays later in this chapter by Mark Edmundson, Amy Wu, and Brad Benioff, even autobiographical essays that focus on a person rather than a single event tend to use only a few well-chosen details to present the person.

To see how Dillard presents people, let us look at the descriptions of the neighborhood boys in paragraph 4. Notice that she gives each boy a brief descriptive tag: "Mikey and Peter—polite blond boys who lived near me on Lloyd Street" and "Chickie McBride . . . a tough kid, and Billy Paul and Mackie Kean too, from across Reynolds, where the boys grew up dark and furious, grew up skinny, knowing, and skilled." The details "blond" and "skinny" create a visual image, whereas "polite," "tough," and "knowing" convey Dillard's characterizations or evaluations of the boys. These characterizations or evaluations contribute not only to the impression we get of each boy but also to our understanding of his significance in the writer's life. (As you will see later in the chapter, such characterizations are one way writers convey autobiographical significance.)

Analyze

1. In paragraphs 10, 16, and 21, *find* and *underline* words and phrases that visually describe the man. Also *put brackets around* words and phrases that characterize or evaluate the man.
2. *Look* at paragraph 18 and the last sentence of paragraph 20, where Dillard presents the man through dialogue. *Underline* the details used to describe how the man looks and sounds. Also *put brackets around* words and phrases used to characterize or evaluate what the man says and how he says it.
3. *Think about* how Dillard's presentation of the man in these five paragraphs helps you see him in your mind's eye and understand his role in the chase.

Write

Based on your analysis, *write* several sentences examining Dillard's use of descriptive details and characterizations to present the man. *Use examples* from the words and phrases you underlined and bracketed to support your ideas.

Describing Places

Whether autobiography centers on an event or a person, it nearly always includes some description of places. Writers make a remembered place vivid by naming memorable objects they want readers to see there and by detailing these objects. For examples of *naming* and *detailing,* look at paragraph 3, where Dillard describes what it looked like on that particular morning after Christmas. Notice that Dillard uses naming to point out the snow, Reynolds Street, and the cars. She also adds details that give information about these objects: "*six inches* of *new* snow," "*trafficked* Reynolds Street," "cars traveled . . . *slowly* and *evenly*."

To make her description evocative as well as vivid, Dillard adds a third describing strategy: *comparing.* In paragraph 5, for example, she describes the trail made by car tires in the snow as being "like crenellated castle walls." The word *like* makes the comparison explicit and identifies it as a simile. Dillard also uses implicit comparisons, called metaphors, such as when she calls the cars "targets all but wrapped in red ribbons, cream puffs" (paragraph 3).

Analyze

1. *Examine* how Dillard uses naming and detailing to describe the "perfect iceball" in paragraph 6. What does she name it, and what details does she add to specify the qualities that make an iceball "perfect"?

2. Then *look closely* at the two comparisons in paragraphs 3 and 5. *Notice* also the following comparisons in other paragraphs: "smashed star" (8), "sprung us into flight" (10), "mazy backyards" (12), "every breath tore my throat" (14), and "backyard labyrinths" (15). Choose any single comparison—simile or metaphor—in the reading, and *think about* how it helps you imagine what the place was like for Dillard on that day.

Write

Write a few sentences explaining how Dillard uses the describing strategies of *naming, detailing,* and *comparing* to help you imagine what the places she pre-

during the chase. *Give at least one example* from the reading of

Conveying the Autobiographical Significance

Autobiographers convey the significance of an event or a person in two ways: by *showing* and by *telling.* Through your analyses of how Dillard narrates the story, presents people, and describes places, you have looked at some of the ways she *shows* the event's significance. This activity focuses on what Dillard *tells* readers.

When Dillard writes in the opening paragraphs about boys teaching her to play football and baseball, she is telling why these experiences were memorable and important. Autobiographers usually tell both what they remember thinking and feeling *at the time* and what they think and feel now *as they write about the past.* Readers must infer from the ideas and the writer's choice of words whether a phrase or sentence conveys the writer's past or present perspective, remembered feelings and thoughts or current ones. For example, look at the following sentences from paragraph 1: "You thought up a new strategy for every play and whispered it to the others. You went out for a pass, fooling everyone." The words "whispered" and "fooling" suggest that here Dillard is trying to reconstruct a seven-year-old child's way of speaking and thinking. In contrast, when she tells us that football was a "fine sport" and what was fine about it—"Your fate, and your team's score, depended on your concentration and courage"—we can infer from words such as "fate," "concentration," and "courage" that Dillard is speaking from her present adult perspective, telling us what she may have sensed as a child but now can more fully understand and articulate.

To determine the autobiographical significance of the remembered event or person, then, readers need to pay attention to what Dillard tells about the significance—both her remembered feelings and thoughts and her present perspective.

Analyze

1. *Reread* paragraphs 19–21, where Dillard comments on the chase and the man's "chewing out." *Put brackets around* words and phrases that tell what the adult Dillard is thinking as she writes about this event from her past. For example, in the first sentence of paragraph 19, "perfunctorily," "redundant," and "a mere formality" may seem to you to be examples of adult language, rather than words a seven-year-old would use.

2. Then *underline* words and phrases in the same paragraphs that seem to convey thoughts and feelings that Dillard remembers from when she was a child.

Write

Write several sentences explaining what you have learned about the event's significance for Dillard. What does she tell readers about the thoughts and feelings she had as a child as well as the thoughts and feelings she has now as an adult looking back on the experience? *Quote* selected words and phrases from your underlining and bracketing, indicating what identifies them as either remembered or present-perspective thoughts and feelings.

A SPECIAL READING STRATEGY

Comparing and Contrasting Related Readings: Dillard's "An American Childhood" and Rodriguez's "Always Running"

Comparing and contrasting related readings is a critical reading strategy useful both in reading for meaning and in reading like a writer. This strategy is particularly applicable when writers present similar subjects, as is the case in the autobiographical narratives in this chapter by Annie Dillard (p. 16) and Luis J. Rodriguez (p. 33). Both writers tell what happened when they broke the rules and were chased by adults. In both instances, their transgressions are relatively minor; however, the chase is viewed very differently by each writer and its results also differ dramatically. To compare and contrast these two autobiographies, think about issues such as these:

- Compare these essays in terms of their cultural and historical contexts. What seems to you to be most significant about the two versions of an American childhood represented in these essays?
- Compare how the two writers make their narratives dramatic. Compare the strategies Dillard uses in presenting the chase (paragraphs 11–14) with those Rodriguez uses (27–32). In addition to looking at the kinds of verbs each writer employs, you might also analyze how they construct sentences to push the action forward or slow it down. Notice also the length of the sentences and how much information the writers pack into sentences.

See Appendix 1 for detailed guidelines on using the comparing and contrasting related readings strategy.

Readings

SAIRA SHAH

Longing to Belong

Saira Shah (b. 1964) is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. The daughter of an Afghan father and Indian mother, she was born and educated in England. After graduating from the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University, Shah began her career as a freelance journalist in the 1980s, reporting on the Afghan guerillas who were fighting the Soviet occupation; eventually she became a war correspondent for Britain's Channel 4 News. She is the recipient of the Courage under Fire and Television Journalist of the Year awards for her risky reporting on conflicts in some of the world's most troubled areas, including the Persian Gulf and Kosovo. She is best known in the United States for her undercover documentary films about the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Beneath the Veil *(2001) and* Unholy War *(2002).*

"Longing to Belong," originally published in New York Times Magazine *in 2003, is adapted from Shah's autobiography* The Storyteller's Daughter *(2003), which relates her search to understand her father's homeland of Afghanistan. In this essay, Shah tells what happened when, at the age of seventeen, she visited her father's Afghan relatives living in Pakistan. As she explained in an interview, "I wanted this kind of romantic vision. This is the exile's condition, though, isn't it? If you grow up outside the place that you think of as your home, you want it to be impossibly marvelous. There is also the question of how Afghan I am. When I was growing up, I had this secret doubt—which I couldn't even admit to myself—that I was not at all an Afghan because I was born in Britain to a mixed family."*

As you read, think about Shah's search for her ethnic identity and the sense of cultural dislocation she experiences.

The day he disclosed his matrimonial ambitions for me, my uncle sat me at his right during lunch. This was a sign of special favor, as it allowed him to feed me choice tidbits from his own plate. It was by no means an unadulterated pleasure. He would often generously withdraw a half-chewed delicacy from his mouth and lovingly cram it into mine—an Afghan habit with which I have since tried to come to terms. It was his way of telling me that I was valued, part of the family. 1

My brother and sister, Tahir and Safia, and my elderly aunt Amina and I were all attending the wedding of my uncle's son. 2