

Your assignment is to write your own essay about something that delights you. (See the guidelines for a “personal essay” on the first page of your P.E.N. weekly assignment.)

from Delight

by J. B. Priestley

Giving Advice

Giving advice, especially when I am in no position to give it and hardly know what I am talking about, I manage my own affairs with as much care and steady attention and skill as--let us say--a drunken Irish tenor. I swing violently from enthusiasm to disgust. I change policies as a woman changes hats. I am here today and gone tomorrow. When I am doing one job, I wish I were doing another. I base my judgments on anything--or nothing. I have never the least notion what I shall be doing or where I shall be in six months time. Instead of holding one thing steadily, I try to juggle with six. I cannot plan, and if I could I would never stick to the plan. I am a pessimist in the morning and an optimist at night, am defeated on Tuesday and insufferably victorious by Friday. But because I am heavy, have a deep voice and smoke a pipe, few people realize that I am a flibbertigibbet on a weathercock. So my advice is asked. and then, for ten minutes or so, I can make Polonius look a trifler. I settle deep in my chair, two hundred pounds of portentousness, and with some first-rate character touches in the voice and business with pipe, I begin: “Well, I must say that in your place---” And inside I am bubbling with delight.

This essay’s point/theme is that _____.

Waking to Smell Bacon, etc.

Waking just in time to smell coffee and bacon and eggs. And how rarely it happens! If there should be coffee and bacon and eggs (not all your eggs, of course) to smell, then it is long odds against our waking--or at least against my waking--just in time to smell them. If we should happen to waken bang on breakfast, the nit is probably fifty to one against there being bacon and eggs and coffee all hot and suitably odorous. We live in a world of fantastic events and staggering coincidences. The papers are full of them. After listening to an hour of our talk these days, Sinbad the Sailor would roll out in disgust, calling us a pack of liars. Few of us ask to be immersed day after day in all this farfetchedness. Most of us could do with a smaller, plainer but more companionable world. We plan, we toil, we suffer--in the hope of what? A camelload of idols’ eyes? The title deeds of Radio City? The Empire of Asia? A trip to the moon? No, no, no, no. Simply to wake just in time to smell coffee and bacon and eggs. And, again I cry, how rarely it happens! But when it does happen--then what a moment, what a morning, what delight!

This essay’s point/theme is that _____.

Other People’s Weaknesses

What delight we give other people by confessing to absurd weaknesses! For example, I cannot endure being tossed about in small boats, where I sweat with terror. Again, the sight and sound of a bat or a bird fluttering and banging about in a room fill me with disgust that can leap to fear and panic. When I have admitted this, I have seen people light up for the first time in their converse with me. At last I have succeeded in pleasing them. Until then, apparently, I have been insufferable. And I behave in the same fashion. I delight in J’s terror of public speaking, in M’s horror of spiders, in A’s fear of being left alone in any old house, in H’s rejection of all flying, in W’s shuddering withdrawal from any cat. We like to feel that there is an equitable rationing system for this nonsense, and that we are all at times still children huddling together in the dark. A man or woman whose personality had not a speck of such weakness would be intolerable, not one of us at all, a sneering visitor from some other planet. Now and again they turn up, and we are delighted to see them go.

This essay’s point/theme is that _____.