

Homeless

Problem-Solution Essay

What's the Connection?

In the short story you just read, a mother instructs her son not to look at a homeless man who is begging. In the problem-solution essay you are about to read, Anna Quindlen notes that this is often the way people react to “the homeless,” but she recommends a different response.

Standards Focus: Identify Author's Purpose

An **author's purpose** is his or her reason for creating a particular work. The purpose may be to entertain, to explain or inform, to express an opinion, or to persuade readers to do or believe something. An author may have more than one purpose for writing, but usually one is the most important. Sometimes the purpose is directly stated. Often, it is not stated. You may have to infer the purpose from the author's statements or from the theme of the work.

Here's how to identify Quindlen's purpose for writing:

- Notice which parts of the topic Quindlen focuses on.
- Write down direct statements about the way she thinks or feels about the topic.
- Note words and details she uses to describe the topic.
- Think about what these elements of her essay tell you about her purpose for writing.

As you read Quindlen's essay, use these tips to help you complete a chart like the one started here.

<i>Direct Statements, Descriptive Words, and Other Details</i>	<i>What These Details Tell Me About Quindlen's Purpose</i>
<i>She introduces a homeless woman by name, emphasizing that this woman has a name and is a human being like any one of us.</i>	<i>She wants people to look at homeless people as individuals.</i>
<i>"I've never been very good at looking at the big picture, taking the global view."</i>	



Use with “What Do Fish Have to Do with Anything?” on page 352.

COMMON CORE

RI 1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of inferences drawn from the text.

RI 6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text.



Homeless

by Anna Quindlen

Her name was Ann, and we met in the Port Authority Bus Terminal several Januarys ago. I was doing a story on homeless people. She said I was wasting my time talking to her; she was just passing through, although she'd been passing through for more than two weeks. To prove to me that
10 this was true, she rummaged through a tote bag and a manila envelope and finally unfolded a

sheet of typing paper and brought out her photographs.

They were not pictures of family, or friends, or even a dog or cat, its eyes brown-red in the flashbulb's light. They were pictures of a house. It was like a thousand
20 houses in a hundred towns, not suburb, not city, but somewhere in between, with aluminum siding and a chainlink fence, a narrow driveway running up to a one-car

FOCUS ON FORM
"Homeless" is a **problem-solution essay**, a short work of nonfiction in which a writer presents a problem and offers a reasonable solution.



garage and a patch of backyard. The house was yellow. I looked on the back for a date or a name, but neither was there. There was no need for discussion. I knew what she was trying to tell me, for it was something I had often felt. She was not adrift, alone, anonymous, although her bags and her raincoat with the grime shadowing its creases had made me believe she was. She had a house, or at least once upon a time had had one. Inside were curtains, a couch, a stove, potholders. You are where you live. She was somebody.

I've never been very good at looking at the big picture, taking the global view, and I've always been a person with an overactive sense of place, the legacy¹ of an Irish grandfather. So it is natural that the thing that seems most wrong with the world to me right now is that there are so many people with no homes. I'm not simply talking about shelter from the elements, or three square meals a day or a mailing address to which the welfare² people can send the check—although I know that all these are important for survival. I'm talking about a

1. **legacy** (lĕg'ə-sē): something handed down from an ancestor or from the past.

2. **welfare**: a program of financial aid provided by the government to people in need.

home, about precisely those kinds of feelings that have wound up in cross-stitch and French knots on samplers³ over the years. **A**

Home is where the heart is. There's no place like it. I love my home with a ferocity totally out of proportion to its appearance or location. I love dumb things about it: the hot-water heater, the plastic rack you drain dishes in, the roof over my head, which occasionally leaks. And yet it is precisely those dumb things that make it what it is—a place of certainty, stability,⁴ predictability, privacy, for me and for my family. It is where I live. What more can you say about a place than that? That is everything. **B**

Yet it is something that we have been edging away from gradually during my lifetime and the lifetimes of my parents and grandparents. There was a time when where you lived often was where you worked and where you grew the food you ate and even where you were buried. When that era passed, where you lived at least was where your parents had lived and where you would live with your children when you became enfeebled.⁵ Then, suddenly, where you lived was where you lived for

three years, until you could move on to something else and something else again.

And so we have come to something else again, to children who do not understand what it means to go to their rooms because they have never had a room, to men and women whose fantasy is a wall they can paint a color of their own choosing, to old people reduced to sitting on molded plastic chairs, their skin blue-white in the lights of a bus station, who pull pictures of houses out of their bags. Homes have stopped being homes. Now they are real estate. **C**

People find it curious that those without homes would rather sleep sitting up on benches or huddled in doorways than go to shelters. Certainly some prefer to do so because they are emotionally ill, because they have been locked in before and they are damned if they will be locked in again. Others are afraid of the violence and trouble they may find there. But some seem to want something that is not available in shelters, and they will not compromise, not for a cot, or oatmeal, or a shower with special soap that kills the bugs. "One room," a woman with a baby who

A AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

What does Quindlen think is most wrong in the world right now? Name two facts she shares about herself to help readers understand her purpose in writing this essay.

B PROBLEM-SOLUTION ESSAY

Restate the point that Quindlen makes in this paragraph.

C AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Reread lines 95–109. What does Quindlen say homes have become? What does she mean by this?

3. **in cross-stitch and French knots on samplers:** spelled out in fancy stitching and embroidered decorations.

4. **stability:** a condition of being reliable or permanent.

5. **enfeebled:** deprived of strength; made weak.

D PROBLEM-SOLUTION ESSAY

Reread lines 132–148.

How does Quindlen think most people “work around” the problem of homelessness?

E PROBLEM-SOLUTION ESSAY

What does Quindlen recommend that readers do to start addressing the problem she has introduced?

was sleeping on her sister’s floor, once told me, “painted blue.” That was the crux⁶ of it; not size or
130 location, but pride of ownership. Painted blue.

This is a difficult problem, and some wise and compassionate
150 people are working hard at it. But in the main I think we work around it, just as we walk around it when it is lying on the sidewalk or sitting in the bus terminal—the problem, that is. It has been customary to
140 take people’s pain and lessen our own participation in it by turning it into an issue, not a collection of human beings. We turn an adjective

into a noun: the poor, not poor people; the homeless, not Ann or the man who lives in the box or the woman who sleeps on the subway grate. **D**

Sometimes I think we would be
150 better off if we forgot about the broad strokes and concentrated on the details. Here is a woman without a bureau. There is a man with no mirror, no wall to hang it on. They are not the homeless. They are people who have no homes. No drawer that holds the spoons. No window to look out upon the world. My God. That
160 is everything. **E**

6. **crux**: the most important point or element.



Comprehension

1. **Recall** In Quindlen’s opinion, what was Ann trying to tell her by sharing her carefully protected pictures of a house? Explain.
2. **Recall** What do some homeless people want that they cannot get at a shelter? Explain.

Text Analysis

3. **Analyze Author’s Purpose** Review the direct statements and details you noted in your chart. Then write a statement that describes Quindlen’s main purpose in writing the essay.
4. **Evaluate a Problem-Solution Essay** A strong problem-solution essay does all of the following: gives a clear picture of the problem, explores its causes and effects, recommends a solution, and explains how to put the solution into effect. Would you say that this essay is a strong problem-solution essay? Why or why not?

COMMON CORE

RI 1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of inferences drawn from the text.
RI 6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text.
RI 9 Analyze how two authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations.

Read for Information: Compare Ideas

WRITING PROMPT

Determine the theme of “What Do Fish Have to Do with Anything?” and the main purpose of “Homeless” and explain the differences in the ideas presented in these two selections.

To answer this prompt, first clarify the ideas presented in each selection. You might need to go back to the story to figure this out. Then follow these steps:

1. Review your chart to see what you have learned about Quindlen’s purpose.
2. Then, keeping her purpose in mind, decide how it is different from the theme of the short story.
3. Look for evidence in “Homeless” and “What Do Fish Have to Do with Anything?” to support your conclusion.

Conclusion: _____



Use evidence from both selections to support your conclusion.