



This guide was prepared using the Persea Books edition, ©2003. Other editions may differ.

## Synopsis

### Book I: Hester Street

#### I. Hester Street

Ten-year-old Sara regrets that her sister Bessie cannot find work. Without Bessie's wages, the Smolinsky family will be homeless. Fania also struggles to find a job. Mashah is more interested in being pretty and living like the wealthy. Sara hates searching for scraps of coal and wood to burn. Reb Moisheh Smolinsky exalts himself as the only male in the household and belittles his wife Shenah, who scrimps and begs for food. He allows her to move his books to the bedroom and to prepare for receiving a boarder in the front room. Muhmenkeh lends Shenah a feather tick. The landlady exhorts Father to work instead of relying on his girls' wages. Father is arrested for slapping her. Sara buys 25 herring for a penny each to peddle on the street for two cents each. She is thrilled to contribute something to the starving family.

#### II. The Speaking Mouth of the Block

Neighbors attend Father's trial and witness his exoneration. Family finances improve after a boarder moves in. Sara feels independent because of her earnings. Mother enjoys memories of peasant life in Russia, where her father bargained for a learned son-in-law. The family lost their wealth trying to bribe Father's way out of the tsar's army. Father lost the family's business and had to emigrate.

#### III. The Burden Bearer

Mother worries that Bessie is unwed. Boarders admire Mashah, the self-centered sister who spends her wages on beautification. Fania goes to night school with the boarder living with Zalmon the fish-peddler. Bessie beautifies the kitchen with oilcloth, gold paper, and a lace curtain. Father names her the burden bearer. Bessie gives Mashah a quarter for the vaudeville. In Mashah's absence, Bessie puts on her sister's pink dress and welcomes Berel Bernstein, the head cutter at the shop where Bessie works. While Father bargains with the suitor, Bessie rushes to the next room. Father demands that Berel pay for a wedding and for the family's clothes. Bessie refuses to marry Berel. Six weeks later, he marries a forelady. Sara rushes to the engagement party and curses Berel to a life of eating dirt.

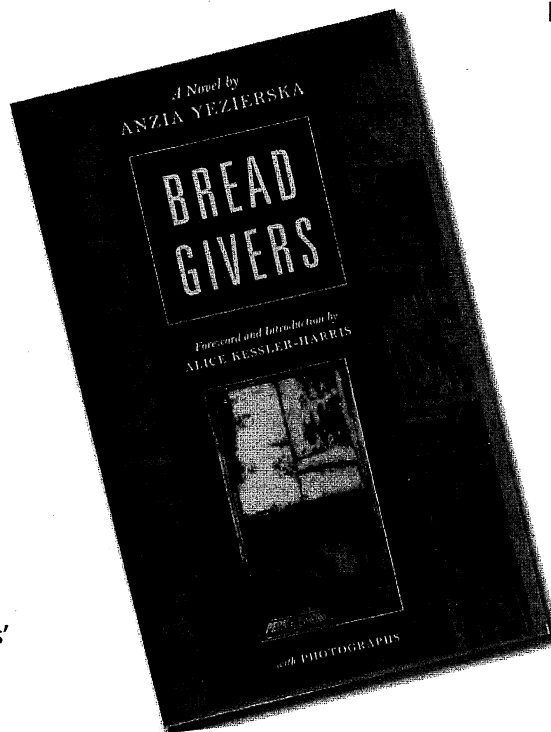
#### IV. The "Empty-head"

Mashah falls in love with Jacob Novak, a pianist. She cleans house and learns to cook American style. Jacob's father, the owner of a department store, sneers at the Smolinsky's poor apartment. On the night of Jacob's concert,

Mashah sobs. She has Sara write a farewell letter to deliver to him. He pleads with Mashah, but Father shuts him out. Sara describes Father as a tyrant like the tsar. She begins to hate Father.

#### V. Morris Lipkin Writes Poetry

Father seizes Morris Lipkin's love letter to Fania and discredits him as a dreamer. Mother challenges Father to find a suitable beau for Fania. While Morris stands unnoticed, Father introduces Moe Mirsky, a diamond dealer. Fania accuses Father of being cruel to Morris. Mother sides with daughters who want to meet suitors before the wedding. Father sends Mashah with Moe to Coney Island.



He brings her diamonds. Bessie grows more bitter. Father brings Abe Schmukler, a clothing dealer, to meet Fania.

Mashah and Fania have a double wedding. Mashah returns to denounce Moe as a mere salesman. Six months later, Fania reports that Abe Schmukler is a gambler. Father refuses to let her come home. Sara blames Father for choosing a bad mate for Fania. Sara finds Morris's love letters under the mattress and falls in love. He calls her a silly kid.

### VI. The Burden Bearer Changes Her Burden

Sara works in a paper box factory, but Father wastes her wages on lodge dues and charities. Mother chastises him for not letting her buy a winter coat. He begins working as a matchmaker and tries to pair Zalmon with Bessie. Mother protests, but Zalmon is so handsome when he arrives that Bessie is stunned. She rejects gifts of his dead wife's fur coat and jewelry, but warms to Benny, Zalmon's motherless son.

### VII. Father Becomes a Business Man in America

Mother doubts that Father can thrive in American business. He buys a grocery store in Elizabeth, New Jersey, from a swindler. The shelves are barely stocked. Containers are filled with wood and sawdust or only air. He and Mother argue into the night.

### VIII. The Hard Heart

The parents and Sara move into the back of the store. Sara hates the lonely town and her father's dominance. He slaps her. At age 17, she leaves home and returns to New York. Father is scandalized.

### IX. Bread Givers

At Bessie and Zalmon's home, Sara explains her departure from Father. At Mashah's home, Sara witnesses a starving wife and children while Moe dresses in style. Sara blames Moe for neglecting his family.

### Book II: Between Two Worlds

#### X. I Shut the Door

Walking the streets all night, Sara determines to study and become a teacher. Because she is a single woman, she has difficulty finding a room. She gets a job in a laundry and eats at night at the

Grand Street Cafeteria, a diner for working girls. At night school, she takes arithmetic and English.

#### XI. A Piece of Meat

Sara must eat on less than 35 cents per day. She protests a server who gives larger portions to men. Mother walks all the way from Elizabeth, New Jersey, to bring a feather bed and a jar of pickled herring. Sara is too busy with work and school to visit her parents.

#### XII. My Sisters and I

Sara misses her family. Fania and Bessie arrive. Fania grieves at putting on a show of wealth and longs for Morris Lipkin, her first love. Sara prefers to stay single than to marry Abe's partner in Los Angeles.

#### XIII. Outcast

Laundresses ridicule Sara for her books and her attempt at makeup and finery. At 23, she seems like an aged pedant, but she clings to her dream of being educated.

#### XIV. A Man Wanted Me

One evening in spring, Sara gets a failing grade in geometry. Fania writes that Max Goldstein is coming to New York to meet Sara. Max arrives and admires Sara's plainness. He narrates his own story about selling used clothes, acting, and moving to California to cure consumption. He bought a store that grew into a department store. He takes her to a vaudeville show and to a jazz hall. On his return, he calls her an old maid and takes her to dinner. For a week, he pursues her. She realizes that he is only interested in making money. He has no respect for her scholasticism.

#### XV. On and On—Alone

Sara longs to discuss her life with her father. He bursts in and scolds her for refusing Max Goldstein. She demands love. He accuses her of being immoral. She accuses him of selfishness. He disowns her.

#### XVI. College

Sara takes the train to college in a quiet town and feels like an outsider among clean middle-class students. She works for George Martin's hand laundry and is excused from physical education. She flees from a school dance and works harder than ever. At the end of the term, she must repeat geometry.

From Mr. Edman's psychology class, Sara learns self-control. In summer, she works in a cannery. Out of admiration for Edman, she takes a room in the boarding house where he lives. He brusquely ends her crush on him. The dean considers her a pioneer. She wins \$1,000 for writing an essay about her college experience.

**Book III: The New World**

**XVII. My Honeymoon with Myself**

On Sara's return to New York City, she buys a suit and accessories and rents a sunny room.

**XVIII. Death in Hester Street**

After six years apart, Sara returns to her family, who live on Hester Street again. The four daughters visit Mother, who is ill from a gangrenous foot. After her death, Sara rejects the traditional rending of the clothes.

**XIX. Lodge Money**

Daily, Sara visits Father, who courts Mrs. Feinstein. Before 30 days of mourning end, he marries Mrs. Feinstein, who spends the lodge insurance money on furniture. Father demands that she support him.

**XX. Hugo Seelig**

Sara aches with emptiness. She tries to refine the slum children's English. Father writes a letter of complaint against Sara to the principal, Hugo Seelig. Seelig visits Sara's room and shares memories of Poland.

**XXI. Man Born of Woman**

Three months later, Sara rushes to join Hugo for dinner. She bumps into Father, who sells chewing gum on the street. She takes a leave of absence to tend him. Hugo asks Father to teach him Hebrew. Hugo insists that he and Sara take care of Father.

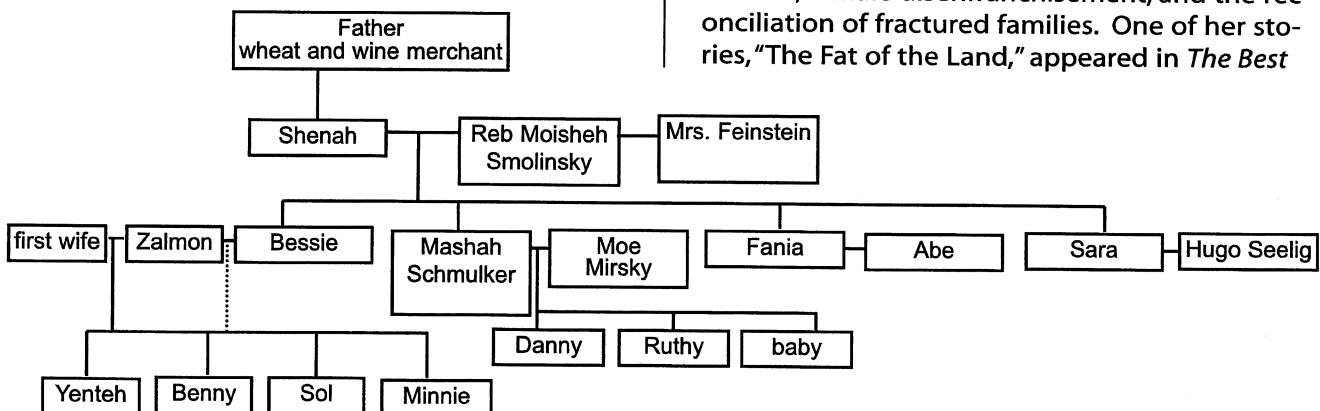
**Author Sketch**



Polish-American educator, reviewer, and vernacular novelist Anzia Yeziarska contributed to fiction her views on the immigrant American experience. Born around 1880 on the Polish-Russian border at Plinsk near Warsaw, she was the last of the nine children of Baruch and Pearl Yeziarska. Until age ten, she lived in a mud hut. When her family emigrated to New York City to join Meyer Yeziarska, the oldest son, officials at Ellis Island renamed her Harriet "Hattie" Mayer. They lived in the Lower East Side, a slum where her mother worked as a domestic while her father studied Torah and Talmud.

As was common in patriarchal households, Yeziarska stayed home while her brothers attended school. She sewed in a garment district sweatshop and, in 1901, learned English at night school. From the Clara de Hirsch settlement house for working girls, she advanced to home economics classes at Columbia University's Teacher's College and graduated in 1905. She paid tuition with a modest four-year scholarship and her wages from working in a laundry. For a decade, she taught English in an elementary school during her brief marriages to lawyer Jacob Gordon and to teacher Arnold Levitas. At the failure of the second marriage, she lost her daughter, Louise Levitas Henriksen, to the girl's father because Yeziarska could not afford the child's care.

Composing in Yiddish-English, Yeziarska began her writing career by submitting essays and short stories to *Century*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Forum*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's*. She focused on the denigration of immigrants in brutal manual labor, wretched tenements, female disenfranchisement, and the reconciliation of fractured families. One of her stories, "The Fat of the Land," appeared in *The Best*



*Short Stories of 1919*. In 1920, she anthologized her dialect fiction in *Hungry Hearts and Other Stories* (1920). When Samuel Goldwyn filmed the semi-autobiographical stories for the silent screen in 1922, the author signed a contract for \$100,000 and settled in Hollywood to consult on the production and write screen drama. She soured on movies after Goldwyn altered story endings to depict women's rescue through marriage.

Yeziarska is best known for a feminist melodrama, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), a satire on male domination and on women's fashions, and for *Bread Givers* (1925), a dialect New Woman novel that exposes Jewish sexism. After returning to New York City to write for the Works Progress Administration Writer's Project, she lived with philosopher John Dewey and characterized their platonic relationship in *All I Could Never Be* (1932) and *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950). On a Zona Gale fellowship, Yeziarska taught as writer-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin contemporaneous with her daughter's enrollment there. She lectured and reviewed for the *New York Times*. After moving to California, she continued to write after the dimming of her eyesight. She died in 1970 at age ninety.

### Critic's Corner

Like many early feminist and ethnic authors, Yeziarska faded from reading lists and library shelves until her rediscovery by second-wave feminists of the 1970s. The recovery of her realistic fiction introduced readers to the Old World androcentrism imported by Eastern European immigrants to the Atlantic Coast ghetto. She reminded Americans that laboring-class immigrant women gave up family, religion, and culture to liberate themselves from tyrannical fathers, overbearing husbands, unstinting child-bearing and child rearing, and brutal male employers. Critics value her intense scenarios for their documentation of social history, class stratification, and commentary on gender relationships.

### Other Works by the Author

"The Free Vacation House," 1915

"The Fat of the Land," 1919

*Hungry Hearts and Other Stories*, 1920

*America and I*, 1923

*Children of Loneliness*, 1923

*Salome of the Tenements*, 1923

*Bread Givers*, 1925

*Arrogant Beggar*, 1927

*All I Could Never Be*, 1932

*Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, 1950

*The Open Cage: An Anzia Yeziarska Collection*, 1979

### Bibliography

- Bassman, Michael F. "Mary Antin and Anzia Yeziarska: A Study of Two Early Twentieth Century Jewish Women Immigrant Writers" in *The Image of Class in Literature, Media, and Society*. Pueblo: University of Southern Colorado, 1998.
- Bingham, Charles, and John Gabriel. "Economies of Teaching: Class, Money, and Identity in Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*," *Journal of Thought* 36, no. 4 (2001): 33-44.
- Botshon, Lisa, and Meredith Goldsmith. *Middlebrow Moderns: Popular American Women Writers of the 1920s*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003.
- Dearborn, Mary V. *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yeziarska and John Dewey*. New York: Free Press, 1988.
- Drucker, Sally Ann. "Yiddish, Yidgin & Yeziarska," *Modern Jewish Studies Annual* 6 (1987): 99-113.
- Ebest, Ron. "Anzia Yeziarska and the Popular Debate over the Jews," *MELUS* 25, no. 1 (spring 2000): 105-127.
- Ferraro, Thomas J. "Working Ourselves Up in America: Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (1990): 547-581.
- Henriksen, Louise Levitas. *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer's Life*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Open Cage: An Anzia Yeziarska Collection*. New York: Persea Books, 1979.
- Okonkwo, Christopher N. "Of Repression, Assertion, and the Speakerly Dress: Anzia Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*," *MELUS* 25, no. 1 (spring 2000): 129-145.
- Schoen, Carol B. *Anzia Yeziarska*. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- Sol, Adam. "Longings and Renunciations: Attitudes Towards Intermarriage in Early Twentieth Century Jewish American Novels," *American Jewish History* 89, no. 2 (2001): 215-230.
- Yeziarska, Anzia. "Mostly about Myself" in *Children of Loneliness*. New York: Funk & Wagnall's, 1923.

## General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of parental rejection
2. To account for conflict in a multi-ethnic community
3. To interpret shifts in social and religious customs
4. To contrast sources of bias and idealism
5. To discuss the contrasting themes of ambition and obedience
6. To explain a hunger for learning
7. To analyze father-daughter relationships
8. To describe attitudes toward marriage
9. To describe the atmosphere of Jewish tenements
10. To analyze the roles of doctor, teacher, and employer

## Specific Objectives

1. To explain the positions of Bessie, Mashah, Fania, and Sara in the Smolinsky family
2. To analyze the implications of Reb Smolinsky's gender superiority
3. To summarize a series of wrong choices in wives and investments
4. To account for opposing attitudes toward Sara's ambition
5. To justify Hugo Seelig's pity for Reb Smolinsky
6. To predict how Sara and Hugo will attend to Reb Smolinsky's needs
7. To contrast the life choices of the Smolinsky daughters
8. To discuss long-term implications of Sara's college degree
9. To describe the career Sara anticipates as a teacher
10. To list events caused by hatred, suspicion, and religious fanaticism

## Related Reading

Isabel Allende, *Daughter of Fortune*  
 Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*  
 Harriette Arnow, *The Dollmaker*  
 John Galsworthy, "Quality"  
 David Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*  
 James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston,  
*Farewell to Manzanar*

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*  
 Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant*  
 Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*  
 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*  
 Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing"  
 Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*  
 Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Yentl, the Yeshiva Boy*  
 Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*  
 Suzanne Fisher Staples, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*  
 Amy Tan, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*  
 Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

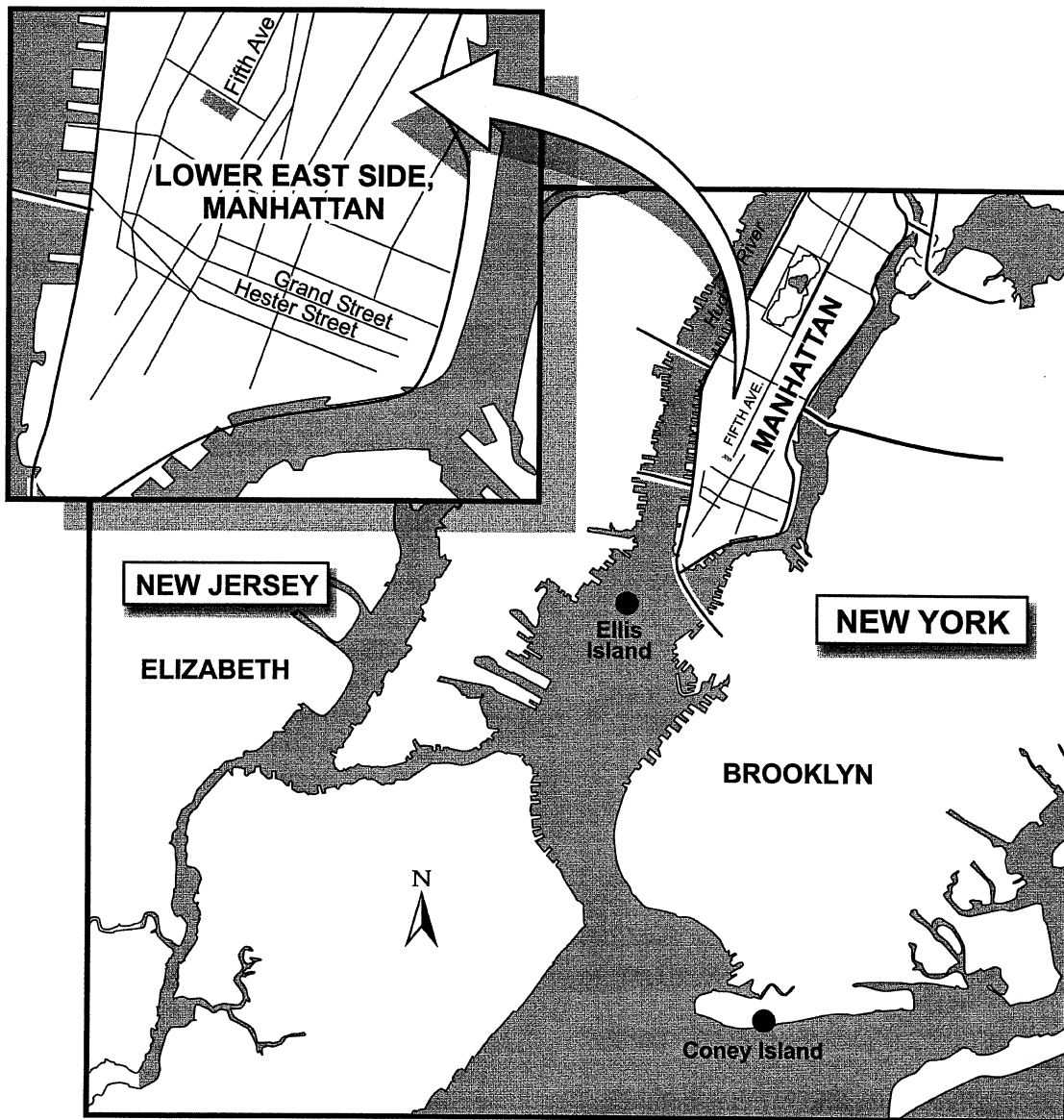
## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Anzia Yeziarska's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

**First-Person Narrative** a story or series of actions told from the vantage point of a single observer. Anzia Yeziarska examines the childhood-to-young womanhood years of a Jewish immigrant through the perspective of one character, the semi-autobiographical Sara Smolinsky. Because she is tyrannized by a misogynistic Jewish father, she is frustrated and angry at her father's self-absorption and his denigration of women as servants to the needs and whims of men.

**Historic Milieu** the setting of fictional events in a real period of history. The hardships of Polish immigrants to New York City in the late 19th century derive from rapid growth of tenements and competition for low-paying jobs. Contributing to social disorder and unease are hunger and inadequate housing and education, which compound the loss of familiar ethnic customs and surroundings.

**Symbol** a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship. In *Bread Givers*, references to food acknowledge the centrality of women to the sustenance of a male cleric. The irony of honor to a lazy, self-important father enhances the value of Yeziarska's work to feminist literature. Ironically, his only job is selling chewing gum, a non-nutritional, throwaway commodity indigenous to the United States.



## The Importance of Setting

The opening milieu of Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* is Hester Street in a Jewish ghetto in the late 1890s in New York City's Lower East Side. The strivings of immigrants at feeding their families, treating illness, and cleaning and heating their apartments illustrate the determination of newcomers to succeed. Sara, the youngest member of the Smolinsky family, is far enough removed from their mud hut in Poland to absorb the newness of America and the possibilities for advancement and self-fulfillment, especially for females. She witnesses the fate of the weak in tenements where life is unforgiving, often brutal.

Sara's removal to a failing grocery store in Elizabeth, New Jersey, does nothing to improve her outlook on family life. Although she attempts to make life less onerous for Shenah, Sara has no pity for Reb Smolinsky, who is too foolish and ill-prepared for domestic economics to interact with customers or to support his wife and four daughters. As quickly as possible, Sara flees the wretched environment to live on her own. Her willingness to board in a dingy room and to work as an ironer in a laundry attests to her spunk. Through night school classes, she gradually rises above slum squalor to visions of education and a professional career.

After Sara travels out of New York City to college, she still feels like an outsider. Campus life broadens her experiences with middle-class people, who seem cleaner than the people on Hester Street. By graduation, she earns the respect of faculty and students, who cheer her winning essay. With \$1,000 in her checking account, she can ride the Pullman car back to New York City, dine with other passengers, and look out on familiar territory from the perspective of a survivor. Living in a sunny rented room, walking Fifth Avenue, window-shopping for a suit, and dressing in the best are unforeseen rewards. In the classroom, she lives her reward daily in giving back to tenement children the tools to elevate them from poverty and ignorance.

### Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Judaism, Polish immigrants, psychology, the Holocaust, family strife, Yiddish dialect, the New Woman, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

#### Articles

Pratt, Norma Fain. "Culture and Radical Politics: Yiddish Women Writers, 1890-1940," *American Jewish History* 70, no. 1 (September 1980): 68-90.

#### Audiocassette

*Elie Wiesel: On Remembering*, National Public Radio  
*Elie Wiesel Reads Night*, Caedmon  
*Jewish Life*, Folkways  
*Ordinary People*, Recorded Books

#### Books

*An American Tragedy*, Theodore Dreiser  
*Call It Sleep*, Henry Roth  
*The Dollmaker*, Harriette Arnow  
*The Endless Steppe*, Esther Hautzig  
*Giants in the Earth*, O. E. Rolvaag  
*Jews Without Money*, Michael Gold  
*The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair  
*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Stephen Crane

#### Filmstrip

*Dealing with Anger*, Guidance Associates  
*Judaism*, SVE  
*Self-Fulfillment*, Guidance Associates

#### Internet

The Lower East Side,  
<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/alt/polish6.html>  
 Tradition and the Polish Immigrant,  
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/polish.htm>  
 The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire,  
<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>.

#### Memoir

*The Promised Land*, Mary Antin  
*Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Jane Addams

#### Multimedia Kit

*Thinking Things Through: Solving Problems/Making Decisions*, A. W. Peller

#### Plays

*I Remember Mama*, John Van Druten  
*The King and I*, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein

#### Poems

"The New Colossus," Emma Lazarus  
 "When in Rome," Mari Evans

#### Poster

*World Religions*, Knowledge Unlimited

#### Reference Books

*Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*  
*Jewish Liturgy and Its Development*  
*The Jewish Woman in America*  
*The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*

#### Short Stories

"How the Other Half Lives," Jacob Riis  
 "I Stand Here Ironing," Tillie Olsen  
 "The Lie," Mary Antin  
 "A Pair of Silk Stockings," Kate Chopin  
 "Quality," John Galsworthy  
 "The Revolt of 'Mother,'" Mary Wilkins Freeman

#### Speeches

"Sex Slavery," Voltairine de Cleyre  
 "Those Who Marry Do Ill," Voltairine de Cleyre

#### Video

*Fiddler on the Roof*  
*Funny Girl*  
*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*  
*Yentl*

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *Bread Givers* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- patriarchy
- piety
- arranged marriage
- parenting
- cultural bias
- immigration
- unemployment
- ambition
- scholarship
- rebellion
- independence
- reconciliation

### Motifs

- establishing autonomy
- understanding the patriarchal mentality
- assuming the role of rescuer
- comprehending psychological coercion
- coping with ambivalence

## Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from chapter headings. Explain each in context. Book, chapter, and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. III. The Burden Bearer (I, 3, p. 35)  
*(Yeziarska stresses the lives of wives and daughters as laden family members who shoulder a disproportionate amount of responsibility and labor to support the household. In the final chapter, Sara feels the tug of a burden she thought she had dropped.)*
2. IX. Bread Givers (I, 9, p. 139)  
*(When Sara leaves home to support herself, she bestows on herself the title image of bread giver, the earner of wages who must be dependable and hard-working for the sake of self-sustenance.)*
3. XI. A Piece of Meat (II, 11, p. 165)  
*(Yeziarska turns meat into a gendered image of disproportionate rewards for males. Because a serving girl favors male patrons over females,*

*Sara demands her fair share of meat in her stew, a gesture of feminist rebellion against the double standard.)*

4. XIII. Outcast (II, 13, p. 179)  
*(Sara's departure from family turns her toward peers as a source of inclusion. Because the laundresses reject her, Sara experiences a new version of the exclusion she has endured from childhood.)*
5. XIV. A Man Wanted Me (II, 14, p. 185)  
*(Sara enjoys a boost of self-image from meeting Max Goldstein, a suitor who petitions for her hand. The compliment becomes a paradox—a reason for Sara to congratulate herself and another opportunity for Reb Smolinsky to bully and batter her for rebelling against Old Woman womanhood.)*
6. XVII. My Honeymoon with Myself (III, 17, p. 237)  
*(Yeziarska contrasts the rewards of coming-of-age that the Smolinsky sisters enjoy. Unlike Bessie, Mashah, and Finia, Sara credits herself with success and enjoys a honeymoon period of satisfaction, even though she still lives alone.)*
7. XVIII. Death in Hester Street (III, 18, p. 242)  
*(The loss of Shenah troubles Sara, who had to abandon her mother in order to escape a bullying, belittling father. The family's return to Hester Street in Shenah's last days indicates Reb Smolinsky's lack of progress and the defeat that awaits Shenah from a gruesome decline and death.)*
8. XIX. Lodge Money (III, 19, p. 257)  
*(Reb Smolinsky's years of squandering the family income on charities and on lodge dues end in disaster. Just as he bargains poorly for sons-in-law and for a grocery store, he wastes the lodge insurance fund on Mrs. Feinstein, a scheming widow.)*
9. XX. Hugo Seelig (III, 20, p. 269)  
*(Sara dedicates a chapter to Hugo Seelig, a male version of the Jewish Polish immigrant. Because Hugo perceives the worth of Sara's learning and her good heart, he represents the eventual reward for Sara's years of labor, study, and self-denial.)*



10. XXI. Man Born of Woman (III, 21, p. 281)  
*(Reb Smolinsky's recitation of Job 14:1 enhances the theme of Old Testament gloom and misogyny. Rather than refer to man as human, the verse implies that the act of giving birth is the start of all male woes. The immersion in self-pity summarizes Father's hypocrisy. Simultaneously, the chapter heading provides a wry gesture toward Sara's life of denigration and devaluation and her triumph through self-rescue.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important; you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

### Motivation

1. How do Sara Smolinsky and Hugo Seelig become friends?  
*(Sara fears that Reb Smolinsky's letter of complaint to the principal will compromise her employment as a first-year elementary school teacher. Actually, her lengthy account of her father's hypocrisy and pomposity endears her to Hugh Seelig, who comes from the same Polish-Russian-Jewish background. He helps her overcome her ghetto speech. Their conversation and shared tea in Sara's room precede a growing friendship based on mutual admiration and a love of learning. After Hugo observes Reb Smolinsky's diminished circumstances, Hugo wins Sara's heart by asking Reb Smolinsky for lessons in Hebrew.)*

### Characterization

2. Describe important minor characters.  
*(Anzia Yezierska makes use of numerous secondary characters.*
  - *Benny, the pathetic ailing child of Zalmon the fish-peddler wins Bessie's heart. As she teeters toward refusing Zalmon's marriage proposal, her concern for Benny's survival convinces her that Zalmon needs a second wife to mother his needy children.*
  - *Muhmenkeh, a generous neighborhood woman on Hester Street, pities ten-year-old Sara and her family's need for a way to earn money. By sharing squashed herring, Muhmenkeh allows*

*Sara to determine her own fortune by doubling her investment from a penny each to two cents each.*

- *George Martin, the laundry owner at the college, recognizes thrift and determination in Sara, who remains at the ironing board until he must close the shop for the night.*
- *the doctor, who treats Shenah and her husband, identifies the family's quandary over a dying mother and the declining health of the recently married widower.)*

### Character Development

3. Why does Reb Smolinsky part grudgingly with his oldest daughter?  
*(Upon opening a matchmaking service, Reb Smolinsky congratulates himself on wisely choosing husbands for Fania and Mashah, even though both marriages are failures. When Zalmon the widowed fish-peddler seeks a second wife, Reb realizes that Zalmon will pay \$500 cash for Bessie, his oldest and least marriageable daughter. The betrothal is a mixed blessing. Although Reb receives instant wealth from the deal, he loses the daughter who works unstintingly for his upkeep.)*

### Cause and Effect

4. How does the Smolinsky family react to living in back of the grocery store?  
*(Sara is bored by the grocery store in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Because it is sparsely stocked and appeals to few customers, her days with Shenah are tedious and their labors fruitless. Sara realizes that the bustle of Hester Street was at least entertaining, even if ghetto dwellers were poor and noisy with their constant bargaining. Immurement at the grocery store also reminds Sara that Reb Smolinsky is a fool when it comes to making wise investments. His squandering of the matchmaking money from Bessie's marriage to Zalmon the fish-peddler further depresses Sara and her mother.)*

### Theme

5. Why is patriarchy destructive?  
*(The heavy irony of dependence and denigration enhances the theme of Jewish patriarchy. Reb Smolinsky has no respect for his wife or his four daughters. He constantly reminds them that they can't enter heaven without husbands and that women's worth to men is limited.*

*Meanwhile, the daughters keep the family in rent and food money and endure their father's perpetual carping about how to find good husbands and how to be obedient wives to dominant males. To Sara, the emotional battery hardens her heart toward her father and convinces her to reject marriage to live on her own and get an education.)*

**Interpretation**

6. Why is education important to immigrants? *(As women like Sara Smolinsky contrast Old World mores with New World opportunities, they recognize the importance of autonomy and self-fulfillment. The only way for Sara to escape the gendered world of Poland is to educate herself for a good-paying profession that provides her dignity and contentment. As Sara begins to enjoy psychology, she reaps a peripheral benefit of self-knowledge and an appreciation for objectivity and life experiences. She begins to evaluate her past troubles as examples of cause and effect. From these insights comes satisfaction with her chosen direction.)*

**Conflict**

7. How does Reb Smolinsky dismay his daughters after Shenah's death? *(The daughters are aware the Reb Smolinsky depends on Mrs. Feinstein for meals and companionship during Shenah's decline. At his wife's death from a gangrenous foot, Reb Smolinsky begins to dress neatly, trim his beard, and act youthful and appreciative of female attention. To Sara's amazement, he marries Mrs. Feinstein before the traditional 30-day mourning period ends. Sara and her sisters suspect that the second wife has designs on Reb Smolinsky's lodge money and that she will cheat the old man of the funds to live well in old age.)*

**Atmosphere**

8. How does the train ride home alter Sara's outlook? *(After winning \$1,000 in an essay contest, following graduation from college, Sara feels rewarded for years of study, labor, and scrimping. She buys suitable clothing for the journey back to New York and eats among middle-class passengers in the dining car. Because she can afford travel by Pullman car, she returns to New*

*York City a changed woman from the ghetto girl who determined to get an education. Unburdened of family responsibilities, Sara is able to hire a realtor to find a sunny, airy room and to equip it with furnishings and kitchen supplies that will allow her to eat well and to live comfortably.)*

**Author Purpose**

9. Why does the novel appeal to feminists? *(Anzia Yeziarska produced a classic of the New Woman novel. In place of gentility and wifeliness as the measure of female success, Bread Givers depicts an autonomous self-rescuer. Sara has no need of a strong male to retrieve her from poverty. Instead, she models the American prototype of the decisive, career-minded go-getter, a female liberated from fatherly and husbandly domination. Instead of Mashah, Bessie, and Shenah's domesticity, Sara empowers herself through a vigorous job in the teaching profession, one of the few venues to financial independence and personal advancement. She epitomizes the first-generation citizen who realizes her Jewish father's dream of wealth in a land of opportunity. She states the creed of the New Woman: "In America, women don't need men to boss them.")*

**Style**

10. Why do critics differ in categorizing Yeziarska's work? *(The author's choice of ethnic settings and dialect place her among the early 20th-century realists, which include Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Hamlin Garland, Tillie Olsen, and Upton Sinclair. Yeziarska pictures scenarios that typify the shackled immigrant woman, from the daughters' purchase of new oil cloth and a scrap of lace to brighten the flat to Reb Smolinsky's pathetic attempt to weigh a bag of salt for a customer. Vignettes of shoppers scrapping over the price of carp and the unification of the neighborhood in grief for Shenah's passing preserve for American literature the immigrant experience from the perspective of one who lived it. Clashing with Yeziarska's verisimilitude are melodramatic outcries and sentimentality that connect the novel with the emotionalism of early 20th-century short fiction, especially that published in women's magazines. Because Sara empties*

*herself of grief for Shenah and torments herself for abandoning Father, the tone varies from straightforward description to self-indulgent venting of frustrations.)*

## How Language Works

Anzia Yeziarska creates dialogue that reveals character faults as well as their strengths:

1. In Moe Mirsky's courtship of Mashah, he displays both commercial dynamism and insincerity: "I got a chance to sell your diamonds at a big profit, and meanwhile I'll bring you yet bigger diamonds."
2. Mrs. Feinstein reveals both self-esteem and materialism in her belief that "a good husband steals and robs even, only to give his wife what's coming to her."
3. Reb Smolinsky exonerates his duplicity by claiming to lie on Bessie's behalf: "It's only because Zalmon is such an innocent, good heart that he takes my word for the lies of praise I tell about you."
4. Sara displays both courage and foolhardiness in her departure from home at age seventeen: "I'm smart enough to look out for myself. It's a new life now."
5. Shenah's Old World views reveal an ambivalence toward America as the melting pot: "What's a school teacher? Old maids—all of them. It's good enough for Goyim, but not for you."

## Across the Curriculum

### Social Studies and Economics

1. Post a bulletin board display on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Explain why the event was a significant moment in feminist history and a boost to organized labor.
2. Summarize in an annotated time line the decades of strife that accompanied the clash between the Russian tsar and Judaism. Account for unparalleled emigration from Eastern Europe and for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine in 1948.

3. Explain the importance of marriage to unemployed women with children. Comment on the shift in Shenah's life if Reb Smolinsky had predeceased her.

### Science and Health

1. Compose a speech on the contributions of Margaret Sanger and Lillian Wald to women's health and family life. Explain why Sanger introduced barrier methods of birth control to immigrant tenement dwellers in Brooklyn and how her compilation of women's health histories changed the medical view of marital sex and reproduction.
2. Account for high death rate from consumption among women sweatshop workers, especially those who sew, launder, and iron.
3. Comment on the need for rest, medication, and rehabilitation from consumption, a foot injury, blood poisoning, or bronchitis. Explain why Shenah's refusal of surgery kills her. Propose less taxing work for Reb Smolinsky than selling chewing gum on the street.

### Religion

1. Brainstorm a definition of compromise explaining how Sara can despise Reb Smolinsky's sexism, yet care for him in old age.
2. Compose a theme contrasting arranged marriages with a free choice of mates. Account for the orthodox system of pairing husband and wife. Explain why this custom suits Shenah and Reb Moisheh Smolinsky, yet destroys the hopes of their daughters.
3. List daily rituals, garments, readings and prayers, Passover dishes, Sabbath candles, funeral customs, holidays, and other reminders to devout Jews of their relationship with God.

### Composition

1. Compose a news item announcing Sara Smolinsky's hiring at the elementary school and her educational background.

2. Design a brochure on ways to help immigrant girls develop into independent American women. Include inventories of interests, talents, beliefs, and ambitions. Suggest websites and reference works that would help Sara coordinate her longing for education with the needs of her elderly and infirm parents.
3. Outline a theme on the commitment that a mother makes to her husband and children. Contrast the dedication of Shenah Smolinsky, Bessie, and Mashah to the selfishness of Mrs. Feinstein.

### Drama

1. Sketch stage settings for the following scenes: inspecting a retirement home, eating in a train dining car, paying respects to the dead mother, visiting Bessie's home, sharing tea with Hugo Seelig, professing love for Morris Lipkin, selling chewing gum on the street, wearing Mashah's pink dress, meeting a potential suitor, helping Rosy Stein pronounce "bird," cursing Berel Bernstein at his wedding celebration, redecorating the kitchen, graduating from college, and buying herring to sell.
2. Role-play a part for yourself in a stage version of *Bread Givers*. Select from a mourner at the synagogue, an elementary school student, a neighbor on Hester Street, a college teacher living at the boarding house, a laundry worker, or a shopper in the grocery store in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

### Education

1. Propose courses for Sara's freshman year that balance geometry and physical education with a full range of coursework necessary to a public school teacher. Include world history, a modern foreign language, modern literature, health, and a lab or earth science. Suggest readings for each course.
2. Compose a lesson on immigration. List famous newcomers to America, such as Louise Nevelson, Elie Wiesel, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Albert Einstein, Fanny Kemble, Irving Berlin, Greta Garbo, and Charles Proteus Steinmetz. Explain the importance of Auguste-Charlotte Bartholdi as the model for

the Statue of Liberty and a symbol of American freedom.

### Language and Speech

1. Compose a short speech in which you describe the impact of Old World patriarchy on the lives of Shenah, Bessie, Mashah, Finia, and Sara. Note how Mrs. Feinstein circumvents male dominance to gain control of the lodge money and to deck herself and her home in finery.
2. Describe Hugo Seelig's method of improving immigrant speech. List other examples of grammar and syntax that depart from standard English, particularly word placement.

### Cinema

1. View films about people who make difficult decisions that dismay their families or society, for example, *Member of the Wedding*, *Yentl*, *Life with Father*, *I Remember Mama*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Queen*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Reds*, *Dances with Wolves*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *Titanic*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Daughters of the Dust*. Summarize the events that precipitate a final choice.

### Geography and Culture

1. Create a web site or bulletin board of contrasting locations mentioned in the text, including Los Angeles; Plinsk, Poland; Elizabeth, New Jersey; and Fifth Avenue, Broadway, and Hester and Grand streets in New York City's Lower East Side.
2. Account for the pogroms by which the Russian tsar terrorizes Jews on the Polish-Russian border. Explain why terrorist tactics force a religious minority to abandon traditional communities and to resettle in America.

### Art

1. Sketch Sara before and after she graduates from college and buys a suit, gloves, and hat. Include costume changes that make her look less like a slum child or laundress and more like a professional woman.

2. Propose a book cover that contrasts Sara at the mangle with Sara window shopping on Fifth Avenue or entering Principal Hugo Seelig's office.

### Psychology

1. Review the concepts of psychology that intrigue Sara. Account for her interest in human motivation and behavior. Outline reactions from childhood that set her apart from the rest of the Smolinsky family, for example, cursing Berel Bernstein at his wedding reception and pursuing poet Morris Lipkin and Mr. Edman.
2. Summarize Sara's ability to battle loneliness, rejection, insecurity, low self-esteem, hunger, frustration, isolation, prejudice, tedium, cold, and stress. Comment on the importance of intellect to her survival of sweatshops and night school.
3. Discuss learning as an antidote to the hardships of a pioneer feminist. Propose similar activities for Jewish immigrant girls who want to escape Old World patriarchy and achieve full American independence.

### Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: inhibitions, pogrom, samovar, sweatshop, *King Lear*, impudence, Coney Island, blind instinct, tsar, rankling, pushcart, dean, alumnus, apperception, bursar, serge, ingratiating, consumption, predicate of action, reflex arc, stupefy, bungalow, piker, vaudeville, Carnegie, pianola, Grodno, Rockefeller, gangrene, mangle, Morgan, transfigured, shirtwaist, synagogue, Mrs. Vanderbilt, challis, and Potter's Field.
2. Create a web site featuring a gazetteer of religious and cultural terms from the novel. Include blasphemers, mammeh, fall of Jerusalem, blut-und-eisen, shekel, canopy, Jacob and Joseph, Isaiah, Day of Atonement, canopy, Mazel-tof, tzimes, Gott sei dank, Jeremiah, lokshen kugel, Job, David and Goliath, Passover dishes, Songs of Solomon, Torah, ach, noodnik, shtetl, meshumid, gentile, lotkes, schnorrer, gefülte fish, rabbi, capote,

nu, yentch, oi weh, Goyim, and Meshugener Yid. Categorize items under the headings of slang, history, study, ritual, beliefs, celebration, religious objects, and Bible characters.

3. Using desktop publishing, design a choice of suits and hats for an early 20th-century professional woman, a page from an illustrated Yiddish-English dictionary, a banner welcoming freshmen to college or sophomores back from summer vacation, multiple cartographic views of the Polish-Russian border, a business card for Hugo Seelig or Mr. Edman, an epitaph for Shenah Smolinsky or for Zalman's first wife, a news feature about slum conditions on Hester Street, illustrated encyclopedia entries on apperception and geometry, an extended definition of patriarchy and sexism, a schematic drawing of the New York City train station, and a price list for fish or the undertaker's services.

### Literature

1. Characterize Sara as a daughter, Jew, immigrant, sister, student, date, ironer, girlfriend, teacher, American, rebel, pioneer, New Yorker, herring seller, decorator, and New Woman. Summarize her decision to study rather than to enter an arranged marriage.
2. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe incidents of immigration and displacement similar to the transplanting of the Smolinsky family from a mud hut in Poland to New York's Lower East Side. Include Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Joseph Bruchac's *Bowman's Store*, Isak Dinesen's *Babette's Feast*, Cathy Song's *The Picture Bride*, Ruthann Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent*, Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, Gish Jen's *Typical American*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, T. Coraghessan Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain*, John Van Druten's *I Remember Mama*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*,

Carmen Deedy's *Growing Up Cuban*, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, Isabel Allende's *Daughter of Fortune*, and Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter*.

3. Explain how the novel would change if the main character had been Reb Smolinsky's studious son. How would relationships change among siblings? with Shenah? with Mrs. Feinstein? with Moe Mirsky, Morris Lipkin, and Abe Schmukler?

## Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of conflict in the lives of the characters, for example, the landlady's demand for payment, Mrs. Feinstein's spending of the lodge money on furniture, Reb Smolinsky's demand that his wife and four daughters obey him, Sara's determination to live alone and educate herself, Bessie's dislike of marrying a widowed fish-peddler, Mashah's loss of beauty and health, Mr. Edman's rejection of Sara's friendship, the laundresses' ridicule of Sara, the pogroms that the tsar's soldiers inflict on Polish Jews, the hardship of women's lives in tenements, misrepresentation of suitors' wealth and promise, the unwise purchase of a grocery store in New Jersey, and Sara's guilt that her mother dies in misery.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate Sara's personal responses to Judaism, family, daughters, scholarship, ambition, poverty, forgiveness, obedience, ambition, bullying, home decoration, physical education, and arranged marriage.
3. Compose a scene in which Sara and Hugo marry under the traditional canopy and celebrate their union with the extended Smolinsky family.
4. Make a setting list and explain crucial actions that occur in each. Include the dean's office, college gymnasium, Grand Street, laundry, pushcart, Bessie's kitchen, Poland, Mrs. Feinstein's table, a sunny rented room, cannery, cafeteria, vaudeville theater, Fifth Avenue, Pullman car, grocery store, geometry class, Mr. Edman's residence, and Hester Street.

## Vocabulary

Match each underlined word in the sentences below with a definition. Write the letter of your response in the space provided.

- |              |               |           |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|
| A. irking    | F. hesitancy  | K. rogue  |
| B. scripture | G. tent       | L. fat    |
| C. pleading  | H. beginner   | M. dull   |
| D. assurance | I. redress    | N. ogled  |
| E. ridiculed | J. impersonal | O. temple |

- \_\_\_ 1. So many words about words. "Apperception," "reflex arc," "inhibitions."
- \_\_\_ 2. I wanted to live and not stupefy myself with geometry.
- \_\_\_ 3. If only there was plenty of money between them, how happy they would be together, fighting in fun, instead of nagging and galling each other fighting over pennies.
- \_\_\_ 4. After that I was shut out like a "greenhorn" who didn't talk their language.
- \_\_\_ 5. A disgusting-looking comedian with a false red nose wagged his finger and leered grossly at the shimmying shoulders.
- \_\_\_ 6. "Late?" Max scoffed. "Our best good time will just begin."
- \_\_\_ 7. I read him a story, "The Pavilion on the Links."
- \_\_\_ 8. Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, he put his hands over our heads to bless us.
- \_\_\_ 9. He staggered to a chair and lifted his eyes in supplication.
- \_\_\_ 10. It was a beautiful building, but the moment I entered, the loveless, inhuman, institutional atmosphere struck me like a blow.
- \_\_\_ 11. By the butcher, by the baker, by the fish market, everybody was telling everybody over and over again, as you tell fairy tales, how Father hit the landlady when she stepped on the Holy Torah.
- \_\_\_ 12. And Father was yet in the synagogue.
- \_\_\_ 13. You must choose between that scoundrel and your father.
- \_\_\_ 14. Mother skimmed off the fat part of the potato soup, and carefully picked out all the little pieces of suet and fried onions for Father's plate, and handed it to him.
- \_\_\_ 15. I depended myself on Zaretsky to give me a guaranty for their characters, when Zaretsky himself is the biggest liar in America.

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Quotation Completion (30 points)

Complete each of the following quotations from the novel with a word from the list that follows.

apperception, Blut-und-Eisen, bullied, bursar, challis, chaperon, cinch, dowries, dumbbells, gangrene, indulgently, inhibitions, irresistible, mangle, manual, objectivity, pianolas, rankling, recitations, samovar, serge, shtetl, thwarted, transfigured

1. But the minute you begin with the matchmaker you must have \_\_\_\_\_ like in Russia yet.
2. No wonder your father named you \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I've been a coward—\_\_\_\_\_ by my father.
4. I'll start you at the \_\_\_\_\_ for five a week, and later I'll break you into an ironer.
5. There's a commercial course, \_\_\_\_\_ training—.
6. Phonographs and \_\_\_\_\_ blared against each other.
7. He patted me \_\_\_\_\_. "I'll take you to something more your kind."
8. What did anything matter except this \_\_\_\_\_ gladness that drew us toward each other?
9. I've been figuring out that I'd better \_\_\_\_\_ that offer of twenty thousand for my property.
10. I picked up \_\_\_\_\_ and pushed them up and down and sideways until my arms were lame.
11. A \_\_\_\_\_ must have noticed my face, and she brought over one of those clumsy, backward youths who was lost in a corner by himself.
12. What countless riches lay buried under the ground of those early years that I had thought so black, so barren, so \_\_\_\_\_ with want!
13. But I have no time for \_\_\_\_\_ outside of class hours.
14. His course in psychology had opened to me a new world of reason and "\_\_\_\_\_."
15. The way I dashed into the \_\_\_\_\_'s office demanding money for my failed geometry.



---

---

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Shenah knows that her husband has already selected a second wife.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Max Goldstein decides to marry Sara before he arrives from Los Angeles.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Bessie agrees to the matchmaker's proposal as a means to save Benny.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Sara repeats the physical education course before leaving night school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Reb Smolinsky spills salt on the floor of his grocery.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Hugo requests lessons in Hebrew from Reb Smolinsky.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. On return to George Martin's shop after a summer at the cannery, Sara no longer has a job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Cannery work is hotter and heavier than laundry work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Reb Smolinsky marries before the end of thirty days of mourning for Shenah.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. By demanding meat in her stew, Sara impresses the landlady with her self-confidence.

### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Provide a word or phrase in answer to these questions:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Who befriends Sara at college?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. In what course does Sara learn logic?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What neighbor starts Sara on her first job?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What symbol of matrimony does Mrs. Feinstein want?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Who refuses an operation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Where does Sara sleep on the train?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Where does Sara sleep at Bessie's apartment?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Who corrects Sara's pronunciation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. What does Mashah preserve on a hanger?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Who brings Sara a feather bed?

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Explain Reb Smolinsky's justification of his laziness.
- 2. How does Mashah change after marriage?
- 3. Summarize the quarrels between Reb Smolinsky and Shenah.
- 4. Contrast Finia, Bessie, Mashah, and Mrs. Feinstein as wives.
- 5. Characterize Reb Smolinsky's response to a woman living alone.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Quotation Completion (20 points)

Complete each of the following quotations from the novel with a name from the list that follows.

Abe Schmukler, Aby, Benny, Berel Bernstein, Dave, doctor, Mr. Edman, Fania, Mrs. Feinstein, Hugo, the landlady, George Martin, Mashah, Max, Minnie, Moe Mirsky, Morris Lipkin, Muhmenkeh, Jacob Novak, Jacob's father, Rosy, Yenteh, Zalmon, Zaretsky

1. At last, her husband came with the news that he got a job as a shoe clerk, so worn down was \_\_\_\_\_ by Father's never-ending pictures of the hell that was waiting for her, that she was glad to leave our house.
2. "In America, a man can get rich quick if he only has a head for business," said Father, as he counted out the five hundred dollars that \_\_\_\_\_ the fish-peddler had given him.
3. When \_\_\_\_\_ turned to me to share his enjoyment, I tried to smile, but inside I felt sort of sickened.
4. I remembered the time I was so crazy for \_\_\_\_\_.
5. And look at \_\_\_\_\_. He teaches eighteen periods and his pay is no more than ours.
6. "You try it again, \_\_\_\_\_. The birds sing-gg."
7. Just as I was beginning to feel safe and free to go on to a new life with \_\_\_\_\_, the old burden dragged me back by the hair.
8. I was just going to give myself a push in when \_\_\_\_\_'s mother grabbed me by the braids and shoved me out.
9. His name was \_\_\_\_\_ and he was a piano-player.
10. If \_\_\_\_\_ don't want to grab this chance, then you go with him, Mashah.

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Pogroms drive the Smolinsky family from Poland to the United States.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Being married to a duplicitous diamond dealer reduces Fania to poverty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The grocery store is poorly stocked with near-empty shelves and sawdust in the sugar barrel.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. At the mourning for Shenah, Sara refuses to rend her suit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Shopping for kid gloves on Fifth Avenue becomes commonplace to Sara.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Sara is astounded that Father offers her Hebrew lessons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The letter to the principal expresses Mrs. Feinstein's outrage that she has no money to buy food or diamond earrings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. From the train station, Sara returns to Hester Street to rent lodgings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Working as a shoe clerk is a come-down for Moe Mirsky.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. A realty agent finds Sara a sunny room.

**Comprehension Test B (Page 2)**

**Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

Select an answer to each of the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Hugo and Sara share  
A. a love of vaudeville.  
B. Sabbath prayers.  
C. a Polish background.  
D. a day at Coney Island
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Sara proudly  
A. doubles her money selling herring.  
B. covers the coffin.  
C. makes up her face for work at the laundry.  
D. carries roses to Mother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Max is eager to  
A. marry a Polish Jew.  
B. sell his property.  
C. leave Los Angeles.  
D. wed a beautiful young girl.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The boarder is happy to  
A. attend prayers at the synagogue with Father.  
B. find real meat in the stew.  
C. rent from a man who won a court trial against the blasphemous landlady.  
D. pay more rent rather than share the space.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The essay explains what  
A. Sara wants to do with her life.  
B. the importance of college to Sara.  
C. the dean means by education.  
D. Mr. Edman teaches about psychology.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. For too long,  
A. Shenah neglects treatment for consumption.  
B. Mrs. Feinstein lives without a husband.  
C. Reb Smolinsky tries to earn a living in Elizabeth, New Jersey.  
D. Bessie supports the family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Mashah wastes money  
A. on her face and wardrobe.  
B. trying to heal Benny.  
C. buying herring for Sara to sell.  
D. on a matchmaker's fee.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Sara prefers a room that is  
A. small and steam heated.  
B. near her job.  
C. clean and empty.  
D. filled with books.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Gradually, Sara  
A. falls in love with Berel.  
B. finds reason to like her stepmother.  
C. forgives Father for denying Shenah a decent home.  
D. the best geometry student in the class.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Fania sneeringly refers to  
A. Morris Lipkin as a dreamer.  
B. Hester Street as a land of promise.  
C. Sara as "princess."  
D. marriage as a "deal."

**Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Sara fears for her job.
2. Contrast Sara's life before and after she meets the principal, Hugo Seelig.
3. Describe Bessie's unhappiness as the unmarried older sister.
4. Account for Reb Smolinsky's mistreatment of women.
5. Summarize the value of learning to Sara.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. E  | 11. B |
| 2. M | 7. G  | 12. O |
| 3. A | 8. I  | 13. K |
| 4. H | 9. C  | 14. L |
| 5. N | 10. J | 15. D |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Quotation Completion (30 points)

- |                   |                 |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. dowries        | 6. pianolas     | 11. chaperon    |
| 2. Blut-und-Eisen | 7. indulgently  | 12. thwarted    |
| 3. bullied        | 8. irresistible | 13. recitations |
| 4. mangle         | 9. cinch        | 14. objectivity |
| 5. manual         | 10. dumbbells   | 15. bursar      |

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T  |
| 2. F | 7. F  |
| 3. T | 8. F  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. F |

#### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- |               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. dean       | 6. Pullman car   |
| 2. psychology | 7. kitchen floor |
| 3. Muhmenkeh  | 8. Hugo Seelig   |
| 4. earrings   | 9. pink dress    |
| 5. Shenah     | 10. Shenah       |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Quotation Completion (20 points)

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Mashah        | 6. Rosy            |
| 2. Zalmon        | 7. Hugo            |
| 3. Max           | 8. Berel Bernstein |
| 4. Morris Lipkin | 9. Jacob Novak     |
| 5. Edman         | 10. Fania          |

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F  |
| 2. F | 7. F  |
| 3. T | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. F | 10. T |

#### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. D  |
| 2. A | 7. A  |
| 3. B | 8. C  |
| 4. D | 9. B  |
| 5. B | 10. C |

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

**PERMA-BOUND**<sup>®</sup>  
**THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY**

#### Perma-Bound

617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650  
Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169  
E-Mail: books@perma-bound.com

#### Perma-Bound Canada

Box 868, Station Main • Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7A2  
Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811  
E-Mail: perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca

Visit us online at [www.perma-bound.com](http://www.perma-bound.com)