

## 13. ANECDOTES: THE SECRET IS OUT!

The word *anecdote* comes originally from Greek, meaning "things not given out." Today, however, good writers know that using anecdotes—brief stories that illustrate a point—is one of the best ways to support a point.

Specific stories about specific people are a powerful way to illustrate general truths and to keep the reader's attention. Brain research, for example, reveals that when given a variety of different types of material to read, people will always rate stories the highest for keeping their interest. Cognitive scientist Daniel T. Willingham reports that our brains seem predisposed to understanding and remembering stories, that stories "are treated differently in memory than other types of material."

Like examples, anecdotes show the reader your point. The key, therefore, is not just telling a story; rather, the stories you select must be relevant to your point. The stories you draw from don't have to be just about famous people. You can use stories of your personal experience, stories that you have heard from other ordinary people, or even stories you have discovered in fictional stories.

### Directions

Read the following three anecdotes, and match each anecdote with the appropriate general statement that follows.

1. *At the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C. the Greek forces faced an invading Persian army. Greatly outnumbered by the Persian forces, one of the Greek soldiers reported to the Spartan warrior Dieneces that the invading force had so many archers that their arrows would blot out the sun. Undaunted even by the overwhelming odds against him, Dieneces replied, "So much the better, we shall fight in the shade."*
2. *One day a friend of Socrates observed the great philosopher carefully studying some flashy items on display in the marketplace. Knowing Socrates' reputation for frugality, the friend asked, "Why, Socrates, do you come to the market, since you never buy anything?" Socrates responded, "I'm always amazed to see that there are so many things I can do without."*
3. *Two women came before King Solomon claiming to be the mother of a single baby boy. After briefly contemplating how to resolve the dispute, the king ordered his officers to bring him a sword. He then announced to the women that he would cut the child in two and give each woman a half. One of the women immediately cried out, saying, "Give her the living child rather than kill it!" while the other woman demanded, "Let it be neither mine or thine, but divide it." Solomon, recognizing that the compassion of the first woman identified her as the true mother, ordered that the baby be given to her.*

A. Knowledge of human psychology can come in handy when trying to solve complex problems. Anecdote # \_\_\_\_\_

B. Vain pursuit of material possessions brings little satisfaction. Anecdote # \_\_\_\_\_

C. Humor in the face of a stressful situation can dispel fear. Anecdote # \_\_\_\_\_