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Straw Into Gold

When I was living in an artists' colony in the south of France, some fellow Latin-Americans who taught at the university invited me to share a home-cooked meal
5 with them. I had been living abroad almost a year then on a grant, subsisting mainly on French bread and lentils so that my money could last longer. So when the invitation to dinner arrived, I
10 accepted without hesitation. Especially since they had promised Mexican food.

What I didn't realize when they made this invitation was that I was supposed to be involved in preparing this meal. I guess
15 they assumed I knew how to cook Mexican food because I was Mexican. They wanted specifically tortillas, though I'd never made a tortilla in my life.

It's true I had witnessed my mother
20 rolling the little armies of dough into perfect circles, but my mother's family is from Guanajuato, *provinciales*, country folk. They only know how to make flour tortillas. My father's family, on the other
25 hand, is chilango, from Mexico City. We ate corn tortillas but we didn't make them. Someone was sent to the corner tortilleria to buy some. I'd never seen anybody make corn tortillas. Ever.

30 Well, somehow my Latino hosts had gotten a hold of a packet of corn flour, and this is what they tossed my way with orders to produce tortillas. *Asi como sea*.

Any ol' way, they said and went back to
35 their cooking.

Why did I feel like the woman in the fairy tale who was locked in a room and ordered to spin straw into gold? I had the same sick feeling when I was required to
40 write my critical essay for my Master of Fine Arts exam—the only piece of noncreative writing necessary in order to get my graduate degree. How was I to start? There were rules involved here,
45 unlike writing a poem or story, which I did intuitively. There was a step-by-step process needed and I had better know it. I felt as if making tortillas, or writing a critical paper for that matter, were tasks
50 so impossible I wanted to break down into tears.

Somehow though, I managed to make those tortillas—crooked and burnt, but edible nonetheless. My hosts were
55 absolutely ignorant when it came to Mexican food; they thought my tortillas were delicious. (I'm glad my mama wasn't there.) Thinking back and looking at that photograph documenting the three
60 of us consuming those lopsided circles I am amazed. Just as I am amazed I could finish my MFA exam (lopsided and crooked, but finished all the same). Didn't think I could do it. But I did.

Adapted from "Straw Into Gold: The Metamorphosis of the Everyday" by Sandra Cisneros. First published in *The Texas Observer*, September 1987. Copyright 1987 by Sandra Cisneros.

Write the answers to
the following questions
on a piece of paper!

- 1) What do the author's observations in the final paragraph suggest?
- A. Sometimes good luck is better than hard work.
 - B. It is possible to complete difficult tasks even if the results are not perfect.
 - C. Ordinary challenges can be overwhelming without the help of others.
 - D. Sometimes failure is a powerful motivator.
- 2) Which statement best explains the function of the third paragraph (lines 19–29) ?
- A. It illustrates why the author does not know how to make tortillas.
 - B. It shows how the author's parents encouraged her to try new things.
 - C. It supports the author's claim about the benefits of knowing how to cook.
 - D. It demonstrates how experience gives the author the confidence she needs.
- 3) Which statement best explains how the fairy tale reference contributes to the passage?
- A. It suggests the need to know and obey the rules.
 - B. It suggests how important it is to follow the orders of others.
 - C. It reinforces the idea that it is difficult to complete some tasks.
 - D. It reinforces the idea that it is important to avoid failure.
- 4) The author compares herself to a woman from a fairy tale. Since most things end better than expected for the heroes of fairy tales, which aspect of the author's experience is ironic?
- A. The author's performance on the exam did not end her career as a writer.
 - B. Although her mother could make tortillas, the author cannot.
 - C. The author's friends assume she can make excellent tortillas.
 - D. Her tortillas and her MFA exam were not particularly successful.

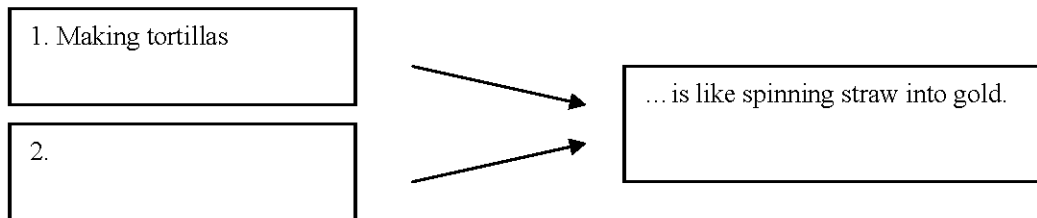
5) Which statement best explains how the information in the fifth paragraph (lines 36–51) relates to the rest of the passage?

- A. It provides an example of the author's success with a challenging and unfamiliar task.
- B. It describes another incident that shows the author's frustration with her life.
- C. It describes an activity that the author feels is beyond her ability.
- D. It provides an explanation of the lesson the fairy tale teaches.

6) The title "Straw Into Gold" alludes to the fairy tale "Rumpelstiltskin." In that fairy tale, a young woman is told she must change straw into gold by twisting and winding it on a machine, a process known as spinning. Spinning straw into gold seems like an impossible task.

As illustrated in the graphic organizer below, the author suggests that, for her, making tortillas is like spinning straw into gold. Complete the graphic organizer by identifying another task that the author compares to spinning straw into gold.

Use evidence from the text to explain how each of the tasks is like spinning straw into gold.



1.

2.

Please use the space below to write your response(s) to the writing assignment provided by your teacher. If there are multiple tasks to the question, please clearly label the number or letter of each task in the column to the left of your answers. If you need additional pages for your response, your teacher can provide them.

Please write the name of the writing assignment here: _____

Task

A vertical gray bar, likely a placeholder for a task label or a visual separator.

