

Passage 4, Questions 30-40. Read the following passage from *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* by Barbara Kingsolver carefully before you choose your answers.

*Note: Earlier in the chapter, the author described an encounter with a gas station clerk who, during a severe drought, expressed her hope that the clouds coming in would not bring rain because she wanted to wash her car on her day off.*

Who is *us*, exactly? I live now in a county whose economic base is farming. A disastrous summer will mean some of our neighbors will lose their farms. Others will have to keep farming *and* go looking for a job at the end of a long commute. We'll feel the effects in school enrollments, local businesses, shifts in land use and tax structure. The health of our streams, soils, and forests is also at stake, as lost farms get sold to developers whose business is to rearrange (drastically) the topsoil and everything on it. When I recognize good agricultural sense, though, I'm not just thinking of my town but also my species. It's not a trivial difference: praying for or against rainfall during a drought. You can argue that wishes don't count, but humans are good at making our dreams manifest and we do, historically speaking, get what we wish for. What are the just deserts for a species too selfish or preoccupied to hope for rain when the land outside is dying? Should we be buried under the topsoil in our own clean cars, to make room for wiser creatures?

We'd surely do better, if only we *knew* any better. In two generations we've transformed ourselves from a rural to an urban nation. North American children begin their school year around Labor Day and finish at the beginning of June with no idea that this arrangement was devised to free up children's labor when it was needed on the farm. Most people of my grandparents' generation had an intuitive sense of agricultural basics: when various fruits and vegetables come into season, which ones keep through the winter, how to preserve the others. On what day autumn's first frost will likely fall on their county, and when to expect the last one in spring. Which crops can be planted before the last frost, and which must wait. Which grains are autumn-planted. What an asparagus patch looks like in August. Most importantly: what animals and vegetables thrive in one's immediate region and how to live well on those, with little else thrown into the mix beyond a bag of flour, a pinch of salt, and a handful of coffee. Few people of my generation, and approximately none of our children, could answer any of those questions, let alone all. This knowledge has vanished from our culture.

We also have largely convinced ourselves it wasn't too important. Consider how Americans might respond to a proposal that agriculture was to become a mandatory subject in all schools, alongside reading and mathematics. A fair number of parents would get hot under the collar to see their kids' attention being pulled away from the essentials of grammar, the all-important trigonometry, to make room for down-on-the-farm stuff. The baby boom psyche embraces a powerful presumption that education is a key to moving away from manual labor, and dirt—two undeniable ingredients of farming. It's good enough for us that somebody, somewhere, knows food production well enough to serve the rest of us with all we need to eat, each day of our lives.

If that is true, why isn't it good enough for someone else to know multiplication and the contents of the Bill of Rights? Is the story of bread, from tilled ground to our table, less relevant to our lives than the history of the thirteen colonies? Couldn't one make a case for the relevance of a subject that informs choices we make *daily*—as in, What's for dinner? Isn't ignorance of our food sources causing problems as diverse as overdependence on petroleum, and an epidemic of diet-related diseases?

If this book is not exactly an argument for reinstating food-production

50 classes in school (and it might be), it does contain a lot of what you might learn there. From our family's gas-station beginnings we have traveled far enough to discover ways of taking charge of one's food, and even knowing where it has been. This is the story of a year in which we made every attempt to feed ourselves animals and vegetables whose provenance we really knew. We tried to wring most of the petroleum out of our food chain, even if that meant giving up some things. Our highest shopping goal was to get our food from so close to home, we'd know the person who grew it. Often that turned out to be *us*, as we learned to produce more of what we needed, starting with dirt, seeds, and enough knowledge to muddle through. Or starting with baby animals and enough sense to refrain from naming them.

60 This is not a how-to book aimed at getting you cranking out your own food. We ourselves live in a region where every other house has a garden out back, but to many urban people the idea of growing your food must seem as plausible as writing and conducting your own symphonies for your personal listening pleasure. If that is your case, think of the agricultural parts of the story as a music appreciation course for food—acquainting yourself with the composers and conductors can improve the quality of your experience. Knowing the secret natural history of potatoes, melons, or asparagus gives you a leg up on detecting whether those in your market are wholesome kids from a nearby farm, or vagrants who idled away their precious youth in a boxcar. Knowing how foods grow is to know how and when to look for them; such expertise is useful for certain kinds of people, namely, the ones who eat, no matter where they live or grocery shop.

Absence of that knowledge has rendered us a nation of wary label-readers, oddly uneasy in our obligate relationship with the things we eat. We call our food animals by different names after they're dead, presumably sparing ourselves any vision of the beefs and porks running around on actual hooves. Our words for unhealthy contamination—"soiled" or "dirty"—suggest that if we really knew the number-one ingredient of a garden, we'd all head straight into therapy. I used to take my children's friends out to the garden to warm them up to the idea of eating vegetables, but this strategy sometimes backfired: they'd back away slowly saying, "Oh *man*, those things touched *dirt*!" Adults do the same by pretending it all comes from the clean, well-lighted grocery store. We're like petulant teenagers rejecting our mother. We *know* we came out of her, but *ee-ew*.

85 We don't know beans about beans. Asparagus, potatoes, turkey drumsticks—you name it, we don't have a clue how the world makes it. I usually think I'm exaggerating the scope of the problem, and then I'll encounter an editor (at a well-known nature magazine) who's nixing the part of my story that refers to pineapples growing from the ground. She insisted they grew on trees. Or, I'll have a conversation like this one:

90 "What's new on the farm?" asks my friend, a lifelong city dweller who likes for me to keep her posted by phone. She's a gourmet cook, she cares about the world, and has been around a lot longer than I have. This particular conversation was in early spring, so I told her what was up in the garden: peas, potatoes, spinach.

95 "Wait a minute," she said. "When you say, 'The potatoes are up,' what do you mean?" She paused, formulating her question: "What part of a potato comes *up*?"

"Um, the plant part," I said. "The stems and leaves."

100 "Wow," she said. "I never knew a potato *had* a plant part."

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