

Small Tales from Amsterdam

“Dear Kitty, I hope I will be able to confide everything to you”

So begins *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Anne Frank’s account of the two years she and her family hid from the Nazi occupation in the Netherlands capital city of Amsterdam. Like most diaries, the one kept by Anne Frank’s includes the ordinary details of daily occurrences, Anne’s opinions on various topics, and descriptions of her feelings. *The Diary of a Young Girl* also includes many anecdotes—brief stories about people and events—that offer vivid snapshots of what Anne’s life was like, both before she entered the Secret Annex and while she hid there.

Anecdotes have several unique characteristics. First, they focus on one single episode in a person’s life, and the event almost has some significance for the writer.

“Dearest Kitty, Something unexpected happened yesterday morning.”

For instance, Anne relates an anecdote about how she and Hello Silberberg met and got to know each other. This anecdote is one brief incident in Anne’s two-year narrative.

Another characteristic of anecdotes is that they tell often a personal story with wit and insight.

“Mr. Keesing . . . was mad at me . . . because I talked so much.”

Anne tells an anecdote about her math teacher, Mr. Keesing, who makes her write essays as punishment for excessive talking in class. Anne recounts how she decides to turn her essays into clever arguments and funny stories. In this way, Anne soon wins over Mr. Keesing, who reads Anne’s essays to his classes and stops scolding Anne for talking too much.

Anecdotes often confess the writer’s private, amusing, or even embarrassing thoughts and feelings—especially if the anecdotes appear in a diary that is later published.

“I’m dying to tell you about another one of our clashes. . . .”

Once Anne’s life is completely changed by going into hiding, she uses anecdotes to relay the arguments that occur in the Secret Annex. Her descriptions of these conflicts include personal, potentially embarrassing conversations between residents of the Annex, as well as Anne’s own thoughts and feelings about these events.

One more characteristic of anecdotes is that they lack the more complicated elements you typically find in short stories, such as character development and a carefully constructed plot. Anecdotes are more likely to share insights into the author’s own personality along with the habits and quirks of those with whom the writer interacts.

“Father has a friend . . . named Mr. Dreher. . . .”

Anne tells many amusing stories about herself as well as about other people she knows. In one anecdote, she relates how people in the office avoid helping Mr. Dreher, who is a nuisance. Anne describes how they put him off, pass him to others in the office, and avoid his calls. This story doesn’t

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give in-depth information about Mr. Dreher or his wife. Instead, Anne relates only the details that add to the humor of her anecdote.

If you read *The Diary of a Young Girl*, you'll soon see that Anne Frank was a gifted writer, even at the age of thirteen. As she narrated the story of her life in hiding, she relied on anecdotes to create humor or to provide insights about herself and others. These stories are important because they help you relate to Anne on a personal level, they persuade you to take Anne's side, and—ultimately—they create empathy for all of the residents of the Secret Annex.
