



CHAPTER 14

the act of reading | quote | paraphrase | summary

You have engaged in a **DIALOGUE WITH THE TEXT**. You have ANALYZED texts. You have written **ESSAYS** about texts. Now, when you want to **convey** part or all of the information from a text to someone else, you have a few options for how to do that.

quote

paraphrase

summary

You will want to use each of these options for a different purpose.

Let's take the beginning of an article that the *New Yorker* magazine published on September 5, 2005. Then we'll look at how the author, John Seabrook, uses **quote, paraphrase, and summary** to prove his **THESIS**.

Renaissance Pears

The Fiorentina¹ is a squat and hippy pear, its dark-green skin blemished with black freckles. It is to supermarket fruit as real people are to supermodels. Until recently, the pear was thought to have disappeared from central Italy, where it once flourished. But Isabella Dalla Ragione, a forty-seven-year-old agronomist² in Perugia³, continued to look for it.

Dalla Ragione⁴ has straight brown hair and crooked teeth; she can look twenty years younger than her age or ten years older, depending on the angle of her head. She is a fast driver and an even faster talker, with a gift for making archeologia arborea,⁵ as she calls her vocation—the pursuit and recovery of

¹The Fiorentina is a type of pear that has almost become extinct.

²An agronomist studies soils and plants.

³A major city in central Italy, the capital of the province of Umbria.

⁴This is the family name of the woman, Isabella Dalla Ragione.

⁵Archeologia arborea is the study of the archeology, or the history, of trees

old varieties of fruit—sound thrilling. She finds clues in many places: Renaissance paintings⁶, obscure books, and the records that were kept by former estate owners in Umbria and Tuscany⁷, where the climate is peculiarly advantageous for many kinds of fruit. Last year, while studying the catalogue of a large estate that once belonged to the Bufalini family⁸, on the northern tip of Umbria, she came across a reference to the Fiorentina. The Bufalini maintained villas⁹ with extensive gardens and orchards, from the fifteenth century on up to the nineteen-eighties, when the final landlord left the property to the state.

Pear trees can live for more than two hundred and fifty years—among fruit trees, only olives live longer—and so Isabella thought a Fiorentina¹⁰ might remain on the former Bufalini lands. She knew what the pear looked like, thanks to a memoir left by an itinerant¹¹ early-twentieth-century musician, Archimede Montanelli, whose travels had taken him all over Umbria. She also happened to have an uncle, Alvaro, who hunted in that part of Umbria and was acquainted with some of the farmers who lived there. Eventually, one of them told Alvaro that a Fiorentina remained on his farm.

Earlier this summer, I accompanied Isabella on a trip to visit the old pear tree. We drove into a mountainous region above the town of Pietralunga, a land of thick woods with small farms in the valleys. Stone houses where the landowners had once lived, many of them now abandoned, sit on the tops of hills. The old orchards are gone, but the landscape is dotted with a few rugged arboreal¹² survivors: almonds, olives, and pears.

The Fiorentina was growing in the Valdescura, the Valley of Darkness. When we arrived, relatives of several families, spanning four generations, were sitting under the big shade trees outside the farmhouse. The matriarch¹³ was an eighty-four-year-old woman named Sergia. She wore a ragged shift and filthy slippers, and carried a long walking stick. Hearing my accent, she recalled the Americans who had escaped from a nearby Fascist¹⁴ prison and turned up one night in 1943; she had given them shelter and something to eat.

There was a cherry tree beside the house, and Isabella walked with Sergia to gather some cherries. Or, rather, Isabella gathered them; Sergia ate them, the pits tumbling down her whiskery chin as more cherries went into her mouth.

Then the farmer, a nephew of Sergia's, led us through a potato field to the Fiorentina, which was growing next to a rutted¹⁵ old road. Its black bark had deep crevices, and the trunk and lower branches were covered with scabrous¹⁶ white lichen¹⁷. Isabella fought through the high weeds around

⁶The Renaissance is a period of time that took place in Italy from about 1420–1600.

⁷Tuscany is another Province of Italy, just to the west of Umbria.

⁸The Bufalini were a wealthy Renaissance Italian family, like the Medici family, that owned huge estates.

⁹A villa is a huge home on an Italian estate.

¹⁰The Fiorentina is the tree that bears the Fiorentina pear.

¹¹An itinerant musician is someone who travels around to perform his or her art in different places.

¹²Arboreal is the adjective meaning trees.

¹³A matriarch is the oldest living female in a family, usually the grandmother or great-grandmother.

¹⁴The Fascists were the Party that governed Italy in the early 20th Century and took Italy into World War II.

¹⁵A rutted road is a bumpy, uneven, potholed road.

¹⁶Scabrous means something with a rough surface.

¹⁷Lichen are organisms that grows over rocks and trees.

the tree and patted its trunk. “Sometimes when I find one of these old trees I feel like weeping,” she said. “If only they could talk—what a story they could tell.” Then she frowned, and said, “But I think, Maybe it is better they cannot talk. They would probably curse us.”

For thousands of years, peasants in Umbria and Tuscany cultivated fruit trees. Most tended small pomari, or family orchards, with no more than ten trees. A fruit tree provided food, shade in summer, fuel in winter, furniture, and children’s shoes, which were made from the wood of fig trees. Fruit was also a staple of the cooking of the region, in dishes like salt cod with roasted pears, and pork with plums; whole cherries in *agrodolce*—pickled in vinegar and sugar—were served as a chutney¹⁸ with roasted meat. The farmers planted as many varieties as possible because the different trees would bear fruit at different times over the growing season. The mountainous topography¹⁹ of Umbria, and its lack of roads, insured that varieties common to one valley were unknown in the next. When a woman married, she often carried seeds from her family’s farm with her in order to prepare her mother’s recipes, which were based on the particular varieties of fruit in her home valley.

This feudal²⁰ way of life endured, more or less unbroken, for two thousand years, until it abruptly ended in the two decades following the Second World War.²¹ Nine million Italians, about a sixth of the population at that time, left their rural homes and went to the cities. They acquired Fiats,²² Vespas,²³ televisions, and fashionable clothes—all the trappings of modern Italian identity. The old fruit trees were among the things they left behind.

The varieties eaten in Umbria and Tuscany were replaced, first, by generic²⁴ fruit grown in the Emilia-Romagna²⁵ region, where much of Italy’s agricultural industry is concentrated, and, more recently, by fruit from other countries—peaches and cherries from Spain, pears from Argentina, and apples from China. In most markets in Italy you can find only three kinds of apple (Golden Delicious, Stark Delicious, Rome Beauty), and lately the Fuji apple, from China, has begun to replace those. It’s not hard to imagine a day when there will be only one kind of apple for sale in the whole industrial world.

The Dalla Ragiones’ orchard is an open-air museum of Old World fruit. It was begun by Isabella’s father, Livio, forty years ago, on his land in northwestern Umbria, and is now maintained by Isabella. The trees grow on a hilltop in San Lorenzo di Lerchi, a hamlet²⁶ about seventy miles southeast of Florence²⁷ and thirty miles northwest of Perugia; Livio lives in a stone farmhouse that overlooks the orchard. There are about four hundred trees in the collection: pears, apples, plums, cherries, peaches,

¹⁸Chutney is a relish served with food.

¹⁹Topography means a way of describing a landscape.

²⁰A feudal system was a country way of life, where landowners dominated the peasants living on their land.

²¹World War II took place from 1939–1945.

²²A Fiat is a European brand of car.

²³A Vespa is a popular brand of motor scooter.

²⁴Generic refers to something general, in this case, something not from a local family farm, but from a large corporate farm.

²⁵Emilia-Romagna is another Province of Italy, south of Umbria and Tuscany.

²⁶A hamlet is a small village.

²⁷Florence is the capital city of the Province of Tuscany.

quinces,²⁸ and medlars.²⁹ Most were common in Umbria as recently as sixty years ago; now they have all but disappeared. Some of the Dalla Ragiones' specimens are believed to be the last examples of that variety.

* * *

Seabrook has written about saving varieties of fruit trees threatened by extinction. In doing that, he also writes about history, art, food, culture, and how the people he encounters form their identities by interacting with the landscape they live in. Notice how Seabrook handles all these different subjects, how he organizes his essay to include all this interesting material, while, at the same time, he never loses touch with his **THESIS**.

You can read the rest of this essay in the back of the book, or in the September 5, 2005 issue of the *New Yorker*, to find out what happened to Isabella Dalla Ragione and her adventures in saving the ancient fruit trees of Italy.

quote

We use a **QUOTE** to support and prove our thesis. To **QUOTE**, we copy the exact words from a text, be it a written text or an oral text (someone speaking). John Seabrook **QUOTES** Isabella Dalla Ragione in his essay. (We have put all the **QUOTES** in **bold**.)

“Sometimes when I find one of these old trees I feel like weeping,” she said. **“If only they could talk—what a story they could tell.”** Then she frowned, and said, **“But I think, maybe it is better they cannot talk. They would probably curse us.”**

paraphrase

We may not always want to use the exact language of a text by **quoting** it. When we **paraphrase** language from a text, we restate that language in our own terms. A **paraphrase** is often about the same length, nearly the same number of words, as the original, but rewritten in our own words.

You may want to use **paraphrase** to vary the style of your essay. You might want to use **paraphrase** if a **quote** is too long for your essay. You might want to use **paraphrase** to give your reader the flavor of your own language or to make your reader feel that you are talking directly to him or her.

²⁸A quince is a pear-shaped fruit.

²⁹A medlar is an apple-shaped fruit.

She's a fast driver and an even faster talker, with a gift for making archeologia arborea, as she calls her vocation—the pursuit and recovery of old varieties of fruit—sound thrilling.

summary

When you **SUMMARIZE**, you give the main points of the material from the text. A **SUMMARY** should be much shorter than the original.

You might want to use a **SUMMARY**:

- if you give a **SUMMARY** of the text you're analyzing, your reader will better understand what you're talking about;
- to give your reader a lot of information with a few words;
- if you have a lot of information to convey to your reader, but you don't have a lot of space to do that in;
- if the original contains important information, but it does not read well or is boring;
- if you have a lot of information to convey from the original, but you want your reader to hear your voice speaking in the essay.

Here, John Seabrook **SUMMARIZES** Isabella Dalla Ragione's research.

She finds clues in many places: Renaissance paintings, obscure books, and the records that were kept by former estate owners in Umbria and Tuscany, where the climate is peculiarly advantageous for many kinds of fruit.

Seabrook doesn't want to go into all the detail of Isabella's work. He wants to give the sense of what she does and how she does it. He uses **SUMMARY** to do that.

Seabrook uses all these methods—**quote, paraphrase, and summary**—to convey information to us, information that, as **EVIDENCE**, supports his **THESIS**.



Chapter Review: Quote, Paraphrase, Summary

We use quote, paraphrase, and summary to give our reader information from the material we are writing about.

- A quote repeats the original source language.
- A paraphrase restates the original source language in your own words.
- A summary conveys the main ideas of the original source.

