

0. Pre-read for context.

1. Close read the text for understanding.

2. Perform one of the five analytical reading tasks.

3. Write a one-page reflection, connecting this article to your own experiences, reading, or observations.

‘It’s Starting to Feel Like a Pressure Cooker in This House’

Readers tell us what it’s like to almost never be home alone.

by Rachel L. Harris and Lisa Tarchak, *The New York Times*, March 30, 2020

“The coronavirus may turn out to be the ultimate stress test for couples,” writes Jennifer Senior in her column, “Welcome to Marriage During the Coronavirus.”

Many of us will have logged multiple weeks of extreme isolation with family and housemates this weekend because of the coronavirus. We checked in with readers who told us about how they’ve been managing relationships with those in their households at various points of confinement. Some, feeling the strain, are trying to stay away from each other in their small spaces. But others are relishing the time as a chance to get to know each other again. For some readers, self-isolation has meant not seeing their loved ones at all.

A selection of their accounts, edited for length and clarity, follow. Tell us about how you and yours are doing in the comments.

‘It’s definitely way too much togetherness’

It’s starting to feel like a pressure cooker in this house. Today my husband of 28 years said something hurtful. Then I said something mean back. It’s definitely way too much togetherness. Not going out for a date night or happy hour, to escape, is taking its toll. Right now I’m sitting in bed looking at his back and it makes me want to start talking and maybe apologize. But it’s late and we’re exhausted. Maybe I’ll get up and go to another room for a glass of chardonnay. — *Bev Buto, Houston*

My husband and I have had heated arguments about the president. He is pro-Trump. I am not. Last week I thought we were going to divorce after watching a presidential address. Not sure if we’ll make it through this quarantine. — *Serena Spina, Miami*

We’ve both recently been laid off and will be spending 24/7 together. The reality of our life being turned upside down is settling in fast: reduced funds, budgets for food, hiding or sharing our fears and anxieties from each other and maybe not laughing as much. We are already sick of looking at each other! He has to listen to me talk endlessly about this viral pandemic to my friends and family. I’ve been monitoring his trips to the freezer vodka for “comfort drinks.” We are getting to know one another very well and it’s only been 3 days! It feels like a year of “Groundhog Day” already. I love this man and I know we will weather this challenge, but it will change us, and probably the innocence of what we kept for so long. — *Katy Lyons, Philadelphia*

‘All we have at this point is hope and each other’

My wife is nine months pregnant and we’re expecting the baby any day now. A few nights ago I woke up to find her in a worry spiral: “What if we get the virus? What if you get it and can’t be there when he’s born? What if I get it and they isolate the baby?” All reasonable concerns with no way of knowing the outcome. We acknowledged that fact and talked about everything we were thankful for. All we have at this point is hope and each other. — *Brian Smith, Carlsbad, Calif.*

We've only been married four months. Our friends half-joke that isolation is our "honeymoon." Some days, I snap at him for not closing the kitchen cupboard or cutting cheese with the jelly knife, or I'm just angry that he's in his tracksuit all day. But in the moments that I slip out of my vehement resistance to this coronavirus mode of living, I actually enjoy the time with him in our one-bedroom apartment. I worry I'll get used to it. — *Argyro Nicolaou, Manhattan*

This is the fourth major emergency in three years for my family. We live less than a mile from where the devastating 2017 Tubbs fire burned in California and were evacuated for two weeks. We evacuated again last October for the massive Kincadee fire, and in between the two fires, in West Sonoma County, there was a major flood.

Enter coronavirus, and a shelter in place order. While I'm not sure how we'll manage teleworking with two small kids, it feels amazing being able to shelter in a house that is, for once, not threatened. — *Leah Murphy, Santa Rosa, Calif.*

I'm 77, my wife 82. She has severe dementia and is in a memory care nursing home about 75 miles away. I used to go see her every Monday. Now she is locked away from me. I sit at home and see and talk to no one. I was a mathematician and know what these curves mean. We will not be through this until July. I don't know if I can stay sane that long without seeing anyone. — *Tom Barker, Londonderry, Vt.*

'Cocktails with friends over FaceTime just aren't the same when you're drinking your parents' booze'

I'm 24 and recently moved back in with my parents for a variety of reasons. Sliding back into childhood patterns felt somewhat inevitable, but I set up boundaries to mitigate the loss of whatever fledgling identity I had developed since I graduated from college.

Social distancing has demolished those boundaries. I spend my days working at the desk where I did my homework in high school. Cocktails with friends over FaceTime just aren't the same when you're drinking your parents' booze. The sense of imminent danger that permeates life in this pandemic has driven my parents, who control our little ecosystem, into their old roles as protectors, while I am reduced to the infantilized. — *Katie Kehoe, Gurnee, Ill.*

'It seems we are always in the same room with our arms around each other'

We are two introverts who have been together 44 years, both retired. Our favorite place? Home. Our favorite companions? Each other. By all appearances, we were made for this. But it's way too early to be smug. I'm curious to see how long this feeling will last. — *Ann Burner, Portsmouth, N.H.*

I am teaching the kids auto mechanics, gardening, cooking and personal finance. I'm getting closer to my man than ever before, resurrecting the "happy hours" of my parents' generation. We start the day with yoga, learn guitar online, shoot hoops at the playground and watch the movies we've always wanted to see. It seems we are always in the same room with our arms around each other. I know this feeling of carefree existence will not last forever but I'll sure take it for now. — *Carrie Stowers, Las Vegas*

If there's any upside to this crisis response, it's been spending more time with my fiancé's daughter. The stars aligned and I got to be the one to pick her up from college. I have loved growing closer to her, sharing stories, food, and WiFi — some sliver of stability and comfort at a vulnerable time. — *Oana, New Hope, Pa.*

Now that we've been sheltered in place for two (plus) weeks, we've discovered something that our former urban millennial life couldn't offer: time. Not only did we test the theory that two grown people can't lay side by side in our bathtub, but we've taken steps to acknowledge the patterns in our disagreements, and work through our differences. — *Samantha Pinto, Dallas*

'Basically, I'm driving them nuts.'

Already somewhat of a germophobe, I've pretty much transformed into an obsessive-compulsive nag constantly ordering my husband and our millennial daughter to wash their hands, use sanitizer, keep social distance in public, read the latest scare-tactic article I sent them, etc. Basically, I'm driving them nuts. It's a lonely thing to be the anxiety-ridden, practically hysterical one in the family. — *Diane Evia-Lanevi, Chapel Hill, N.C.*

My wife is obsessed with Covid-19 coverage and consumes it 24/7. I'll be watching something entertaining, reading a book or listening to music and she'll shout, 'Did you hear this?' and proceed to tell me the latest infection rates or death toll. I'm feeling tremendous anxiety from fear of the virus, but even more from my wife's obsession with it. — *William, Long Island*

I never realized what a worrier my spouse is even after 40 years of marriage! He is so freaked out over the stock market that he has me tell him the balance of our 401(k) every day. He has never been like this. We don't even need that money yet. He tells me that I'm sticking my head in the ground. Oh my, it is going to be a long month! — *Gayle Vuletic, Hammond, Ind.*

We don't kiss the cats, or each other

We are a family of five on our fourth day of self-quarantine. Our daughter, a medical assistant, was sent home from work because one of her patients tested positive for Covid-19. Tensions are running high. My husband is finally taking this seriously. I'm asthmatic and I'm worried about my health, as well as my daughter's. Her kids are having a hard time not being able to hug or kiss their mom, so they cry for about 30 minutes until they fall asleep at night. — *Lydia Soto, Lemon Grove, Calif.*

I'm not totally isolated — I have to work. My husband doesn't, so he's safer than I am, but he has a disease that makes his immune system weak. These days, we are very scared of each other. We barely kiss or hug, we try to be away from each other; even our weed has a separate stem for each of us. We don't kiss our cats either. — *Fernanda, Brazil*

My fiancé and I have hit a turning point. She's been working at home with the dog barking nonstop and I've been working in a hospital, the word "virus" bleeding into my every interaction. We are really feeling the tension. We're pretty good at balancing each other out and I hope this test can prepare us for whatever else lies ahead. But for now, it's "no kisses until further notice." — *Eric Pierce, New York*